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The New Curators: Bloggers, Fans and Classic Cinema on Tumblr

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The New Curators: Bloggers, Fans and Classic Cinema on Tumblr

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Dedication

This study is dedicated to my parents, whose dislike of television and subsequent search for child-appropriate entertainment resulted in my lifelong love of classic cinema.

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The author would like to acknowledge the help of the many bloggers who contributed their time and articulated their wonderful thoughts and insights for this study. Without their devotion to the art of classic film, this project would not have been possible.

Abstract

The New Curators: Bloggers, Fans and Classic Cinema on Tumblr

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This study examines the role of social media in maintaining interest in classic cinema in today's media culture. Ethnographic analyses and case studies were performed within a robust classic cinema fan network on the social media blogging site Tumblr. The practices of these bloggers and their online platform are framed against the traditional structure of the curator and museum, indicating that they serve many of the cultural functions attributed to these institutions. This study further demonstrates that these Tumblr networks serve as a resource for young people to discover, share, and create communities relating to classic cinema. Due to the networking capabilities of Tumblr's youth-oriented platform, these fan activities reach a broad range of individuals, exposing them to scenes and actors from classic cinema, stimulating interest in and acceptance of the cinematic framework of classic films. This content visibility and distribution potentially draws those outside the community into the extant fan network. These communities and practices represent previously unexplored methods by which classic cinema appreciation may develop and thrive within the fast-paced media culture of the 21st century.

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Introduction

The background wallpaper of “Miss-jitterbug,” a blog on the social media website Tumblr, is a black and white patchwork collage of old movie stars.¹ In it, Ava Gardner smolders in her black satin dress from *The Killers*. Charlie Chaplin peeks impishly from around the corner of a building. Lauren Bacall swoons in Humphrey Bogart's arms, Greta Garbo vamps, her crescent eyebrows raised to unimaginable heights, while Marlon Brando squints roguishly, his hat cocked to one side. The central section of the blog itself is made up of another series of pictures, some animated, some static. The blog is undeniably reminiscent of those cinematic fan magazines of yesteryear such as *Picture Play* or *Motion Picture*, whose pages were filled with one-name headlines: *Bergman*, *Dietrich*, *Lombard*. But whereas those magazines are now the relics of a bygone age, archived and largely forgotten, this blog and these images are new and vibrantly alive in an online social space some seventy years later.² Perhaps most extraordinarily, this blog does not belong to an aged movie fan who lived during the Classical Hollywood era, who now interacts with the images to preserve nostalgia for that lost time. It doesn't even belong to a film student, or a media history scholar. Instead, the blog belongs to a 17-year-old girl named Vivian, who fell in love with Rita Hayworth at age fourteen and is now an avid blogger on not one but *two* Classic Hollywood sites.

Vivian is a bright, bubbly young woman whose written sentences are punctuated with “lols” and smiley faces. She has the unbridled enthusiasm of her age and gushes about the actors and actresses she loves. However, instead of Jennifer Lawrence or Theo James, she is most enraptured with Vivien Leigh, Marcello Mastroianni and Cary Grant. “I love Vivien because she was probably one of the greatest actresses that ever lived,” she

¹[Http://Miss-jitterbug.tumblr.com](http://Miss-jitterbug.tumblr.com). Accessed March 29, 2014.

²Archive of classic cinema fan magazines, <http://mediahistoryproject.org/fanmagazines/>

writes, “and her biggest complaint was that she was not received as such. She was a really interesting character that suffered a lot too.”³ When asked whether she prefers new cinema to old, Vivian does not hesitate. “The movies of today cannot even come close to those of the golden age,” she states bluntly. “There are some good movies out there but they are very few.”

