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# Communities in (Digital) Space: Creating Networks for Daily Living Through Pervasive Media

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**COMMUNITIES IN (DIGITAL) SPACE:  
CREATING NETWORKS FOR DAILY LIVING THROUGH PERVASIVE  
MEDIA**

by

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## **ABSTRACT**

### **COMMUNITIES IN (DIGITAL) SPACE: CREATING NETWORKS FOR DAILY LIVING THROUGH PERVASIVE MEDIA**

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Old Dominion University, 2016  
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Studies of online communities often focus either on communities that produce texts or the texts with which individuals engage. This dissertation examines online communities that practice in ongoing activities, in their leisure time, often with no end goal of producing any final text. Through interviews, surveys, and community forum analysis of running, gaming, and translation communities, this study finds that place and everyday habits factor heavily into the ways that sustained online communities structure their work. “Place” can have several meanings within this context, including the communities valuing specific locations or working with specific individuals because of where they live. Due to the rise in use of pervasive mobile devices, online community access often weaves into members’ offline lives. This knowledge of life ancillary to online community adds a layer of affective work to online community participation.

Throughout the data collected from these communities, stories pertaining to the work of community maintenance dominated the conversation. Participants defined “work” as managing community involvement around other obligations, maintaining relationships across distances, and acknowledging the benefits that corporate entities derive from these communities. By investigating work within this context, we expand our understanding of the ways less visible populations work online in their leisure time.

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This dissertation is dedicated to my son, Dorian, who has grown up alongside it. You will never know what it meant that you imagined me to be the smartest person in the world while I was writing it.

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Some people happen into a doctorate, but I have wanted this since I first saw *Raiders of the Lost Ark* and have only been slightly disappointed at how few Nazis there

have been to punch. In this near life-long quest, I am indebted to my parents, Jim and Mary Turner. Thank you for keeping a house full of books, never limiting my interests to age appropriateness, and for listening to the research papers I assigned myself over summers. I am who I am because you never yelled at me for staying up all night reading, but also kicked me out of the house during the day to play with my friends. Thank-you, Chris, for being my best friend in the many moves the military invited us to enjoy and for being the kindest of brothers. To Amanda, it has been such a joy watching you grow up, and now to watch you love on our kids the way Chris and I loved on you.

To Gavin, I'm not sure if at eighteen anyone can know where their lives will take them. I would not have developed this study of games if I had not married a fellow gamer to test ideas and theories on. Thank you for the sense of adventure and humor that you bring to all far reaching and overly complicated situations I find our way into. I have been so lucky to have such a friend and partner through study, travel, parenthood, and general adulthood. I eagerly anticipate what is next for us.

Finally, to Dorian, before I applied to PhD programs holding a baby, all my research concluded that being a mother-scholar was essentially impossible. At the first conference I went to after your birth, an older woman laughed at me for trying. However, I am so happy I listened to my gut. My fondest memories of this dissertation include you curled up next to me during 5am writing sessions, half asleep, as I read sentences out loud to myself. No one else has been so integrated into the everyday work of my research, which often extended to public playgrounds, swim lessons, and gymnastics practice. I'm not sure you can remember a time when I was not writing this dissertation, or understand that most people do not write their dissertations with young children, but know you being you was integral to my success.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

Online communities are integral to my success in work and life and that interest has sparked this dissertation. Online communities provide the support and accountability I need to make it through both the daily and long term goals I set for myself. Social media provides me near constant access to others as well as regular reminders that I could be working on something more productive. Place has played a significant role in the usefulness of these communities. For instance, I am in a hybrid PhD program. Just over half of my colleagues attend class synchronously from a distance. Because our cohorts stretch across the globe, we have created a number of online groups, usually through Facebook, that help individual members stay involved wherever they are. Below is a post I made in a group called Write Now! (Figure 1):

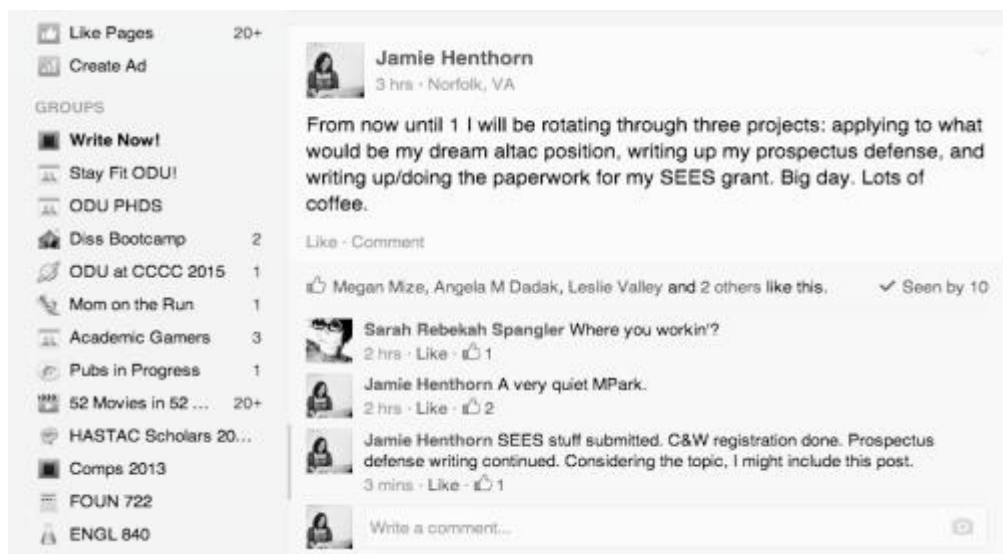


Figure 1. Post in an online community. Screenshot by author.

The relationship to work in what is meant to be a primarily social platform is evident in two spaces within this image. On the left side of the image you can see several of the groups I belong to. Most of them are “work” related, meaning they are related to the busyness of life, but not obligatory. These communities include groups for classes I have taken, writing groups, professional networks, and exercise groups. Write Now! is a group where members of the community share daily writing goals as and the daily successes and failures reaching these goals. Write Now! connects members of Old Dominion University’s hybrid English PhD program because we sometimes miss the opportunities other grad students have to meet and collaborate in person.

However, while this program is supposed to transcend place, location continues to play a role. I have chosen the more traditional path in this less than traditional PhD program. I moved to Norfolk, VA to attend class and work on campus. In the above post, I state my writing goals and another on campus student asks where I am physically working. I tell her MPark, Media Park, a graduate research lab on campus where I worked as a lab assistant. I mention that the lab is quiet because I want her to come write with me, even though we have established Write Now! so we can all write alone, together. The comment about my location garners several likes; two of the individuals who like the post had never been in Media Park. Our program has a low residency requirement (two weeks over the summer for two summers) and one of the individuals is dissertating and finished her residency requirements before the Media Park opened. The other had yet to start her residency requirements and, therefore, never been on campus physically. However, the Media Park was an on campus hub for graduate students in the English department. Even students who have never visited Media Park

have embedded a certain value to it. Within this digital community, the Media Park is a valued place and my distance colleagues know more about it than I, as a residential student, know about where they write. Within this post, an awareness of place permeates the community even though the degree program advertises itself as a rigorous distance program. Place remains important as we move more activity online. Communities continue to define themselves in the context of place. Even ODU's mostly online PhD English Program pulls its ethos from the brick-and-mortar institution that houses that chiefly online community.

While ODU's English PhD program might still be unique, the practices that we participate in online are not uncommon. Online communities appeal to individuals because of the convenience of communicating with others, making one of the most appealing elements of the internet other people. The ability to communicate and connect with others across space using relatively inexpensive and often mobile technologies can make for connected and active digital communities. How these communities form and their ability to maintain strong affective ties over time and distance depends on a number of factors. Even though proximity was originally central to the idea of community, place is regularly thought to collapse online (Yuan 667). However, this narrative promoting a network culture can devalue the multiple uses of online community (Yuan 671). This dissertation examines how place affects online communities several ways, particularly where one is while interacting with an online community, including living environments (living room, office, neighborhood) and geographical location (city, state, country). Individuals adopt new media usage based on how those around them model acceptable use (Gershon 2010). Community members contribute time and talents in exchange for a sense of belonging and a position in the

hierarchy in the community structure they help develop. While communities provide many benefits—including positive feelings of belonging, empathy, and collaboration—communities need work from their members to create that atmosphere. As such, discussing communities includes discussing how communities work, both on a project and with each other.

Place is understudied in the production of online communities and a focus on place is a focus on the everyday. By “everyday,” I mean the repetitive work and life environments both online and offline that structure a person’s daily existence. In order to utilize and empower community members, online leaders need to understand how and when its members manage their daily lives of work, family, and leisure. Research in online communities has largely focused on communities that produce texts, often individually but with the feedback of others (Lessig 2004, 2008; Jenkins 2006). This kind of work often requires significant time commitments from fans and volunteers. While these are important discussions about online community and production, other populations turn to online communities to manage the more mundane aspects of their lives with reduced time commitments, including professional goals, health, and personal hobbies. These communities might be focused on production of the self and often focus more on archiving and accountability. In an analysis of these mundane practices we can, as Gregg notes “grapple with the concrete ways political discourse shape experience” (379). It is enriching this political discourse that grounds this dissertation. I worry that conversations around new media that erase issues of place also erase conversations surrounding the work that goes into creating online communities. Using the PhD program once more as an example, this group cannot rely on relationships to build loosely around classes, seminars, and hallway conversations. Members of this

community have to use a variety of digital tools—like Facebook groups, cameras, omnidirectional microphones, and conference call software—to in some ways simulate the environment of other exclusively on-campus PhD programs. This extra layer of work, dispersed across faculty and students, is rarely discussed and in no way compensated, but is necessary for the success of the program.

I argue that place needs to be reinscribed and theorized in new media studies because it is often ignored or diminished. Looking outwardly at public communities structured around mundane daily tasks, this dissertation examines community practices through new media's notion of interface. As individuals spend more time interacting with new and emergent media and these media integrate into leisure activities, 'place' remain integral to how individuals work in online communities. These practices present themselves in two different ways. For certain communities, new media tools reinforce location specific communities where pervasive social media keep members engaged in the work of the community even when they were not actively participating online, allowing online work to permeate any daily activity. In groups that are more geographically dispersed, a sense of placeness helps build social ties in online communities through an awareness of the individual. The communities represented here rely on the support of corporate-produced interfaces, which in turn depend on volunteers contributing affective labor. This affective labor is rarely regulated by corporate hosts for these communities, but work as an interface itself to buffer between the individual and the less agreeable parts of social and/or public life in the online and offline spaces community members inhabit. This place/work dynamic reveals the levels of often overlooked but necessary work that go into creating productive online communities.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### *SPACE VS. PLACE*

A historicized definition of place is necessary to understand the ways that place is used and occasionally erased online. In contextualizing this debate, place can then be applied to online communities with this history of analysis as precedent. Ultimately, communities have always focused on place and our interactions with online media and online community is not truly detached from place. Instead, individuals carry their communities with them in a variety of ways and place reminds them of their online interactions in varied ways.

Space and place are often under-theorized as concepts (Tuan, 1977; Massey, 2005). Often defined against more dialectical nature of time (Soja 11), space is seen as the fixed and abstract (Tuan 6; Soja 11). Space is aligned with transit; we pass through spaces to get to places; however, “[s]pace is transformed into place as it acquires definition and meaning... strange space turns into neighborhood” and “a grid of cardinal directions results in establishment of a pattern of significant places” (Tuan 136). Doreen Massey argues that early structuring of space and place have left space as a surface level concept that things happen upon (4) and that place then takes on a “totemic resonance,” that “everyday, of real and valued practices, the geographical source of meaning, vital to hold on to as ‘the global’ spins its ever more powerful and alienating webs” (5). The meaning of spaces is often political and “established relations between objects and people in represented space are subordinate to a logic which will sooner or later break them up because of their lack of consistence” (Lefebvre 41). Space is defined by our relation to and separation from objects and relationships.



de Certeau notes that place, in its relationship to time, is haunted by actions: “[p]laces are fragmentary and inward-turning histories, pasts that others are not allowed to read, accumulated times that can be unfolded but like stories held in reserve, remaining in an enigmatic state” (108). de Certeau finds space to be much more powerful than place and states, “[t]o walk is to lack a place” (103). He observes the act of moving through space as the act of making meaning (102). This act is personal and political: “[t]o practice space is thus to repeat the joyful and silent experience of childhood; it is, in a place, to be other to move toward the other” (110). Place, then acts as both a progressive and regressive act. One constantly moves to and away from places, which are embedded with memories and ideologies. Massey argues for space as an open system of multiplicities, and our conceptualization of space determines what meaning we extract from space itself and “ultimately to think of its potentially disruptive characteristics: precisely its juxtaposition, its happenstance arrangement-in-relation-to-each-other, of previously unconnected narratives/temporalities; its openness and its condition of always being made” (Massey 39). Places, as such, are socially constructed over time. Individuals constantly move through and navigate these social constructions. With this conversation in mind, I define place to be a location embedded with personal and social meaning. This can materialize as a structure (a building), an area (a city or even a particular route), or a region (a nation or geographic region). Online sites and communities can also take on similar characteristics through individual participation. Place in both circumstances is heavily constructed through repeated experiences.

#### *ONLINE COMMUNITY AND PLACE*

The term community initially had spatial connotations (one’s community was populated by those who lived close by). Benedict Anderson’s *Imagined Communities*

outlines community's relation to nationalism. He argues for community as a system of practices performed by individual members who assume other members of the community perform similar practices. Here the belief of shared practices is more important than personal connections within the community (Anderson 20). As discussions of internet community meet new technologies and greater access, they by and large move to simplify community to a group with "close social relationships," (Yuan 667) a significant shift in perceptions of community. Yuan argues that the oversimplification of community does not take nonwestern cultural contexts of online community into account. I agree with Yuan, but add that it also simplifies western uses of online community. In the early 1990s, as internet use grew in popularity, optimism surrounded online communities, "in which webs of connection transcended time and distance to create meaningful new social formations" (Baym "Communities and Networks"). However, community became a term used by marketing teams to mean interactivity (Baym "Communities and Networks"). In *Personal Connections in the Digital Age*, Nancy Baym identifies community by three principles: a space of their own, an established set of linguistic practices specific to the community, and what she calls "shared resources and support" ("Communities and Networks"). Resources range from links to shared files and documents to material gifts and favors. Significant to shared resources, individuals in communities usually offer assistance without the expectation that support will be returned at an equal exchange.

Online communities were popular in new media scholarship at the end of the twentieth century, but shifts towards the study of online networks have led to diminished research in online communities (Yuan 667). Networks differ from communities in distinct and important ways. The biggest difference is communities

focus on core interests or practices and networks set the individual as a connecting node to several linked interests and communities (Baym “Communities and Networks”).

There are many advantages to networks, including the ability to connect outside of the market-defined structures online communities rely on (Benkler 4). However, Elaine Yuan states, “[a] culturalist perspective is needed to reckon the interplay of materiality and sociality into the production and reproduction of social order in particular contexts” (666), particularly how different cultures use the internet (676). An interest in place and new media has not been absent from new media studies, but there is much more to be examined. Focusing on the everyday places individuals’ participation in online communities and allows for research that expands conversations on internet use.

The study of online community and place changes as technologies become smaller and more pervasive. To manage social interactions online, people turn to others within their communities, either their online or local communities (Gershon 2010). Technology plays a role in online community building, naturally, but more significant are smaller social environments developing what Gershon calls idioms of practice. The computer has been instrumental in the production of online communities and these communities further develop as media devices become smaller, mobile, and more accessible. Cultural demand for immediate access to information and personal communities recursively pushes certain kinds of technology. Community members have pervasive access to online communities through their laptops, smartphones, and tablets.

Individuals within online communities bring a variety of resources and those with technological expertise often lend their knowledge to less experienced users. This includes both helping individuals with web literacies, coding experience, community netiquette, and content creation protocols for the community (Nakamura “Digitizing

Race” 135). Communities, in order to encourage interactivity, often create events that will encourage involvement in the community. There are several ways to go about this kind of community involvement, which can include friendly competitions, rewarding community service, and establishing gift economies. Gift economies (sometimes called sharing economies) transcend digital spaces and exist in some of the oldest of societies (Mauss 1990), and can flourish online, beginning with the gifting of code, but extending to material gifts as well (Barbrook 1998). These economies are tied to social and market surveillance that add levels of complexity as competing forces use gifts to persuade the environment of these social spaces. Gift economies and market economies tend to work well together online: “The hybrid is either a commercial entity that aims to leverage value from a sharing economy, or it is a sharing economy that builds a commercial entity to better support its sharing aims” (Lessig *Remix* 177). However, once sharing economies understand themselves as “tools of a commercial economy” they are less likely to want to participate (Lessig *Remix* 177). Maintaining a community culture is integral to maintaining gifting/sharing economies.

While community members merge digital and material idioms of practice, the connections between new media and place remain under-researched. Most spatial studies on digital media have focused on electronic literature and video games. Analyzing how this research has been conducted will help in establishing where the fields are going while also helping to identify new research opportunities.

Repositioning the role of reading began in the 1970s. Scholars like Roland Barthes argued that each reading of a text became a rewriting of it as well: “so the text passes: it is a nomination in the course of becoming, a tireless approximation, a metonymic labor” (11). In discussing Barthes’ *S/Z*, Colin Brooke notes that “*S/Z* is a

book that signals the transition from literary/textual object to interface” (63). The study of interface values how something is used as much as its content. Jason Farman argues that space is something “produced through use” (18) and the same could be said of the texts and technologies interfaced with. In *Cybertext*, Espen Aarseth refers to ergodic texts, in which “nontrivial effort is required to traverse the text” (1). This nontrivial effort includes hypertexts, where the paths the reader chooses alter the story and/or limit future possibilities (2). Ergodic texts are not limited to new media, but new media has introduced new kinds of interactivity. Bolter and Grusin observe that “[w]hile the apparent autonomy of the machine can contribute to the transparency of the technology, the buttons and menus that provide user interaction can be seen as getting in the way of the transparency” and that the any attempt at any interfaceless technology is imaginary (33). Looking at the non-trivial efforts involved in these texts aids in identifying unique questions facing online communities and spatial studies.

This dissertation will look at communities housed in social media, online forums, video games, and mobile apps. These communities were created by corporations to make money or cultivate site activity; individuals use them to collaborate on common goals: becoming better runners, translating texts, and winning cooperative games. A feeling of play and entertainment permeates all of these groups and look at game studies begins a conversation on these communities. The conversation on games and space begins with Johan Huizinga’s somewhat romantic notion of the magic circle, as described in *Homo Ludens*. Games are often played in shared spaces, but in entering a game one agrees to ascribe to different rules than other everyday events. Huizinga’s reference to space is based in nondigital play, but his theory permeates contemporary research surrounding games and place. In discussing games and day-to-day

interactions, play spaces become fragmented by both practical uses of media (with players even using several media simultaneously) or the nature of the multi-use spaces—living room, classroom, or even a bus or restaurant booth. While players are locked into a particular place—limited by headsets, handsets, or their own vision—others sharing those spaces may enter and exit without entering into play. Marc and Michelle Ouellette’s “Married, with Children and an Xbox” highlights the reality of games played in specific spaces with specific emplaced challenges. In their case, the couple desires to play video games together while also raising two small children, leading to compromises on the when, where, and what of play. The magic circle loses some of its magic is porous and often a space of compromise. Part of this comes from imaging a larger audience of video game players, including those with families. Case studies like that of Marc and Michelle Ouellette’s are both recent and rare, revealing a budding interest in this kind of scholarship.

Traditional notions of the magic circle are further complicated once mobile phones become a factor in research on game play. Mobile use has skyrocketed and pervasive media’s constant access changes the individual’s spatial relationship with technology (Varnelis and Friedberg). The relatively new medium of the mobile phone “is a smorgasbord of possibilities—signaling the owner’s tastes, values, and constructions of identity such as class, gender, and culture” that “can be a cultural index for specific localities. It can provide insight into emerging transnational flows, regional resurgence, and shifting centers of modernity” (Hjorth 87). Games have the possibility of creating hybrid or augmented realities, but also of adding a new casual gamer to the discussion of the power of place and play (Hjorth 85). As a still evolving technology, mobile games open discussions on games and the ways specific technology is affected by space.

In their introduction to *Digital Cityscapes* (2009), de Souza e Silva and Sutko acknowledge, “computer games of the past 20 years can blind us to the significance of the physical environment as a playful space” (1). In their introduction, de Souza e Silva and Sutko reference the flaneur, a 19<sup>th</sup> century pedestrian who walks the city of Paris to be part of the city, to see and be seen, “the playfulness embedded in city spaces with his new way of navigating the cityscape, without a specific goal or purpose” (7). Play in public spaces is by no means new, but an understanding of how digital media affect public play is still emerging. de Souza e Silva and Sutko identify location based mobile games as a particularly important way to talk about play and place: “[t]here are two common characteristics to all these games that differentiate them from traditional video games and physical games: (1) they use the city space as the game board, and (2) they use mobile devices as interfaces for game play” (3). Developments in mobile games have subsequent years, however, and better GPS technology makes playing mobile games in suburban and rural areas much easier. de Souza e Silva and Sutko’s anthology focuses more on the challenges of establishing communities to play mobile games than how those communities work. Much of this is because mobile games were new to Americans in 2009. Ingrid Richardson’s “Ludic Mobilities” focuses on Japanese as a result, where players work together through multiple media, including computers and phones, to play games. Richardson argues that this type of game encourages players to interact in new spaces they then inscribe with meaning. Players rewrite the cities they inhabit.

The community or text itself need not be mobile, however. Mobile media allows individuals to use media to supplement games and interact outside the game itself. Mobile apps alter the ways traditional computer or console games are played. Christian Christensen and Patrick Prax build on Richardson’s work and consider how innovations

in mobile apps challenge earlier arguments about apps as a genre. Initially, apps, especially games for smartphones, were generally thought to be casual, time-consuming, entertainment (732). The two find that these applications keep the player engaged even when she is not playing the game. Instead of being a way to fill time while waiting, these apps expand and dilute the magic circle outside of game play. Players ultimately dedicate more time to the game and their communities through the apps. Smart phones become a toolkit and “the assemblage of interaction with, and social interaction around, smartphones as mobile devices in everyday life...means that the particular parts that are cut out of the ‘desktop/laptop’ play are primarily those that the creator deems will work in mobile form, appropriated by the app creator” (736). In general, as technology and use increase, the smartphone can augment community experiences beyond those thought possible even ten years ago (737).

While the interactivity of play and mobility is integral to understanding media use, online communities, as collaborative spaces, perform in ways similar to online gaming communities, including the element of play. The mobile apps referenced above generally use play to keep players engaged with other players the way community members stay connected while tending to other obligations. This new kind of mobility questions how interfaces recursively influence the spaces we inhabit. At the same time, games made for mobile media change the activities we participate with in public spaces. Studying the changes in where and how texts and technologies are used asks us to “recast our understanding of places as not simply private or public, but as primarily mediated” (Chamberlain 23). How we use technology affects the way technologies are built and the software that individuals and corporations make:



Taking account of the multi-spatiality of networked media spaces also better addresses the real and imagined mobilities engendered by the ubiquity of network provision. Different networks allow for different levels of access and discrimination, parameters managed at scales ranging from the individual to the household to the community and beyond.

(Chamberlain 25)

Discussions of use extend beyond video games into other communities. These communities can aim for a great number of objectives, but place continues to factor into these communities. Film communities, for instance, have long been limited by geographical access related to everything from regional distribution rights to what is available at their local video store (Tryon 2009). Additionally, digital streaming services extend access to film and television exponentially, but continue to mediate place-based distributions laws.

Place works on both a domestic and global scale. For instance, Korean drama fan communities embody some of these issues in the context of crossover media. Before Netflix and similar streaming companies purchased rights to Korean dramas, fan communities formed online because of localized distribution agreements. Research surrounding community based fan production is well researched (Lessig 2004, 2008; Jenkins 2006), but looking at the ways geographical location plays a role in these communities has received less attention. Companies like Viki have found ways to create this sense of community. They purchase distribution licenses and pool volunteers to translate global media into many over 200 languages. The site utilizes an international community working together to segment, translate, and subtitle films into multiple languages. Viki creates software that allows community members to collaborate on short

clips of video. Place and regional culture play a large role in the possibilities and limitations of these kinds of communities. Globalization, immigration, and cultural movements like Hallyu work to create audiences for national media on international stages. Where these communities' labors are capitalized on (where the work happens, where the final projects are distributed, who takes claim for the labor) all factor into conversations on place and global economy.

While scholars continue to explore the intersections of place and technology, the intersections of place, technology, and community have not received the same level of discussion. New technologies affect the way that we interact with digital communities and the ability to interact with individuals in our daily lives. Building on this research, and considering new contexts, we can see new ways that place plays a role in the access that individuals have to online communities, how place is represented in these digital communities, and how members are encouraged to participate and produce within spaces to contribute to the communities they are involved with.

## **THEORETICAL METHODOLOGY**

In order to study the building of online community, this dissertation combined research methodologies from new media and cultural studies to analyze relation between place and the construction and maintenance of online communities. This lens was applied to data collected using social science methodologies. New media and cultural studies are two disciplines regularly used collaboratively to discuss social uses of digital media. Media studies' investment in the use of emergent media as well as methods of distribution establishes vetted approaches to examining online

communities. Cultural studies, specifically theories surrounding work and leisure, focus on how media, in all its manifestations, encourages particular social practices.

### *NEW MEDIA AND THE INTERFACE*

In discussing methodologies for analyzing online communities, a review of the history of the discipline of new media reveals an aversion to place. Discussed below, this aversion is grounded in early new media scholars who focused more on the object of production, but when new media is defined instead as an evolving relationship between individuals, social structures, and digital tools, the need to discuss place features more prominently in debate. This review leads to a discussion in new media of interfaces, which include studying the relationships between self, technology, and culture. Looking at the evolution of interface as necessary for understanding how new media helps to develop a theoretical methodology to talk about the when, how, and where of online community activity.

Early new media theory focused on product as the defining characteristic of new media studies. New media became defined as media that collapses other media within itself (McLuhan, 1964; Kittler et al. 1987; Bolter and Grusin 2000; Manovich 2001). For example, Kittler notes of new media's ability focus attention onto what new media produces: "Sound and image, voice and text have become mere effects on the surface, or, to put it better, the interface for the consumer...a total connection of all media on a digital base erases the notion of the medium" ("Gramophone" 102) later developing this idea further in "There is No Software" to highlight that written texts "no longer exist in perceivable time and space, but in a computer memory's transistor cells" (147). Kittler focuses on the materiality of the computer itself and the interface, but in doing so argues

that placeness and material production become less significant. Building on the production aspect of new media, in *The Language of New Media*, Lev Manovich defines new media through five loose principles: numerical representation, modularity, automation, variability, and transcoding (27-46). In defining new media by these characteristics, Manovich turns away from materiality of new media and instead focuses on more ephemeral code which is used to direct hardware to these tasks. In *Remediation*, Bolter and Grusin analyze how older medias are encapsulated in new media. Computers master older medias (like film) and then remediate it into a new form (digital animation, interactive films, live streaming, etc.). The two define new media as hypermediacy, which “acknowledges multiple acts of representation and makes them visible” and “offers a heterogeneous space, in which representation is conceived of not as a window on to the world, but rather as ‘windowed’ itself—with windows that open on to other media” (Bolter and Grusin 33-34). Hypermediated technology “turns our whole world into a computer interface” (213). Here, new media again collapses place in interesting ways. Place as interfaced is not unique and expressed in the ways that places are defined by their use, as referenced in the introduction. What this argument does, however, is flatten how we interface with place.

The thread of interface strings these theories of new media together and when analyzing ways in which technology is adopted by a number of individuals, we must consider interface theory. An interface is a buffer between the individual and the other (human or technological) and allows the individual better control over the situations he finds himself in. For instance, a GUI and operating system help an individual to navigate and control information stored on their computer. Additionally, a common set of linguistic practices and social expectations help one navigate public interactions. For

instance, bringing a book into a public place, like a city park, helps filter out much of the interactions going on around an individual while also signaling to others they would prefer not to be approached. While interfaces are not exclusive to emergent media—Farman as well as de Souza e Silva and Frith note that papyrus was mobile media and interface—mobile new media technologies have increased the number of interfaces we have when engaging in public. Contemporary interfaces give individuals two-fold control over the technologies we interact with. In much of the world, we have constant access to the information coming in and control how and when we see it, but we also have control over how and when we respond.

Interfaces demand examination because, as de Souza e Silva and Frith argue, “[c]omputer interfaces are not neutral. They actively influence communication relationships (in this case, the relationship between a human and a computer), and transform both parties that it connects” (2). Interfaces actively influence the ways we engage technology, the expectations we have for the individuals we interact with through that technology, and the places and spaces in which we access technology (de Souza e Silva and Frith 186). This shift to focus on how we use media stresses a shift in new media from what it does to how we use it (Farman, 2012). With an array of selections as far as media and therefore interfaces, these choices that we make when using media and the expectations that we have about it continue to evolve. Galloway argues that the computer becomes the interface that defines our way of being today: “the computer is not an object, or a creator of objects, it is a process or active threshold mediating between two states” (23), calling software an ethic, or a regimented system of practices. In this way, computers, phones, and any other digital technology is neither a creator nor an output.

Due to a variety of interfaces and evolving expectations for those interfaces, I argue that a better definition of new media is ‘idioms of practice.’ Illana Gershon defines idioms of practice thusly: “people figure out together how to use different media and often agree on the appropriate social uses of technology by asking advice and sharing stories with each other. They end up using these technologies with the distinctive and communal flair that has been attributed to dialects, or idioms” (6). Society has yet to agree upon proper protocol for online interactions. As such, there are *languages* of new media, and new media studies should document and analyze the ways in which individuals use, hack, and discard these technologies. In considering new media as idioms of practice, scholars are able to consider the relationships that individuals build to communicate online and how those relationships are interfaced both through the formal design of digital tools and the social environments its participants interact with outside of the online community.

#### *LEISURE AND PLACE: A MARXIST CRITICAL LENS*

Studying the relationship between place and online community is one way to examine idioms of practice. As smaller communities develop different practices, communities engage and interact differently. The term “spatial studies” is somewhat ambiguous and where to begin discussing place demands clarification, but of note is the fact that spatial studies have long been connected with Marxist thought. Connecting place, leisure, and interface, Marx wrote, “The universality of man is in practice manifested precisely in the universality which makes all nature his *inorganic* body—both inasmuch as nature is (1) his direct means of life, and (2) the material, the object, and the instrument of his life activity” (75). A history of spatial studies as related to

Marxism connects place and new media, highlighting new ways to consider online communities. Before taking a detailed look at spatial studies, I want to quickly reference the differences between work and labor to better establish this project's scope. Labor connotes a struggle. We labor at particularly challenging tasks and the term labor takes on a connotation of class struggle that a term like work does not. Work, instead, implies a much more neutral relationship to activities of production. Ruggill and McAllister argue that in video games, "While play defines the computer game experience, work defines the computer game medium. It is the work of developers, players, scholars, and even games themselves that arguably makes computer games what they are" (83). This could easily be said for any of the communities here, even those that are not affiliated with a game. Work, here given without pay may even be part of the attraction, as Marx notes, "[w]ages are a direct consequence of estranged labour" (80), giving this kind of work more meaning for participants.

This dissertation focuses on work, particularly communities that produce knowledge-based cultural objects in what would be defined as leisure time. As leisure, I want to stress that participants within the communities discussed in this dissertation are aware that their work often benefits both the corporate hosts of the platform they interact on. Any acts of rebellion, however, do not hope to do more than enrich their experiences with others, build relationships, and shield themselves from the negative parts of this community that they often feel are out of their control. At the same time 'labor' is such a common term in leisure studies that it will appear over and again in the following section. Instead, it is best to keep Alexander Galloway's words in mind from the aptly named chapter "We Are the Gold Farmers":

What does it mean, that *we are the gold farmers*? It means that in the age of post-fordist capitalism it is impossible to differentiate cleanly between play and work. It is impossible to differentiate cleanly between nonproductive leisure activity existing within the sphere of play and productive activity existing within the sphere of the workplace (Galloway 135).

Leisure studies has a long history of analyzing what we do when we are not at work. Leisure has often been referenced in regards to class, which continues to expand or limit what access an individual has to leisure activities. (Ravenscroft and Gilchrist 2009; Rojek, 2010). As such, how we use leisure time is closely connected to “honor, privilege, and rank” (Rojek 17). As labor practices improved, the idea was that everyone would have more leisure time in all its manifestations (Rojek 31) creating a leisure society (37). What we do with this leisure time is thought to more closely reflect who we are as individuals within a society than many of the other actions we perform on a daily basis (Rojek 68) even though we often engage in leisurely activities with others. As such, while it might seem that we could do anything with our time, social and legal restrictions push individuals towards specific kinds of leisure activities. Reading, watching films, and participating in amateur athletics are all encouraged over activities like recreational drug use. Likewise, notions of entrepreneurialism bleed into leisure time and as work becomes more mundane and precarious, leisure offers “opportunities for creativity and strategic investment of the self” (L. Oullette “Enterprising Selves” 91).

As will be discussed in-depth in chapter 2, the 20<sup>th</sup> century has closely aligned leisure with both place and sport. Leisure was acknowledged as necessary for citizens and many countries increased the number of recreation centers and public parks for free



or at an inexpensive price in (Rojek 54). Leisure studies aligns with a spatial turn from Modernism's investment in time as a focus for critical thought (Soja 1989; Jameson 1991; Massey 2005). Scholarly theorizing on space in the mid to late 20<sup>th</sup> century connects to Marxism and cultural studies because of the politicization of space. Speaking on the arrangement of cities, Foucault states, "[s]pace is fundamental in any form of communal life; space is fundamental in any exercise of power" ("Space, Power, and Knowledge," 170). This move is led by French Marxist scholars who Lefebvre, Foucault, de Certeau, Baudrillard, and Debord (Soja 43). Scholars such as Edward Soja and Frederic Jameson revisit the spatial turn in critical thought at the end of the twentieth century.

Henri Lefebvre pioneers efforts to recreate space as necessary in humanities scholarship. In *The Production of Space*, Lefebvre shows that space had been appropriated by the sciences (2) and works to instead create a language for how space might be read and interpreted through power and notions of production (15). Lefebvre breaks space down into: "spatial practices," how space is organized socially for production, reproduction, and cohesion; "representations of space," which ties space to abstract notions like "knowledge," "signs," and "codes"; and "Representation Space," the symbolisms that connect places to social life and art (33). His work influences postmodern studies of art, visual rhetoric, political science, and geography. De Certeau's *The Practice of Everyday Life* focuses on how pedestrians problematize city planning. Pedestrians' movements are challenging to predict because walkers are rhetors and their pathways through cities represent several rhetorical strategies, significantly synecdoche and asyndeton (101). The walker uses his or her own trajectories and creates a mythic city not reflected on a map and landmarked by personal experience. Cities attempt to

organize the flow of pedestrians to take away the spaces pedestrians ‘haunt.’ Significantly, walkers move by either populating symbolic spaces cars and buses cannot or removing space through short cuts. From De Certeau’s perspective, pedestrians become political agents through the ways that they travel. Similarly, Eco observes how individuals and organizations rewrite spaces to make them hyperreal, wherein the real and the constructed combine to create a ‘more real’ experience through the integration of more objects, more technology.

The importance of spatial studies extends to the end of the twentieth century. Frederic Jameson remarks that, “postmodern hyperspace—has finally succeeded in transcending the capacities of the individual human body to locate itself, or organize its immediate surroundings perceptually, and cognitively to map its position in a mappable external world” (44). In essence, space has evolved and humans are yet unable to process postmodern spaces. Jameson criticizes postmodern spaces:

We are submerged in its henceforth filled and suffused volumes to the point where our now postmodern bodies are bereft of spatial coordinates and practically (let alone theoretically) incapable of distantiation; meanwhile, it has already been observed how the prodigious new expansion of multinational capital ends up penetrating and colonizing those very precapitalist enclaves (48-9).

Postmodern spaces are popular (39), all consuming, and designed to disorient those who inhabit these spaces (43). Jameson’s writing on the destabilization of the human relationship to space mirrors other postmodern scholars on the destabilization of text. Soja connects Lefebvre’s ideas of representational space with Jameson’s notion of destabilized spaces, noting that “the spatial matrix must constantly be socially

reproduced, and the reproduction process is a continuing source of conflict and crisis” (Soja 129).

It is this constant dialogue between space and place, who has access, and how these places that enters the twenty-first century. Some remain focused on bodies in spaces, like Topinka’s “Resisting the Fixity of Suburban Space,” which argues that walkers subvert suburban spaces built to encourage consumption. Walkers within this space will have a completely different experience: “the walkers embodied location in a material space for agency and invention” (68). While these theorists do not directly discuss the relationship between new media and space, many of the issues de Certeau, Eco, Jameson, Soja, and Topinka write about can be applied to and complicated by digital technology. The internet seems all consuming, popular, built for consumption, spatially disorienting, and designed by those willing to move more slowly and carefully through its spaces. Yet, as new media become more popular, they alter the ways users manipulate physical places and how digital communities manage placeness online.

Combining new media theory and Marxist critical thought has a precedent in the works of 21st century Marxist scholars. Production moves into digital realms and geospatial considerations focus on how digital media flattens space across global organizations. Discussions surround how immaterial and affective labor become important to talking about class and labor. Methodologies shift to following the flow of work through digital networks. Essential to a networked and service based economy, immaterial labor is, at its most basic, labor that does not produce a tangible product. In *Empire*, Hardt and Negri identify three types of immaterial labor: production of communication technology, analytic and symbolic tasks, and affective labor” (293). Affective labor is a type of immaterial labor that produces an emotional response. While

much of this production happens in online spaces, human interaction and contact remain essential in creating the environments needed to keep online communities together: “With the Web, we feel we create the sequences rather than being programmed into them” (McPherson 204) and we become part of a community based on the work we put into it. These types of labor need not be mutually exclusive. A community creating a communication technology (online fan fiction) might also produce affective labor (positive comments on that fiction). Likewise, these kinds of work need not have a negative connotation. Many happily involve themselves in these kinds of activities these communities because they enjoy them.

The rewards of affective labor are enough that immaterial labor is often offered up without expectation of pay. Digital texts of the 21<sup>st</sup> century demand a great deal of immaterial labor from those that use them. For instance, video games, particularly a Massive Multiplayer Online Role-Playing Game (MMORPG), require players to give labor in time, communication, and energy to create an enjoyable place to play. Marxist scholars Nick Dyer-Witheford and Greig de Peuter note, “one of the characteristics of intellectual and affective creation is a blurring of the boundaries between work and leisure, creating a continuum of productivity and of exploitability” (23).

## **METHODS**

At its heart, this dissertation is theory driven. It utilizes conversations discussed in broad strokes above to paint the ways in which place factors into today’s leisure communities. At the same time, the communities discussed here are active and to assume that individuals within these communities feel the same way that I do about them would be presumptuous. As such, while theories of place and leisure guide this

dissertation, I also collected data from participants within these communities. The communities analyzed within this dissertation were chosen for their variety and their longstanding public appeal. Gaming and translation communities have a long history of analysis within media studies. Running, while less popular, has been a cultural force in conversations on exercise since the 1970s. At the same time, each of the case studies presented below adds to the conversation within these topics, particularly when analyzed through the lens of place. For instance, while studies exist on the success rates of online fitness accountability communities, little research looks at the ways individuals navigate the spaces they exercise in. It is the access to the everyday practicalities in these communities that contributes to larger conversations about online community construction.

I mostly surveyed and interviewed a small number of participants chiefly because my aim was not to do a large quantitative study, but to gain perspective on how these diverse groups operate. When existing texts were available, such as the Viki study, I used those instead. This data provides a 'slice of time' for many of these communities. Online communities are often in flux, working within structures often out of their control and adapting to the needs of their current members.

### *Personal Community Involvement*

The nature of communities as organizations that group around common interests, languages, and practices means that they are often encapsulated systems. It can be challenging both to know if a community is a good candidate as an object of study, or to gain access to members, if one is outside the community. I am a runner and a gamer and several of the communities researched within this dissertation are communities I have at least tangential relationships with. For some of these

communities my involvement started as academic inquiry, for others I belonged to them before I realized that they were something I wanted to study. I chose early on to not discuss any communities that I was the leader of or had a hand in starting. In this section, I will explain my relationship to each community I study and how I found the community so as to be as transparent as possible about my relationship to the experiences described in later chapters.

- I started using the app *Zombies, Run!* knowing that I planned to look at it academically. I had already been a regular runner for 2 years prior to beginning research and do not necessarily fit the typical individual described in the following case study. I am not an active member of any *Zombies, Run!* fan community. However, I have (literally) run through all four seasons of the game in the way a television scholar will view a show in its entirety before on the subject.
- I was added by a personal friend to the group “Mom on the Run” the day I finished my first half-marathon and became a pretty active member of the community. I did not know I was going to write about this group until I started preparing for my candidacy exams. Because this group is the one I have the closest relational ties to, the IRB board and I collaborated on a set of anonymous survey questions that I could present to the group. This protects the identities of my participants and mitigates some of the bias that interviews might have caused.
- I learned about the Call of Duty clan referenced in Chapter Three in my own living room when I heard one player of my partner’s clan thank another for a new controller over game chat. I have never played with the

clan. Because of my relationship to one of the clan mates, participants were invited to participate anonymously, meaning I would not share this info with any other clan members and would not reference clan members by name in my writing. Interviews were conducted away from my partner, and all interviews data were stored in password protected folders. My partner was not a leader in this clan when this research was taking place.

- My interest in Viki is purely academic. I found it after some research both online and in the body of research on translation communities. Since I found the group, I have not only read up on the group but also gone through one of the training programs referenced in Chapter 4 to better acquaint myself with the community and its practices. I was honest with trainers that my interest was academic and that I do not at this time plan to become full member of the community.

I am aware that my personal involvement in some of these communities may color my interpretations of data, particularly in reference to Mom on the Run and the Call of Duty Clan. The concern in involving communities like these into research includes the issue of observer bias, that these community members, who knew me or my loved ones, would be too invested in giving me the answers that I wanted to hear. To this I can say that I took the effort to ask open ended questions that allowed participants to answer in their own ways. I kept my interviews and the timeframe for collecting data short so as not to disrupt the communities I inquired into and discouraged members from pushing other members to participate so that my studies were never the focus of any of these communities. I cannot say whether members felt coerced to participate based on the nature of these communities, some of which had practices of support and

gifting. I can only say that I found no significant distinction in involvement with communities I was and was not a part of.

My interview questions and surveys could be answered in fewer than fifteen minutes. I made clear to the one or two who asked that raw data, which would be easier to identify participants by, would not be shared with any community members. This was generally not a huge issue as members were happy to help but seemed generally disinterested in the results, which is not uncommon for many research projects. Finally, this research was not ethnography as I started with specific research questions. I went into these communities with questions based in theory and scholarship on place and online community. These interviews expand our understanding of these communities, but do not guide these discussions.

### *DATA COLLECTION*

While it would be ideal to apply the same data collection methods from all of the communities I examined, that was not practical due to the different communication strategies each group had. As an example, a community communicating through forums leaves an archive of text to analyze, but a gaming community using oral communication has no such archive. For this reason, my data collection had to be a bit different for each community. While this does affect the ways that this data can be analyzed, I am here discussing how data collection varies so that readers can see when I am analyzing ongoing forum discussions and more reflective interviews.

*Zombies, Run!* I interviewed participants who had used the app for at least two weeks and ranged from beginning runners to those who had trained for marathons. Local participants for a pilot study volunteered after seeing posted flyers on the campus



of Old Dominion University. After the pilot study, volunteers were solicited through posts on Tumblr, which has an active fan community surrounding the app. The interviews were one-on-one in person or through Adobe Connect. I began with a pilot study of five individuals in the spring of 2013 and added four interviews in the fall of 2014. These interviews received IRB Exemption in March of 2013 (12-027). Data from the pilot study was published in a collection on casual games.

Mom on the Run. Because this was a more specific online community and the community shifted from being an open community to a closed community during data collection, I collected data using a survey that was shared with community members over a two-week period. I promoted the survey twice, but other community members also promoted it during the time period. Twelve community members voluntarily participated and completed the survey. This study received IRB Exemption in November of 2014 (682603-1).

Call of Duty. I interviewed current and former members of one clan who have played together since 2009. The community has about 15-20 members and I interviewed six of them. Interviews took place over Adobe Connect, a synchronous chat software. Interview questions focused on an awareness of location while playing, an awareness of the places others played in, and questions about the ad hoc gift economy many players participate in. This study received IRB Exemption in October of 2014 (14-005).

Viki. I collected and analyzed posts from one forum on segmenting called "SEGMENTERS PLEASE VISIT HERE." This is an open forum and anyone can see responses, whether or not they are members of Viki. This study received IRB Exemption in October of 2014 (14-005).

## *METHODS OF ANALYSIS*

Text interfaces between reader and content, but, as referenced above with Barthes, the meaning of any text is co-created with the reader, and in this instance, community participant. Early new media research focused on hypertexts, but video games serve as an excellent, perhaps better, example of this textuality because of the input demanded from players. Some video games can be more ‘on the rails’ than print text, but even in this situation there are often several strategies to completing a level. Even simple casual games allow multiple solutions to a level (Juul 42). Narrative heavy games still allow for several strategies to literally create the text with the game’s creators and these varied approaches create different texts for each player. While video games are ergodic texts, new media communities can also be seen as candidates for this textual analysis as everything can be seen as a text (Jameson 77). Daniel Chamberlain calls these destabilized texts (15), and Colin Brooke states:

if new media provide us with objects that are not stable enough for the kinds of shared, close reading to which we are accustomed in print culture, then locating theoretical values behind the texts will largely be a matter of assertion, rather than demonstration. New media ‘objects’ lend themselves neither to close reading nor really to demonstrating the broader values represented by the theoretical. (14)

Finding overarching meaning in destabilized texts becomes problematic, studying use instead of making general assumptions on content-based meaning is an alternative for studying the meaning and purpose of digital objects. The way texts are used and co-created by specific communities will help us to better understand how some

communities work and point to ways in which strategies used by these specific communities could be used by other communities as well.

In order to study the value of place within online communities, I will look at three kinds of community—running communities, gaming communities, and translation communities. These communities are diverse, but that is not say that there are not similarities between the communities. The element that connects all four communities analyzed is that, as communities of practice, their practices were more important than any text that was produced. *Zombies, Run!* uses a narrative to encourage individuals to run 3 times a week with larger race or distance goals buried further within the app. Mom on the Run focuses on encouraging the everyday commitment to exercise over race or weight goals. The Call of Duty clan members actively engage players between clan battles and the bimonthly regularity of clan battles actually make individual events less significant. While Viki members do produce texts, the forum looked at is more invested on helping individuals doing the segmenting of very small pieces over an awareness of the final project. It is the focus on work in smaller acts that connect these communities. Significantly, the communities studied here are leisure communities, but that leisure is inherently tied to work.

After interviews were conducted and transcribed, evidence of place, work, and community were identified and tagged using qualitative analysis software. I then repeated this tagging process. These tagged instances were aggregated and, with these instances grouped together, I looked for patterns for how place, work, and community were described by members of these communities. At this point I analyzed these patterns and compared them against scholarship in the field for each online community.

### *STUDY LIMITATIONS*

Surveys and interviews that ask for individuals to participate do come under a certain amount of bias, particularly with regard to finding willing participants who have both the time and means to participate. It is challenging to collect data on lurkers, individuals who do not or rarely post content to an online community they regularly read, those who have walked away, or those who have been removed from the community. As such, an overwhelming majority of the participants within this study are active users who by and large have rather positive relationships with the communities they are describing.

### *SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY*

While there is no lack of studies of online communities, looking at communities through the lens of place is a way of reconsidering online communities through what we now understand about Web 2.0, or how internet practices have changed now that the internet is more accessible to later internet adopters. For instance, while early studies of online community focused on communities who had mostly focused on the virtual, contemporary communities have revolved around to individuals joining communities populated mostly by people they know in their material lives (boyd 2014). This study reassesses some of the assumptions researchers have had about the virtual/material divide in online community and points to some examples of how these shifts in perception are applied in very different digital communities. Its findings can be applied to other communities, help community builders understand the role of place online, and better theorize the ways place continues to matter in online research.

## CHAPTER SUMMARIES

This dissertation examines three different kinds of communities that inhabit different kinds of media. These communities all focus on activities one would do in their leisure time. In talking about leisure and place online, the ability to be both specific enough to understand the practical undertakings of this community as well as the ability to make broader observations about the practice online.

### *INTRODUCTION*

The introduction includes a literature review, a theoretical methodology as well as an overview of my methods for interviews and analysis.

### *(IMAGINED) COMMUNITIES OF RUNNERS*

Chapter two analyzes two running communities and the use of two different online communities to encourage runners. Though it can be perceived as a solitary act, running has relied on social and state support, particularly through the use of public spaces for millennia. Culturally, running as leisure has been promoted and privileged by state and corporate institutions; jogging got a market surge in later half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century as a way to combat the stress of extensive hours in an office for both its health benefits and the ways it got individuals outside. This chapter looks at the ways individuals use online communities to manage running's 'hurdles,' like anxiety surrounding exercising in public as well as working an exercise regimen into a busy lifestyle. Running is a regular hobby and individuals invested in the sport generally have to run several times a week to maintain their conditioning. Many runners use communities for encouragement, accountability, and planning purposes. There are, of

course, many successful non-digital running communities, but they do not appeal to every runner. Running and new media bring up new challenges as runners use digital media and applications to motivate themselves to maintain and improve their running activity. The ease of incorporating GPS programming into mobile apps and a 'quick fix' environment to health has led to a deluge of running apps that spread the running community thin.

This chapter uses the lens of place to consider how runners have used online tools to create running communities online. The first example will be from an app called *Zombies, Run!* and the latter will look at a localized Facebook running group called "Mom on the Run." Many runners within these communities have anxiety engaging in running, either from past experiences of having to compete in higher stakes competitions during their primary education, preconceived notions of what runners should look like, or frustrations at finding time for physical fitness. These two communities show the ways in which members manage precarity, the stress that comes with neoliberal structures of structures like leisure time so as to put the responsibility of fitness on the individual, even when many of the factors of fitness lay outside the individual's control. These communities become places individuals can work through this precarity. As members further their own running hobby, many need the support system of the community less and less. In these instances, many of the members join larger running communities. As such, these smaller subcommunities create entryways into larger communities both in locative proximity and online.

*Zombies, Run!* is a gamified, narrative based, running app. Runners use cell phones to listen to a story while running. The user plays as Runner 5, charged with defending the survivor colony of Abel Township from constant threats, living and

undead. Even though the game is single person, the entire narrative centers on the idea that the user runs for the survival of a community. Because of this, the runner has more of a sense of community within the application even though the community is fictional. Runners use objects they collect to rebuild Abel Township. The feeling of running for others under exciting circumstances benefits those who can find running tedious.

In the narrative, running is a life and death matter. The township would crumble without the protagonist, Runner 5. Related, the users' only chances to hear about the community are through conversations had while out on missions. The app strongly encourages individuals to run outside, making place integral to the success of the app even though the app has no control over the places individuals run in. Working within this community breaks up the tedium of daily running for individuals who are invested in running and training. Fans of the app have developed an active fan community to interact with and support each other and create fan art, fiction, and podcasts; this affective work also promotes the game to other would-be runners.

Mom on the Run (MotR), is a small Facebook community centered on the sharing of runs and accomplishments with others that started in a Richmond, Virginia suburb. The community connects through loose personal networks. Many members make weekly goals for fitness accountability. Several women have set up friendly competitions with one another, using Facebook's ubiquitous access across platforms to keep community members involved throughout the day. Most (but not all) members live relatively close to one another. Importantly, members use different fitness apps to track runs and share their runs to this community page instead of their personal timelines.

Idioms of practice within this group limit conversation almost exclusively to exercise. The group talks little of dieting (outside of nutrition for runners) and talking

about one's life outside of running is uncommon, aside from occasional mentions of children. The group has published files on group practices, but any posts outside of exercise are either ignored or removed by a moderator. Ultimately, this community is set out to benefit its participants and participants benefit from living closer together. Those who live close enough will run and/or cross train together and mention having seen one another while running. While many of the runners have actively participated in social sports, the time constraints associated with motherhood have led this community of mothers to privilege the mobility of a Facebook running community that they can access and engage with through mobile devices. In this, women within this group contribute affective labor, their own posts that motivate others as well as likes and comments that support other runners. In the process, they create content for Facebook that keeps members active on the social media. This makes even more sense as runners can easily access both running apps and Facebook from their phones.

For both of these communities, the cellphone becomes the media center of running. It is able to track runs, chronicle runs through shared maps, images of runs, and images of members running. The two communities advocate for a sense of play that helps individuals to cope with some of the precarity that comes with how running is socially constructed, helping individuals space to resist and align with contemporary constructions of running culture. While MotR focuses on Facebook, fans of *Zombies, Run!* have created a fan community on Tumblr. These communities often work as starting points for members who want to enter larger running communities.

### *BANDS OF BROTHERS, GIFTING IN FPS CLANS*

Chapter three discusses how digital and material gift economies can be integral in creating connected online communities. Much has been written on digital gift



economies, including the lucrative and robust economies of video games like *World of Warcraft*, but little research has been done on the ways players continue to gift tangible items to each other across distances. Some guilds, clans, or groups consist of players who know each other outside of their gaming communities—as friends, coworkers, and family—where sharing material gifts seems more logical. However, individuals in gaming communities who have not met in person can still gift through more traditional mediums like the mail. The work here, similar to the running communities, is by and large affective, members often give because it makes them feel good about themselves or makes other members feel good about their place within the community, but the expectation is often that these gifts will be returned in stronger community ties and hours logged playing with the clan. Again, the connection here is that this affective labor hopes to create the community as a ‘place’ that others would want to contribute more time to. The key difference between the communities in chapters two and three is that while members of the running communities are by and large working on individual goals, members of Call of Duty have to play well together to compete in bimonthly clan battles. As such, this gifting economy develops as a disciplining agent, creating cycles of obligation that keep players playing Call of Duty games. Players will often gift items that help with gameplay: Xbox Gold subscriptions, new games, and headsets. However, they will also gift outside of objects needed for the game, everything from housewarming gifts to cash.

For this study, I examined a clan that has been together since 2011 with the release of *Modern Warfare 3*, an installment in the Call of Duty line of games. The group is relatively small for a clan, but remains connected through their attention to members of the group. Part of this attention is in the establishment of a gifting culture.

Players gift to players, often objects that help with game play and benefit the parent companies that produce, market, and distribute the games. However, players also gift items that have nothing to do with the game. These affective gifts outside the game fall under social expectations that the receivers will continue to be dedicated to and play with, the clan. Givers may not realize this when they give gifts. This commitment in turn keeps players buying annual installments of the games and remaining dedicated to a particular console to maintain their community. Finally, one more gift that players give is that the clan restricts all discriminatory language based on age, sex, gender, or ability. In this way, the clan gifts a safe space to play based on individuals' emplaced practices.

*I HAVE ALL THE QUALIFICATIONS. INTERNATIONAL FAN*

*PROFESSIONALIZATION ON VIKI*

Chapter four considers translation communities, which derive in some ways from international film communities. Digital streaming has increased access to foreign films and television shows. 'Admittance' into film communities has long been one of immaterial work. The digital era presents itself as providing countless movies available to anyone with a strong internet connection and a decent computer. At the same time, issues of access, particularly in the realm of regional distribution rights, mean geographical location continues to determine who can be involved in these communities. In this chapter I will look at a subcommunity of Viki, called segmenters. Viki is a large for-profit translation site focused on non-English media. Segmenters time captioning boxes for multilingual volunteers to enter translations into. This labor is crowd sourced by community members working together to translate film and television shows from one language into another, Korean to Spanish for instance, and provides

web based tools to create high quality translations. Like the Call of Duty clan, members must figure out ways to work together, often creating relationships and networks that are based on both skill at segmenting and personality. As such, members have created training programs that help individuals to learn to segment and introduce members to leaders to facilitate this professional matching. This likewise connects to the in interest running communities have in cultivating the self in leisure time. Once the projects are completed, the films are hosted on the site for free (with advertisements) and with active discussion forums to discuss the films and shows. Many of these films are then also sold and hosted on popular streaming sites like Hulu. The work of volunteers is broadcast on the front page of the site, announcing what community members work on at any given time.

There are several 'jobs' one can have within this community: lurkers, viewers, segmenters, translators, project managers, and critics. Segmenters, because the work is technical and only needs to be done once for each show/film, is the smallest subcommunity within Viki. While it may seem as though one can do this from anywhere, legal and cultural restrictions mean that many of the working groups are location based. Because of regional restrictions, volunteer groups are often organized by region code. Likewise, issues of decorum (or netiquette) are still very place-based, and individuals from similar cultural backgrounds tend to work together. As the Viki community works to break down cultural barriers to access and work against "West-to-Rest" distribution models for contemporary media, it confronts these issues of place over and over again. Viki, the company, gains quality crowd sourced translations that are then licensed out to other streaming sites. Users gain access to films and television before they would if waiting for the release of DVD or digital streaming versions.

*CONCLUSION*

The concluding chapter sums up the arguments within this dissertation and points to ways that this analysis can be expanded upon. It also considers ways that these cultures have changed over the past two years and ways that these observations can be applied to emerging online communities.

## CHAPTER II

### (IMAGINED) COMMUNITIES OF RUNNERS

#### INTRODUCTION

Running, at its core, is an exercise designed to conquer space. The sport has been culturally constructed as a social and civic activity, generally supported by state powers and facilitated through related communities. Currently, running is culturally viewed as a leisure activity, an ideal leisure activity because it can be part of a healthy lifestyle. This posturing and its spatial nature give it some privilege within contemporary conversations on fitness. It also privileges particular populations as it is middle class neighborhoods and public parks that tend to be built to accommodate running. Discussed below, it is this population, who often work more hours seated (in an office or at home) for whom running is a more appealing leisure activity. Entering the larger running community, consisting of millions around the world, can be overwhelming but is made possible by entering smaller gateway communities. Running is currently seeing a technological boom in mobile running applications, wearable fitness trackers, and robust online running communities. In analyzing two online running communities, *Zombies, Run!* and *Mom on the Run*, a cyclical pattern of use emerges wherein individuals desire the online community that folds into their work and life, but then also want a physical connection to this community, typically expressed as gatherings that supplement the digital community experience. Recursively, individual members write other community members into their own fitness narratives. Ultimately, within these case studies of running communities, material places become essential points for social engagement even though individuals purposely sought out digital running communities.

Scholarship on physical fitness has focused largely in the fields of health and exercise science, driven by getting individuals involved in health promotion communities (Liu et al., 2011; Stephens and Bryan, 2012), particularly the roles that mobility and access play in continued use of online fitness communities. These efforts have led to breakthroughs in how we discuss, measure, and develop fitness communities. A humanistic approach to the question of developing and maintaining participation in running communities offers a new approach to looking at not only what motivates individuals to involve themselves in running commitments but also how cultural expectations fold into the success of running communities. By using a cultural studies approach, this chapter unpacks the ways that individuals within these communities write themselves and their actions into the community itself.

### *RUNNING, LEISURE, AND DISCIPLINE*

Running has long been associated with both physical ability and rigid discipline. Before public transportation, telegraph wires, and reliable roads, the job of a runner was integral to communication networks. Running has been rooted in societal need, including messengers, state competitors, soldiers, and healthy workers. For instance, runners in the Incan Empire transported oral messages as well as pieces of knotted string that coded messages for the recipient (Gotaas 10). Lucian discusses the discipline of maintaining a strong warrior male population:

Furthermore, we train them to be good runners, habituating them to hold out for a long distance, and also making them light-footed for extreme speed in a short distance. And the running is not done on hard, resisting ground but in deep sand, where it is not easy to plant one's foot solidly or to

get a purchase with since it slips from under one as the sand gives way beneath it. (45)

Other professional runners included city and state sponsored champions in public and religious festivals. Winning glory for the state could earn one a lifetime of financial security and leisure and was an opportunity for healthy bodied persons to improve their station in life. However, as technology and state municipalities developed, roads, horses, and carriages usurped runners as communication networks and state champions. Running was likewise looked down on for working classes because it took necessary energy away from their work. Running was an activity for elite and often eclectic aristocrats in the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries (Gotaas 69).

Gotaas notes that in the 18<sup>th</sup> century running evolved culturally into an entertaining sport for gambling. This shift coincided with technologies such as precise timers and the adoption of the standard meter. Exact distances and times could be measured, making running a more precise sport. While helping develop the modern Olympic Games, Pierre Frédy took Michel Bréal's suggestion that the 1896 games include a race to honor the soldier who ran from Marathon to Athens to proclaim the victory of Athens over the Persians (Gotaas 131). A 25-mile run from Marathon to Athens was planned for the 1896 Olympic games. The popularity of the run and the success of winner, Spiridon Louis, created the modern marathon. The Olympic Games made the marathon an international pastime that increased in popularity throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries and solidified distance running as an amateur sport.

In the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, running shifted from being a societal necessity to a serious hobby that supported a healthy population. A connection between health,

recreation, and ideal employees led to state sponsored health promotion to maintain a strong workforce. During the Industrial Revolution, “A mentally alert, physically robust population was identified as a desirable social goal. One reason for this is the industrial requirement for strong, adaptable manpower” (Rojek 87). Concurrently, as Cervantes observes, new child labor laws resulted in children having excess free time. Playgrounds and physical education helped occupy children and keep them away from more dubious activities. Play became institutionalized through the state and, as Cervantes continues, “play education, which frames play as an activity that brings individuals, particularly children, closer to the achievement of both individualized and community minded states of being” (111). Physical fitness became a standard part of education for children, who were taught to connect fitness with citizenship.

State promotion of physical fitness was further encouraged in the 20<sup>th</sup> century through state and national institutions. For instance, the United States further developed youth physical fitness programs to prepare young men for military service during the First World War (Cervantes 116). Physical education became an academic discipline in the same way that English or algebra did and degrees in recreation studies developed in the 20th century. Through the state’s participation in physical education, fitness became a way to maintain good citizenship. Encouraging fitness as leisure was extended to adults as a way to occupy themselves during the Great Depression, when leisure “makes a decisive move away from gymnastics, which were valued for their ability to develop strength and poise” in exchange for time and distance (Cervantes 116). This marks a shift away from fitness as art or performance to fitness as part of a healthy civic lifestyle. Creating places where citizens of all ages could be involved in physical activity became a state priority and parks and recreation centers became important both



to preserve nature and to counteract “the neurosis surrounding urbanization, industrialization, the break-up of traditional society and the presentation of relevance, competence and credibility in the self” (Rojek 86). These parks and recreation centers “expanded with more jobs for leisure and recreation graduates and eventually, more demand for university level training in these fields” (Rojek 54). Leisure as physical fitness grew as a state sponsored initiative and developed a market for fitness; this set a foundation for twentieth century cultural practices that surround leisure.

In a climate where health is connected to a corporate and state good, running became popular because it can be done almost anywhere. The popularity of running led to popularity in training systems during the latter half of the 20th century. These systems led to a jogging revolution in the United States and Europe. Gotaas notes that adults adopting an active hobby was novel, but soon caught on as the benefits of jogging were seen to fight cardiovascular disease, obesity, and depression. The latter half of the 20th century saw ever increasing numbers of individuals working in sedentary fields, developing depression and neurosis linked with affluent living. Jogging got people active and outside: “They all knew the roads but now they were trying them without wheels and engines and discovering that everything felt completely different when travelling on foot” (Gotaas 259). Joggers, in their visibility on the road, helped to promote the sport. Running likewise paved the way for the idea that adults should have a fitness regimen and healthy hobby.

I argue that in the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century through present day, running has fallen under the purview of late capital. Neoliberal running has been subject to the same market trends seen in the cultural shift toward late capital markets, which place obligation on the individual, encouraging them to be entrepreneurial in all aspects of

life, including leisure. This cultural shift has led to a community of amateur runners for whom the marathon is the key race, meaning that distance road running becomes the norm for amateur runners (as opposed to sprinting or track running). A shift to long distance running maintains the sport's competitive edge, but adds to these distance races a social element for serious amateurs who spend a great deal of the free-time running. As running has evolved from a professional sport to an amateur hobby, a market developed around the sport that included everything from training guides to high tech clothing. Digital technology has also continued to evolve with it. Technology here has meant everything from diet to shoes to better ways to track distance. At the moment, the most noticeable change has been in digital tracking devices, like mobile apps and wearables. This has led to a revolution of data that closely aligns with a habit of life-tracking that is happening culturally, but also gives hobbyists tools once only available to professional athletes.

Leisure in this late capital construction is adopted as a culturally moral value and physical fitness is seen less as a government provided right and more as a collection of moral choices and personal risk management (Lavrence and Lazanski 80; Ouellette 93). Remaining physically active into adulthood requires individuals to identify themselves as active people. In capitalist societies, identity is closely linked with consumptive practices: "appropriate health management and the consumption of wellness lifestyles are ways in which citizens both abate and ultimately reinforce anxiety" (Lavrence and Lazanski 80). The anxiety here is directly linked to the number of choices that individuals have regarding their health. Called precarity, this anxiety ties into trying to make the 'right' choices about health by purchasing the correct attire and technology and buying into the right training plan and these choices not leading to desired returns

is another source of anxiety. These returns can be anything from a desired physical aptitude to achieving a body composition that society deems *fit*.

Connecting physical fitness with moral character means that individuals need to show that they are making good choices while also fitting said choices into their daily life. To not be fit, or to not look fit, means not making ideal use of one's leisure time, even if one does not have much leisure time to begin with. This also marks a shift from believing that leisure time should be spent doing things one enjoys to believing that leisure time should be spent improving the self. One way that people navigate the expectation that they do more with their leisure time is to try to make these self-improvement activities more fun. In their article, "Affective Labor and Convergence Culture," Laurie Ouellette and Julie Wilson discuss serial edutainment, which they use to contextualize how media convergence works to keep individuals (particularly women) involved in near constant self-improvement. As Ouellette and Wilson note, "Media convergence enables engagement...but this engagement is not necessarily pleasurable and is difficult to characterize as leisure" (554). Whether or not edutainment media manages to actually make activities one doesn't want to do more engaging or more fun, the appeal is apparent. Being physically fit is a lifelong process that requires an individual to make small choices every day. Finding ways to get more immediate results for making smart health choices could be integral for people trying to take up a demanding leisure activity like running and increases the consumptive practices one can participate in to indulge the hobby.