Vivian may seem like an anomaly in the current cinematic atmosphere of “bigger, louder, faster, brighter”--but she is not. Her blogs “Miss-jitterbug” and “ForLovelyRitaHayworth” have 2,811 and 1,511 followers respectively and she is but one individual among a vast network of people—for the most part very young—who are discovering and promoting and sharing a love of films that were released, in some cases, more than seventy-five years before they were born. They exist under the umbrella of the micro-blogging site Tumblr, largely unacknowledged by the popular media, or the world of cinephilia at large. Within this online forum they gleefully share links, manipulate the films they love into personal animated snippets, upload millions of pictures, bicker back and forth about the virtues of Gary Cooper versus Gregory Peck, and, most importantly, expose countless new individuals every day to the faces, films, and fandom of classic cinema.

Dipping into this burgeoning renaissance of old Hollywood (or “OH” as the bloggers call it) can be overwhelming—there is simply *so much content* to contend with and so many bloggers posting it. While reading the youthful back and forth banter and the blithe captions, one can easily fail to realize that these individuals are participating in an absolutely crucial form of artistic preservation—whether or not they are aware of it: they

³Blogger “Miss-jitterbug” Vivian, “Cinema Blogger” Survey Questionnaire. January 26, 2014.

are archiving, cataloguing, exhibiting and promoting features of classic cinema for consumption by the online community at large.

The medium of film is of our newest and most dynamic art forms, and one that has brought inspiration and pleasure to millions of cinemagoers. However, it is constantly in danger of having its past works eclipsed and forgotten. While other art forms, such as poetry or painting, are taught in schools as part of an arts curriculum, film often is not.⁴ One can open a book on painting or photography, or go to a museum and quickly appreciate a variety of art from a range of centuries; in contrast, films presented in the traditional cinema setting require a viewer to devote roughly two hours of their unbroken time and concentration to the work they are experiencing. Therefore, while a non-cinephile may recognize the name of Shakespeare or Monet, they may not know the names of Antonioni or John Ford. Without a means to keep these names in front of the public, the legacies of so many great directors, screenwriters, producers, cinematographers and actors may gradually fade away, to the detriment of both the future of cinema and to our shared cultural history.

Although there have been strides made in the preservation and promotion of classic film, its future as a popular form of entertainment is wildly uncertain. Film must be *watched*; watched and appreciated and loved by young people who will continue to take interest in and preserve its legacy. However, popular media discourse would have us believe that young viewers are only interested in “fast cuts, loud music and vulgar humor.”⁵ The average lengths of shots have shifted from a leisurely fifteen seconds (Howard Hawks's 1940 classic *His Girl Friday*) to the frenetic 3.1 seconds of a 2007

⁴Holcomb, Sabrina. “State of the Arts.” National Education Association. January 2007.
<http://www.nea.org/home/10630.htm>

⁵Tsering, Lisa. “Krrish 3: Film Review.” *The Hollywood Reporter*, November 2, 2013.
<http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/review/krrish-3-film-review-652776>. Accessed April 6, 2014.

Michael Bay movie.⁶ This is occurring in a multi-screen media landscape that is condemned for fracturing the attention spans of our children.⁷ Furthermore, film in itself is a tricky medium to approach and consume. The type of time commitment film requires is becoming more costly as young people's attentions are demanded by myriad screens and devices, all clamoring to be utilized.

So the question stands: In this kind of cultural environment, *how can classic film survive?* Is actually going to a film the only real way to interact with it (as some cinephiles maintain)? How do today's youth interact with it, if at all? Where can it be appreciated? And, most crucially, where and how can classic cinema find the new fans it needs in order to continue to be appreciated and enjoyed as an art form?

Study of the classic film community within the microblogging website Tumblr may help to address these questions. Within this social media space, young bloggers have found a happy medium between the modern desire for quick, short content and the spectacle, grandeur and nostalgia of classic cinema. Rather than partake only in traditional participations with cinema (i.e., going to the theater), they have adapted traditional cinema fandom to suit their online media practices. Through their largely visual blogs on Tumblr, these users have opened the door to a new type of heavily networked fan practices and, most importantly, a completely new viewership by cutting down film into easily-appreciated pieces, thereby providing a gateway into film appreciation for an entirely undiscovered audience.