Healthy citizens are healthy workers and developing healthy citizens is good for the national economy. This shift marks a change in the kinds of work individuals do as well. As workers begin to work more flexible hours in less physically demanding jobs,

they theoretically can take up a physically demanding hobby. Earlier, during the industrial age, the adoption of the same hobby could be seen as selfish, taking time and energy away from necessary work. However, as society has transitioned to less physically demanding work overall, a dedication to fitness during free hours has become the norm. Running as leisure is supported by expectations, consumptive practices, and engagement through digital media.

### *RUNNING AND THE SMARTPHONE*

Running has always had a relationship with technology which is described previously as a relationship between the individual, society, and digital tools. Right now this relationship is heavily influenced by the interface. Interfacing allows users to control both the environment they are physically in as well as who individuals share their movements and actions with. Mobile interfaces, like those used in running apps, have “important implications for our sense of privacy, and influence surveillance, control, and power mechanisms in today’s society” (de Souza e Silva and Frith 3). Today’s networks promote not only mobility, but also allow constant connectivity with networks regardless of location. Mobile phones allow runners to track their runs, and share them with specific individuals or communities. This allows runners to personalize their running experience before, during, and after runs.

Personalizing and tracking running has been more and more significant since the running revolution took place in the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Runners were using spreadsheets and blogs to track fitness and connect with other runners before smartphones became pervasive (Lee and Drake 2013). Today, smartphones have quality GPS devices in them and software developers have built running apps that can

accurately gauge time and distance. Because running is distance based, it is one of the easiest fitness activities to track and this ease has led to a deluge of running apps on the market. Running apps are precise, giving runners real-time feedback on performance. Logs allow runners to reflect, mile-by-mile, on their performance. Tracking apps can tell runners their speed, elevation, and what songs had them running the fastest. While not all runners use these apps, today's running hobbyists have access to more data on their performance than ever before, presented to runners in easy to understand formats that help runners read data. Running apps, in their focus on performance, "injected data into athletic activities by quantifying athletic performance, thereby introducing new ways of thinking about and knowing what one's body was doing" (Lee and Drake 40).

Data is not useful without some contextualization and this is where interfacing with running communities becomes advantageous. Web 2.0's social and networking abilities, often-linked to smartphone usage, allow runners to share their runs with social media for support and guidance. Runners can receive support through comments or badges. Runners can also use apps to set up running challenges either against other individuals or other running groups. Where smartphone apps excel beyond wearables is in this social element. Additionally, running apps have the ability to extend the running experience beyond the act of running itself. Not only can runners review their data, they can talk to runners across the globe. Not all of the advantages are exclusive to running apps, but include convergent media available on smartphones. Smartphone portability also means runners never need be without the apps and media that aid them in running.

Daniel Chamberlain argues, "[d]ifferent networks allow for different levels of access and discrimination, parameters managed at scales ranging from the individual to the household to the community and beyond" (Chamberlain 25) and small running

communities allow runners to set the parameters they have when turning to the web. Privacy becomes an issue with running communities and runners may only want to share runs with those who understand the discipline of running and/or to completely hide their routes from others to maintain anonymity. Finally, runners can cue to others in their material space, through their use of a phone and headphones, that they do not wish to be approached by others. This interfacing can give runners who can afford the gear more control over their environment while running that they might not have had before these apps were created. Likewise, the interface helps runners to navigate their experiences into the communities that will be most helpful and supportive to them as individuals, encouraging them to run more often.

### *RUNNING AND PLACE*

Running always occurs in a physical place for which cultural meaning ascribes particular activities. As individuals interface with these spaces, they must navigate not only their bodies' ability and needs, but also these cultural expectations. One cannot participate in running without being cognizant of the placeness both of their own body and how the body is located within a place and our body "acts as a layer between a place and our perception of it" (de Souza e Silva and Frith 26). Placeness is heightened when running outside, where runners must be aware of their distance from intersections and oncoming cars, but extends to treadmill running where one must be aware of where they are on a treadmill to prevent tripping or falling off of the end. On a more personal level, runners are constantly aware of the effects of running on their bodies. Much of the time, humans are aware of their spatial positioning in very abstract ways to move through place without bumping into others and objects. When running, one must be aware of

foot position, hand position, breathing, fatigue, and muscle pain. Runners are also aware of how they look running and/or how they perform running compared to others. It is through these physical performances that individuals assess their own skill at running.

Emplaced practices in public spaces take on meaning, and moving by foot allows individuals to use and rewrite spaces in ways that can align or resist intentional use in distinct ways. This is perhaps what is the most interesting about walking and running, the freedom one has to inscribe meaning on a place. Michel de Certeau describes place as “an instantaneous configuration of positions. It implies an indication of stability” (117). Space, on the other hand is “composed of intersections of mobile elements. It is in a sense actuated by the ensemble of movements deployed within it...the street geometrically defined by urban planning is transformed into space by walkers” (117). In de Certeau’s explanation, the shifts in space and place are fluid and determined by the individuals participating in those places. Space becomes a place is through cultural and emotional capital imbedded into a space by events. Activity, particularly daily practice, inscribes spaces with meaning. Running routes are “an instantaneous configuration of positions” as runners aim for specific goals creating cultural meaning for particular distances. Running is always happening in a place and those places take on significant meanings through daily incidents like a terrible run, a twisted ankle, or a personal record made. Official races likewise take on emotional significance, even if the runner regularly runs the route outside of races as the eventness adds significance to the place for the runner (Robinson et al. 390). When discussing running, even in digital contexts, the conditions of place remain significant. Marathons are all 26.2 miles, but training for the Boston Marathon, with its famous Heartbreak Hill is a distinct experience from the

flat Berlin Marathon, where the world record for marathon speed is regularly broken. At its core, running is about conquering specific places, places that have been given cultural and emotional capital. As such, running, and particular racing, is a social relationship, with the individual, social expectations of fitness, and state and corporate powers that continue to lobby for these spaces. They are complex and layered and the runners' relationship with specific places is also a mixture of the self, social structures, and geographic and geological realities.

When individuals run in public places they create porous realities for individuals in public spaces. They are porous in that their act of running intersects with the ways that others are using the same spaces: driving, biking, walking dogs, socializing, even sitting on their own porches watching others. Much is written about this issue in game studies, where this particular concept intersects with casual or pervasive gaming, games usually played outside of the home. Preliminary research on mobile games and material space begins with Huizinga's notion of the "magic circle," an almost sacred space entered into during play. Playing personal mobile games in public spaces is not a new cultural practice; ancient Roman board games have been found throughout its empire (Moore 374). Similarly, even digital games started out in public places; these included labs in the 50s and 60s and arcades in the 70s and 80s. What shifts in as far as spatial studies and mobile technology is the awareness of other individuals that one is playing a game, "the thin line between this ludic circle and the practice of everyday life becomes the main focus" (Nieuwdorp 203). Players practically mitigate different realities and social expectations as they play, causing players to play at "the edge of the magic circle or the metaphorical membrane that is entered when accepting the rules of irrelevance" (Nieuwdorp 207). The awareness of the porous barrier between the digital and material



world can be seen beyond what we think of as games and instead in any mobile technology we use in public spaces. In adding a layer of technology to runs, runners often exist in dual realities. They have the reality of the physical places they are running in that includes issues of everything from hills, cars, and cracked sidewalks to the reality of running around or through spaces that are socially and racially classed. Media wise, runners run in a digital realm, complete with different audio and visual signals that include the regular reminder of speed and distance. When running, one is navigating the line between an idea of how one should be running and the material realities of the individual run.

### *THE SIGNIFICANCE OF RUNNING COMMUNITIES*

In helping maintain fitness goals, research shows that joining a health promotion community helps individuals to stay committed to an activity along with tracking fitness, further shown in the remainder of this section. If one joins a community, then they may become more loyal to the community itself than to the actual task that the health promotion community participates in (Dunlop et al.). This is particularly true if tasks are repetitive in nature, but the community itself is dynamic, causing one's commitment to the task to remain constant, but for the community to change (Dunlop et al. 1243). Joining a community that supports fitness goals can help one stay committed through cycles of investment in the activity. Joining a running community or running group aids in the motivation to participate in at least as many runs as the group does collectively. Running with a community creates a sense of belonging to a local community and “[b]elongingness to the group was ultimately translated into belongingness, articulated through identify, to a larger community of long distance

runners of whom they now felt a part” (Robinson et al. 384). Participation in a small community focused on running makes runners feel as though they are part of global communities of individuals, most of whom they will never meet. The decision to stop running or miss runs means the individual loses the opportunity to socialize with a dynamic community. Because this feeling of belongingness links with the identity of the runner, running communities aid in keeping engagement with a leisure activity even when one feels less motivated to participate in that form of physical exercise.

While there are several reasons to join a local running group, there are also reasons to avoid these in-person communities. One’s work or family schedule may exclude an individual from participation. Intimidation can likewise play a part in new runners avoiding runs with experienced and/or faster runners. These feelings of intimidation may be less rooted in how the running communities present themselves as the experiences new runners had with fitness when they were younger and in physical education courses. Disability or regular injury may likewise hinder individuals from regular participation in local running groups where they can only participate when they are healthy. Finally, one can update an online community about their running practices daily and as such online communities can augment localized running communities.

Emergent media introduces new possibilities for more interactivity as runners use digital media to motivate themselves to improve running performance.

Contemporary health administrators have attempted to move in-person health communities into online spaces for a complex solution to personal health:

Given that complex health promotion is often conducted across multiple sectors (e.g. communities, non-government organisations, and multiple levels of government) and large geographic areas, there is a great need for

Health Information Managers and others to develop online platforms that can supplement and support offline activities. (Sunderland et al. 9)

However, few studies on online health promotion communities exist and scholars are looking more at moving local communities online and less at digital-born online fitness communities (Sunderland et al 10). With little concrete data on how to best promote online communities, more analysis on independent health communities is necessary to better understand how people develop health promotion communities, what is effective, and what assumptions are carried into online communities.

Community has clear connections with gamification, the incorporation of game elements into non-games, and what is known as serial edutainment: community membership “makes members feel rewarded in some way for their participation in the community; and has shared emotional connections such as common history, common places, time together, and similar experiences” (Sunderland et al. 10). The ease of incorporating GPS programming into mobile apps and a ‘quick fix’ approach to health that encourages individuals to purchase products to solve health issues has led to a deluge of running apps. The number of apps spreads running communities thin. Many of these apps include a social media aspect, either they let runners ‘friend’ other runners they know or allow runners to share their runs through social media. However, if one has a dozen friends who run, spread across three or four different apps, creating a networked community becomes problematic. Sharing runs through social media sites is likewise problematic because those who care about running achievements may not be the same as the larger social networks most individuals have on Facebook and Twitter. Friends who do not run may view regular Facebook postings about running as spam. At

the same time, runners find public accountability to be effective for success. Finding a group one can discuss running with often requires a runner to search out a community.

Running communities are heavily influenced by mobility technology and can influence the technology that community members adopt. GPS enabled smartphone applications track speed and distance through GPS and allow individuals to share experiences they have while running with the community even when they run alone. With enough battery life, one never needs to run alone. Likewise, running communities will set trends within their own groups. In some groups, cell phone apps are acceptable, in other communities, wearables are considered a more serious choice for runners (Robinson et al. 385).

Finally, when in public, runners manage several interfaces at the simultaneously and in doing so develop a perception of their surroundings to help cope with spatial interface: “When we experience a place, we do so through our body, which acts as a layer between a place and our perception of it. We also develop techniques to filter the information around us, further interfacing our experiences” (de Souza e Silva and Frith 26). This interface management is twofold. Runners utilize playlists and audio tracking to filter out the sounds of the spaces that they run in, but also allow runners to archive their runs and later share them with others, interfacing with their online communities. This includes taking pictures of running spots and sharing them on a targeted social network, logging their run routes to public forums, or challenging others in running competitions. Instead of utilizing these app specific communities, runners can likewise filter their experience through a privately established community in a Facebook group or online forum. The smartphone becomes a core connection between these disparate elements that allows runners an engaged relationship with their community.

## **APPLICATION: RUNNING, PLACE, AND ONLINE COMMUNITY**

In analyzing the relationships between anxiety brought on by neoliberal precarity that puts the blame for not seeming healthy on the individual, social expectations of physical fitness and running, and interfacing I will look at two different running communities: the community surrounding *Zombies Run!*, an augmented reality running app, and “Mom on the Run,” a Facebook community based in a Richmond, VA suburb. Both these communities welcome beginning runners, though more experienced runners also participate in both communities. These communities use personal connections to motivate runners to remain engaged in the community, but utilize different emotional connections and communication strategies, making them ideal for comparing the tension of the virtual/material within running communities. In analyzing these two groups the low stakes of joining are initially attractive to new members. As runners engage with the communities, they are more likely to look for ways that the community can be more interactive, often in material places.



Figure 2 Players pick up supplies, receive messages, and listen to music while running. Screenshot by author.

### *THE COMMUNITIES OF ZOMBIES, RUN!*

*Zombies, Run!* (ZR) is a gamified running app that one ‘plays’ through a smartphone while tracked via GPS. The runner listens to a narrative interspersed between a playlist the runner has set up. The runner ‘plays’ as Runner 5, a British agent who serves Abel Township, a small survivor colony in suburban England. Runner 5 runs missions to protect Abel from the constant threats of zombies and greater institutional powers. While running on missions, players “collect” supplies and materials that can help Abel survive and thrive through the zombie apocalypse (Figure 1). Users build Abel by running by picking up virtual supplies on each new run. During missions, runners

can participate in ‘zombie chases’ during which the player increases speed for sixty to ninety seconds, to simulate interval training. The app can be played while on a treadmill, but most players run outside and, for convenience, in familiar places like their neighborhoods.

Players’ identification with Runner 5 is integral to the app, and the game achieves this by giving Runner 5 no identifying characteristics so that runners can instead imagine themselves as the protagonist. ZR is an auditory game with no graphic representation of Runner 5. Runner 5’s sex, gender, and sexuality are never referenced and the narrative uses no gendered language for Runner 5. For instance, the name Runner 5 is only addressed by code name. Runner 5’s significance in Abel rests on athletic prowess and strong intuition, and the game gives examples of both men and women filling runner roles. Inclusiveness is further exemplified by the relationships of side characters in the narrative. These identity models are further diversified by race, class, religion, and national identity. Inclusiveness is important because ZR utilizes tropes from zombie and horror films and video games to construct its narrative, genres that have historically poorly represented women, LGBTQ communities, and people of color. Because the game relies heavily on runners embodying the protagonist, utilizing these stereotypes would be inadequate and ZR has instead created fully developed and diverse characters. The audio application helps a great deal, and Runner 5 only receives orders, never having to respond verbally. Ambiguous identity in ZR allows users to ‘write’ their own version of Runner 5. By embodying the character with users’ own bodies, paces, and neighborhoods, users create Runner 5 as themselves and construct themselves as heroes. This idea, however, is not without its critics. Brian Sutton-Smith discusses the problems of play as identification, noting that the “purpose of most

conflicts, contests, and expressions of power is to prove the superiority of one's own identity, community, and traditions" (91). This makes any attempts at an everyman character challenging to accomplish. If nothing else, this lends to the hyperreal element of the game, wherein the attempt to create an immersive experience can work to highlight the artificiality of the environment.



Figure 3 Descent is one of few missions where the player has choices within the narrative. Screenshot by author.



This attempt at inclusiveness also complicates user agency, as Runner 5 is literally without a voice. Because any identifier would change this relationship, the story is set and the users have few chances to make choices in the game. The few chances they have to change the course of the narrative have to happen before the day's run is even started (figure 2). Sutton-Smith argues for many types of play, including what he calls "Rhetorics of Fate," wherein players remain at the will of chance or fate, which he connects with optimism and flexibility (64). The power users have in these contexts revolves around how they navigate their own tangible world: what route to run, how long to run with the game, and how to reconcile the narrative users hear with the places they run in. As such, agency here comes from dedicating to the practice of running, intellectually involving one

### **FAN-DRIVEN RUNNING COMMUNITIES**

To study ZR, I interviewed nine runners from four countries (United States, England, Austria, and the Netherlands) who have used the app. Runners ranged in ability from beginners (less than two years) to experienced distance runners who have participated in marathons. Participants were solicited via flyers, listservs, Tumblr, and word of mouth. As such, the community of ZR can be seen as a privileged and tech-savvy community. Members had the time and disposable income for active fan community participation, smartphones, and what could be considered a relatively expensive running application. Participants were limited to those who belong to *Zombies, Run!* communities. Therefore, the individuals interviewed found the app to be useful with positive comments on ZR, a general limitation with this type of research.

### *LEARNING TO RUN AROUND OTHERS*

Most adult runners need to learn how to run, and it is this need that leads them to online communities. Individuals often turn to digital tools to learn to run because past communities have deterred them from the activity. The idea that one must learn to run may sound peculiar as humans typically begin running and as toddlers and we socially connect childhood with enjoying running. However, running as a hobby requires daily discipline with training running activities as well. Most of the participants were introduced to this discipline running through school physical fitness tests. These social school-based situations that can be off putting to those who do not instantly excel at the activity. As Foucault observes, “Disciplinary punishment is, in the main, isomorphic with obligation itself; it is not so much vengeance of an outraged law as its repetition, its reduplicated insistence” (*Discipline and Punish* 180). This repetition highlights both why participants saw themselves in the way they did as well as their desire to become good runners, even though running is certainly not the only way to practice fitness. To identify or improve at the sport, runners find interfaces, like ZR, that help them learn to run ‘alone.’ As runners improve, they then want to take a more active role in the running community.

In interviewing ZR users, running experience was the topic participants showed the greatest divide in answers over, and this divergence was largely determined by how participants experienced running in school. Four participants had competed in a team sports in school where running was part of training. Of these four, three were confident in their running ability based on feedback from coaches and teammates. The fourth participant had the opposite experience; coaches told her that she was slow and/or the wrong body type. This participant claims to still hate running. The five non-athletes

grew up assuming that they would never become runners. Participants expressed emotions similar to:

All through high school, [running] was something you only do if you are a certain body type and if you are a naturally sporty person and I wasn't. I'm not. So, I got put off of it very early. I mean, even when we had to do some running in school they never teach you how to actually run. They just tell you to go and do it.

Similar perceptions on running were expressed by other participants. These participants compared their performances against other classmates as evidence of their inadequate running ability. Participants not armed with knowledge about the discipline of running, while being forced to run, concluded that they were simply incapable of succeeding at the sport.

This identification as a weak runner was internalized by runners who then negatively described their own athleticism: "I've never been a fast runner, so, we're talking 10 to 15-minute mile range," or "I'm not particularly fit." Likewise, runners had negative things to say about the sport itself: "I never did any running. I did sports, but not running. Running was boring." These statements say a great deal about what these individuals imagine a runner to be where running is associated with a level of elitism. Finding running to be hard, time consuming, and tedious for many challenges the notion described above that looking physically fit is important. Athletes, in contrast, had more realistic expectations for running. For instance, one participant ran to train for swimming and noted that he would run 6-10 miles every other day to increase his cardiovascular strength. He had a strong fitness foundation, an established routine, and understood the value of regular running for his fitness goals. As such, running in social

environments can have positive and negative effects on how individuals see their own athleticism.

Running in competitive social settings, like school, does not work for everyone. As such, runners often find interfaces that help them develop and maintain a running habit. Runners have long relied on media to help them to interface; treadmills have come with mounted television screens for a reason. People have been using mobile devices to listen to music or books on tape since the Walkman. Participants mentioned that they would watch movies while on the ever-tedious treadmill and listen to music, books on tape, and podcasts when they ran outside. Media interfaces running very well. The media distract runners and helps individuals to cope not only with the physical act of running, but also with coping with performing running in public spaces. As de Souza e Silva and Frith note about interface “When we experience a place, we do so through our body, which acts as a layer between a place and our perception of it. We also develop techniques to filter the information around us, further interfacing our experiences” (26). While in public spaces, wearing headphones send a clear signal that an individual does not want to be engaged with. This helps runners to better control the spaces they run in. Deciding to use interactive collaborative media, like ZR, adds another layer of interface that can help runners continue running.

*Zombies, Run!* utilizes a running based narrative to further develop the interface that a certain class of runners can intellectually build into their running experience. ZR attracts media savvy users who are used to narrative rich media. Users of ZR are more interested in mobile apps that provide a culturally rich environment than an app that better tracks and analyzes runs the way more technical running apps would. They tried ZR because they liked zombie films and video games, or quirky podcasts like *Welcome*

*to Night Vale*. ZR's slogan is "Get fit. Escape Zombies. Become a Hero." For gamers and popular culture fans, these objectives are much more familiar than speed and/or distance running objectives. The key difference is runners master these objectives through the interface of physical space instead of a screen.

An immersive and media rich interface is one of the key draws to digital running tools and online running communities in general. In using interfaces, individuals are able to momentarily distract themselves from much of the cultural baggage and anxiety attached to maintaining fitness or a healthy hobby in current neo-liberal thinking. Individuals who do not always find running fun, either because they have past negative experiences with the sport or because running can get tedious, are instead able to involve themselves with a narrative that allows them to overcome these drawbacks. Mobile applications are particular good at helping individuals start a running habit because one does not need site specific community to start and runners have time to develop their own running ability before they incorporate others into their running hobby.

### *RUNNING ALONE, TOGETHER*

Runners enter the narrative of ZR and acquaint themselves with the world through the main characters that Runner 5 either "runs" with or hears from Abel's communication tower. The app is entertaining and running becomes the chance to engage more with the narrative. So, while runners are technically running through their neighborhoods alone, they are always running with a character from the narrative. ZR is an audio driven application, and instead of listening to a story the way that one might an audio book, the user is given commands that assume the narrative is happening in real

time. The character driven audio narrative creates a hyperreal space wherein runners experience layers of reality as they run. This kind of running can be immersive. Narrative mixed with these real-time auditory cues leads to a hyperreal running experience: “When I’m listening to *Zombies, Run!*, I’m very much part of the story. I’m listening to the story. I’m waiting for the next thing. I’m occasionally eyeing the horizon in case the zombie apocalypse has happened.” In addressing the zombie chase feature specifically, one participant responded, “It’s actually a bit of fear. The first time the zombies got me I was so mad and ever since then I’ve just booked it...I know that they aren’t really there but I can pretend.” Another participant explained the dual awareness thusly: “It’s equal parts entertaining (I notice myself experiencing the narrative, and I am able to smile in observation of the experience) and engrossing (I lose myself in the activity, perhaps separating reality from fantasy if only for a moment).” To counter, a participant commented that the story was interesting and immersive, but did not feel chased by zombies. This dual feeling of immersion and awareness of the construct is not only a hallmark of hyperreal texts, but also integral to safety. For runners, looking out for imaginary zombies instead of real cars could be deadly.

The hyperreal elements of the game are essential users to identifying with Runner 5. All participants in the study described runner 5 as a person who was similar to them in age, gender, and athletic ability. One participant, a cosplayer who has gone out on runs dressed as Runner 5, imagined the character as a slightly improved version of herself: “When I think of Runner 5, I think of someone who is similar to me, but different from me at the same time. Someone who fits more the story than I would. Someone who is more advanced at running.” Here, Runner 5’s identity is intertwined with an idealistic, or the person that she hopes ZR can help her become.

Building on this identification, ZR makes runners feel essential to the world of Abel. Characters within ZR protect Runner 5 and see the character's contributions as essential for the community's survival. Runner 5 gains this significance through hard work. In the first mission, Runner 5 is only allowed into Abel Township after retrieving valuable medical files for the town. Good will is maintained through continued compliance in Abel-sponsored missions. Ultimately, the narrative is structured to simulate that the participant's commitment to the practices of the community lead to continued support by the community, just as a commitment to running for fitness could lead to health rewards for runners. Participants have characters within the app that they feel close to emotionally, characters who they regularly run with. This imagined camaraderie is, for several participants, their first positive experience had running in a community, even though that community is imaginary.

Support is essential for new runners who generally do not see themselves as athletes. ZR fills this void by introducing a fictional community that is in need of just what the user provides. In doing so, Abel Township momentarily fills in in a way that previous experiences have not. So, users who have lost the purpose of running have a digital community to fall back on who are in need of Runner 5. As one participant described this phenomena:

You're never punished for not being able to do something. It's always encouragement and whatever your speed, whatever body type you have or size you are, whether you're walking or running, you're still good enough to be a hero. You're still good enough to save the world. You're still good enough to run.

ZR makes runners feel valuable where they are as far as fitness. This helps runners continue on with ZR because a community depending on them as a hero. These immersive experiences exist not only in the athletic experiences of the user. This narrative world is embedded on runners' communities and as such the individual communities flavor the narrative. Runners who ran in urban areas expressed more concern over their own safety while running, expressing both frustrations navigating roads with cars and concerns over not "looking suspicious." Urban runners would not run with ZR after dark and made sure to look "as normal as possible" while running with the app so as to not draw attention. Class here is portable, tied to the body and gaze.

Moving through neighborhoods is also moving through class systems. These observations tie into two different ideas. Urban runners felt more self-conscious running in less affluent neighborhoods which they did not see as places where one typically runs. "Less affluent neighborhoods" refers to working class neighborhoods, showing the ways in which running is classed. They also felt a strong desire to be normalized and to not draw attention to themselves, what Foucault would call a 'constraint of conformity' (183). Their involvement in the narrative was necessarily balanced with their awareness of their surroundings. In contrast, participants who lived in rural and homogeneous areas were more comfortable immersing themselves in the story. One respondent who lived in what she describes as a small English village explained, "I'm lucky my village understands I'm a cosplayer and an actress at the same time and they do understand. I place myself in the character; I try to act it out as best I can." Because this participant feels as though her community supports who she is as a person, she feels as though she can participate in this digital game all the more. As such,



the experience of running with ZR is unique for all individuals, even though they are sharing the same levels and quests.

While running with ZR, participants conveyed that the events of the narrative embedded themselves in the places the runners run. One participant, a relatively new user of the app, mentioned he could remember every place he had experienced a zombie chase. Another participant mentioned that ZR better acquainted her with her neighborhood: “I went down a bunch of side streets I haven’t gone down before and some paths and ended up in the woods and I was like I didn’t even know there were woods around here.” One participant mentioned that she’s most aware of the construction of the game: “The one I distinctly remember is, by the time I got to a third toolbox I was thinking how the heck would I be carrying 3 toolboxes right now?” This participant also incorporated her dog, who she ran with, into the narrative and would imagine her large dog might pull a cart to carry equipment. The zombie chase function within the game forces users to keep running or lose the materials they collect for their digital community. In order to keep sprinting, runners avoided crossing streets and would often make sharp turns or double back. This can take users down roads they have never been down and see parts of their community they otherwise would not.

Overall, the hyperreal nature of the app applied to material spaces was appealing to interview participants. One user, who had started by walking with the app and treating it like a podcast, mentioned that the narrative of ZR helped her to better engage with exercise and push herself to run: “I decided I want to find out what happens enough so I have to make it this special thing I can only do when I’m exercising.” This participant’s engagement with the narrative incentivized her running. Running becomes a reward, a chance to slip into a world of characters in the way that one might a favorite

television show or a good book. This shift in perspective on running helps runners weigh the rewards and consequences of running differently and helps them to develop running as a regular practice.

### *RUNNING WITH OTHERS*

Once runners gained experience running with the app, they expressed a desire to create a community of others, even though the digital nature of the app was a preliminary reason for using it. This desire is expressed by either seeking out ZR fan communities or by wanting ways to use ZR with other runners. First and foremost, runners did feel that the app helped them to improve their running. In stark contrast how they discussed their running history, participants talked about their experience running with ZR to be largely positive, making comments like: “I usually run for two minutes and then just walk. Now, I won’t quit running. I try to run until I hit a limit and it’s easier with the app,” and “When I run with the app I’m better at regulating my breathing and focus on what I’m doing.” These responses show participants are more realistic about what it means to improve as a runner. Additional replies focused on how ZR helped users to enjoy running more: “So, I’m fairly confident I still hate running. I will still primarily run so that I can eat and/or get in better health. But it already makes me want to more. It makes the time I’m doing it more enjoyable, and that’s huge.” So, as users improved and gained confidence as runners, they wanted to supplement the fictional community of the app in order to meet and interact with a larger community of runners in virtual or material places.

Since the apps release in February 2012, fandom around ZR developed on Tumblr. Like other fandoms, the community exists mostly online, but supplements that

community with in-person meet ups at fan conventions and ZR sponsored events. Images of fans cosplaying Runner 5 are easily searchable on Tumblr and the creators of *Zombies Run!* have participated with fans with events like convention panels and pre-planned ZR meetups. This fan activity likewise works to promote the app across Tumblr's often intersecting communities and promotes the app to new communities. Members of the fan community were overwhelmingly positive about the participation of the creators with the fans. These participants likewise expressed a strong connection with the ZR Tumblr community, closer than other communities, as one participant described it:

I've been in bigger fandoms where you have to figure out who to follow...And I think it does keep my interest in something when [I] have other people to discuss it with...[I] can talk to them, trade theories, extend the canon with fan fiction and fan art.

The community within the narrative gets individuals invested in a community outside of the app, and this community allows individuals to extend their experience beyond the narrative provided by the app. This is important because there is a significant amount of downtime between seasons. Each season of ZR is 25 to 60 episodes long. That's more than one would expect from a television show, but individuals who run three or more times a week do not take long to finish a season. Where the seasons leave gaps in content, these related communities can support runners and keep individuals closely connected to both ZR communities. For those in the Tumblr community, their involvement within this community likewise gives individuals the opportunity to participate and give back emotional and artistic (through cosplay, art, and fan fiction) to this community that has benefitted them.

Other participants, particularly those not involved in the Tumblr community, wanted people in their material communities to engage with the app as well, preferably collaboratively. One participant talked about purchasing the app for her step son, who “is a horror fanatic...has done zombie proms and stuff like that and runs.” Other felt that sharing the app with neighbors could help others in their community begin walking/running. They also felt that others might also be encouraged to take up running or some fitness hobby seeing these ‘average’ users running publically. Closely connected, participants hoped that the game could be even more hyperreal, specifically in how the game manages the specific places the users run in. Several commented that they thought the app could be improved by being “even more interactive” and “tied into real locations.” One participant suggested making it a MMO, where meeting up with runners could gain users different loot than the game usually provides. This, he argued, was one way to enlist new users and possibly give runners insight into others around them running with the app. Participants who suggested that the app be more place based were aware that this is not yet technically possible because the app would need resources that would exceed the storage and battery of most smartphones.

While participants felt the desire to get friends and community members involved with ZR, no respondent felt as though they had become closer to their local community with the app. So, while this app got them outside more often, taught them more about the geographic layout of their community, and embedded new meanings into the places they ran, they felt as though the relationship they had overall with their own communities was not altered by their use of the app remained constant. This in large part comes as a criticism of what online communities are supposed to be able to do, to encourage a civic mindedness in online members, but reinforces the idea that

individuals identify strongly with online communities (Song 3). What the app does well, however, is help introduce runners to a running community. As an interface it allows users to block out the social and cultural baggage that comes with running, referenced above. This interface likewise prepares runners to enter into more localized running communities, which will also have levels of construct and simulation. After practice in the virtual community that ZR provides, runners often join larger running communities, find other individuals who have shared experiences, and engage in collaborative running with others. Likewise, in this hyperreal construction, the divide between digital and material communities is porous. The drive behind joining an online fan group or planning an in-person experience connects at the same drive to find others in a larger community and join the general running community.

### *CONCLUSIONS ZOMBIES, RUN!*

As discussed earlier, interfaces help one to manage the spaces around them, but they also serve as buffers between an individual and the public. For runners who are self-conscious about running in public or find tedium in running in the same space over and over again, ZR provides an interface that helps users a playful space where they can learn to run. An immersive narrative in a hyperreal environment can help runners to cope with the self-conscious aspects of running: “The pervasive game interweaves the concept of reality and fantasy, thus transforming our everyday environment into a world in play. This complicates the notions of reality and fantasy (fantasy referring to the game)” (Nieuwdorp 199). In this complication, runners are able to focus on the game instead of the many drawbacks to developing a labor-intensive skill.

Identifying as part of this digital community is essential to runners engaging in this immersive world. In analyzing runners, understanding runners' previous experiences is necessary to understanding how they interact in this new medium because those previous experiences flavor new situations. They then use these experiences to ZR because "[w]hen players participate in a pervasive game; they are actively creating meaning...they often need to reinterpret common conventions about meaning" (Nieuwdorp 202). In this reinterpretation, runners were able to shift their perceptions not only on cultural expectations of what a good runner is, but how they can incorporate themselves into this larger running community. In this reinterpretation, runners can write themselves into preconceived and culturally constructed notions of what it means to be a runner.

As runners become more comfortable with the sport and identify as part of the running community they search out other runners, preferably runners who have also used ZR as a gateway into the running community. Likewise, many app users extend the experience by finding online fan communities to participate in and share cosplay as well as fan made soundtracks, fiction and artistry. ZR creators participating in this community encourages runners in these convergent practices. The experience users have with this application introduces conversations about how best to use hyperreal and augment reality apps in any context. Here, the appeal of the app falls into the ways that it is able to interface and utilize outside resources (like the internet and one's own neighborhood) to create a unique experience and connect people. In developing the app in just this way, it works as a gamified tutorial that helps users to level up into the larger running community. At the same time, it remains a lens that runners keep as they progress as runners. This, however, is more than a tutorial on how to begin running.

Instead, it is a tutorial on how to block out the anxiety, precarity, and tedium that come with running and potentially enjoy running by interlaying over it a narrative that makes the runner feel important. This relationship as though they are succeeding at running, that their experience of running is normalized, and that they are legitimate members of this community.

### **BALANCING WORK AND HOME WITH MOM ON THE RUN**

*Zombies, Run!* can be a successful gateway into the running community, particular for individuals invested in immersive media and popular cultural. However, it is not the only gateway into the large and ambiguous running community. Analyzing another, differently structured, running community helps to gain insight into the unique avenues runners find as entryways into larger fitness communities. Mom on the Run (MotR) is a small Facebook community who share their everyday runs and workouts to the group's timeline. Originating in a Richmond, VA suburb, the loose community is connected through loose personal networks. The founder of the group, then training for a half marathon, was looking for support from active friends during race training. MotR is wordplay on the non-profit Girls on the Run, which encourages girls in the 3<sup>rd</sup> through 8<sup>th</sup> grade to adopt running as a healthy habit and confidence builder. MotR initially referred to the group founder, but soon other members were posting their running accomplishments and a community was formed. Most of the women within the community know at least one other person in the community from their daily life.

While online, MotR is based in central Virginia. Because runners are within a general proximity of one another, meeting up for trips, to train together, and/or just happening across each other is not uncommon. However, digital interactions and

regular posting and commenting are the main points of communication for the group. There are several entry points to participation. Members posting their daily workouts to MotR keeps the community active. These postings can include publishing run distances and durations, and reflections that can range from discussing injuries or personal accomplishments. Members also like and comment on posts, giving encouragement or advice from other community members.

Importantly, members use different fitness apps to track runs and share their runs to the community page instead of their personal timelines. Members value a community that cares about their running and other members of their Facebook network can consider these daily run posts spam. MotR members also solicit others in the community to ‘friend’ them on these various social media based fitness applications, like myfitnesspal (a food journal/calorie counting application). Members make weekly goals, and the community’s leader tracks and then posts these members’ aggregate workouts weekly, adding a layer of accountability to the group. Several members have set up friendly competitions with one another and the community hosts annual events like ‘holiday streaking,’ where runners run at least one mile every day between Thanksgiving and New Year’s Day. Members share articles and memes about running. This amalgamation of social medias and content sites is not uncommon and its references to space likewise aligns with the way that social media is used “the intrinsic nature of [social media] sites is the creation of a sense of shared space through embodied practices. Thus, in order to embody space, one must feel a sense of reciprocity within that space” (Farman 60).

Ultimately, MotR is an online community that utilizes the strengths and weaknesses of a variety of social media and mobile technology to create a



hyperconnected group that can be easily accessed several times a day. Members are usually introduced to the group through a social connection. As such, while chiefly an online community, the daily regular activity of the group and its somewhat porous relationship with a geographic region means that group participants desire offline interactions through either races or more casual social gatherings. The reason that Facebook groups are attractive for runners is because running is a daily activity and posting about daily runs to one's individual Facebook page can feel like spam. Instead of broadcasting runs to all of one's friends, being part of a running community allows runners to share their accomplishments with like-minded individuals from inside an interface they are familiar with.

Group members were invited to participate in this study through a post to the MotR Facebook page. Mom on the Run is a small running community with 259 listed group members as of January 8, 2015. Runners range in ability from beginners (less than two years of experience) to experienced distance runners. One does not need to be a runner or a mother (or even a woman) to be a member of MotR and several of the active posters to the page are men (typically the husband of a woman participant) and/or childfree. Likewise, there are non-running members who have joined the group because they want accountability for fitness goals. Others enjoy reading posts about a friend or family member's physical fitness and might not be actively engaged in a physical fitness routine at all. While the group has 259 listed members, during the period of my study, 20 members were actively involved in posting, commenting on, or liking posts in the month the survey took place. The group may have a great number of lurkers (individuals who read posts, but do not post to the site, 'like' others posts, or comment), but because the group has been around for two years, many members may

have been invited and never participated in the community. Ultimately, 12 individuals participated in the survey and all finished. While there is a great diversity to the membership of the group, a large part of the respondents were mothers who were also experienced runners.

### *GETTING STARTED, RUNNING ALONE FOR OTHERS*

Mom on the Run community members tended to be more experienced runners who used the community to help keep them motivated to run because running competed with a variety of other obligations, particularly childcare. MotR works much more as an accountability community that individuals turn to for ease of use, but motivates these same individuals to enter into their local running communities. Participants within MotR expressed histories of running similar to the experiences of *Zombies, Run!* participants. Individuals who had participated in sports in school were much more likely to enjoy running in adulthood: “I grew up playing soccer so I have always enjoyed running.” Those who did not grow up running used a running app or self-regulated running program to teach themselves how to run. More than half the members of this group used a mobile-based training program, notably couch to 5k. Overall, this community had more experience with running than members of the ZR community. MotR members were much more likely to need support maintaining a running schedule around work, family, and schedule commitments.

MotR members run in a variety of locations and looking at where they run helps better understand the community’s priorities. Most members run in multiple locations and made their choices based on convenience. With convenience in mind neighborhood running was the most popular, followed (in order) by treadmills, rural areas (usually

close to home), and wooded trail areas. Overall, participants preferred to run outside, the following comment typical: “Running outside is also very peaceful and I usually run a longer distance than on a treadmill which is really easy to quit on since all I have to do is hit a button and then walk two steps to sit on the couch.” The majority of runners still ended up regularly running on treadmills because treadmills were necessary to maintain the hobby. Community members balanced many obligations, the vast majority of members work and have families and are balancing time, space, childcare, and budgets to participate in any leisure. Treadmills, either at home or at the gym, help members to manage training and childcare. Convenience and scheduling likewise meant that the majority of runs were solo runs. MotR allows individuals to run largely on their own to share in an online community and get some of the benefits a location-based running club might provide as well.

MotR follows trends within the running community that encourage individuals to identify with the furthest distance they have run as opposed to their fastest speed. Members identify themselves with a distance with statements like “I have done a half marathon—I’m not sure if that is really me” or “Since then I’ve run a handful of 5k’s, a few 10k’s, a half, and a full marathon.” This identification is reinforced by the group as weekly goals that community members model around distance instead of speed. Additionally, the person who runs the most miles in a particular month is announced at the beginning of the month and gets a letter from one of the group leader congratulating the member. Finally, the most successful group challenges on MotR have been ones like holiday streaking, where distance and daily participation were the only requirements. While running is not required for membership into this community, it is embedded in the identity of the community. As such, busy members are trying to maintain a time-

consuming leisure hobby and the group's culture often encourages them to dedicate more time to the hobby as they are encouraged by those running longer distances.

### *WRITING MOTR INTO RUNNING*

While not a structured narrative, Like *Zombies, Run!*, members of MotR also wanted to create their own running narratives. Because community members had little disposable time, these narratives had to be something that could be accessed quickly and through multiple entry points. MotR's use of Facebook allows members to access the community throughout the day on a variety of devices. Members have Facebook on computers, smartphones, and tablets and the group itself benefits from Facebook being such a mobile media. The majority of participants accessed the MotR community through their phones for reading and posting to the group, compared to half using a computer and less than 10 percent using other mobile media. When talking about their preference for the smartphone, most members mentioned convenience and a busy mobile lifestyle as the reason for access. In addition, half of respondents checked in with MotR every day. These, however, are intentional check-ins because community members will have posts pushed to their Facebook news feed as new members post so long as they check in with the group a few times a week, based on Facebook's own algorithms for pushing content. So, MotR members can get several reminders to run throughout the day. The events of the group were interwoven in to regular Facebook users' day.

This mix of pushed and pulled data on running produces an algorithmic narrativization that coincides with a cultural inclination to narrativize "fitness journeys." Individuals within MotR usually had a narrative about how and why they ran. Usually it

followed a pretty standard format. First they did not enjoy running at all and had tried several times to find some way to make running stick. Then a life change happened (going to college, becoming a parent, changing jobs) and then this person found a solution to getting started with running. These narratives, however, could be modified within the ways that individuals built their own narrative identities. One member fits running into his identity as a soldier. Running is used specifically to pass PT tests, to maintain both his role in the military and his identity. While he does not enjoy running, he identifies as physically fit and running is part of the discipline he needs to construct that identity. Other members identified injury as a significant part of their identity. Injury was something that they needed to return from through work and discipline, as Foucault observes techniques “by which one imposes on the body that repetitive and different, but always gradual” assured “in the form of continuity and constraint, a growth, an observation, a qualification” (*Discipline and Punish* 161). Even in these instances, however, overall fitness is narrativized to include running and how running helps that individual. Incorporating this narrative helped many runners to keep running. If narrative is progress, continuing to involve oneself in the narrative meant physical progress as well.

Narrative also plays a key role in the ways that individuals see their relationship with MotR. This relationship is twofold; individuals acknowledge that MotR involvement has affected their running and they modify their running to match what they perceive other members performing. As such, 75 percent of participants claim that MotR has affected the way that they run. Members chiefly mention that the ongoing accountability helps them to train harder and keep involved in the community. Others

mention that the advice they have received from posts has helped them to become better runners. One member mentioned a holistic change in running based on the group:

It has changed my life. I was added to the community on day one and shortly after saw someone commenting about couch to 5k. I looked it up and decided to do it. I was impressed in 2013 when [group member] ran a half marathon I thought I'd NEVER be able to do that...I since met that goal.

This member has written her involvement in MotR and the experiences of other runners into how she sees her own running narrative. She uses other members' successes in the group to gauge what she can accomplish. This also helps her to manage precarity, wherein she tries to reconcile what she sees as cultural ideals with practical life. When introduced to the group, she thought she was unable to run. However, seeing other individuals who she knew manage this and larger goals she was able to make the practical changes that would help her meet these fitness markers.

This narrativization works both ways and members likewise consider MotR members and how they will compose posts about their runs for the community while they are running. The majority of respondents confessed to thinking about MotR while they ran, qualifying that statement with statements like "I'm usually planning my post already!!" and "Can I go faster and farther?" Members likewise think about the goal that they announced to the group and how this run will help them to meet their mileage goals. These comments show that community members use the community in part to shape how they construct running and acknowledge that how community members see their success influences their fitness habits. Individuals want not only to post about their runs, but also to show that they are becoming more successful runners. This could

also be discouraging, especially to runners who see the other members as younger or more successful. When their lived experience does not reflect what they see the rest of the group doing they can get disheartened about their own identities as runners.

### *CONNECTING OFFLINE*

In addition to writing their running experience into the MotR community and writing the narrative about themselves into this community through their running, members also wrote the places they run into their level of involvement with the group. It was easier to be involved in community activities if one lived close by and this fact was not lost on members. Because runners signed up for the same races, being geographically close to other runners means that one can participate in place-based activities with other community members. Members who do not live in the Richmond, VA, either because they had moved or because they never lived there, expressed disappointment that they did not have opportunities to meet members face-to-face. This disappointment is particularly interesting because many members initially joined the group because they wanted a digital running club to belong to.

Members also felt as though their level of involvement was directly tied to their ability to participate in location-based community activities. Members who had felt closely connected to the group for the longest had also been able to participate in the face-to-face interactions. The group has been able to participate in communal runs, hikes, and races. Typically, if several runners were running the same race they would meet up before or after the race to take pictures to share to the MotR group page. Additionally, even if they were not training physically together, local members were sometimes training for the same race and were able to communicate with someone at a

similar point in training, communication that bleeds onto the MotR group page and reminds others of their distance from the group. Local members were also able to meet members they did not know from daily life, a practice that strengthened their ties to this digital community. Members unable to participate in these events felt as though they were missing out on part of the experience. So, while members joined an online community for reasons that included the convenience of having an online community to turn to, these same members wanted a physical community to augment the digital one. This desire shows a privileging of material places and geographic closeness that being part of a running community encourages, even in those who know they cannot commit to a place-based running community.

#### *CONCLUSIONS MOM ON THE RUN*

MotR is a community that values convenience and ease of connectivity. Runners in this community show a preference for communities that fold into their daily lives. Participants were typically invited by someone they know from their daily life, but prefer that most of the community interactions are online. Fitness narratives likewise played a significant role in how community members shape their own relationship with the community. They thought about how they were going to compose posts to the community and how they are composing themselves as ever developing runners. This development is significant because “[i]n the digital age, movement is almost always linked to ideas of progress” (Farman 135). Runners progress through runs, progress as runners, and want to see that same progression reflected in their community archive and interactions.



As runners become more comfortable in the community, they then want to find ways to connect with this community offline. Mostly this is a desire to participate with other community members in onsite activities within in the larger running community, including training together and signing up for the same races. This desire can be frustrating for members who live outside of the Richmond, VA area who are unable to compete in the same races as other community members. This is not only the desire for an emplaced practice, but also marks a desire for further participation in the running community. MotR, as a small accountability community, helped runners to interface with cultural notions of ‘good’ running. As runners develop, they take on more runs in public spheres, like half marathons, which bring in tens of thousands of runners. The desire to bring this community into these material places is the desire to hold onto the community as one enters a larger community.

## **CONCLUSIONS ON DIGITAL RUNNING COMMUNITIES**

In analyzing these smaller gateway communities, interfacing and emplaced practices come to the forefront as essential lenses to view running communities through. Mobile interfaces work as a buffer between the self and the public place and help runners to deal with the social inscribed anxiety that can come with modern running. Mobile media—like smartphones, books, and newspapers—allow individuals more control over public environments. These interfaces furthermore allow individuals to filter in a desired amount of information from the world around. Immersed in a narrative (even one happening in one’s imagination), individuals are able to ignore the aspects of public places they choose to ignore. Mobile apps and online communities allow individuals the chance to both filter out information they need to in order to run

and share information intentionally. This gives runners more control when maneuvering through public places. Ultimately, this demands a rethinking of the ways that we imagine spaces of leisure. By selecting the ways that individuals mediate spaces, public places are more easily used for different reasons by different individuals at the same time. This helps self-conscious runners to move past these insecurities and run in public spaces.

For runners fighting either self-consciousness of running in public or the tedium of running in the same place over and over again, ZR provides an interface that helps runners block out the parts of the running experience necessary to improve their running. For instance, runners who are too nervous about the possibility of others seeing them run, wearing headphones cues other individuals that these individuals do not want to be approached. The ZR narrative allows runners to imagine that instead of jogging in sight of their friends and neighbors, they are running through spaces populated primarily by non-judgmental zombies while the audio-narrative reinforces their high success rate. Similarly, members of MotR are immersed in a community they can access at any moment, but are also invested in creating a narrative where they are continuing to develop through dedication and challenges. By interfacing primarily with a digital community, they find the support and accountability they may not feel in other spaces. These interfaces allow runners the playful space to train themselves in the basics of running because “game rules need to be accepted as the laws of the new semiotic domain that is entered” (Nieuwdorp 2006).

Digital media requires further consideration because of the ability for it to influence community interaction: “Computer interfaces are not neutral. They actively influence communication relationships...and transform both parties that [they] connect”

(de Souza e Silva and Firth 2). The ways that individuals work with the technology medium of the community actively affects the expectations that running communities have, both in how individuals are expected to interact and in what they assume other members are doing. In running communities, these expectations necessarily surround embodied acts. “Any theory of embodiment must therefore account for the fact that *embodiment is conceived out of biological factors*” (Farman 29) and in this we must accept that the individual is always not only factoring in the cultural expectations one might have of running and running communities, but also physical aspects like physical ability, health, work hours, physical location, and personal obligations.

In this act of interfacing, and particularly with these running communities, narrative plays a significant role in how runners see their own progress. Here, narrative and place work to help the runner to create an enjoyable space to run in: “The experience of the narrative is shaped by the place she is sitting, as much as the experience of the place is shaped by the narrative” (de Souza e Silva and Frith 39). In the same way, runners’ experiences of these online communities are directly related to where they are because they must reconcile the story with the world around them. When using ZR, runners must remain aware of the world around them while they run in order to stay safe. With MotR, runners are aware that their runs and fitness levels feed into a personal and community narrative. These narratives become essential to runners, who shape their lives around them.

In writing these narratives, runners begin to include others in their own fitness narratives. These are community members they experienced runs with, whether those community members are fictional or live a state away. In this way, the fitness narrative extends beyond running. Even though members chose digital communities to

participate in because for all the reasons mentioned above, once individuals developed skills and relationships with community members, they have the desire to share the skills with individuals they have interacted with online. This also reflects a desire to enter into the larger running community. While fitness might have been a reason to begin a running habit, the immersion and the social element of running kept most distance runners engaged with the sport (Robinson et al. 389). These desired physical encounters augment digital communities and allow them to see and interface differently with community members while also confirming both the size of this community and the degree of the individual's belongingness to the larger runner community.

This narrative, in both ZR and MotR, is based on the idea of progress, which is related to technology and fitness. Narratives progress, and the rhetoric around technology, digital or otherwise, implies improvement. In this way, using technology to track fitness connects with that idea of improvement. Individuals draw conclusions from technology: "We do not simply choose where and how to live based on a determined relationship to technology, but our exposure to technological ways of thinking impacts our imagination of what manner of living is possible" (Chamberlain 27). In a world that appears as though it is "constantly progressing" we search for that same progress within our own bodies.

In general, these digital communities help individuals to manage precarity, but, as interfaces that inherently encapsulate the runner, they do little to change understandings of running. While they help the runner to enter the larger running community with expectations of how they will be received, they also in many ways remove the runner from the material spaces they run in every day. A runner with headphones in and focused on the imagined narrative they use to run is removed from

much of what is going on in the community itself, noticing just enough to keep safe. Headphones (sometimes thankfully) signify a runner's disinterest with being engaged, furthering the idea that the running community is unwelcoming. Likewise, these communities serve as pathways for the few. In calling itself Mom on the Run, MotR both invites mothers to play and excludes non-mothers from the group. *Zombies Run!* similarly shows that it is catering to pop culture fanatics, particularly zombie enthusiasts. So, while running communities might be one of the better ways to help new runners to interface with the public in a way that helps them run, they do less well at making running attractive to those outside of the group. Finally, these groups, in functioning almost like game tutorials, can give the impression that there is a hierarchy to running, that there are neophytes and grandmasters and that one must prove that they are good enough to run. As such, the communities may do much to help targeted individuals, but do little to help the cultural image of running.

## CHAPTER III

### BANDS OF BROTHERS, GIFTING IN FPS CLANS

#### INTRODUCTION

*Call of Duty* is a franchise of war-themed first person shooter games (FPS) with PC, Xbox, and PlayStation versions. With the release of *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 3*, Activision added significant social play to the franchise's multiplayer mode, creating clans for the first time within the game. Clans can range from a handful of players to upwards of 100 members. At the time of this study, clans competed in twice-monthly clan battles during much of the year, stopping a few weeks before a new game's release in November. Clans transfer from one game to another within the franchise and are self-governed by their members and are rarely policed in what is called a "customer service state" (Castronova 210). This organizational freedom in a long running game franchise makes *Call of Duty* (CoD) clans ideal places to study online community practices.

There are many games that have at their core an economy. This can be a robust economy, between players and the game, as can be found in *World of Warcraft* (WoW). This chapter analyzes games with limited economies to see if they could and/or would adopt this common social exchange and what might result from this ad-hoc virtual economy. With less regulated social systems in place, some CoD clans create internal small-scale gift economies. Players in these economies can focus on the exchange of material products and use gifting to create bonded, collaborative communities. The clans utilize a mixture of social media to connect with one another and participate outside of game space. These kinds of gifting demand a reconsideration of both traditional online gift economies, usually focused on the gifting of code, and the ways in

which material gift giving enters into digital play. Ultimately, material gift giving aids in the building of social structures within the game and adds to an overarching sense of community, revealing both that players adapt available resources to their benefit and that players value control over interpersonal exchanges within game spaces. These long standing social ties to the community often evolve into emotional ties to the game itself and benefit game producers because players help create content and continue to spend money on both the software and hardware to continue to play with their communities. This analysis points to scholarship that addresses how digital economies are mixed economies and considers the ways that these economies using giving to solidify community across space. While mostly linked to gameplay, this addition of material products supports an emplaced understanding that active clan members have toward their teammates, expressed through an awareness of those members' daily lives and the importance of the transfer of embodied realities like age, sex, and race into gameplay.

### *GAMING, LEISURE, AND DISCIPLINE*

As described in the previous chapter, leisure time, defined as time away from work, is socially constructed to encourage individuals, particularly those of the middle class, to spend that time focused on personal projects that develop them as individuals (Rojek 68). While play is accessible at a variety of social classes, contemporary cooperative online gaming requires expensive hardware (console or gaming computers, television screens, and headphones), and software (the games themselves, online subscriptions). Finally, players tend to live in homes that can afford strong internet connections and multiple screens/rooms to accommodate other members as one uses

these resources for hours during online play. Gaming is a lucrative business that caters to those with the drive and disposable income to play.

At the same time, while exercise is regularly looked at as always positive for both the individual and the state, gaming has a more mixed reception. Many major media circuits have portrayed video games in a negative way, arguing that they instigate violence. FPS are a genre of game that portray realistic violence and games like *Doom* have been connected with youth violence, specifically the Columbine shooting in 1999 (Kline, Dyer-Witheford, and de Peuter 247). With regards to leisure, video games are often written about as though they were “deficiency leisure” based on the virtual nature of the video games “devoid of any ‘real’ physical changes whether emotional, physical, or intellectual” (Fox and Lepine 109). More extreme video game practices might be considered as deviant leisure activities, which would connect video game play with illegal and abnormal practices (109). This criticism, however, tends to limit public conversations surrounding games and is common among emergent technologies. For instance, in discussing the novel’s popularity in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Brantlinger remarks:

With great regularity, novel-reading is represented, both by its critics and by novelists, as a form of leisure activity done instead of something else—a something else that is almost always, as the 1890s opponents of libraries suggest, categorizable as mental improvement and therefore as a sort of work, albeit cultural or spiritual work. (22)

The suspicion over emergent medias compare new leisure activities to the spiritual or cultural work that one “should” be doing in their free time. In some respects, Fox and Lepine describe this assumption as a conflation of the content of the games themselves and the actions of the player. Playing a game where one steals cars, robs



banks, and blows up helicopters does not mean that a player will enact those events outside the game.

The place-ness of leisure is integral in identifying the divide between acceptable leisures. Leisure studies most often focuses on emplaced practices that generally bring some positive improvement to the individual. Sports and outdoor recreation, as explained in the previous chapter, are perhaps the best examples of leisure activities that typically promote social behavior while relieving stress and helping to maintain health. Exercise often requires certain kinds of spaces. Large stretches of nature are required for hiking. Safe roads are required for running. Storage for weights is necessary for strength conditioning. These public places can appear to promote socialization in the way that more encapsulated leisure activities, like gaming, may not. However, this should be qualified by the individuals participating in those leisurely activities, a conclusion that sociologists have suggested for quite some time. Theoretical discussions of the use of space populate the works of de Certeau, Massey, and Soja presented in the introduction. Public and domestic places can both be used for any number of endeavors. Essentially, placeness is only one element of the socialness of these spaces, and who uses these places for what purposes changes with the individuals participating in leisure in those spaces.

Ultimately, games are a form of media and their use, as mentioned above has much to do with the relationship between the individual, the artifact, and the culture that surrounds it. Culturally, video games have been popularly perceived as played alone on a computer or console in a domestic place. However, while there are many games that can be played alone at home, games have also always had a social and public element to them, with archeological evidence of games found in public places going back

at least as far as the Romans (Moore 374). *Tennis for Two* (1958), often thought of as the first game made for entertainment, is a two player game. Arcade games of the 1970s and 80s often had multiplayer and single player modes, which were brought into the earliest console games. Early FPS like *Doom* (1993) were likewise popular in part because of the incorporation of multiplayer modes. Much like any other technology, video games are adaptable to the needs and conditions of a specific group of people. They are neither inherently pro-social nor anti-social. The rules of games are simply set up to encourage players to participate in particular ways.

The expansion of casual and pro-social elements to video games have made the field more social and open to more diverse demographics (Juul 2010). Cooperative and pro-social play has also made its way into AAA games<sup>1</sup> like CoD. These elements of the gaming public, while not new, do enter long running and often contradictory social environments in online gaming culture. While some see gaming as a relatively negative activity, others often see it as a productive use of time. Games can be both and neither. Players who participate in cooperative games must work together to compete against other teams and develop civic skills like “leadership, governance, team building, organizational processes, social skills, and character education” (Passmore and Holder 211). They can likewise grief, act in purposefully annoying and uncooperative ways, within these social spaces. Nardi argues, “[p]roblematic use of video games is sensible only in relation to other competing activities (since gaming does not have drastic physical effects)” (128). These events again show the ways that individuals mediate the activities a technology can be used for. In their many contexts, gaming is becoming ever

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<sup>1</sup> AAA Games are games with high production value, usually taking several years to make, and intended for wide dissemination. They are often adapted for several regional markets (O’Hagan 772).

more common. Games are pervasive leisure activities that can be played with a variety of people in countless places, and their continued convergence with more mobile media increases the number of people who play games in their leisure time, or as Ian Bogost has mentions comparing games and other leisure media:

There'll no longer be an oligarchy of videogame industrialist-gods to whom all creators and players will pay homage. Instead, there'll be many smaller groups, communities, and individuals with a wide variety of interests, some the occasionally intersecting with particular video games (154).

However, games franchises like Call of Duty, a military-based FPS, cater to audiences who play intense, time-consuming, and violent games. This leads conversations around game studies to acknowledge that:

The resulting configuration is more complex than either side in the virtual violence debate usually acknowledges. But the nexus of war-, combat-, and conquest-oriented games enjoys a pervasiveness that overlaps genre distinctions, is far more widely diffused than the industry likes to admit, and is perpetuated by a number of feedback loops that gives 'militarized masculinity' a persisting centrality in interactive game culture. (Kline et al. 255-6)

To say 'militarized-masculinity' means that the players of these games would be inherently male is a bit offset, as women have played and adapted play inside FPS as long as the genre has existed. For instance, women created all female clans and modded female skins into the game *Quake* (1996) (Kline et al. 262). What this instead implies is that war games engage a "band of brothers" trope distinguished and normalized not only in war games, but also in war films (Dyer-Witheford and De Peuter 107). This trope

references the connections between soldiers regardless of race or class and we can see this layered over games like *Call of Duty*, which will be discussed more later in this chapter. Dyer-Witthford and De Peuter connect this with the banality of war (100) and, as a leisure activity, games like *Call of Duty*, become part of everyday activities.

As leisure activities, video games find themselves at the intersections of conversations that often discredit new forms of leisure, which we can see in the ways that novels were historically portrayed. However, as the gaming becomes a more pervasive hobby, we see that players use these digital spaces in ways that seem both productive and unproductive. These assumptions, however, come from the expectation that leisure time should primarily be spent bettering the self. Video games as a media do not inherently promote or discourage socially acceptable activities. Instead, they reflect the players who use the space.

### *CALL OF DUTY, CONSOLES, AND CONNECTIVITY*

*Call of Duty* (CoD) describes a franchise of cross-console first person shooter (FPS) wargames. As of 2016, there are thirteen main games in the franchise with a new game typically released annually during the month of November. The franchise has brought in more money than box office sales of popular movie franchises like *Star Wars* or *Harry Potter*, two of the most popular movie franchises of all time (O'Hagan and Mangiron 14-15). Cinematic in quality, the games sell millions of copies during their release weekends with the main attraction being cooperative online play. These games represent what are called "AAA games," because of the heavy investment in how they are both produced and advertised in which "the industry's profitability rests significantly on trying to synchronize technological innovation, cultural trends, and marketing strategy"

(Kline et al. 74). While also available for computer gaming, the franchise's success lies mostly in its console versions, particularly PlayStation and Xbox systems. Originally single player shooters set in World War II, the games have evolved to include war simulations through different historical periods, including the near future. The games' designers also created an expansive cooperative online competition based on twice monthly group competitions called clan wars.

While CoD is not the first FPS and little about the gameplay is necessarily unique, CoD has distinguished itself as a franchise because Activision Blizzard has made the games flexible, familiar, cooperative and, most importantly, competitive, allowing players to create highly connected communities across media, culminating in clan wars, which allow players to compete alongside players they might spend several hours during the week with. This increase in community elements has been part of Activision's attempts to make Call of Duty the number one console eSports game and to help the game compete more with free-to-play pc-based eSports games like *League of Legends*. Sam Cooper, senior director in Activision's marketing department told *Fortune Magazine* in reference to the release of *Black Ops III* (2015), "[w]e want [fans] to play Call of Duty year-round. Building that community and driving engagement of the game is good for the health of the franchise. That's a big part of where eSports is going for us" (Gaudiosi). Reaffirmed in their 2015 letter to their investors, Activision Blizzard describes their move to a sports model as a move to further franchising their intellectual property: "Professional sports leagues are able to generate billions of dollars in revenue each year through various sources including ticket sales licensing, merchandising, sponsorships, and broadcast rights" ("Key Reports" 16). Activision's initiatives to cultivate participation and community are ways to develop their own eSports initiatives

to lead the console eSports market and expand their own franchising ability. The games themselves are spaces to train and recruit both professional gamers and an invested audience of amateur players.

This eSports initiative has been building for some time and a look at the development of collaborative play within the franchise helps understand where individual clans fit within this larger market initiative. The first installment, *Call of Duty*, was released in 2003 for PC and included interactive non-playable characters and military units to make the games feel immersive and collaborative. Starting with its sequel, *Call of Duty 2* (2005), the game producers included a multiplayer feature for game play, allowing players to use different maps to play with each other. *Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare* (2007) shifted the focus of the games into contemporary world conflicts and introduced map packs and downloadable content that could be purchased in addition to the game itself. These maps were exclusively for online multiplayer modes and downloadable after the game's release. New content keeps players engaged in the game after finishing campaign modes, extending play by allowing players to interact more. *Call of Duty: Black Ops* (2010) included more types of online multiplayer game play. Activision worked to include new game types in *Black Ops* because players in *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare* had begun to create their own games within multiplayer maps (for instance, putting self-limiting restrictions on weapon use). In *Black Ops*, several of those player-generated games became actual game types within multiplayer mode. Game producers observed how players used the game and included elements that accommodated player's natural inclinations into the game itself. This is a chief example of a practice called "playbor," wherein players collaborate in creating key elements of a game, often using these elements to extend the playability of a game. As Julian Kücklich

notes, the problem with this kind of labor is that, while fun and engaging, “the games industry not only sells entertainment products, but also capitalizes on the products of the leisure derived from them.” This is the case with many cooperative games, wherein the appeal of the game is less the game itself than the other individuals one plays with. It likewise means that companies like Activision Blizzard can create profitable spaces supported by the cultural capital that comes with social networking, similar to what Taylor highlights when referencing modding communities (“Precarious Playbour”).

While CoD games have always had some online component, starting in 2011 with *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 3*, players were also able to join Elite. In Activision’s ongoing attempt to professionalize some of its games into eSports, Elite was an in-game social network that allowed players to create small groups known as clans. The term clan is not limited to CoD and many FPS label groups of players as clans. CoD clans identify by an up to four-letter tag next to their screen name and clans compete in bimonthly matches to advance through leagues and potentially win prizes. There is usually one official commander and then any other organization within the clan is done internally. The clan observed in this chapter does ‘promote’ players using Army rankings. These players follow a chain of command where the highest ranking player leads the group through at any given time. Clans are organized for clan wars using an algorithm that puts several clans of similar size and overall ranking against one another. In *Call of Duty: Ghosts*, it was seven clans. In clan wars, clans capture and hold ‘nodes’ over the course of a weekend tournament. Nodes are specific multiplayer game types within the game. These nodes are overlaid on a map. Clans ‘capture’ a game type by earning capture points. This is done by winning games within that game type. Clan members do not need to be on the same team or in the same game lobby to win these points, so the

strategy is figuring out how many players to have where to hold as many nodes as possible. Typically, the top three clans would win prizes that range from custom DLC, to opportunities to compete professionally, to cash prizes. At the end of a clan war, clans can be promoted/demoted to a different league based on their performance.

With this dispersed kind of play, surveillance is done by both players and the game. Elite tracked individual and clan statistics, allowing players to view previous game performances and work with their clan to improve their future performances in clan wars. Even though Activision shut down Elite in 2014, it has incorporated Elite elements into the Call of Duty app, which added mobility to what was previously a website. With both Elite and the app, gameplay changed with the ability to develop structured groups, track players' performance, and work with their clan to improve performance. CoD clan battles made gameplay more closely resemble structured sports competition rather than the loose networks that existed previously in the series. These tools and apps likewise work as surveillance mechanisms that Dyer-Witthford and de Peuter recognize as biopower within the game: "biopower is the capacity that rulers must try to control and direct" which can lead to "a friction between biopower wielded from above and the 'biopolitical production' rising from below" (126). Here, these tools encourage players to bring ever more competitive skills to the game and to push themselves to work harder in their leisure time. As Activision Blizzard works to privilege eSports initiatives, surveillance will continue to be more important to the company. Also, in moving towards an eSports model, Activision Blizzard and Treyarch have removed clan wars from the most recent game, *Call of Duty: Black Ops III* in favor of Arena, a two-tiered competition in brackets for professional and amateur teams. This



move removed leagues and the flexible number of members who could be on a clan.

While clans can still use their clan tag in *Black Ops III*, there are no longer clan wars.