This study evaluated the ways in which the Tumblr platform has been employed by its users as a platform to exhibit, store and share images and associated media relating

⁶Jameson, A.D. "The Longest Average Shot Lengths in Modern Hollywood." *Press Play, Indiewire*. June 26, 2013. <http://blogs.indiewire.com/pressplay/the-longest-average-shot-lengths-in-modern-hollywood>.

⁷Galinsky, Ellen. "Texting, TV and Tech Trashing Children's Attention Spans." *The Huffington Post*, November 5, 2012. http://www.huffingtonpost.com/ellen-galinsky/kids-and-technology_b_2068862.html

to classic cinema, designated as films released pre-1966.⁸ The objectives of this study were to 1) define these communities, and 2) to classify their practices. While these communities' activities do not adhere directly to a traditional understanding of an archive, museum or exhibition, the result is the same. Thus, the bloggers were framed as “curators,” and the Tumblr platform was compared against the model of a traditional museum. Community practices were defined by the ways in which images from classic films are shared and manipulated by Tumblr bloggers to create a personalized historiography of a film, celebrity or movement, and how the communities interact with each other and classic cinema. The study investigated the ways in which the networking aspect of Tumblr allows the content to be altered, expanded and passed from one user to another, and how this content is used to express a blogger's personality or aesthetic. The overall goal of this study was to illuminate the cultural importance of sharing and communicating about artifacts and histories in an open public forum such as Tumblr, and how these practices relate to “curatorship” as it is currently understood.

The study focused on a group of “young” bloggers (born 1990 or after; specifically, individuals who began their blogs between the ages of 13-25). These individuals have come of age within the online social media environment, and were born well after any of the films they blog about were released; they represent the social group that grew up exposed to the current frenetic multi-screen media landscape and would therefore seem to be unlikely to respond to the aesthetics of classical cinema. Furthermore, this age bracket reflects the majority age demographic of Tumblr users as a

⁸American cinema, the culture of which is the primary concern of this study, saw a large tonal shift after the relaxation of censorship codes (brought about by the institution of the ratings system in 1966). This gave rise to films with considerably broader subject material and thematic elements. This period will be referred to as the “modern” period, while pre-1966's (at the time of release) films will be referred to as “classic.”

whole.⁹ As such, they formed the focus of this study. It is important to note here that certain classes and genders may be omitted in this conversation and fandom. Participation in an online community implies extensive access to the Internet, with a capacity to consume visual and mixed media content. The nature of Tumblr also requires that a user have leisure time in which to participate in the conversation and interact with the content on the site.

Interpretation of the results of this study included examination of the practices present within this platform and between these individuals, and what this may mean for the future development of cinematic fandom, exhibition and preservation. It concludes with a hypothesis of how, witting or unwitting, this created fandom may give rise to future viewership of and participation with classic cinema. The survival of cinema as art may lie not in the hands of today's historians or the film history classroom but in online communities such as these in which young individuals develop intensely personal, rather than strictly historical, relationships to the content they accrue and preserve.

⁹“13% of [internet users]18-29 are blogging on Tumblr.” Duggan, Maeve, and Joanna Brenner. *The Demographics of Social Media Users, 2012*. Vol. 14. Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project, 2013.

Chapter One: The New Curators

The best thing about museums is that they are forever changing.

-Karsten Schubert¹⁰

INTRODUCTION

In a “state of the union” overview of the current cultural environment of museums and their curators, Nancy Proctor quotes Neal Stimler of the Metropolitan Museum of Art: “I do not share the view that using social media makes everyone a curator. Curators are the most trusted art experts, whose aggregated knowledge, critical thinking abilities and aesthetic observations define the meaning and value of art.”¹¹ Stimler's lofty point of view, while firmly stated, gives way to a gray area in his definitions of “curator.” What constitutes an “expert”? What criteria define “critical thinking abilities?” How can one qualify the worth of one individual's “aesthetic observations” over those of another? And, moreover, why is it argued that when a person operates primarily online or within the realm of social media he or she cannot meet the other criteria for being considered a “curator”?