Elite and the CoD app were significant launching points to keep players connected to the clan, but players regularly supplement these resources with social media (Facebook, Twitter...) as well as clan websites and text messages. A porous relationship between media is common to digital spaces. In *The Wealth of Networks*, Yochai Benkler argues that we live in a networked information economy (3) and that “[t]he result is a flourishing nonmarket sector of information, knowledge, and cultural production, based in the networked environment, and applied to anything that the many individuals connected to it can imagine” (7). In CoD, players tap into systems they are accustomed to. Benkler also observes that networked economies ease collaboration by better connecting those with similar interests but multiple skill sets (Benkler 9). In contrast, Golumbia stresses the importance of weighing the empowering parts of active network economies with their costs. Individual empowerment within networked hierarchies comes with surveillance, both by corporate entities and other users (Golumbia 182). It is easier than ever before to be connected and players capitalize on this moment to increase experiences surrounding play, but these practices also help companies capitalize on the play of gamers.

By utilizing these communicative media and clan competitions, Activision is able to sustain game play year round, even for gamers who play more than 40 hours a week. Most CoD games have both campaign and multiplayer gaming options. However, multiplayer mode is so popular that it is not uncommon for players skip the campaign altogether. The chance to win prizes and rankings months after the game’s release keeps players in the game world. Additionally, Activision releases map packs multiple times

over the year and the new content encourages players to remain engaged in the world until the next game is released. Players continue to spend money on downloadable content, supporting the franchise year round and playing the game becomes an abiding hobby. Similarly, individual and clan rankings carry over from game to game, allowing a sense of continuity not available in all games.

Hyperconnected clan play across games also requires a relative conformity of products amongst players. Kline et al. describe games like *Call of Duty* as 'ideal commodities' because they exemplify the "crisis arising from the difficulty of managing the blistering speed of perpetual innovation, and the relentless exhaustion of the entertainment values of experiential goods" (77). In order to play together, players must own the same games and map packs on the same console, including any subscriptions required to maintain online gameplay. Put simply, multiplayer online games cost money and can be expensive. Contributing to that cost is the annual release of new games within the series. Not only will fans of the series want to purchase the game, whole clans will find it advantageous to purchase the game earlier rather than later so that they can perfect many of the games' features in order to compete in clan wars. Kline et al. connect this to a growth in gaming markets that use AAA games to intensify the experience of play in affluent homes who often can afford designated game consoles in addition to their personal computer (185). Players who do not have the financial means to buy the game are either left behind or the group has to pool resources to get the game for the player. Similar problems arise when hardware breaks down: consoles and controllers break, forcing players to repair or repurchase; higher end headsets are necessary for communication in team play and break with extended use. Again, players are obligated to restock these resources quickly to maintain ranking and good will within the clan.

Clan play, therefore, is a communal and cooperative type of game play that takes advantage of a variety of software and hardware to create an immersive experience. This experience, however, demands that players have timely access to a variety of software and hardware so that they can maintain good standing and help the clan compete.

### *THE SIGNIFICANCE OF GAMING COMMUNITIES*

Above we have described CoD online play as having little governance, but a great deal of surveillance. Little is written on clans and this section will rely on work done on guilds, primarily WoW guilds. There are many ways to organized CoD clans and Activision reserves few controls on how gamers can do this (mostly involving making clan battles easier to score). Castronova calls this a Customer Service State, and argues that it is advantageous for the game and its algorithms to be as detached as possible (210). Guilds and clans are common ways that many games have come up with to help players police themselves. While these small communities split and merge with some regularity, they become “a stable feature of the political environment” (211). Within these spaces, there are patterns of thinking about the relationships and motivations between players. There are several theories as to why clans and guilds organize the way that they do and looking at a few of them will aid in understanding the values and assumptions placed onto games.

James Paul Gee, for instance, argues for the term “affinity spaces,” considering online spaces as portals where players “interact with the content generators generate” (Gee 94). Gee is particularly critical of gaming ‘communities’ because he sees the concept of community as one of exclusion. He argues with the concept of affinity spaces that “what people have an affinity with (or for) in an affinity space is not first and

foremost the other people using the space, but the endeavor or interest around which the space is organized” (Gee 98). In Gee’s argument, collaborative gameplay (including online play, game wikis, and game tutorials) privileges winning. As such, the collaboration seen online is a loose network of people agreeing to work together for an aim. While Gee’s model is not dominant in the field of game studies, it has been used to describe some CoD clans, and is often adopted when discussing CoD. I argue that one of the chief concerns with this kind of analysis is that it places on players narrow motivations that limit the kinds of play that can go on even within even a tightly regimented game like Call of Duty. The assumption that individuals play to win is challenged by games like CoD, where players will play the same game types over and again. Gee’s model is essential to address because, as Beatriz Lárez notes, “the environment of game practices can strengthen the cooperation between all the members as well as their tolerance capacity towards both the rest of people and themselves” (Lárez 39). However, Lárez also argues that the ability to create sustained friendships in a game like CoD is equally important for motivation to play the game (39). These games have a social element to them that make the socializing equal to or more important than winning. Lárez’s survey of hundreds of players finds that social interaction is key to why certain individuals play Call of Duty. If this is the case, then affinity spaces may not work for all clans. To put teams against one another, CoD must encourage players to see other clans as less essential. Battle with other clans creates an ‘us vs. them’ mentality because, as Kenneth Burke notes, there cannot be cooperation without division. Burke notes that war is “that ultimate disease of cooperation” (25). As such, while these games are pro-social in some literature, they encourage players to be social with primarily members of their clan and anti-social with most others. Sustained socialization requires a

community model and exclusion is key because players can only maintain the sustained social situations with a finite number of other players. Additionally, the lines between cooperation and exploitation can be unclear in a space where different individuals are bringing different skills and resources to a game (25). The games employ manufactured tribalism, but this tribalism that Marshall McLuhan notes can happen when any new technology is introduced (24). Self-selection helps clans to find clan mates who will help them to win clan battles while also finding individuals they want to spend several hours a day with potentially over the course of years. This allows players to self-select individuals they want to play with, but also means that some players without competitive averages might not be selected for competitive clans while high performing but socially offensive players can jump from clan to clan.

Research on online gaming communities has an existing rich history that reflects the nuances of online community game play, particularly with the study of *World of Warcraft* (WoW). Because of the predominance of WoW studies in the literature, the game is a great place to begin discussing cooperative games and gives us a structure to work with when talking about clans, though WoW and CoD have significantly different economic structures. Wow players, like most game players, are not easily defined by age, sex, gender, or income (Nardi 18). Castronova constructs pros-social, guild based games as their own worlds with their own economies and governments, highlighting the fact that many, though not the majority, of Everquest players consider it's fictional Norrath as their "main place of residence" (59). While Kücklich does not go as far with his immersive perspective, he builds on this idea of game as government/economy by talking of cooperative games as providing "precarious sovereignty" to players wherein game producers take on roles to roles of government to protect game economy, like

policing inflation (“Virtual Worlds” 345). In WoW, as in other games where a significant amount of farming or grinding is involved (repetitive tasks that help the player to level up and advance in the game) the line between work and play often collapses both in work and leisure (Dyer-Witheford and de Peuter 31; Nardi 108). This structuring of game play around issues of economy is significant to the ways that players play and how their continued work with other players is significant. Nardi notes that lower level players in WoW often play alone. They seek out guilds when they begin to want to take on more challenging activities (15). At this point, players unite to earn more treasure that helps them advance to new levels and defeat more challenging monsters.

Players come to a game like CoD with an array of objectives for those spaces and, in games like CoD, one element that requires more analysis is the way that the games socialize players. As T.L Taylor notes:

Players are not merely consumers of games, but actively contribute to their creation and maintenance as evocative lifeworlds through their engagement with them. And while there are certainly those who cheat and disrupt, the more powerful under-explored phenomenon is the incredible role of socialization in games and the ways players are not only deeply ‘normed’ into appropriate behavior, often coming to internalize the values of the game, designers, and company, but actively seek to improve and develop these game worlds. (“Beyond Management”)

Players within clans can set qualifications that surround anything from game skill to hours one needs to play, to special side interests. The point is that players have more choices than they ever had before to build specific small communities, though this system is not without its drawbacks. Individuals can look for teammates with similar co-

identifiers to play with, but they can also look for players they will “work” well with. Figure 4 provides just such an example. This community member posted what looks like a job posting in a public forum, inviting new members with skill sets that match other individuals within the clan. However, the age, geographic location, behavior, and equipment are equally important for consideration within the community. Finally, while Call of Duty is the core game that is played by this community, they mention that they also play other time-intensive cooperative games. This group cares about the similarities between its members because they spend a great deal of time together. Clans structure rules and spaces outside of the game as a way to organize and police themselves as well. This clan, like many others, has forums and websites outside of CoD games that allow players to communicate with one another. These avenues help players to connect and strategize, but also include more work, time, and often money from players who continue to invest in constructing strong clans that can sustain themselves from game to game.

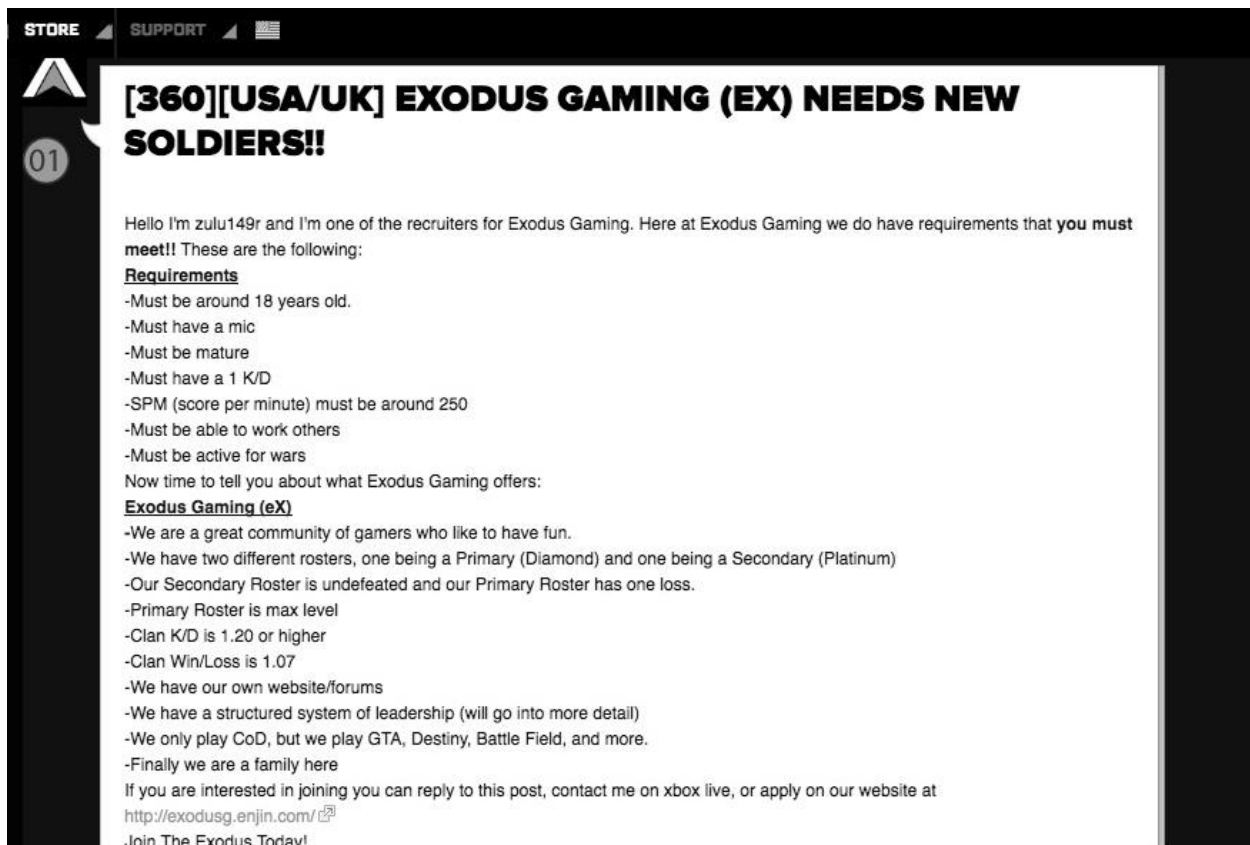


Figure 4 Players search out players equal both in skill and life stage. Screenshot of public forum by author.

### *PLACE, GIFTS, AND DIGITAL ECONOMIES*

Gift giving, integral to game franchises like *World of Warcraft*, does not currently exist within the code of the CoD franchise. In fact, CoD games lack the economy that many collaborative games have. However, gifting is such an integral part of community building that some clans create small scale economies, giving or otherwise, within their communities. To describe what is meant by gifting, I want to turn to a specific scenario. A *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 3* player goes to his physical mailbox to find a greeting card from a state he has never visited. Folded inside is a check for \$150 and a note addressed to his Xbox screen name that states: “1. GET YOUR MEDS! 2. Buy Black Ops



3. Renew Elite 4. Take the family out to dinner” and signed with a clan member’s gamer tag. This is a material gift meant to be used for consumable objects both in and outside of game play. This is interesting because not only is it a gift that works outside of the game itself, but also it is a gift that both has much and nothing to do with play. This gift works in and with digital economies, which are often mixed economies, that allows players to build relationships, police behavior, and extend their own game experiences.

While communities within CoD games work to bond for the purposes of play, there are few ways to show appreciation, respect, and friendship within the games. Different clans may handle this perceived lack in different ways, but one solution for small clans is gifting economies. Gifting to keep clan members playing together is practical, but players might give gifts that are seemingly unrelated to the games as well. A better understanding of the complexities of material gift giving is essential to unpacking the motivations and functions of a gift economy in competitive game. Research on gifting economies start with Marcel Mauss, who’s anthropological studies concluded that gifting is more akin trading (13) because participants are expected not only to return gifts, but also to give to others, pulling them into a cycle of obligatory giving. Essentially, gifting builds a society through the production of emotional debt. Players’ gifting practices establish a society with cultures and practices that incentivize players to stay involved in a game. This is done more explicitly in Facebook games, wherein individuals need others to interact with in order to give and receive commodified gifts and succeed in the game. However, as Moberly and Phillips describe when talking about the game *Social Life*, this mechanic problematizes the idea of friend, when one must regularly solicit friends for gifts within the game:

[T]he game's stress on useful friendships fractures the possibilities for gratifying intimacy as the need for friends translates the bonds of friendship into a commodifiable resource, a transaction in virtual currency. Against its design, the game polarizes the nature of friendship by integrating networks of friends into gameplay.

In order to not stress their personal networks, many players of Facebook games end up friending individuals outside their Facebook friends list in order to succeed in the game (Phillips and Moberly). Gifting in any game is challenging to balance, but this is particularly true in a game where gifting becomes necessary for the game. Gifting outside of requirements can also be challenging. Receiving a gift is hard to turn down and “[t]o refuse to give, to fail to invite, just as to refuse to accept, is tantamount to declaring war; it is to reject the bond of alliance and commonality” (Mauss 13). Establishing a gift economy is to enter into an unspoken contract with a community.

In CoD clan play, however, gifting is not obligatory within the code of the game. If used, then it is socially constructed amongst players. In *Social Solidarity and the Gift*, Aafke Komter introduces the connection between corporate and interpersonal relationships in a system he calls market pricing: “Rational choices and utility considerations determine how and when people will interact with others. People give and get in proportion to a common standard, reflecting market-pricing values like money, time, or utility” (Komter 24). With these market concerns in mind, gifts are given as much to benefit the giver as the receiver. There are several motivations for doing this in CoD clan play. Well-equipped players mean that the whole team is stronger and this benefits the giver. Better headsets aid in better, clearer, communication between players that shave seconds off of tactical moves. Lapses in Xbox memberships

mean key players might not be able to play online. Aiding other clan members means everyone can continue to play at the same level. It also puts the giver in a place of power. In gifting, the member has power over who stays and who helps to control community participation. Finally, gifting can help the giver to feel like they are a major contributor to the clan, even if that is not reflected in a title or other leadership marker. As such, gifting has a strategic element to it and is tied most directly with the solidifying of a person or group within a larger community. The process of maintaining a clan, then, means that different people bring different resources to the group. Players are not literally sponsoring other players and most of these gifts are infrequent. However, a player that has the means to aid players financially every now and again can be as critical to a team as a great tactical leader.

These smaller gifting economies work in larger digital economies that affect individual, community, and corporate endeavors. Digital economies are regularly thought of as hybrid economies that have corporate, personal, interpersonal, and altruistic motivations behind them. Significantly, while gifting items benefits individuals within the community, they also overwhelmingly benefit software and hardware producers. Online and offline gift economies have traditionally been looked at separately, with online economies focusing on the gifting of code and other immaterial goods, but this may be a false binary as digital objects can likewise be “useful, scarce, and persistent” (Castronova, Knowles, and Ross 787). Digital items can likewise be purchased outside of game, the most obvious example being the selling of gold in WoW. Gift economies distinguish themselves from communities because communities are defined by the way that they share resources. Instead, economies surround human investment and scarcity. Virtual and digital economies are often built “to attract, hold

and manage attention; to reward and incentivize contributions; to allocate resources; to lock users into a platform or to guide them around it” (Lehdonvirta and Castronova 4). They often materialize at the intersection of tensions and “compel participants to combine elements and logics from market-and nonmarket-based modes of exchange into hybrid modes” (Scaraboto 159).

Digital economies are complex and varied, often a mixture of elements that reveal a complex and nuanced relationship between corporate designers, code, and users. Code is important here and Lawrence Lessig’s argument that code is law (*Code 5*), referencing the ways in which the digital world is determined by code, is important to acknowledge. And, as Castronova, Knowles, and Ross note of EVE Online, the developers “control much more than just the laws and rules that bind the merchant. They control the weather, the number of pirates, and the size of the waves” (788). Lessig’s argument warns readers against an overly policed online culture. However, this does not always work out the way policing entities anticipate. For instance, in an attempt to use algorithms to combat inflation from gold farming and bot farming in WoW, Blizzard Entertainment did little to stop the practice and drove up the price of gold, seemingly making the act not worth the effort (Kücklich “Virtual Worlds” 346). As the WoW example reveals, the virtual economies are meant to intersect with ‘real-world’ economies. Sometimes this is intentionally by game designers—Zynga games on Facebook wants players to purchase power ups and exclusive digital objects—and sometimes these are user driven, often built on social media, and have generated, by some estimates, \$6 billion (Castronova et al. 788).

Gift economies are one part of multifaceted virtual economies. As is mentioned above, code plays an important part in thinking about how early gifting surrounded the

sharing of code, usually gifted through the programmer's time. Richard Barbrook notes this when he explains in "Hi-Tech Gift Economy":

the digital economy is a mixed economy: it includes a public element (the states funding of the original research that produced Arpanet, the financial support of academic activities that had a substantial role in shaping the culture of the internet); a market-driven element (a latecomer that tries to appropriate the digital economy by reintroducing commodification); and a gift economy element, the true expression of the cutting edge of capitalist production that prepares its eventual overcoming into a future of 'anachro-communism.'

Barbrook somewhat positivistic outlook argues that gift economies could upturn issues of class, a digital revolution. An early scholar on digital economies, and even in his own 2005 update to the Barbrook article he affirms that the digital market is mixed and qualifies, "[a]llowing people to download your photos for free from Flickr doesn't seem very radical...Yet when large numbers people are engaged in these activities, commercial self-interest is checked by social altruism within the Net." Barbrook acknowledges the mundane acts of sharing that make up much of net content and attributes this to a hint of rebellion against corporate economies online. Several scholars, however, see the majority of these acts as in fact aiding corporate endeavors.

Barbrook's ideas are not without their critics. Tiziana Terranova, who's "Free Labor: Producing Culture for the Digital Economy" uses Barbrook's quote above as a launching point to discuss how virtual economies, gifting or otherwise, work as a labor force that provide free labor to capital (36). Labor here is extracted from employment and individuals labor online in the work it takes to create and manage chats and

listservs (38) and we can add to that game play. Terranova separates labor from employment (46), noting instead that “the Internet is about the extraction of value out of continuous, updateable work, and it is extremely labor intensive” that is by no means free (48). Finally, labor here should not be confused with exploitation “the labor of building a community was not compensated by great financial rewards (it was therefore ‘free,’ unpaid) but it was also willingly conceded in exchange for the pleasures of communication and exchange” (48). In this way, Terranova complicates notions of gift; unlike the breaking down of barriers that Barbrook sees, Terranova argues that all these activities feed capital, but also benefit the individual and the community. The line between labor and exploitation here is precarious. Boundaries are undefined.

Writing at about the same time as Barbrook, in *Cyber-Marx*, Nick Dyer-Witford shuns this techno-utopic rewriting of Marxism, noting that it “retains the notion of historical progress toward a classless society but reinscribes technological advance rather than class conflict as the driving force in this transformation. It thus annexes the idea of ‘revolution’” (37). Dyer-Witford is wary of the ways in which the ‘information revolution’ stymies analysis of power, capital, and labor online. Dyer-Witford and de Peuter build on this argument in *Games of Empire*, noting the ways that free internet spaces are often enclosed by corporate powers, like Massive Multi-Player Online (MMO) games adding graphics to and then enclosing fan produced MUDs (Multi-user Dungeons) (125) and then using fan production within those spaces to create a popular game. Game producers then utilize biopower to produce the space to control and direct the community populations (126). So, game programmers create the space, and in doing so set the world “it is the constitutive bottom-up behavior of player populations, the interaction of thousands of avatars, that gives this form content,

animates its parameters, and sometimes pushes against its preset limits” (127). I argue that gifting within a communal game, like CoD does represent one way that players can push against pre-set limits. Gifting is a quick way to work around enclosures of the game itself, the way it was programmed. However, with Terranova in mind, these work-arounds are often still to the advantage of the capital increasing measures of the game. In the context of CoD clans, explained in greater detail below, gifting often surrounds the continuation of play itself. Players gift items to their clan members that benefit the team. Resources were saved and pooled so that clan members can compete without missing or broken hardware acting as a hurdle. Relationships between material and immaterial goods, immaterial and material labor, are necessary and complex.

One key factor in making games fun is our identification with them and, in the case of networked games, our identification with other players. Players populate clans, creating time intensive social organizations that make other individuals want to be included, helping feed Activision Blizzard’s bottom line and keeping players buying games and DLC year after year. Additionally, players spend money they earn on the games and hardware, occasionally spending even more aiding teammates and keeping their clan together. The social element of the game is likewise a social relationship, as Marx said, “*Capital*, also, is a social relation of production. It is a *bourgeois production relation*...And is it not just this definite social character which turns the products serving for new production into *capital*?” (207-8, emphasis in source). In CoD, as in many pro-social games, the players are the reason the players want to continue to play the game and the game and consoles companies profit from creating this social space.

## **APPLICATION: GAMING, GIFTING, AND ONLINE COMMUNITY**

Call of Duty's annual release regularly leads in the most purchased console games of the year. This chapter will in no way be able to catalogue the experience of over 100 million players who have collectively purchased over 250 million games across the franchise. While Activision Blizzard publishes its sales records, it does not distribute demographic information on its players. In a 2013 interview, since deleted, with Mark Rubin, a former developer at Infinity Ward, one of several companies that produces CoD, says that CoD players "aren't hardcore gamers, or even gamers, but they play Call of Duty every night" (Tassi). There is a bit of a false dichotomy between what constitutes a hardcore and casual gamer as these really define ways to play, but some analysis of these terms helps to better understand play within these games. The term hardcore here is essential and Jesper Juul defines the hardcore ethic of gamers to be "spend as much time as possible, play as difficult games as possible, play games at the expense of everything else" (29) as opposed to a casual game ethic wherein flexibility is the preferred ethic and "a casual game is sufficiently flexible to be played with a hardcore time commitment, but a hardcore game is too inflexible to be played with a casual time commitment" (Juul 10). Rubin's observations of players here should not lead one to believe that players of CoD do not play a lot, but that they privilege particular types of play. CoD stresses flexibility and diversity in its advertising as well. The TV commercial for *Call of Duty: Black Ops*, opens in a warzone, but the soldiers mirror individuals in everyday jobs engaged in play war. The trailer opens with a woman in business attire, complete with heels, a man dressed in a hotel uniform who stops shooting to answer his phone "conciierge," ending with a man dressed for food service with the tagline "THERE'S A SOLDIER IN ALL OF US." This tagline has been used in subsequent games



rhetorically as a way to invite a wide audience of players, players who may only play this one video game the whole year.

The interviews included in this chapter present a small slice of time in the history of this game, which has since changed in some key ways with the removal of clan wars from *Black Ops III*. Call of Duty clans can range in size from 2 members to over 100 and possess broad freedoms when it comes to organizing themselves. In choosing which clan to focus on, I decided to look for a clan developing a strong community that I could obtain access to. With this in mind, as a small study, I chose my partner's clan, a small clan that ranges from 12 to 25 members. I did not interview my partner for this study and I did not relay to him which members participated in the study in order to limit any consequences this research would have on clan dynamics, though I do recognize the participants may have agreed to be interviewed as a gift to my partner and may have felt compelled to provide the answers I was looking for. CoD has a huge community and fan following. There are many ways to play and participate in Call of Duty clan wars and the ways that this community participates with the game may differ largely from groups that are bigger or are structured differently. This data is an example of how some individuals play, but should not be seen as indicative of how all players play CoD. Larger quantitative analyses of the community have been done, like Larez's study referenced in the beginning of this chapter, but more could also be done to obtain a broader understanding of CoD clan activities. The value of this study comes in its in depth look at one community and how that community uses its resources to create a personal online space.

The clan described here is, as I have stated, small, but its members were also very active and the clan itself was a strong competitor for its size. Clan members self-

reported playing an average of 37 hours per week with approximately 70 percent of that time spent playing with clan members. Activision does not release statistics on clan play, but the hours are higher than the 3 hours per day Rubin stated as average in October of 2013 (Kain). They did, however match the ‘loyal’ customer base that Activision Blizzard has built (Kain) in that players had all played more than one CoD game and 67 percent of participants had been with the clan for more than a year. During interviews, the clan was shifting from *Call of Duty: Ghosts* to *Call of Duty: Advanced Warfare* as well as shifting from Xbox 360 to Xbox One. Clan members who had participated in the clan for more than six months were invited to participate through Xbox’s messaging system, which allows users to send very short messages to friends. I invited members who had participated for six months because it allowed clan members enough time to both understand the clan and to develop relationships with clan members. This criterion left out several players technically using the clan tag but who had taken time off the game for personal reasons and players who had joined the clan only a few weeks prior and participated in one clan war with this group. Because clan battles happen every other week, participants in the study would have had many chances to interact with the community during clan wars. Of the ten members invited, six agreed to be interviewed. Interviews were conducted in person or online using Adobe Connect.

### *EMPLACED LIVES AND COD*

This clan relied on an emplaced awareness of other players that began when players were recruited into the clan. Emplacement, the connection between place and embodiment, as described by Jason Farman, is “the awareness at a certain level that bodies and spaces exist through their use, through movement, through person-to-

person object relationships” that “does not always need to be located in *physical space*. As people connect across networks on a global level, what many are experiencing as the practice the space of the network is embodiment” (21). Embodiment can be identified as emplacement, both in geographical place and the places where individuals were in their lives. Embodiment starts with this clan at the recruitment stage. Reiterated throughout these interviews, members stressed that they recruited new members based on personality and not on skill. As mentioned previously, the games can take on an ‘us versus them’ war mentality, where players generally only converse with members of their own clan. Building a close group can be challenging. One of the founding members of the clan noted that when Elite came out, he wanted to start a clan with two other members; however, because clans could be rather large and were usually built through existing friends and personal acquaintances, this led to problems within the group when someone else’s acquaintances play in a way others do not enjoy. The third founder of the clan ultimately had to break off and start his own clan:

I don’t seek out any other clans except [redacted]. We call them our sister clan. They are a group of people who were our friends, but their friends and the friends of their friends rubbed everybody...we really didn’t all get along that well.

Participants emphasized recruiting individuals who refrain from discriminatory language. They also stressed that finding people they could build bonds between was important to enjoying play and improving participation. The two major requirements for being a member of the clan were that members must show up for a majority of clan battles and members are prohibited from using discriminatory language. Clan members included women, racial minorities, LGBTQ players, and individuals on a spectrum of

mental and physical ability. Additionally, everyone I interviewed, regardless of race, class, or sexual orientation, highlighted that they did not want to bring prejudicial language into their living rooms and work places. This is a practice called ‘participatory surveillance’ wherein players within a clan set up specific rules and police each other’s habits to make some change. T.L. Taylor describes the way that mods can be used in guilds as participatory surveillance of group and individual performance (“Does Wow Change Everything?”). Collister highlights how this same kind of surveillance can be used to enforce “hate speech” rules in WoW guilds. She noted that interviewed participants felt empowered by being able to create a safe space within the game (344). This practice also connects to the Customer Service State of the game. Because CoD does little to police game lobbies, players create and enforce their own rules to work as a buffer that helps them interface with the game.

The founding member purposefully started a clan that was sensitive to issues of race, gender, and ability: “Originally, I just wanted to play with veterans, but a lot of language they used and the person they would put off was off putting to me...I only wanted people in there that were like minded as far as treating people decently.” CoD games simulate a military experience and this particular clan, started by a veteran, weaves patriotism into its structure, including having a patriotic name. The clan uses rhetorics surrounding military as a guideline for behavior within the clan, as the US military is not supposed to factor race, class, religion, sex, or sexuality into who can serve. However, in taking this position, the clan has set up rules that counter some of the more common cultural practices within the game, like the use of derogatory language specifically against women and minorities. In this way, CoD does an excellent job of showing the ways that military and gaming culture conflict as much as they work

together. Dyer-Witheford and De Peuter discuss the ways in which war games are “*the classic example*” of “the intensely, arguably ultimately, corporeal activity of war” (98) that makes war banal. However, as this example illustrates, these games are also sites of resistance against the assumptions of these cultures, particularly the parts of both cultures that exclude through language and practice the participation of those who are not hetero-normative white males.

Because clan leaders were serious about language and behavior, members of this clan were encouraged to avoid these practices even when they were not playing with the clan or were playing other games entirely, extending this participatory surveillance into other lobbies and games. If members were caught using derogatory language they usually received a warning and a second offense led to suspension or removal from the roster, depending on the offense. They were not the only clan that made this a requirement for clan play. This kind of policing may seem extreme, particularly in a game discussed by popular media as played mostly by teenagers who converse primarily in racist and homophobic language. This chapter makes no attempts to quantify the language use in CoD, but instead points to the ways that a clan can create implicit rules that protect its players from the more distasteful elements of CoD play. By restricting the language within the clan, the group creates an identity for itself, defends its members, and solidifies its bonds. One member, who is a young woman, was initially uncomfortable playing video games online until she played with the clan. Her entryway into the clan was through her partner and initially she would only play when he was there. However, she’s become comfortable enough to play without him. She mentions that when she plays with the clan she is confident that other members will protect her from gender-based harassment from players outside of their clan.

A discussion of play and language should not leave the impression that this clan consisted of players aghast at the culture surrounding video games. For instance, while derogatory language was not allowed, all members tolerated a fair amount of profanity, even those not wholly supportive of those lexical choices. Lisa Nakamura notes that this is a distinction between ‘trash talk,’ the use of profanity as “a form of discursive waste, lacking meaningful content that contributes to the game” and “discrimination and hate speech at the hands of the other players through voice-activated telepresent and co-present forms of racial and sexual harassment” (506). Trash talk is generally acceptable because players in competition can get frustrated during gameplay and there are only so many ways to verbalize said frustrations. However, the line between trash talk and harassment is individually based and culturally specific, usually based on the speaker and the listener, both of whom have limited perceptions of one another based on the allowances of gameplay. This creates within the game what Richard Rorty calls abnormal discourse, which occurs when individuals enter conversations for which they do not have a firm understanding of what counts for acceptable conversation within that community (320). Essentially, this community does not have a naturalized set of values for acceptable language and members uncomfortable with certain kinds of discourse must create their own interfacing mechanisms. For instance, in one iteration of clan wars, players could report users of discriminatory language through the site. Enough reports lead to the suspension of the offending player, but this happens only after the offense and if the clan member is on one’s team, means that person is unavailable to play in competition. One member mentioned reporting a person for derogatory language only to have a report placed against him for unsportsmanlike conduct, making this policing system challenging to control through a Customer Service State system.

Participants generally did not expect the game to help with issues of discriminatory language.

Because this group was small and played together so often, they did know people in their group for whom racist, sexist, or ableist language could particularly upset, turning players the clan enjoyed away from the game, and avoiding such language helped the clan play together. Though this clan did not advertise on forums like the example in figure 4, these advertisements likewise helped brand the game as an accepting place. On most consoles, players have the option of muting any player they want to, so players can easily mute members of clans they are competing with who use discriminatory language; however, muting other clan members restricts the clan's ability to verbally strategize and employ maneuvers to win the match. It likewise forces victims to adapt and find a solution instead of working to change the offenders (Nakamura 511). So, while muting is a great way to avoid negative interactions with players within the larger CoD community, it is an impractical strategy for clans to adopt. None of the individuals interviewed were shocked about the kind of culture that has developed around games. Instead, they simply prefer not to participate in this part of that culture and employ interpersonal and technical strategies to avoid the parts of the game they do not enjoy.

While players can mute other players, there are other parts of the game that they cannot control. For instance, in some games, players were allowed to make their own player cards. These cards were attached to a player's avatars and players can choose whatever they want to represent them. Some players choose cards with graphic sexual images and members of the clan I interviewed found these offensive. The clan and its rules helped players to manage the parts of game play they did not agree with as well as

giving the clan a purpose that contains the clan and encourages clan members to play only with each other, increasing the connections that players have. In this way, clan play is one way to interface with a social game with limited oversight. The clan for many of the players interviewed was more about finding a group they could enjoy playing the game with than it was about being winning a lot of games.

Emplaced practices in play extends beyond identifying markers and into topics more closely aligned with place. When players were playing synchronous clan battles, place became a big factor in the clan's success. Because the clan chose players based on rules of conduct instead of location, finding times when clan members could play simultaneously was problematic because of emplaced scheduling issues. Player availability is closely tied to lifestyle and clan members must balance play with geographic considerations (players on Virginia are online at different times than players in Wyoming). Knowing when people are on to play meant knowing where they lived. Every player interviewed knew at least which state each of their clan members lived in. The majority knew the cities most clan members played in. In order to play well, the clan needs to know where everyone plays. Bonnie A. Nardi references this in *My Life as a Night Elf Priest*, where her guild balances when to play based on having guild mates on both US coasts (9). Nardi notes that players likewise adapt play to their locations and residences. For instance, in China, where she researches WoW players, Nardi finds players tend to play in wang ba, internet cafes. These get them out of cramped shared living environments and around other players on better hardware (179-82). Taylor ties this into location and national identity, noting that guilds who form based on national identity can find those spaces "friendly and familiar," but that can likewise open the group up to harassment and generalization as well ("Does WoW Change Everything?")



4). The place of a North American clan, like the one described in this case study, is more likely to play in a domestic space. As such, they coordinate play over different localities. T.L. Taylor argues that scholars “underplay the difficult work player communities engage in when they negotiate this aspect of identity and community and, just as important, the active role game companies and the structures games are taking in mediating it” (“Does WoW Change Everything?” 2).

This clan also had to be flexible as far as work and family considerations with regard to its members. Because CoD is a violent war game, some players would only play when their children are at school or asleep. Some players could play all day, but worked night shifts and could not play while the majority of their clan mates were online. One player, a flight medic, might play for 10 straight hours if there were no emergencies during his shift, to keep himself awake. However, he just as likely may have had to leave for hours on end. While these choices may appear to hamper performance, they were just as likely to encourage ongoing gameplay. The clan included retirees, individuals with disabilities, and, like the medic above, individuals for whom game play can be done at work. These players could play the game longer and be more flexible about when they could play than some younger single players. In clan battles, this meant that someone could be on near continuously to defend nodes the team has captured during more active play. Before each clan battle, clans submitted rosters and were put in competition with clans of similar size. Scheduling clan wars required knowledge of participants’ work schedule and weekend plans. While larger clans might address this issue differently, a small community, like the one addressed here, required players know a great deal about the lives of the individuals they play with. This reality aligned with findings on local running communities addressed in chapter 2.

While clan members definitely play to win, they were also accommodating to a variety of schedules. The clan as such, was a mixture of a serious clan, where there are mandatory practices and statistics are combed over, and casual clans, where “statements such as: ‘family first, the clan second’ communicate in which order priorities are being made,” which happens in clans where a majority of the members have competing obligations (Johansson 85-6). For some, dedication to the clan was essential and letting family related obligations slip during clan play was allowed: “being in a clan is a responsibility, especially during clan wars...I have to tell my boyfriend I have clan wars tonight so there’s sandwiches on the counter. I take it very serious.” At the same time, clan members had unique insight into the lives of their clan members: “I hear arguments and I hear kids playing and you hear parents yelling at kids. You hear a lot of stuff.” Several members were attracted to the clan because of this familial tone: “In [the clan] I’ve found that the members are very nice, very respectful people, and most of them have families...and that’s understood within the clan.” As it balances the obligation and understanding, clan members knew much more about the lives of individuals they played with because they are involved in clan wars. Players also learned a great deal about each other while chatting several hours a week during collaborative play. This awareness is emplaced, as members need to know who players are in their lives in order to gauge clan participation from individual to individual.

### *GIFTING WITHIN DIGITAL ECONOMY*

As previously mentioned, digital economies are complex and usually work in and against competing individual and corporate motivations. Scholars of gaming communities (and more general online communities) agree that in order for a person to

join a community, he or she must see joining the community as something that benefits the individual (Johansson 2013; Song 2009). While many community members joined this particular clan because of the constructed participatory surveillance mentioned in the previous section, gifting could be read as an obvious perk to being part of and staying with this particular clan. Gifting would have to be structured this way because, although gifting within this community was a regular practice, participants rarely talk about it and as such no terms or policies surrounding gifting exist within the community. While the majority of members are participating in this activity, it is hardly ever discussed within the clan. Most members only learn of the practice when they receive their first gift. As an understated practice, defining what constitutes a gift, or the standard gifting practices are for this community is challenging. However, gifting usually starts out of a player's need and then, as time goes on, can evolve into the gifting personal items.

In structuring participant interviews, I worked with a very general definition of gifting pulled from Marcel Mauss' *The Gift*, which Mauss calls 'total services': material and immaterial exchanges "committed to in a somewhat voluntary form by presents and gifts' (5). Any object given in a clan could match this definition. However, not every individual interviewed had the same outlook on gifts and that is because giving might be perceived differently by the giver and receiver. For instance, several of the participants encouraged me to interview one particular player because this member was known to be a generous giver. When interviewed he told me he had received gifts, but never given one. I was a bit surprised and pushed a little on the question. The player had generously given several objects, some worth hundreds of dollars. When asked why he did not consider these gifts, he explained that they were not for a special occasion, saying "It's

just. I know they want to play and I want them to stay with the clan so I try to help them out.” This member specifically associated gifting with ceremonial obligation, like the giving one does at a birthday or wedding. In this imagining, the player had no assumption that the receiver would be obliged to return a gift, though he obviously saw the connection between giving the objects and gameplay. This is one of the challenges of studying an online economy. What one participant understood to be a gift, the other saw an investment. There is no set policy on gifting and few members confessed to having given the practice much thought. This hybridity is not uncommon in interpersonal economies like the one discussed here, as mentioned earlier.

Additionally, what objects might be considered a gift varied amongst participants. Most of the gifted objects were related to game play, with the intention that they would keep or improve player performance. The most common items gifted were Xbox Live subscriptions, access to Xbox’s servers for online play. When individuals buy new online Xbox games they often come with passes for Xbox Live. Clan members will hoard these passes in case a clan member’s subscription to Xbox Live ends before the member can renew the subscription. Clan members can gift them these passes, ranging from 3 to 30 days, so the player can keep playing with the clan. In some ways, this is a unique kind of giving more akin to sharing, because members rarely thought of these passes as their own. While sharing resources like Xbox Live free passes was important, buying another member a one year Xbox Live subscription also happened. While these practices sometimes work around Xbox’s market, these sharing practices remain part of the larger production economy of Microsoft and these cooperative online games. While these Xbox Live passes are included in these games as hooks to get players started in online play, we can see how they also facilitate the continued use of these services. While

Xbox Live codes were the most common gift exchanged, there were a wide range of gifts given, often based on what clan members need. Players have sent cash for bills as well as purchased games, controllers, and headsets. They have likewise purchased Xbox 360s for clan members and put down payments Xbox Ones. This was particularly relevant as the clan itself was shifting from Xbox 360 to Xbox One. One member purchased another player an inexpensive laptop so that player could look for a job outside of his small rural community. Again, while there were altruistic motivations behind some of these gifts, most revolved around gifting as a way to keep players playing. They reflect both relationship building and market pricing within the group.

Of note, gifts were typically consumer goods known to break down over time and use and the gifting of these products both helps and hinders Activision Blizzard, which produces the game, but also Microsoft, which makes the hardware, as well as companies that make accessories, like headsets. They helped the company because players needed this hardware to cooperate with other players, so they purchase software and hardware early and often. Discussed earlier, Kline et al. mentions that gaming objects are regularly improved upon to force users to reinvest in new products. The other side of this issue is e-waste, broken and antiquated technology products, often full of toxic chemicals, that often find their way to economically disadvantaged populations. However, because players are resourceful, they often work together to find, replace, and repurpose old hardware. Likewise, the act of gifting here is too unstructured and dispersed to say that any of these companies capitalize specifically on gifting economies. Instead, they capitalize on more general social labor that this gifting is part of. This works in and around planned obsolescence. Players are obviously buying newer and

better headsets before their old ones break down, but they are also holding on to their functional products to share.

In a cultivated community like this one, player retention was essential because of the investment they put in other members. As one participant put it, “we are still playing but we’re not playing with the full spectrum of maps we can play, so someone will help with that...It’s all about keeping them in the group and playing with the group and having as much fun as we can have together.” Gifts were given outside of gameplay: packages were shipped, Xbox Live codes were read over the phone, and objects were put on layaway at a store in the receiver’s hometown to be picked up. Players networked through backchannels to locate contact information on players to send gifts surreptitiously. References to these gifts are rarely made with the clan during gameplay.

Gift-giving to maintain resources for gameplay marks a distinct value in this community as gifting privileged keeping people playing and not rewarding players for playing well. They gifted to stay together as a group, not to reward higher-level players for good performance. Reiterated over and over again during interviews, gifts should not be considered a reward for playing well: “No one is going to win a new camouflage controller if they have the highest KD [kill/death] rate. That promotes self-worth and we want to promote clan worth.” Likewise, with its lack of structure, there are no ‘turns’ or the sense that anyone is owed a gift: “People know when someone can’t afford to help and no one ever really asks. Usually someone offers and it’s sometimes done before they even, it’s like something shows up in the mail.” The gifting culture here was subdued. Players might not even know that it exists until they receive something from another clan member. In this way, expectations are kept reasonable, but gifting also worked to

invite someone into the community instead of expecting them to participate in a practice already held by the community itself.

While primary, gifts that benefited clan competition were not the only gifts given. More personal gifts were given in similar ways. Players have exchanged craft brews, other games, and souvenirs from trips. Several players have received 'life advice' that they considered a gift from members of the community as well. Players have been gifted services; one player is a professional musician who gifted his services for another player's wedding. These personal gifts can do a lot to help players to feel a part of the community and this in turn helps game play: "Once you've become friends and you've bonded like that it's easier to play and even when people get upset we'll send messages or call." This community values player retention because they see the value that focusing energy on keeping members as opposed to seeking members has on clan performance.

### *WORK/PLAY*

Giving works to encourage social ties, to invite, and to build a supportive system. However, gifts and exchanges highlight issues within larger economic structures. While gifting helps to solidify the bonds of this clan, gifting also highlights basic insecurities, both between members of the group as well as individuals and how they perceive their own financial status. As Komter argued, cycles of gifting are also cycles of power and obligation. Depending on the circumstances, the giver or the receiver is put in a place of power through the gift. Players can likewise feel as though these transactions (or too many of these transactions) obligate them to play or highlight their own economic insecurities. Again, since giving a gift often feels as though it puts the giver in a place of power, or is the acknowledgement of one's lower social class, these gifts can feel

unwanted. Gifting, as seen earlier in this chapter, is an emplaced way that individuals show how they see members of the group, members they spend 30 or more hours a week with. As one participant mentioned when I asked why this culture has developed, “I think it’s the type of people we recruit in the clan.” However, these bonds also help the clan to play better, which means both playing more competitively and looking for ways to enjoy the game: “Once you’ve become friends and you’ve bonded like that it’s easier to play.” This game creates a space that players can use to create a community and then the game played becomes less important than the community that has built around it. Several players mentioned that they don’t particularly care for particular types of play, but enjoy the community enough to tolerate the parts of the game they do not like.

Gifting, however, comes with its own cultural baggage. One example is that one might receive a gift they do not want and be forced to feign excitement over the object (Sunwolf 13), but within this clan, no one ever discussed receiving something they did not want or need. Unease with receiving gifts was often feeling as though they had to reciprocate or that it put them in a position of weakness, making them feel as though they must “use elaborate *return rituals* to displace their negative feelings towards gift givers (Sunwolf 14). It is the odd relationship with gifting that individuals are much more comfortable giving a gift than receiving it. Participants were much more excited to discuss times when they gave gifts and, as one participant mentioned, “I’m more of a giver than a receiver. It feels very uncomfortable to receive something, personally.” This highlights what Aafke Komter calls ‘authority ranking,’ wherein gifting puts one in a place of authority and power. In giving one both makes a person part of a community and obligates that person to participate in this gifting culture. Likewise, gifting hits on



income insecurity because those who receive material gifts must accept that others know that they need help.

Even though economic factors play a huge role in gifts shared, not everyone receives gifts purely because they have economic instability. Several participants have accepted gifts from members that they themselves could easily afford. As such, players with less capital were often gifted stuff that is useful for playing the game. Individuals who did not need these objects purchased for them were occasionally given gifts that had a lot more to do with them as people or as nice gestures. Therefore, letting another member buy one map packs, even though they are affordable, was another way to enter into this gifting economy, but it is also another kind of gift. Other members have accepted gifts for their spouses or children in lieu of needing things for themselves.

Gifts, while common in this community, was not tracked by any member and existed in many ways outside of traditional disciplinary frameworks. Not even the leaders of the clan were completely aware of how regularly gifting happens amongst members. This lack of tracking was significant to the group. It helped to make sure that members were not connecting the amount of gifts one gets to clan issues like personal performance or hours spent playing clan battles. It also helped players to not feel as though everyone knew they needed help. In this way, the clan is able to keep a rhetoric that many of them already perceive, that gifting to a member of the group helps the group overall as far as play. Finally, it helped players to not feel as though they were obligated to gift constantly to other members, as one participant noted, "The times I've helped out I haven't told the clan that I helped out because I can't help out all the time. And that's the same with everyone else too." Another member mentioned only gifting to people in the clan that he considers friends. By gifting, the group establishes power

structures within the group that are implicit as opposed to explicit. Gifting, however, also highlights individual insecurities over finances, both in giving and receiving. As such, the practice of giving is rarely discussed. In ways, gifting becomes a civic duty. Gifting within this clan is a way for any individual within the clan to do what they can to improve the state of the group.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

While most gifting surrounded competitive gameplay, players did more than give each other items that promoted participation specifically within clan wars. Individuals joined this clan for a variety of reasons, but the social element of the game ranked highly in the choice of a game like CoD. The CoD franchise, like many FPS games, has by and large left many of the social elements of the game unstructured, leaving community members to regulate themselves. To help avoid some the more negative elements of the game (like racist and homophobic language and sexual harassment), some players joined clans that regulate acceptable language during play and muting players not in their clan, like the clan studied here. This language rule, and the subsequent hours spent chatting with only clan mates, creates an embodied awareness of the players in the clan, allowing players to get to know who and where others are. In this clan, this culture has led to players creating an unstructured gift economy, where players gift items that help in and outside the game. This gift economy strengthened ties between individual players as well as players and the game itself. Ultimately, this small clan economy worked inside larger economies within the game. These corporate motives surround getting users to continue to be new and/or improved hardware and software. While gifting often helped

individuals to use resources efficiently, their continued ultimately benefits these companies.

This was a small sample size and it would be interesting to compare these clan dynamics with a clan with similar motives. However, after these interviews were conducted, Microsoft and Activision Blizzard made changes to the software of their products that made significant changes to some of these projects. Microsoft initiated a program called “family sharing” that allows players to log in to another player’s account so that the two can share digital games. This allows clans to buy half as many digital copies of games to play, which can help when a new game comes out. The bigger shift is that, at least for now, Call of Duty games no longer have clan wars and now favor continuously rolling arena games as well as semiannual tournaments with smaller teams. More research could be done to examine how these changes affected players. Additionally, the practices of these clans could be compared to clans and groups in other cooperative clans or guilds to get a better understanding of how individuals use and navigate collaborative competitive play.

## CHAPTER IV

### I HAVE ALL THE QUALIFICATIONS. INTERNATIONAL FAN PROFESSIONALIZATION ON VIKI

#### INTRODUCTION

Creating high quality translations of local media for a global audience is a challenge. Translation itself requires a host of different skills that span technical abilities—like knowing how to edit and host video online—to more culturally embedded abilities—like the language skills to translate and contextualize localized media for international audiences. Similar to the necessary collaboration that filmmaking demands, translation requires a host of individuals. Global fans of localized media also often have a small and dispersed fan base. Internet fan sites have been integral to translating localized media for a host of fans, but these endeavors are subject to both technological and legal hurdles that make fan production sites precarious spaces to host global and crossover media. In this system, Viki, an international fan audiovisual translation site, has managed to create a large community of volunteers who collectively translate video from around the world into over 200 languages.

Looking at segmenters, a subcommunity of volunteers within the larger Viki community, volunteers collaborate with several corporate media companies, and this collaboration leads volunteers to see themselves as amateur expert fans (Baym and Burnette 446), by this I mean volunteers with community-vetted accreditations for the work that they do online who do not happen to get paid for this work. Amateur expert fan is an important qualifier here as many of the fans invested in translation work are highly educated professionals who see this work as an extension of their professional

identities. Many volunteers discussed here are students or professionals who have a great deal of flexibility in when and where they work. These volunteers have built collaborative but hierarchical structures based primarily on training and networking. Volunteers navigate challenges in dealing with issues of place, both where media content is located and where individuals are located, through hard work, which is rewarded with less-encumbered access to global media. This exchange of work for access benefits Viki and regional media producers in several ways. Viki's fans become the testing ground for the viability of localized media in more mainstream markets. It supplies those markets with well-made fan translations, and it allows fans to produce content for a beloved product while without releasing control of copyrighted material. An analysis of one forum, "SEGMENTERS PLEASE VISIT HERE," reveals the value that volunteers can place on honoring the wishes of copyright holders and marks a different way fans can interact with shows and films they follow.

Viki (the combining of the terms 'video' and 'wiki') is a website that legally produces high quality fan made translations of international media. Tessa Dwyer relates that one company founder, Jiwon Moon, a Korean student studying at Harvard, decided after noticing a trend of English dominance on the internet. Viki was an opportunity to create a software that privileged non-English texts and languages (Dwyer 221). At the same time, this move does not necessarily separate Viki from other American or Korean online ventures in regards to online spaces. In regards to globalized media, Homi Bhabha asserts, "their deterritorialization must not lead us into believing that they are detached from national policies of technological innovation, education provision, science policy" (viii). This is a cultural dissatisfaction across Asia that "American-led Western culture" had perhaps too much control over international media streams

(Hogarth 137). Initially funded through investors in Singapore and the US, Viki sold itself as a web start-up “refuting the common assumption that fan translation practices are necessarily non-commercial or non-conventional” (Dwyer 219). Viki, now owned by the Japanese company Rakuten, purchases licenses to translate and distribute films, television series, news, and music videos. Viki allows channel moderators, volunteers themselves, to recruit volunteers to work on creating high quality subtitled translations. Rakuten, a large company in Japan similar in some ways to Amazon, purchased Viki in an ongoing project to acquire tech companies globally. Rakuten is most famous globally for being one of the largest companies to establish an Englishnization project, which adopts English as the company language, even in Japan (Neeley 118). Rakuten, a multibillion dollar company in Japan, has reached near complete market saturation in Japan and must expand globally to increase profit. In this way, it follows practices of international capital that necessarily extend beyond national boundaries, “making nation-states merely instruments to record the flows of the commodities, and populations that they set in motion” (Hardt and Negri 31). The company itself has been deeply engaged in language practices and language acquisition and had been for three years before purchasing Viki. Acquiring Viki was an opportunity to both acquire another American company and spread its corporate power to a global audience, increasing its own image and capital.

Rakuten’s corporate expansion takes place within a global media culture that includes movements like Hallyu. The Hallyu movement is integral to describing the makeup of Viki’s popularity. This importance rests not only in Korean dramas being some of the most popular shows on Viki, but also because their popularity highlights the ways that an American company purchased by a Japanese one can capitalize on a

Korean cultural strategy. The Hallyu movement was an intentional plan by South Korean media corporations and government entities, like the Korean Parliamentary Culture and Tourism Research Group, to move cultural products—like films, television shows, and pop music— into other regional Asian markets (J. Kim 47). Building on Japanese global media flows from the mid-1990s, this movement led to the popularity of Korean media in Asian and then Western markets in the mid-to-late 2000s (Hogarth 137), though the popularity of media outside of Asia is not necessarily considered Hallyu. Hallyu is chiefly an economic term over an aesthetic one where, “[t]he term inextricably carries with it the notion of selling Korean-ness to the rest of Asia, and has thus become extremely important to Koreans not only as a source of entertainment but also of national pride” (J. Kim 50). While Korea also exported film and popular music, Korean dramas were a nearly instant hit in regional markets like China. These state-encouraged texts used high-end camera work and cinematography to portray either “ultra-modern globalized or exotic historical settings,” highlighting Korea’s history and beautiful landscapes in addition to its contemporary global sensibilities (Hogarth 137). The movement improved global perspectives of Korea for the better and increased tourism to South Korea (J. Kim 53). South Korean media’s rise in popularity converged with the popularity of digital distribution, making Korean media important to contextualize fan sites like Viki.

Viki hosts media from around the world and anyone can watch most of the site's content for free with advertisements. Community members also have two pathways to obtain a premium account, which allows users to bypass commercials and gain access to exclusive content. Members can either purchase a monthly subscription or earn a premium account through robust volunteer work on the site. Popular translations are

sold to and hosted on partner sites. In August of 2015, Viki had 58 different partner companies across the world that purchased licenses and/or shared advertising revenue to host its translations. These not only include American sites like Netflix and Hulu, but also sites from Europe, East Asia, and South America. Like many other streaming sites, Viki is available as a cross platform streaming service that users can access from their computer, phone, tablet, or smart TV. Viki provides an interface with a design that invites fans to both consume and create content. As such, Viki's current interface shares much in common with the more well-known Netflix interface. A large carousel slider dominates the lead banner, chiefly highlighting the website's newer Korean dramas (figure 5); however, directly under that field is a feed that highlights currently active volunteers to Viki (figure 6). This interface helps fans to know Viki is a site in which fans can both watch and interact with their favorite shows. Viki emphasizes the significance of participatory fans to the community, and positions its fans as creators of content for the site. It has also established ways for fans to professionalize within the site through training programs that help fans to better segment and subtitle. Through this interface, Viki creates a place that one can go in order to experience global media. One can enter as a tourist viewing shows or can take up residence as a long-time volunteer. In this way, Viki becomes a place in and of itself.



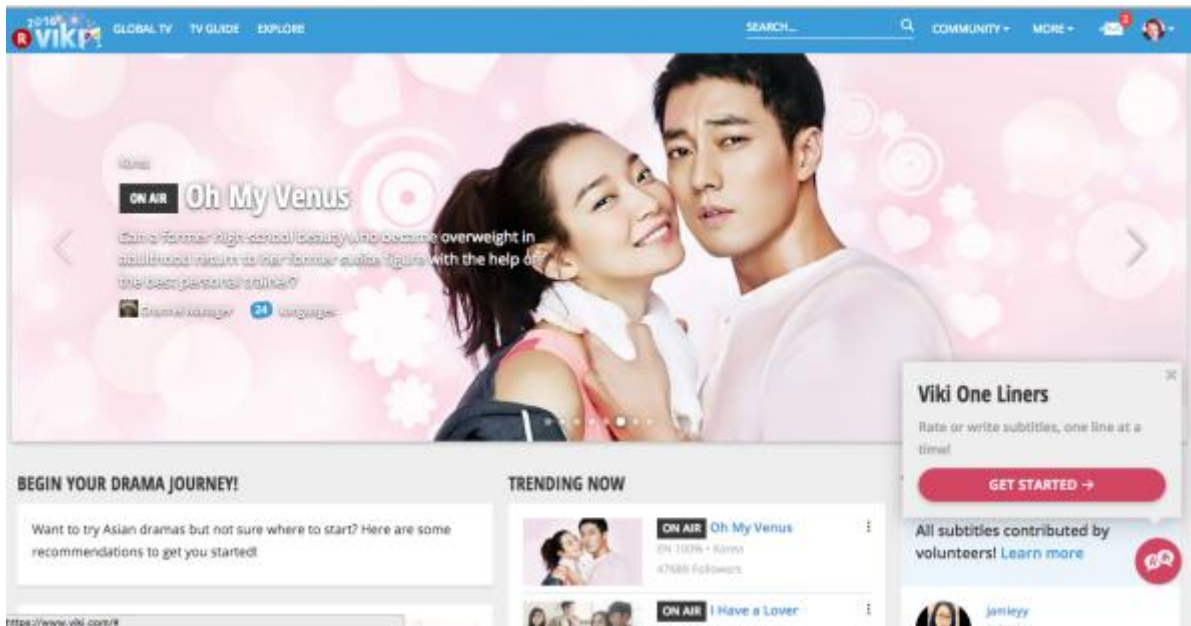


Figure 5 Viki shares stylistic layouts with other streaming services. Viki.com. Screenshot by author.

Viki is a large community with millions of members who have collectively translated over 1 billion words. The Viki community itself intersects with discussions of streaming services, international media consumption, mobility practices, and community engagement. This community is larger than the communities discussed in previous chapters. However, in this larger sample, patterns that surround issues of community, mobility, work, and corporate entanglement can be seen. Again, when working in and with a community tied to products, volunteers create the content that in turn attracts new and more casual participants to involve themselves more in fan work. Finally, while the goal of the community appears to be the collapsing of places over distance, the ultimate effect is to continue to privilege particular places, though they might be different than those privileged in other social circumstances. As will be further explained later, in many ways, Viki members consider Korean dramas a kind of cultural

currency that, instead of usurping any one national media tradition, replaces American-made dramas for Korean ones.

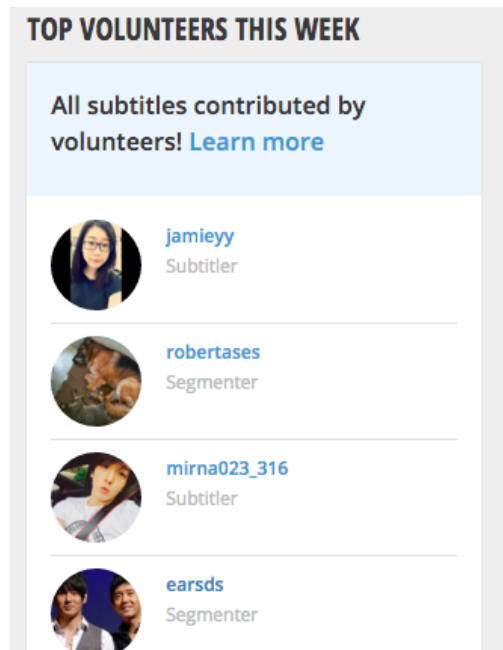


Figure 6 Viki privileges fan participation by giving it space on the front page. Viki.com. Screenshot by author.

### *VIKI AND PLACE*

Most media hosted on Viki can be best described as crossover media. Adrian Athique defines crossover media as a commercial exchange that moves "from a niche audience to a larger 'global' audience, which promises greater exposure and profits. Thus, in its various aspects, the crossing described by the term is minority position" (9). Crossover media, for instance, would not include an American blockbuster or a British television series. The audience for crossover media "is loosely imagined as a collective

body of culturally literate cosmopolitan citizens in the developed world willing to extend their consumption of media cultures (and media as culture) outside of their own nationality or ethnicity” (Athique 9). As such, much of the audience for crossover media may not speak the language of the media they watch. Crossover audiences may not think of themselves as a community (Athique 10). However, this changes when individuals are working together to overcome issues of access. Fans often have to collaborate to get online access to translations of preferred media.

As mentioned above, Viki hosts media content from a wealth of cultural traditions, and this relates in part to an increasing diaspora and, connectedly, a digital diaspora. References to cultural diaspora date back to the Bible, when diaspora was seen as the consequence of “national transgression” (Durham Peters 23). Today, one might just as easily be called an exile (Naficy 4) or a refugee. The popularity of crossover media and the desire for access to localized media outside of its regional area creates the need for translations. While crossover media seems to deterritorialize media, Naficy notes that, “[w]hile technology, media, and capital are globalized and cross geographical boundaries of nation-states with ease, national governments everywhere appear to be tightening and guarding their physical borders more vigilantly than ever” (3). Within this paradigm, global languages claim precedent: “Even for Middle Easterners, English is the ‘open sesame’ to a thousand and one bytes” (Shohat 222). While translation communities can help displaced persons connect back to a home, they also end up reinforcing inequalities that exist outside of online networks. As Shohat explains:

While computer networks do radically redefine our notions of place, community, and urban life, one cannot separate this fact from the ways in which cybercommunities are entangled in unequal material realities.

Cybernetics itself does not transform existing local and global power relations: it extends them into a new space and inflects and shapes them through its diverse formats, even when they are interactive. (223)

With this in mind, a careful consideration of the ways in which translation sites like Viki affect and privilege places is important for to analyze within the context of an increasingly globalized community.

Within this context, Korean soap operas are important to study because of their popularity on the site, even amongst individuals who are not from Korea. Melodrama as a genre is significant to mention because, as Carla Marcantonio notes, “[t]he global era engenders dramas that speak to our being both bound and unbound by the elements that demarcate our mode of inhabiting and imagining community” (7). This trend also relies on ongoing shifts in television watching, many that predate online streaming services like Viki. As Jeongmee Kim notes, the Hallyu Movement started in countries with racial and cultural similarities to South Korea and was aided by media deregulation happening in the late 1990s, which made Korean dramas cheaper than Western ones (49). This deregulation coincides with the rise of online fandom and that begins attracting fans outside the Hallyu market and with whom no distribution policy has been established (Hu 36). Within these fan communities, groups of fans worked together to translate across languages and this affective work “mobilizes resources from around the world in order to sustain the emotional investment for a fandom in absence of traditional advertising and publicity” (Hu 36). Around these fan sites grew many of the same practices that we expect from any fan community—fan forums, memes, and badges—but included individuals dedicated to translating Korean media into English. These communities depended on multilingual individuals, but often fans would learn

enough Korean to create translations, but these translations would look unprofessional not only in the quality of the linguistic translation, but also the use of unprofessional fonts and glosses in the subtitles (Dwyer). These fan sites, which were often breaking copyright rules, are in many ways the predecessors to sites like Viki. This emotional investment extends beyond translating information and into helping other community members invested in crossover media.

Most translation communities hold no rights to the media they translate. In both translation and scanlation communities it is traditional for “extralegal texts [to] bypass editorial and legal barriers” however, as producers seek a wider audience they will rely on established, often corporate, distribution channels (Roh, “How Japanese Fan Fiction Beat the Lawyers”). Translation communities are groups of international fans subject to a multitude of international laws that determine copyright and international media practices. Place factors into not only international law, but also who can access different media. In the same way that DVDs are coded for particular regions and can only be played on regional players, online content also has regional distribution rights that these fan communities must navigate or choose to disregard. This is an issue that larger streaming sites, like Viki, have as they have tried to use streaming services to reach niche audiences. Viki streams content, but does not allow for downloading content so that it cannot be shared outside the media’s regional distribution rights.

While distinct from television, mainly because it lacks the set schedule of TV shows, the everyday use of television shapes how streaming sites are structured and who the audience is. As far as mobility is concerned, television has always been mobile. TV brought audiovisual media consumption into the home, meaning viewers were not bound to any one particular location the way that they were with films in movie theaters.

This mobility was further enhanced by the VCR, which “helped to set the stage for time-shifting, a concept that has become commonplace in the era of digital video recorders (DVRs) and other forms of on-demand viewing” (Tryon *On-Demand* 5). The most popular way to gain access to media online is an on-demand streaming model, like Netflix. An examination of Viki demands some consideration of how streaming sites work in order to understand the viewing gaps a platform like Viki fills amongst an array of other global options. Also, companies like Viki arise just before streaming services like Netflix become interested in adding global media. Viki moved from a school project to a company in 2010 and in October 2011, Netflix signed a contract with CJ Entertainment to bring 20 Korean titles to its streaming line up. Since then, both sites have expanded the amount of Korean and East Asian television and film they host.

Viki itself competes most directly with Drama Fever, another site focused on crossover media for global fans. Chuck Tryon’s *Reinventing Cinema* discusses Netflix’s role in film culture and potential as a “vending machine model” that has “provided independent filmmakers new forms of access to the means of production and distribution, while also opening up entrance points to film culture” (123-4). Never in history has it been so easy or so inexpensive for the film lover to have access to so many films (Von Lohmann, 2007). While the ability to stream media online existed before Netflix and YouTube became popular, our viewing practices have shifted to include accessing online media on our own schedule (Tryon *On-Demand* 25). This shift started with television, VHS and movie rentals, but the digital format of streaming sites allows for seemingly unlimited access to film and television shows. Even in rural areas where a video store, especially one focused on independent or foreign media, might be unheard of, the film lover can access films from any country and/or decade on demand.

Tryon argues that Netflix and other digital distribution platforms have created a society of cinema consumers able to consume media like never before (Tryon *Reinventing* 111); however, “although digital delivery seemed to hold out the promise of unlimited choice, audiences were often confronted with the difficulty of navigating a frequently changing menu of choices as movies and television shows migrate from one platform or service to another” (Tryon *On-Demand* 21). Fans often must consider archives like Netflix as one of many resources. Likewise, not all shows are subtitled for ubiquitous access. Netflix found as it expanded into markets outside of the United States that users preferred subtitled media to dubbed media (Tryon *On-Demand* 48). As streaming sites expand into different language economies, these translations become a hurdle to ubiquitous access.

Streaming services also cater to a problem that many movie lovers have had for a long time, the ability to access old, rare, and foreign films they would otherwise have no access to. Streaming services use licenses to reach more customers in niche markets and can host content for smaller audiences than physical video stores could hope to cater to. Sun Jung connects the rise in popularity of both Korean media and mobile platforms. Jung argues that digital platforms and global media have led to Korean film being a marker in Western (particularly American) societies of the of new cinephilia. Jung adopts the term “new cinephilia” and explains this moment as “root[ed] in the development of new technologies, such as DVDs and the Internet, that enable audiences to access extraordinary, non-Hollywood films” (133). This cinephilia interacts with Henry Jenkins’ notion of ‘pop cosmopolitanism’ or one “embrac[ing] global popular culture as an escape from parochialism of her or his local community (Jung 133). What ultimately has happened is that an understanding of the Western canon of film no

longer marks one as a cinephile. Instead, becoming a voracious watcher of Asian film, particularly Korean film becomes a hallmark of film knowledge. In this way, Korean media happening to rise in popularity alongside technologies and governmental policies that increase the mobility of local media make Korean media the ideal case study for a project on Viki.

While streaming services provide a world of media, the neutral way that a global media distribution site like Viki represents itself can be problematic in how it affects production and distribution. When sites like Netflix present content, they juxtapose global cinema in ways that strip cultural context from the media. Getting content into wide distribution can likewise affect production. In “Interpreting Transnational Cultural Practices,” Sujeong Kim argues that crossover media production strips the cultural ‘odor’ out of a show as its made for larger cultural audiences. S. Kim argues that in Korean television is regionally popular because:

the Confucian values embodied within Korean dramas—such as harmony with community, respect for elders, filial duties, and loyalty to family and friends—are considered the source of cultural proximity that contributes to their popularity” (741).

However, with platforms like Netflix, everything is equally available in the same space and the platform furthers this odor stripping. Netflix can contain films from anywhere but does little to prove contextual meaning of a film. Netflix juxtaposes films one against the other usually by genre and not by place of origin. In some ways, this is to Netflix’s advantage because many films and television shows today cross multiple cultural boundaries in their stories, stars, directors, producers, and funding. Not everyone skimming through Netflix wants an essay on the film. However, these distribution



standards can be seen to strip these complex places from media. Viki presents itself as a global media provider and is sure to inform the reader of a show's country of origin and genre. However, a romantic comedy from the Philippines might still be advertised right next to a Korean police procedural. Global-ness is a different kind of cultural stripping, but is still implicit in stripping cultural odor from its texts.

Issues with production and distribution in this context are conjoined with issues of translation practices. Minako O'Hagan highlights issues with translation software and policies, noting that technology is never neutral in these situations ("From Fan Translation" 750) and require an examination of power dynamics. Relying on translations done by many volunteers leads to "a typical peep-hole approach to translation resulting from the way in which software is constructed. This imposes certain operational logistics in localisation workflow, and creates a situation where translation is often performed without context" ("From Fan Translation" 752). Fan translations are usually done by having volunteers translate only a few seconds of video at a time so that many volunteers can work on the same text simultaneously and the media can be shared quickly. However, this means that the translators do not have access to the whole document as they translate and nuances can get lost. As such, while technology via community translation practices and streaming websites allow for greater access to global media online, the media itself is stripped of much of the cultural context needed to grasp the content. This problematizes the ability of global audiences to understand Korean-ness from the consumption of Korean cinema through these community-produced texts. For instance, Segmenters and translators at Viki will usually receive 8-10 minutes of a larger piece, but only one individual will get the first section. The person segmenting and/or translating the second 8-10 minutes of a conversation

between an arguing man and a woman may not know if the couple are old friends, enemies, new acquaintances, family members, or lovers. This can be exacerbated by languages like Korean, where familial terms are used for members outside the family even in romantic relationships. While these translations can be edited after the fact, the inefficiencies and cultural assumptions within the software itself are apparent.

### *OPEN SOURCE, OPEN ACCESS: COMMUNITY WIKI BUILDING*

Important to the study of Viki is that it is both a streaming service and wiki. A wiki, at its core, is a document created by a community as opposed to an individual (Reingold 181). These texts can be a database, an encyclopedia, or an archive of crossover media. Most wikis, regardless of other genre, are archives. For instance, Wikipedia is a free archive of human knowledge that anyone can edit. Online archives are never meant to be complete and projects like Wikipedia are updated constantly. However, the hybridization of Viki as both a fan produced wiki and a commercial endeavor makes for particularly interesting examinations of the medium because what they archive is based on the willingness of creative parties to agree on distribution. Issues with region distribution rights and the expiration of licensing agreements continue to plague these spaces as international communities try to participate and translate Viki content while navigating emplaced issues. These archives are often in constant flux. Instead of building an archive over time, as Wikipedia does, Netflix and Amazon more curate archives based on availability and popularity. They are not necessarily getting bigger and, based on contracts and legal battles, may clear hundreds of titles from their archives overnight.

Viki follows a slightly different model. Television shows and films are obtained through third party distributors or rights holders under a creative commons licenses to translate and then these translations are provided online for free. One does not need an account with Viki to view most content. Fans actively work within the system to translate content across several languages. This benefits fans of crossover media, who gain access to more global media. It also benefits the license holder, who receives subtitled work in several languages that promote both the individual show/film/music video and any future media now that an audience and a place of access are clearly identified. It should be mentioned, however, that copyright holders can ask that their content be pulled if they find that to be more advantageous. When this does happen, the fan labor that went into the creation of that translation is lost to the community itself.

The commodification of crowd sourced projects like Viki has been an ongoing capital investment. In *Wikinomics*, Tapscott and Williams argue that collaborative projects on a massive scale, calling these peering economies that “allow thousands upon thousands of individuals and small producers to cocreate products, access markets, and delight customers in ways that only large corporations could manage in the past” (12). In these peering economies, the commodity is authority (25) and are best suited to communities like Viki that produce cultural knowledge that can be broken down into smaller pieces so many individuals can contribute (70). Collaborators contribute to these spaces because sustained involvement and good work earns individuals cultural clout within the space and often leads to positions within this community. This is how crowd sourced projects can produce high quality work by allowing volunteers to self-select positions they hold within the organization, positions they are best suited for (Tapscott and Williams 69). Like the gaming communities mentioned in the previous

chapter, peering communities work easily in and around corporate market economies. Translators gift their work to the to a community they have often benefited from as well.

Tapscott and Williams encourage corporations to consider the use of crowdsourced volunteer labor. The commodification of fan work in Viki is indicative of cultural shifts that fans enter for the affordances that market systems can provide. This shift in the use of online fans has been ongoing and fans can often benefit from corporate interest (Jenkins et al. 157) because, as Jenkins notes, groups with noticeable levels of participation can attract the attention of corporate entities, which gives them access to content and spaces they may not have had. However, as Jenkins also states:

That said, commodification is also a form of exploitation. Those groups that are commodified find themselves targeted more aggressively by marketers and often feel they have lost control over their own culture, since it is mass produced and mass marketed. (Jenkins, *Convergence Culture*, “Buying into American Idol”)

Participatory communities attract corporate entities. While usually only a small number of members produce content for any community, they also attract a high number of spectator members, who are attractive for advertisers (Van Dijck and Nieborg 861). Viki follows a similar model. A small percentage of fans volunteer to produce content for the site. The millions of fans who view content on the site work collect advertisements and test what content might be best suited for distribution outside of Viki itself.

In practice, Viki works in a similar fashion to older individualized fan communities that formed around individual crossover television shows. It includes not only the videos but the fan forums and ability to share memes and gossip that were common in older, unsanctioned translation communities. Unique to Viki is that

members accept and, as will be show below, take pride in the fact that their translations may be used for profit and wide dissemination. Additionally, as Brian Hu notes, “[f]or many, the most attractive feature of these communities is the shared technical knowledge for downloading and playing video files and for installing subtitle playback codes” (37). The benefits here are that Viki has created one of the most usable subtitling software around. Users are able to easily help create translations. They can also ask questions and participate in fan created training programs to expand their cultural and technical expertise and improve their own community participation. These communities participate in affective labor, which is the labor where “it’s products are intangible, a feeling of ease, well-being satisfaction, excitement, or passion” (Hardt and Negri 293) and might be better interpreted as caring labor (293). Community members care for each other and for the cultural production that is the work of the community: “the emotional investment that fans in the community hold in these translated materials as well as the emotional pleasure resulting from the process of collecting, translating, sharing, and viewing these materials in a community space” (Hu 40). Community members derive pleasure from the curation process that takes place in creating a wiki dedicated to a loved media.

While Viki does reinforce some larger conversations about global media, the site uses for both corporate gain and to create a counter narrative to a Western media dominated landscape. The company utilizes a corporate model to drive some interesting initiatives that undermine English domination. Viki promotes a world view in which English and Western culture are marginalized. This occurs with the media content of the site, but also its translation system; where possible volunteers are encouraged not to use English as the pivot language for translation (Dwyer 234). Pivot languages are used by

translating something into a common language and using that translation for future translations in less common languages. This brings to mind Benedict Anderson's words, "Nothing served to 'assemble' related vernaculars more than capitalism" (45). However, Viki also hosts an Endangered Languages initiative and 25% of the 200 languages Viki supports are endangered ("Endangered Languages"). Viki's subtitling process also includes a captioning step, which means that the show is now captioned for the hearing impaired in their original language. These closed captions likewise encourage translators to translate from the original language instead of an English translation. In these ways, Viki uses these resources and strategies to deprivilege English on the site. However, as I stated in the introduction, this move also helps expand knowledge of its parent company, Rakuten, into new markets. As such, this fan labor for the good of many is likewise good for Rakuten and folds into their global initiatives in a way that compliments the company's Englishnization project. Globalization is good for large companies and fans freely supporting and promoting the work of a global company is likewise beneficial to Rakuten. This highlights the complicated relationships between production, consumption, work, and exploitation in online spaces.

### *LANGUAGE, LEISURE, AND INTERNATIONAL FILM*

In the conversations surrounding the whole of this dissertation, leisure has been shown to be two-fold. Individuals of middle-income service-based social classes feel cultural pressure to spend their free time doing things deemed to be worthwhile that enrich them in health, network, or skill (Rojek 2010; Oullette and Wilson 2011). Likewise, as work becomes more flexible, the availability of leisure time likewise must become flexible as well. As such, Viki introduces not one but two productive ways to

spend one's leisure time. Volunteers can learn one of two desirable skills: translation or video editing. Doing either of these activities can earn volunteers a translator certificate from Viki, which the site claims can be used to show translation experience on resumes and school applications "Contributor Benefits." Translation itself is associated with the art of learning a language. These participants translate short segments of video for a larger channel that works on several shows. Translating a show is not a word-for-word process, but "the encoding, decoding, and reencoding of texts across cultures (Hu 38); it's time consuming work made easier spread over several volunteers. This approach means that multiple individuals can be working on a project simultaneously, ensuring a fast turnaround before promoting content on the site for casual viewers. As mentioned above, Viki's system makes it easy to get involved, but does little to provide narrative context. Translators don't know the narrative they are translating until it is all put together. Language learning, however, is a skill that requires years of dedicated training, willing teachers, and situations to apply what has been learned and online crowd-sourced translation projects tend to privilege underprivileged languages (O'Hagan, "From Fan Translation," 33). Viki can provide the context that individuals need in order to learn a language. The platform provides translators with short segments of text to work with within a context with legitimate stakes. At the same time, quality crowd-sourced translations require volunteers to organize in ways that encourage quality translation and a review process" (O'Hagan "From Fan Translation," 33). Translators work in teams, meaning translators enter into peer review of their work. Translators can translate content from its original language, but often volunteers translate an already subtitled piece into a new language. For instance, a translator can go through and translate parts of a television episode from Korean to English, but other translators can

take that English translation and translate the show into Farsi. One need not know both Korean and Farsi to benefit the community.

For those who are not multilingual, segmenting films might be the best option for participating in the community. Segmenters break videos down into clips of less than five seconds. The goal is to create the same kinds of segments that one would see in a professionally subtitled film. So, the subtitles match the actor's line, preferably down to a one hundredth of a second. These segments are then passed on to captioners and translators for translation. This system allows many segmenters and translators to work on a project simultaneously. Segmenting comes down to editing for timing. If a segment starts too early, the conversation could lose its dramatic effect. Because segmenting is important to the construction of quality translations, both Viki and its fan community have created tutorials to help new segmenters understand the process before they work on Viki's more desirable channels. In addition to the cultural concerns of large scale translation projects, the flexibility of leisure practices within the site opens conversations on both flexible work and flexible leisure. Media viewing, international or otherwise, does not exist within a vacuum and how we watch and participate in media environments depends on where we live and what our work and home lives. As Tryon notes, today's employees are often "expected to work irregular schedules, snatching brief moments of leisure and in many cases taking work home" (Tryon 10). Mentioned in previous chapters, flexible time at work is a precarious living situation (Oullette 2014). The lines between work and leisure often blur in situations where individuals work in contract and part time flexible positions.

As individual lives adapt to models where flexible life also leads to flexible media, with the related reality that both work and leisure become objects that must be packaged



in smaller segments, leisure must not only be participatory, but also be something that many of its fans can access across platforms with a sense of continuity. This matters both in fan consumption and fan production. As such, Viki is able to harness fan talents by having larger pieces of media content broken down into tasks that can be done in shorter increments. This breaks up material labor to resemble factory labor where the worker only works on small pieces of an object and might never see the finished product. Segmenting utilizes a web-based subtitling software that allows one to segment at home or over a lunch break. This software strips away many of the editing features of other video editing software (iMovie, Camtasia, After Effects...) so that individuals with varying levels of ability can participate. Embedded into this community culture is an awareness that fans need not produce one complete fan produced text, or that a group of fans will produce higher quality work. Segmenters can really focus on creating ten minutes of quality cuts. In this, the software seems to 'fix' everything that might make these crowd sourced translations inconvenient.

While segmenting individual clips may not take long, a subcommunity within Viki who value quality over quantity train other segmenters how to segment video based on the expectations of this smaller community. While the tools for segmenting are easy to use, really a few shortcut keys, getting the exact timing right, creating accurate segments can be a challenge. This is particularly true as segmenters often do not speak the language they segment for. To compensate, volunteers have created multiple training academies to help new volunteers master segmenting. These trainings include multiple tiers of scaffolded assignments. Several members of the segmenting community mentor novice members of through different stages in the segmenting process, sharing their particular specialty along the way. For instance, someone learning

to segment Chinese videos, their mentor will be a segmenter who both runs a channel that hosts Chinese television. Usually the channel managers are also familiar with the language the channel hosts. Here, the technical knowledge is reinforced by cultural knowledge. Members of this community likewise post to forums to help new community members understand netiquette and community expectations. These forums serve many purposes that include recruiting more volunteers and maintaining protocol within the community, even if the community has not agreed on a shared protocol of values.

### **APPLICATION: BUILD A PROFESSIONAL WORKFORCE OF VOLUNTEERS**

Viki is a large community populated by millions of members interested in a variety of media taking on a variety of roles to help with the translation and distribution of global media to a large audience. In order to analyze Viki, this chapter will look at one aspect of the process of developing content for the site, segmenting, and use it as a way to look at how the Viki community manages and works in embedded practices.

Segmenters represent the community because segmenters work on every channel in every language. Additionally, segmenters have tech specific training programs that can be studied in order to intellectualize the fan labor across the site in a way that looking at language specific subcommunities within the larger Viki community might not.

Like other communities referenced within this dissertation, the segmenting community is connected by a system of networks. They use a variety of social media both within and outside of Viki's website to communicate and collaborate. These fans engage with content in roles that range from consumer to critic to producer and analyzing all of these roles extends beyond the purview of this chapter. Community members utilize content created by Viki, community supported forums, training videos

on YouTube and Viki, training documents housed in Google Drive and their own website to connect and communicate with community volunteers. These different systems and documents are conveniently connected and can be referenced by anyone within the community. Pages of training manuals and links to videos are shared in forums and dropped into messages during segmenter training.

To study the group, I analyzed a forum titled “SEGMENTERS PLEASE VISIT HERE! Some Helpful Advice for Current and Potential Aspiring Segmenters” (SPVH). This forum is pinned at the top of the segmenting forum and would be one of the first places volunteers would find when searching how to segment videos. Overall, SPVH stays close to the two topics of how to segment and participate community. Also, the forum was started in August of 2013, but has posts as recent as July of 2015. As a result, it shows how the subcommunity of segmenters has developed over that almost 2-year period. While there are millions of members of the Viki community and hundreds of segmenters, 41 individuals participated in the forum by either ‘liking’ or responding to posts. The forum has almost 5.9 thousand views and 296 individual posts as of October 2015. Many of the posters were or have become leaders within the segmenting community (they run their own channels or participate as teachers in a segmenter training program). Novices often ask follow up questions or solicit advice on smaller segmenting concerns.

### *VIKI, MELODRAMA, AND PLACE*

Place and embodied experience play a role in the Viki community in three distinct ways. First, where shows originate alters their value to different segmenters, who compete to work on the most popular channels, channels that are advertised on the

front page of Viki. Second, materiality plays a key role in the community, including the hardware and software that individuals use to do the segmenting, which often puts members' Viki participation in context of an individual's lived reality. Third, due to regional access issues, where individuals live affect when and how individuals can segment and privilege living in particular places. The community itself must navigate this emplaced practice as it connects individuals with the work they can do. The ability to work with others despite these emplaced challenges helps individuals to network with the community gatekeepers who grant access to these desirable projects.

Places in Viki are hierarchical, particularly in the segmenting community starting with where a particular show originates, which ties into a notion of the hierarchy of particular places in community dealing with technology and dissemination (Anderson 45). "Live" Korean dramas have become the channels that segmenters want to be on. These dramas are "live" in that they are shared with the rest of the community only a few hours after segmenters and subtitlers gain access to the shows and may not be completely translated when they are made available to the larger Viki community. These shows are the most popular in the community and are commonly shared through other distribution platforms, like Viki's Hulu channel. Because Viki promotes Korean dramas, and because of the Hallyu and global media movements have popularized Korean serials in Western culture, positions working on these channels are the most desirable. This ties in part into the privileged place given to Korean media because of its rise in popularity during the rise in digital distribution platforms. Obtaining the technical skills to work on these channels is the main reason individuals turn to advice forums like "Segmenters Please Visit Here" (SPVH) and training programs like Seg101, with one forum member proclaiming:

If you don't think you can be a team player and segment with the same level of good quality and speed as others, I advice [sic] you to carefully rethink your decision to become a Korean segmenter on Viki.

In order to segment on Korean channels, aspiring segmenters must often show how well they work with others first. Penzold examines this practice in ethos-action communities, where community membership is tied to "the personal acceptance of a set of moral obligations and rules of conduct" (716). Community participation is essential for working on channels with quick turnaround. Inherently, volunteers who want to work on desirable Korean dramas must network with individuals beforehand in order to be invited onto these channels. In this, aspiring volunteers must have technical and interpersonal skills to succeed.

While individuals from anywhere in the world can segment on Korean stations, the community itself encourages a familiarity with the culture one is segmenting. However, familiarity can be either a linguistic familiarity or a cultural familiarity, which one might be able to pick up from watching Korean serials. An attentive fan of Korean serials might possess enough knowledge of Korean language to be able to segment with little to no lived experience of Korean culture and language. SPVH, designed as a way to help individuals to improve as segmenters, provides information on how to better understand Korean language in order to better segment on Korean stations. As a note, while volunteers in the forum segment media from a number of linguistic cultures, the constant return to Korean as the exemplar marks the importance of Korean-ness to the larger Viki community. While one need not be able to speak fluent Korean to succeed as a segmenter, a familiarity with the language can help one to better divide longer monologues. One member, the creator of the forum, provides a list of sentence endings

as well as some advice on Korean language “there are several ‘styles’ or ‘levels of speech’ in Korean so knowing the relationship of the speakers is very helpful in knowing what are sentence enders.” The member then lists words one might hear that begin or end sentences. Members of the forum have also adopted as a sign off the term ‘fighting,’ a phrase adopted from English and used in Korean culture to encourage or cheer on.

We can look at this interpretation of Korean culture a few ways. On one hand, this highlights consequences that arise from the intentional push of a local media into a global market. Even with the decrease in desire for large production Korean films, like *The Host* or *The Good, The Bad, the Weird* (K. Kim “Preface” *Virtual Hallyu*), K-dramas have maintained a place in global media studies. Melodrama is globally affiliated with nation-state and “emerging democratic and industrial societies” (Marcantonio 2), but Hallyu itself is positioned as collapsing “the gap between modernism, an aesthetic auteurist revolt against both the waning nationalist (*minjok-juui*) forces and authoritarian (Knownui-juui) legacies that drove Korea through much of the latter part of the twentieth century” (Kim “Hallyu’s Virtuality” *Virtual Hallyu*). As Korean-ness is commodified, individuals will want to work, adapt, and interact with it in the same ways fans want to interact with any piece of convergence culture. However, here, the difference between fan production as Jenkins describes around the *Star Wars* franchise (“Quentin Tarantino’s Star Wars” *Convergence Culture*) that does not involve the commodification and consumption of a millennia-old culture. At the same time, as I want to be critical of reducing a language down to a linguistic cheat sheet, the self-awareness inherent in the segmenting community that they are not the best people to do translation. Many know that they don’t know enough about Korea outside of dramatic

serials to do translation. Additionally, technological skills are in and of themselves a literacy that these volunteers are adopting in order to volunteer on the site.

The cultural clout of Korean media, the attempts of the group to understand Korean culture from outside of it, and the adoption of Korean slang terms creates within the forum a kind of mythical Korea that exists neither in Korea nor in its media. This is one consequence of the Hallyu drive to sell Korea-ness. While Viki fan forums use references from Korean media, this practice of knowing just enough about the place highlights how many of these texts are consumed across global fan markets, who struggle with issues of cultural and linguistic fidelity (Schules 4.7). In effect, group members learn enough about a national culture to participate in the fan community, but over time the fan community can become more important than the place itself. Korea in this community is seen as a more important place, as individuals become more engaged as volunteers on the site, the ability to work on more important channels supersedes an interest in the culture the media derives from. This again folds into the consequences of global media practices. While the similarity of Korean culture to other East Asian cultures makes Korean serials popular in Hallyu environments, the commodification of Korean media in online environments introduces media to new economies with different values. Brian Hu in speaking of fan forums on a specific show (not on Viki), as an emotional economy, saying “[t]he collective act of translation mobilizes resources from around the world in order to sustain the emotional investment necessary for fandom in the absence of advertising and publicity” (36). However, the shift to Viki’s model shows a phenomena Jenkins discusses where companies “‘court’ existing communities” doing the work they want done. Courting translation communities to a wiki mode changes how individuals see the work they do (164). For instance, on

Wikipedia, taking on more important roles within the volunteer hierarchy can begin to matter more than the content being archived and the skill becomes more important than the cultural entry point (Tapscott and Williams 70). As Korean media enters this global media economy with a different value, its Korean-ness gets distorted in favor of the prestige the community has given to it. Here, the ability to build the technical skills can supersede the Korean-ness that was essential to the initial attraction to the site.

Place and emplacement do not only influence what is the desirable work on Viki. The technology one uses to physically segment can affect individual success as a segmenter. One ongoing debate amongst forum members surrounded technical issues and attempts to figure out the divide between software and hardware issues. This technical issue was two-fold. The forum itself encourages members to participate in training programs, initially Seg101. Seg101's training program culminates with students segmenting a longer video that is then graded by several instructors in the program. Participants must score a 95% or better to pass. However, the use of different machines, web browsers, and connection strengths means that individuals have different experiences with the segment timer. In many communities, this would make little difference, but because members create collaborative pieces that must be consistent, managing time differences based on software and connections is integral to teams doing the segmenting. As such, members discuss how best to create the most accurate subtitles. In the work of the community, then, learning to segment largely surrounds learning to calibrate your own physical experience of what is going on to what the rest of the community sees. Online communities use multiple technologies to communicate and, as a result, participate in a variety of places. Once a community is established, individuals often choose the media that best suits the needs of their communication and



this choice spreads communities across multiple devices (Gershon 107). This results in a remediation of practice and “[p]art of understanding remediation involves understanding that people use a range of media—and not always the same range. The use of one medium is always affected by the other media a person uses regularly, as well as the media they refuse to use” (Gershon 121). The willingness of individuals to share information and multiple media exposure changes the way that communities develop.

Building on the notion that segmenting is always emplaced, the act is also always embodied. For instance, in order to be accepted onto a major ‘live’ channel, individuals must quickly segment with great accuracy. The faster an episode can be segmented, the faster it can be translated. In order to work quickly, members give advice on short cuts to segment faster. Members must be able to react quickly to aural and visual content. The quicker one can react the less time they spend editing their segments. This kind of segmenting depends on able bodies and fast reactions, which again favor particular places and social environments. To manage this, within the forum there are recommendations for what buttons to rest one’s fingers on so that one can cut and edit video faster. These embodied references, however, were also used to set boundaries within the group and justify participation. For instance, one member, the founder of the forum, reminds participants that even though she would like to give personal pointers to everyone, “I only have one pair of hands, one pair of eyes and a limited amount of time outside my real life. This is why I have set up this place so you could write me your concern and I will try my best to help you.” This post reflects frustration, but also serves as a reminder of how limiting having few mentors can be. Another member, who has been told she misunderstands the nuance of a rule because she has not been as prolific a segmenter as she was in the past responds that, “5 courses a semester, my [Seg101]

students and other contributions to a specific channel, my employment, volunteer work, and a few other demands, have cut sharply into my time to segment.” This enters with an idea that Campbell calls “labor of devotion,” where audiences (particularly women) are encouraged through “corporate hybridization of community and brand” to devotedly consume and promote brands they identify with (494). These kinds of responses are reminders of the delicate balance volunteers have in regard to dedication to leisure, particularly for individuals who have held more prominent roles in a community before a life change. Likewise, in an online community, individuals must be reminded of embodied practices that factor into the functionality of individual members and, as a result, the community.

### *WORK AND LEISURE*

As referenced above, becoming a member of the segmenting community demands a pretty strong dedication of leisure time. This begins when individuals start finding one of these training programs, like Seg101, or the newer Ninja Academy (which becomes popular about a year after the forum begins). Viki itself provides little information on how to segment; a 3:24 video walks individuals through the interface. If a volunteer wants to learn more than that about segmenting, then she is going to have to start searching for some guidance within in the community. This can be a channel manager who works as a mentor, a training program, or searching through forums for answers to specific questions. In order to work on the best channels, volunteers must have training and experience because, while this is a leisurely activity, many segmenters take the responsibility of segmenting videos seriously.

Many online communities have initially low demands for those interested in joining or participating (Song 49), and members usually join Viki to watch dramas, not subtitle them. One does not need to make an account to view most content on the site. However, once one goes from being a viewer of content to being a volunteer helping produce content, the requirements become much more labor intensive. Individuals learning to segment need the time to go into the site to do segmenting exercises and correct their work as they go along. Jenkins argues that volunteers go through a learning process that includes lurking and that communities that allow individuals to move from the periphery to the center with scaffolding make for more productive community members who feel more involved (*Spreadable Media* 158).

Figure 7 Segmenting interface. Screenshot by author.



Members who do not finish assignments fast enough can be removed from the training program. Likewise, joining a channel means volunteers dedicate themselves to being online on certain days and at certain times. Typically, live shows must be segmented within an hour of being opened so translators can translate the content into other languages. Most shows will post what percentage of a show is fully translated in any language and fans might complain to the community if they feel subtitling is taking

too long. Therefore, Channel Mangers are more likely to give work to segmenters who can work quickly enough to keep fans and translators engaged.

As mentioned above, SPVH largely promotes the value of training programs like Seg101. Contributors to SPVH extol the virtues of participating in one of these volunteer trainings

I don't think anyone could self-teach. Even one of my best friend[s] who is a recent Seg101 graduate but [had] years of Korean drama segmenting experience, had a tutor that taught her on Hindi drama, where she learned timing, length, synchronization, etc....

The relationship between members can also be seen in the metaphors that the groups decide to use in their training programs. Seg101 obviously borrows its ethos from academia and we can imagine teachers here as college professors, experts in their field. Ninja Academy, instead puts trainees in touch with a “sensei,” who trains them to segment a particular language. Sensei is the Japanese for teacher, but the visual argument and title of “Ninja Academy” harken back to martial arts, and evoke the image of a disciplining agent one meets in kung-fu movies where one should see the wisdom of a sensei as absolute. It also brings up images of hard work and physical discipline. The idea is almost that one will be physically changed by the experience of any one of these training programs. Students likewise frame training as a disciplining process when they make comments in SPVH like, “I’m trying my best...So many things to learn from [trainer]” and “I am still in the process of shaping more skill.” Students in these training programs do see themselves as developing and have a level of respect for the time it takes to learn how to segment. Jenkins adds that “The processes of more skilled participants are hidden from public view in order to protect the ‘magic’ and ‘mystique’ of

professional media making” (*Spreadable Media* 158-9). This allows students the time to be introduced to increasingly more challenging media production skills over time. Senseis and teachers are also often channel managers of some of the more popular channels on Viki, so they do bring with them a certain level of authority. Not only are they the ones grading a student’s work, they will also be the ones who decide who gets to work on projects deemed to be more important. In this way, this community of segmenters has professionalized leisure. By this I mean that they have created their own certification processes that borrows rhetoric and training from institutions of higher education to create a network of volunteers who consider this to be more than just a hobby. Viki’s network, its large audience, and the sites use of commercials further develop this notion that this is professional work and not a hobby for enthusiasts.

The efforts that go into these training programs create a strong learning community. As one member notes, “I think Seg101 is like getting someone to provide you with constructive feedback so you know what you are doing right and what needs to be improved.” The community comes back again and again to creating quality segments through experience and most of the tips are about what to do in a variety of contexts. In Seg101 “you must accumulate 2000 segment experience before you are allowed to graduate. That way you would be well equipped for future project[s].” Creating 2000 segments is also the required number to become a Quality Contributor, which allows segmenters to view media on Viki without commercials. It makes you an employee of the site in some senses.

The Seg101 training program ensures that its graduates can work on a variety of projects after they graduate. Graduates can put badges on their profile that acknowledge their skills and training that channel managers can confirm. While this training is

sought after by many within the community, it is important to note that not everyone can get the training as fast as they want it and it is just a natural occurrence that there are multiple inefficiencies in a volunteer training program. The first issue is that people who want to segment may not be able to get into the program because there are only so many volunteers willing to train segmenters. The forum analyzed here is one of the ways that members of that community are trying to help individuals who cannot yet get into Seg101. Likewise, individuals who want to segment may feel as though they do not have the time. Finally, because segmenting can be time consuming and often involves significant edits to one's work after the fact, volunteers drop out and move on to something else; as one trainer notes in SPVH, "[b]ut you will find that for every 10 or so that say they want to do it, maybe only 1 or 2 will." This may be one reason that SPVH stresses that segmenting is hard work so often. It discourages individuals who are only interested in segmenting casually and emboldens volunteers looking to take on a challenge.

While SPVH argues for structured training as a necessary accreditation for working on big projects, not all members of the segmenting community universally agree. There are discrepancies within the group about how serious segmenting should be taken. While the developers of Seg101 rarely visited the forum, they usually did so to lecture other users to be less stringent with regards to creating rules and regulations. One Seg101 panel judge entered the fray in order to remind a member, "[y]our impression of the grad panel is incorrect. The grad panel looks for potential, not perfection. Slight variance in time does not fail a student." The founder of the training program also chimed in to say, "I always use my mind, my heart and not only use theory." As such, discrepancies in this group mirror discrepancies seen across online

communities where issues of ‘systemic bias’ (Jenkins et al. 189) can happen. Essentially, the rules are decided upon by the leaders of a group.

The term ‘hard work’ comes up several times on SPVH. Hard work, however, is not universally accepted as the best way to determine who should have access to premiere content for segmenting. One member of the forum highlights that there are members who get access to channels because they have been segmenting for a long time and, maintain this status regardless of skill. This member is upset about this system, and refers to the group who practices this kind of segmenting as Voldemort and her Death Eaters, a reference to the villains in the Harry Potter franchise who argue that political power should stay with old established magical families. The forum member draws a parallel through both groups’ emphasis on tradition over talent. These remarks did not go unnoticed and a member from ‘the Death Eaters’ responded to this name calling by saying, “And you are calling US death eaters? OMG...this is so childish[.] You weren’t even in Viki during our times.” This incident highlights the group’s ongoing debate between hard work/talent and experience that one may not expect to see in a leisure activity. However, arguing for your own advantage is necessary in an economy where prestige is earned through more desirable work. These discrepancies, however, do not necessarily detract from the work of the group and probably do not need the involvement of Viki itself. If Viki did more to regulate these volunteers and their processes (both technical and interpersonal), it might actually detract from the community. Spinuzzi hazards against seeing workers as “victims of inefficient systems” (14) and that workers tend to find “valuable solutions in their own right that can be allowed to remain under the control of their originators” (15). And, as mentioned above, these workers see themselves as amateur expert fans. This may seem to go into issues of



labor, but here workers are owning the means of their own production in important ways. They are allowed to decide when and how they work and to what quality it should be. The solution to this problem is not more regulation from Viki.

With competing ideas on collaborative projects, etiquette becomes important. Etiquette here is narrowly but inconsistently defined. While all groups develop a general practices of etiquette, the rules here are unique in their focus; in this forum, etiquette chiefly surrounds two competing ideas of work. Etiquette/Netiquette is important here and Baym observes that part of the reason for ‘flame-wars’ moments where conduct becomes the center of discussion, may connect with the disembodied nature of online interactions (“Communication in Digital Spaces”). Though Baym also highlights that breach of netiquette is less common than one would expect considering the volume of individuals in any community. The interest here is in the connection between etiquette and work. Etiquette is complex and multilayered. For instance, the community member who called out ‘the death eaters’ for unacceptable segmenting had no problem using images of their subpar work which included members’ names as examples for all the community to see. Several members argue she should not use examples with names attached to them. The member, however, does not see this as inappropriate because she believes that community etiquette should prioritize editing good segments. Likewise, she assumes that everyone knows who she is speaking of because this is one of the smaller communities within Viki, saying, “I’m pretty sure people would be able to trace back to who the user was without me saying it. Humans are curious in nature.” To this member, politeness is helping someone perform better; she also remarks “As the ‘Chef from Pasta (K-Drama) always said: ‘If you don’t tell someone how he/she can improve his/her cooking, it is like telling that person to remain on the same level all his/her life

and not improve.” In using examples from Korean serials, this member establishes her ethos as a member of this Viki subcommunity. For this member, politeness strategies used in everyday interactions, particularly non-confrontational politeness strategies, are less important than creating good subtitles. However, her perspective is not the norm. Those members who respond encourage her not to use images with specific individuals’ names. This shows that individuals bring emplaced politeness strategies into online spaces. Flaming, purposeful offensive language happens at the establishment or conflict with norms. Here, as norms are changed by new people being part of the group, these changes become more apparent.

In many fan communities, fans feel as though they are able to adapt and use pieces of original content they love to create new, convergent, texts (Jenkins “Introduction”), though issues of ownership have plagued these kinds of fan-created texts. While some of that happens on fan forums, this sub-community encourages keeping as close to the creator’s vision as possible. When one member addresses how to put in community credits, letting viewers know what team translated the piece for everyone else, a member reminded the group that “screenwriters intend to have a meaningful creepy silence, for us to just listen to music, or enjoy a romantic silent gaze. If we have credits for all these areas, it would ruin the mood and overall enjoyment of the show for our audience.” Here, segmenters see themselves as collaborating with show creators to translate the original meaning of the text. They remain consumers of the content that they help to create, even though many of them cannot understand exactly what is being spoken until after the content is segmented and subtitlers have translated the dialogue. In many ways, they are curating their own future experience with the production.

Throughout the forum, community members are reminded that they can and should continue to improve at segmenting. One member remarks, “[I]astly, the more experience you gain on live projects, the better you get. So please practice, practice, practice!” If practice wasn’t enough, community members can utilize tools like an activity tracker that channel managers can use to survey segmenters. Segmenters can also monitor their own work to ensure that they are working efficiently enough. This connects back to the surveillance Taylor references in game communities discussed in Chapter 3, where community members watch each other’s work and conduct more closely than company entities can or do. While segmenting is supposed to be a leisurely activity, most individuals treat it more as a professionalization community where individual members are expected to maintain a high production value. Arguments within the community include whether or not it is acceptable for a subtitle to flash up more than .1 seconds before an individual speaks. Volunteers are serious about what they produce and how the work of others reflects on their own work.

In a community where professional work is key, play is also important for connecting this semiprofessional activity with notions of leisure. This is not uncommon for many reasons. It falls under gamification practices, common in many professional settings, but also highlights the tricky divide between work and leisure in general. While the community argues for pretty rigid standards, members also encourage new segmenters to find fun in segmenting. For instance, hard subs come up often in conversation. Hard subs are when a piece of media content already has subtitles from another language embedded into the image. For instance, a Cantonese drama might already be hard subbed in Mandarin. The debate is whether to subtitle based on when individuals begin talking, as is standard practice for the community, or if members

should instead segment to the hard subs, so that the new subtitles match the existing subtitles. There are two schools of thought on this, and the community decided channel managers should decide on a channel-by-channel basis and “have fun.” Fun, however, is always contextualized with high quality: “Even though it sounds weird, it is still true: we don’t work ‘just for ourselves.’” Baym and Burnett found this to be true in amateur music promotion as well, where participatory members often had complex relationships with the work they did for and with, acknowledging and constant assessing their relationship with professionals they promoted as well as the expectations of their audience (446). In one last instance, one member reminds the community to “just segment to the best of your abilities and just have fun doing it.” Fun here means that individuals should not get overly stressed about segmenting. This focus on fun also encourages amateur expert volunteers to not focus on the burn out that can happen with this expert level of work (Baym and Burnett 43).

Other ways that individuals are encouraged to have fun while working within the community are through sponsored games. For instance, finishing different parts of the program gain individuals badges. This is standard gamification practice, to give rewards for accomplishments within a work or training environment. These badges also act as a certification because members earn the badges by passing parts of the training program. The badges are then posted to the segmenter’s profile so channel managers can see a segmenter’s qualifications. As such, while fun to collect, the badges reinforce skill and ability, much in the same way that any gamified scenario might. For several years, the Seg101 community also had friendly competitions around the anniversary of the training program. Graduates from the program compete to find the faster segmenters and/or subtitlers. Those involved within the games had personalized avatars created as a gift

from a community member. Viki donated company merchandise for winners of the competitions. These competitions are further examples of how games and fun further professionalize the community, shown to both reinforce relationships between the individual members and to display the quality of the training program to the larger Viki community.

As can be seen, this community is by and large focused on creating quality work, above and beyond being fans of any particular show. Quality work is encouraged and rewarded, low quality work might be disciplined by only being able to find work on less important channels or being removed from a channel. This is not surprising as this forum was created around the desire to share segmenting tips with segmenters and introduce them to training programs. All of this may make the group sound as though there is little reward for participation within the group. At the same time, as I have gone through one of the training programs promoted by the community, many of the mentors I have had have been members who were posting on SPVH two years ago. The reward for many of them is not only in learning how to segment well, but also finding a place in which they are experts in their field. This supersedes the goal many of the members started with, to work on a show they enjoy. This specialization is typically place-based. One becomes an expert in segmenting Korean game shows, or Brazilian music videos, as examples. The semi-professional ethos of the community likewise reinforces that individual community members excel and produce something that thousands of others might view. While all of this hard work ultimately benefits Viki and Rakuten in their ability to make money and extend their brand, it is not to say that the free labor members give is exploitation as members seem to enjoy this work. As such, the demands are higher, but the emotional rewards members received were also advanced. Likewise,

as with other communities studied here, this leisurely work is challenging to divide among issues of exploitation and enjoyment. Instead, this co-creation is a more complex collaboration that works in and around fan labor, new media practices, and corporate gain (Banks and Deuze 422).

### *COMMUNITY*

Segmenters within the Viki community seem focused on etiquette and hierarchy. However, this hierarchy is not perfectly explained. Working on Viki is a collaborative endeavor, and an episode is often only as good as the weakest member. In this way, one's importance as a community member hinges on the ability to be a hard and exacting worker:

Viki is not a playground, it's a place for professional volunteers. If you are not willing to provide meaningful contribution to do a decent job, just simply here to kill boredom, I don't thin[k] segmenting is the route for you. Segmenters must be able to look out for themselves and not assume other segmenters or QC-check would clean up after your work. It's both tiresome and time consuming

Here, there is a direct connection between the community and the quality of one's work. Community members are expected to work towards the level of 'professional volunteer' or amateur expert fan. And this professionalism includes networking. An experienced member recommends to a novice trying to work on a Korean channel: "Remember to have your resume ready saying you are a Seg101 graduate and [redacted] recommended you there." Gaining access to particular channels requires some

professional networking as well. Addressed several times within this debate is the issue of hierarchy and etiquette.

Because quality is so important to this community, etiquette is an aspect of community that the group itself pays a great deal of attention to. Members reinforce over and over again that good segmenting is respectful. This question of hierarchy and respectfulness connects to Bourdieu's notion of cultural production, "the site of struggles in which what is at stake is the power to impose the dominant definition of the writer" (42). Bourdieu finds education to be one of the greatest reproducers of culture and members enter Viki's hierarchy based on those they network with when they start learning to segment: "Someone with training from someone like [redacted] and others will produce FAR better segments in only 300 segments compared to one of the people I mentioned with 30,000 segments." The emphasis here highlights the community; there are community members recognized for their value as segmenters and teachers. It also reinforces a system in that those who have gone through the necessary channels and obtained proper training are going to be better at it. Editing is the easiest way to look at this because, as Schules notes, "editing technologies enable fans to easily enact alternative interpretations of dominant ideologies of translation to fit their pedagogical needs" (5.1). Finally, it reminds members of the community that creating many bad segments ultimately puts the work on the community to fix them. It matters little that one created 30,000 segments if a channel manager then had to go through and redo that work. This is one of the ways in which work is directly tied in with community etiquette. Forcing others to clean up one's work is impolite. Etiquette is also the way that the community connects to the larger Viki community: "As a segmenter, we always

think of the subbers and audience ahead of ourselves. That is why I reiterate time and again why quality is more important than quantity.”

Issues of hierarchy fold into issues of work. As mentioned previously, most members have to ask to join channels that they want to work on, particularly popular Korean channels. However, members with a great number of segments, usually over 2,000 individual segments, are free to join channels, with the assumption that they have a lot of experience. Because the website’s algorithms are unable to distinguish quality segments, individuals can get onto popular channels without the training that this group encourages and these community members, who have had different mentors through the process, may not know the rules that the sub-community analyzed here values, and adding oneself to a channel is considered bad form. So, there are three competing ideas of hierarchy here. One group sees time spent with the community to be the main argument for precedent on new channels. The website itself favors quantity in its algorithms, which favors time working on projects over years spent with the site. SPVH posters instead argue that the most talented members should have access to the best jobs. To counteract this bias, members must be recommended by an existing Quality Contributor to Quality Contributor status, thus continuing to reproduce the current subtitle community. Whichever way one chooses to interact with the community will affect the kind of work one will get once they develop a reputation in the community.

Hierarchy also factors into issues of where members choose to work. As referenced above, Korean dramas and licensed channels are considered the premiere work for the best segmenters. However, Viki also allows individuals to create fan channels. Fan channels usually host information from other places, including YouTube, and Viki users can use the segmenting and translation tools that Viki provides to



translate these less popular pieces. Several SPVH posters suggest that individuals start their segmenting careers working on these fan channels, which more often need volunteers. The stakes are lower because community members have lower expectations for the quality of these pieces. These expectations match Viki's expectations for fan channels as well; because Viki has no intentions of hosting these translations on other streaming services they do not need to be the best work. Within the segmenting community, work on these channels is often belittled. Members who work on more regularly watched channels have referred to working on these channels to be synonymous with working at Walmart or McDonalds. Members who do work on these channels remind these members:

Viki was built on fan channels...It's fine if you don't want to work on them, but a lot of people put in a lot of effort (just like on official channels) to so sub on those channels too. There are tons of fan channels that work to keep top quality too.

Here we can see the ways that this community values different kinds of labor and the debates between what is and is not valued on this channel. The intermingling of corporate and fan motivations leads to differences in how the community sees different kinds of work. Some fans focus on creating content for other fans on Viki. Others instead focus on pieces that might be picked up by other, more well known, distribution sites. Contrasting opinions within the community exist on where the community's energy best serves.

In and around the conversations about work and the quality, individuals do show the ways in which they value a sense of community between members. Mentor/mentee relationships develop between members, who reference how long they have known

different members within the community. These relationships reinforce hierarchies within the group as well. These are usually members who have been around for some time and are also known to create high quality segments. Many of these members are also channel managers. However, members in the highest orders of the community make few appearances in the forum, usually only because someone is referencing their work and they want to clear up any miscommunications. Members also have exchanges that publically announce friendships within the group. Working with experienced members, however, ties back into work. Because training new members is such a labor-intensive experience, novices are encouraged to not waste the time of trainers “[Redacted] is a great mentor and you are lucky to become her student. You must finish the program and not let her down. I’m cheering you on.” Again, failing to meet the goals of the group is bad etiquette.

Relationships with the community of segmenters coincide with a somewhat precarious relationship not only with the larger Viki community, but also the company that owns Viki, Rakuten. Seg101 and Ninja Academy both help volunteers to understand how to use the tools that Viki has provided for segmenting. Members become experts in the use of these tools, but the tools can change at any moment. Sometimes this is a minor change, but it affects this community acutely. For instance, changes in the way the interface works in HTML5 can create lag and users who have devised embodied techniques to segment must adapt new strategies to remain useful to the community. When Viki updates the entire editing interface, teachers within this training program have the choice to either learn a new system or to abandon the mission all together, either going back to being just segmenters, or leaving the project: “The transition to Beta-segmenter was proven to be a hard-hit on our program, like a strong

tsunami...many experience[d] segmenters gave up and became passive viewers.” As this community manages teaching volunteers, it often also has to manage how segmenting changes. These changes affect the individuals who want to be part of the community. This is in some ways the challenge of what Spinuzzi considers a hurdle of design where interface designers attempt “to fit workers into their story of designerly heroism, while at the same time workers...are quietly ‘rescuing’ themselves by tailoring workarounds to their local situations” (15). While the major shift here is to HTML5, a

In several instances, individuals, particularly those who have been around for some time, acknowledge the way in which this training program is absolutely essential to the success of the sub-community, but also how they have found a space within the Viki community: “When I started there was no source other than Seg101, which I didn’t feel I had the time for then. The only thing I could do was watch shows that quality segmenters had worked on and try to understand for myself what they were doing. Now, there is a lot of assistance available, especially with this discussion thread.” Before these fan created training programs, and the community that surrounds them, was created, individuals who wanted to segment often had to learn from what they saw or introduce them to someone who already knew more about segmenting than they did. The community that we see here derived from a need both of those who wanted to participate in helping to make something that they were a fan of and also the larger community that wants more content.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

On several tiers, Viki fills niches that streaming sites like Netflix and Hulu leave in the market of online distribution platforms. Viki borrows its interface from these

better-known streaming sites, but includes films from across the world, making them more globally accessible through crowd-sourcing subtitled translations. Co-opting ethos from these sources, Viki is able to be for most community members a place to view international film and television content and experience media content that they would not have access to through more traditional media distribution platforms (like the cinema or television).

Viki is a global community that allows individuals the opportunity to experience almost literally a whole world of television. It brings together volunteers from all over the world to take part in a crowd-sourced translation project that recently achieved the translation of 1 billion words. Over time, fans who participate in these translations usually end up specializing in one type of volunteering, channel managing, segmenting, or translating. As such, the labor of translation is divided among peers by technical and linguistic skills. This article has focused largely on segmenting, which allows volunteers who do not speak second languages, but have a little bit of technical knowledge, to cut several minutes of video into smaller pieces for those able to do the translation. This work, which is done by one of the smallest sub-communities in Viki is practically invisible when done well. Like all good editing, the editing of subtitles is more obvious when the work is poor. To avoid lower quality work, this sub-community has developed casual and formal avenues to train novice segmenters in the process of editing subtitles.

As the sub-community has progressed since the site's inception in 2010, the process of vetting segmentors has become more and more professional. This professionalization increases the quality of segments, but also creates a class of workers within the community. As international media, like K-Dramas, grow in popularity, the segmenting community of Viki becomes larger and there are more volunteers

segmenting and or wanting training and the community adapts to new perspectives on what is quality segmenting and who gets the right to assign positions. Because a professional structure is in place and certifications from a training program helps volunteers to get to work on more popular shows, these training programs help to set the standards for quality and etiquette with regards to the community. Forums like SPVH, the one analyzed here, help to train novices both by helping them to understand how much work goes into working with Viki projects and by giving them advice to improve segmenting, which usually includes participating in one of these segmenting programs.

## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSION

In June of 2016, Microsoft announced its “Play Anywhere” program, which allows players to play some AAA games on both their Xbox One and PC (Windows 10). This expands initiatives like Home Gold, which allows members to share online subscriptions and digital games amongst friends through the sharing of login information. Xbox has tested several different programs that allow for this kind of sharing across accounts, starting with criticized program that required Xboxes be continuously connected to the internet. The commercial for Play Anywhere shows a variety of individuals switching platforms. A young woman is seen playing at home on her Xbox and then later playing at a coffee shop on her PC. A man plays while getting ready for work is then shown picking the game up at work. A woman stops a cooperative game she’s playing when her young daughter comes home; she the Xbox to a television show for her daughter and moves to her home office to continue playing with her group. Several actors are shown playing the same game in the room together on separate screens. These kinds of initiatives shift the Xbox system to a platform as opposed to the necessary hardware for play, which allows players to move, to play with others in a way that they see fit, and to fit play into a flexible lifestyle.

The advertisement attempts to ‘solve’ a myth addressed earlier, that video game play is tied to the console, and that these games are solitary leisure practices locked into domestic realms. Play Anywhere, however, does not show that place is unimportant. Instead, by highlighting the ‘anywhere’ the advertisement also highlights the importance of where we play and who is there with us. It likewise pushes for something highlighted

throughout this dissertation, that in many ways these advances encourage users to work more. Adding mobility not only to gaming platforms, but also to the running and translation communities keep individuals involved and encourages them to work more with and through these communities in and around other obligations. The platforms used by communities discussed here were all owned by corporate entities who use interactive to create content for their sites, which companies capitalize on. By taking placeness into consideration, these companies help individuals to become productive “amateur professionals” in their leisure time and in a variety of living environments.

As these communities continue to fall under more corporate surveillance, I keep coming back to the questions that Tiziana Terranova asked sixteen years ago about the value of free labor. Yes, this is labor freely given to corporations that use individual data for profit, but is it exploitation? The answer is yes and no. The participants within these studies were aware at the very least that their data was used, adapted, and capitalized on. They likewise pointed out some of the struggles of working within systems best defined using Castronova’s term Customer Service State, but they were at the same time so positive about the work being done within those spaces. So positive, in fact, that one of the most challenging parts of this process was being critical of institutions I knew to be capitalizing on the unpaid labor of dedicated volunteers and fans.

The friction expressed here reflects on academia itself. New media studies has had a precarious relationship with capital. Internet studies and humanities computing (now digital humanities) began to rise with a market shift into jobs within the tech field. The field had its own demise forecasted almost before it had begun in the early 2000s with the breakdown of the dotcom industry. Suddenly, the term new media was avoided as a utopian understanding of new media culture and cultural artifacts was dismissed.

This shift demanded a reconsideration and greater cynicism of the field and, as Wendy Hui Kyong Chun and Thomas Keenan express, “[t]he moment one accepts new media, one is firmly located within in a technological progressivism that thrives on obsolescence and that prevents active thinking about technology-knowledge-power” (9). In the mid-2000s, new media benefited from a move away from strict computational studies and a focus on convergent culture, copyright, and open access. The field has shown its resilience and maintains its presence in a burgeoning of similar fields, including digital humanities and digital rhetoric. Yet it often does this at an administrative level by showing how the study helps keep students and academics on the cutting edge. This must be done with proper analysis that complexifies the drive behind these kinds of research. Humanistic inquiry remains necessary to the continued analysis of new media platforms with its focus, using tools like cultural studies that examine the complex relations between power, culture, and the individual.

Ultimately, this dissertation extends that interdisciplinary work, considering the ways that place factors into online communities where place seemingly wouldn’t matter. At the heart of this work, the continued consideration of how technology is used as much in self creation as textual production continues the claim for the humanities’ importance to the study of new and emergent medias. At its foundation this research finds, as Terranova found:

The new Web is made of the big players, but also of new ways to make audience work. In the ‘new Web,’ after the pioneering days, television and the Web converge in the one thing they have in common: Their reliance on their audiences/users as providers of the cultural labor that goes under the label of ‘real-life stories. (52)



At the same time, the work of these spaces has changed. The incorporation of portable and wearable media alters the access points for personal engagement with the work we take up in our leisure time. In the mid-2000s Benkler noted that the network was trumping the community. It is not necessarily that community practice has disappeared. Instead, the work of communities is more pervasive, made up more of shorter but ongoing contact with members who incorporate this leisure work into ever more flexible schedules. It affects when and how much engagement we have with online communities, often extending those experiences into other work and family activities. These shifts make little changes and shifts in how we experience both work and leisure.

## **REVIEW**

The purpose of this dissertation was to examine emplaced practices using a variety of online communities as case studies. It was inspired by the critical work of scholars like Henry Jenkins and Lawrence Lessig, who are both also invested in the ways that people work online. Their studies, like those represented in *Convergence Culture* and *Remix*, focus on participatory communities that have this product driven element. In both books, fans produce or reproduce videos, music, or art. The act of participating online seems in this framework to be about the product itself that will ultimately come out of these efforts. I was interested in considering communities that were more process driven. What about those online communities for which the product mattered little, never ended, or was ultimately undefined? In choosing communities that focused more on process-based tasks with no definite ending point, this study looks at the ways that individuals can use communities to obtain literacy in a new task, but also as a way to mitigate the tedium that can come from ongoing projects.

In my first case study, I analyzed two different running communities to observe key expectations and challenges individuals have with running that individuals see as managed through online involvement. I found that many casual runners carried with them feelings of inadequacy embedded in physical education programs they experienced as children. This feeling of guilt is often socially constructed over several years and is based both in education and retail spaces, where particularly women are made to feel inadequate about their athletic performance. Taking up running is a culturally accepted positive leisure activity, but brings with it issues of anxiety as running is generally performed in public places and most individuals had expectations that they must perform at elite levels. I studied two very different communities, the fan community around *Zombies, Run!* and a local Facebook running community, Mom on the Run. Participants in this study used the communities as interfaces to support their own attempts at running and race training.

*Zombies, Run!* is an imagined community that employs augmented reality to create a game that helps individuals feel as though they are part of a larger community for which they are the hero. The app's narrative is inclusive and inviting, letting users know that any level of ability is acceptable for the app. It reinforces inclusiveness by incorporating supporting characters who vary in age, sex, race, sexual orientation, class, and religion. The narrative likewise reinforces that the runner will be welcome as long as he or she is valuable and value comes from performing runs. Runners used this imagined community to build up their own confidence as runners and to interface with public, focusing on the narrative instead of the anxieties garnered running in a public place. Runners used the app to beat the tedium of daily runs in routine areas. Many runners used the app to gain confidence and ultimately went on to join other larger

running communities, either through running clubs and races or turning online to *Zombies, Run!* fan communities.

Runners in Mom on the Run (MotR) used the community to remain accountable to their fitness goals in the chaos of daily living. Most of the group's participants are working mothers with young children and demanding schedules. Mom on the Run supports runners in by giving them a community to talk to about their successes and failures as runners. By using Facebook, a site accessible on any mobile device, members are reminded to train as they check their Facebook feed to see that others have also worked out. This surveillance encouraged members to continue to put in effort, but also made members who had not been working out, or who were injured, feel left behind. MotR's scheduled group activities also helped participants to stay motivated during busy times of the year, like the holidays, when schedules and travel challenge fitness regimens. Running is a necessarily embodied and emplaced activity. Even when running on a treadmill, where that treadmill was—gym, home, etc.—mattered because members were trying to manage leisure within increasingly consuming and precarious work and family environments. What should be a relaxing activity is tied up in social expectations that make running challenging to start. Ultimately, both communities acted as interfaces to help members mitigate social pressures.

The next chapter analyzed gifting economies in a small Call of Duty clan. Clans were left to govern themselves and in this environment players in this specific clan adopted an informal gifting economy that allows players to support one another for success in the game as well as show members that they are important to the community. This kind of giving required a keen sense of where everyone within the community lived as well as what their emplaced social environment is like. Ultimately, players are in fact

made vulnerable by giving, which forced them to acknowledge that others knew they were in need of something. This giving both engaged players over a year-long cycle for the game and also obligated players, in turn, to gift to other players. While never used to promote the clan, giving helped to keep players engaged with the game, despite its more negative elements. These elements could be the tedium of hours of dedication players had to make to the game, but could also be part of ongoing identity-based harassment that can be found in the games.

While a small community and perhaps not even a particularly common practice. The gift giving amongst this small clan highlights issues of emplacement critical in the larger Call of Duty community. Evidence of emplaced and embodied practices permeate the game as members are found to try and recruit members who are more like them, whether it be age, political viewpoints, or similar mindsets on social decorum. This tribalism, reinforced by the affordances of the technology, creates a multitude of ways to experience the game. As such, this chapter highlights the fact that, even in games where no identifying information need to be given, playing a game for an extended period of time, potentially several hours a day over several years, means that players tend to represent themselves more fully online as a way to find individuals who they will want to spend such extended periods of time with. Embodiment and emplacement are important for members because they of the amount of time they spend in the game.

In a third case study, this dissertation examines the ways in which place factors into fan translation. Translations studies broadly looks at the consumption and fan translation of content moving from the east Asia, coming out of movements like the Hallyu movement in South Korea and the rise in popularity of anime from Japan, to west, like the United States and Canada. These translations were once more frequently

done on private sites and without rights or sanctions given by the rights holders. Today, there are at least two sites that legally acquire rights to popular crossover media and employ their large fan bases to create high quality translations. Focusing on the segmenters, who cut pieces of an existing video down to a few seconds that best match the spoken lines of a character. This chapter looked specifically at how segmenters discussed the work of segmenting videos. This is a technical expertise that allows those who are proficient in the language to do the actual translation.

While it may seem more technical than place based, segmenters need a basic understanding of the language to properly segment it. While a volunteer can become an expert segmenter without knowing little of the language, they do need a cultural familiarity that comes from working with a team of translators. Those who show themselves to be the best get to work on more desirable cultural material, usually soap-opera-style dramas produced in South Korea. This hierarchy privileges the work that comes from specific places. Likewise, where one segments from continues to be important because of varying distribution rights. As different cultural values intersect within the community, issues of appropriate decorum also arise in ways that reflect work space issues. Members of the community debate whether the community should privilege social decorum, which privileges being nice to everyone to create a low key social dynamic, or to instead favor a work environment, where product and keeping on schedule were privileged. The major differences here are what counts as an offense that needs to be called out and remedied by the community. This is a very place-based problem that this online community must resolve.

## *GENERAL CONCLUSIONS*

These case studies found that individuals can bring much of their embodied and emplaced selves into online communities than previously and some favor communities that allow them some kind of embodied identity. Whether running or translating, communities that allowed individuals to share parts of their emplaced existence were appreciated and the feeling that others knew more about them helped them to stay accountable to the community. These communities used multiple strategies to engage and incorporate members, but all of them did so in a way that made sure the incentive acknowledged the specific member of the community. Most of these strategies could be adapted from real life social settings and it is the groups' willingness to share relative information about where they are and where they are working that allowed users to work and interact in ways that are similar to those offline.

Threaded through these communities was an impulse to help individuals to overcome the tedium of an activity they hoped improve upon. Learning to do anything takes time and practice and this level of time and dedication has a degree of tedium that can come with it. There are several ways to combat tedium, including making playful systems, but these three communities found that one of the best ways to encourage individuals to stay motivated was to provide them with connections to other individuals with whom they could interact with and assess their own success with. This ability, however, was made possible through not only through more advanced and easily accessible hardware and software, but also social constructions that encourage users to participate online in very specific ways. These communities inherit standard Web 2.0 protocols and experiences with social media that encourage them to talk and share with

others online, often for the benefit of corporate entities that produce these online spaces or sell the data of users.

However, the ease that came with using these sponsored platforms was also a burden and these communities all had to adapt during my research to these changing environments. For instance, my research into Call of Duty took place when *Advance Warfare* was the most recent game. In November 2015, Activision released *Call of Duty: Black Ops III* which pushed clans into professionalized eSports communities. More casual clans, like the one researched here, have essentially disbanded because of this change in gameplay. This was not necessarily unique. *Zombies, Run!* also changed its payment model and added virtual races. Viki regularly makes large and small changes to the segmenting interface, an act that slows down practiced volunteers. All of this is to say that the study of online community is complex and requires qualification throughout.

This trend towards a push to not only consume but to work in our free time, to professionalize in our free time, is not necessarily a new idea, but the use of digital media and tools further encourages the practice. As digital and social medias further converge, this will continue to be true and materialize in differing forms. Some might be more oblique, like 10ish requests a month I get from friends to join in on their direct sales party (often online) for products that will clear up my complexion, preserve my home grown vegetables, and look great and comfortable in yoga class. However, they can also present themselves in ways that look more like play and fun like the examples in this dissertation. Either way, the methods used by corporate entities and the ways individuals mitigate these changes will continue to develop and ongoing analysis of them should be of importance to media studies.

## **FUTURE AVENUES OF RESEARCH**

A dissertation is less a final step than a platform for larger or multiple research projects to launch from. As such, I do not see the work here as a complete product but a launching platform. All of these studies were small in scale and any one of them could be expanded into much larger projects over the next few years.

### *RUNNING COMMUNITIES*

There is a lot of room to expand the field of amateur sports and locative media. This dissertation shows many of the studies developing in the fields of sports and leisure studies and there is definite need for more analysis of these locative sports and fitness apps from a media studies perspective. This dissertation could have easily focused solely on running apps. Likewise, the market for these apps has changed as I have been writing. The success of apps like *Zombies, Run* has led to the incorporation of narrative into several other apps, including Six-to-Start's own walking app that is based around a *North by Northwest*-esque thriller, creatively called *The Walk*. This research can be expanded into wearable tech and technical clothing, which is where at least the market for running products is headed, though it is not necessary to defend the study of fitness and running apps through the perspective of the market, it is an indicator of social trends towards the narrativization and quantification of leisure time.

This narrativization of fitness journeys through technological interfaces warrants a more in depth study from a media studies perspective. I could see this project becoming a book-length project with the interviews and surveys represented here as the groundwork for a more in-depth analysis of a larger running culture. I would add to this



running apps and wearables like Pact and Charity Miles that are doing different and interesting things with capital and motivation.

### *GAMING COMMUNITIES*

As noted in the conclusion to Chapter 3, this case study has been problematic, in part because the Call of Duty is a relatively unstable platform to analyze because it changes so regularly. While the research I have done within this clan and similarly structured clans will have to end with these interviews, my interest in the monetization of the leisure time has only increased. The example from the beginning of this chapter on Twitch is a great example of how gaming communities can be monetized and how place will continue to factor into online gaming and gaming communities.

Equally interesting is the further development of eSports in Western markets. As games like *League of Legends* professionalize, I am interested to see how strategies for promotion mirror those of other markets. *League of Legends* is an interesting case in that it is free to play, but you often have to purchase characters and other digital items to compete. Call of Duty is likewise looking for ways to import esports into its gameplay. In *Raise the Stakes*, T.L. Taylor (2012) asked regarding eSports, whether “this is a story about a phenomenon in ascendance, a wave of the future for media, leisure, and indeed sports in general, or if we are witnessing a significant downturn in a domain that will pretty much always remain a niche activity for a small portion of gamers” (2). Four years later, eSports, while still a burgeoning field, has global competitions for which team cash prizes in the millions. As game companies attempt to add spectacle and event-ness to their games, this format may become more popular. As games become more mainstream, these questions and strategies will only grow.

More closely related to my research here would be the Twitch format, created as an offshoot of Justin.tv in 2011, is now a huge site with a variety of players and performers. An individual I regularly follow on Twitch has about 1,600 followers. His game play in no way compares to his ability as a performer. Professionally employed in high end customer service, the individual commands conversation in with his viewers in a unique and personal way. His audience rewards him in gifts, usually outside of Twitch's subscription system. I want to connect what has happened in Call of Duty Clans with these current practices.

### *TRANSLATION COMMUNITIES*

There is a lot more to be said about the translation communities. As translations move online and the demand for more global media grows, markets like Viki will have a place. In February of 2016, I helped with co-edited a MediaCommons survey on technology and translation. My major contribution was an interview with a segmenter. That interview opens up questions about how volunteers work on a channel together and the volunteer noted the many ways that where volunteers live matter to the productivity of a channel team. The chapter here could be modified for journal publication and a follow up article on the channel management for a group of amateur translators. Viki is still somewhat of an anomaly and the survey referenced above, while on larger issues of global translation practices, spent a great deal of time questions what Viki was and how to categorize it as a site. It will be interesting to see if Viki remains a somewhat odd phenomenon or if similar pop culture projects arise in different arenas.

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### EDUCATION

Doctorate of Philosophy in English, 2016  
 Old Dominion University (Norfolk, VA)  
 Concentration in Technology and New Media  
 Concentration in Literature and Cultural Studies

Master of Arts in Literature, 2008  
 American University (Washington DC)

Bachelor of Arts, 2005  
 Emory & Henry College (Emory, VA)  
 English with Creative Writing  
 Religion

### PEER-REVIEWED PUBLICATIONS

Henthorn, Jamie. "Rewriting Neighborhoods: *Zombies, Run!* and the Runner as Rhetor." *Social, Casual, Mobile: Changing Games*. Bloomsbury Press, 2016. Print.

### TEACHING APPOINTMENTS

Old Dominion University, 2011-Present  
 Northern Virginia Community College, 2009-2015

### AWARDS AND HONORS

Shining Star Teaching Award, 2016  
 Improving Disciplinary Writing Action Project Grant, 2015  
 The Kairos Award for Service, 2014  
 Faculty Innovator Grant, 2014  
 HASTAC Scholar 2013 – 2014