Establishing traditional curatorial practices as a framework for bloggers on Tumblr serves a threefold purpose. First, interrogating this type of microblogging through the prism of museum curatorship offers a specific ideological approach to this community; both in comprehending the traditional motivations behind the desire to collect, curate and exhibit materials, and in interpreting the sociological effects engendered by their blogging practices. Furthermore, framing bloggers as sharing qualities and practices with the traditional “curator” lends these individuals the credibility they require for their actions to be evaluated by the cinematic and popular communities at

¹⁰Schubert (2000): pg 158.

¹¹Proctor (2010): pg 40.

large with a sense of legitimacy and significance. Frequently, both in academic work and in the popular media, the online practices of teens and young adults are dismissed as a “waste of time” when in fact they often involve meaningful self-expression and creativity. The activities of these Tumblr bloggers must instead be understood not as a quaint activity native to only the online or social media sphere, but as extensions of how we, as a society and a culture, are changing the ways in which we exhibit and interact with artifacts. The implications of this new understanding may have far-reaching effects on the way in which we approach the preservation and appreciation of art and classic film. Third, by recognizing Tumblr and its bloggers as curators and creators, and by defining the ways in which they align with and diverge from traditional and contemporary incarnations of the museum and the curator, we can begin to understand how we are now communicating about and interacting with vital elements of our shared cultural experience.

TUMBLR

Tumblr is a social media service founded in 2007. Today it is host to 167 million blogs that collectively contain 73.9 billion posts.¹² Tumblr is a social media site: an online space in which many individuals may set up their own space or blog and interact with one another beneath the umbrella of the website. More specifically, it is a “micro-blogging platform,” which is a social media site in which entries are typically short and easy to consume—along the lines of Twitter, in which users communicate in messages of up to 140 characters. Tumblr provides a fascinatingly rich basis for this study on two levels: first, it has been largely unstudied by researchers, and second, unlike other microblogging platforms (such as Twitter) or traditional “longform” blogs (in which long

¹²“About Tumblr.” <http://www.tumblr.com/about>. Information retrieved January 19, 2014.

chunks of text are the central feature), Tumblr users participate and interact largely through *visual* media rather than text. This visual media is typically made up of content appropriated by a blogger from an outside source: pictures and video not of a user's making but resonant enough to inspire the user's interaction (a classic example of Henry Jenkins's "textual poachers," who take content and re-appropriate it to fit their particular identities or aesthetics.)¹³

A Tumblr blog is made up of an individual's template (a pre-made layout or design of a webpage) and selected "blogroll" of images. These images can be centered around a certain theme (such as James Dean, cats, flowers, etc.) or around a certain *personality*; many of the most heavily trafficked or followed blogs on Tumblr are run by fashion-minded young women who curate a large collection of sophisticated, artistic content. Interestingly, the young bloggers themselves are quite often the subject of as much (or more) interest as the content itself—users ask the blogger personal questions about his or her lifestyle just as much as they ask for details about the art or fashion they blog.

The Tumblr interface is presented to the viewer in two ways. The first is the actual blog space. Here, the template has been designed by the blogger to fit a certain aesthetic, and all the pictures the blogger has posted are shown in an unending row:¹⁴

¹³Jenkins, Henry. *Textual poachers: Television fans and participatory culture*. Routledge, 2012.

¹⁴Images taken from author's personal Tumblr page, <http://therubythroatedsparrow.tumblr.com>, accessed March 29, 2014

The Ruby Throated Sparrow

FILM. FASHION. FOOD. FFFF...MUSIC.

(BAILEY, 25. PORTLAND/AUSTIN.)

MARCH 25, 2014 *with* 1,124 NOTES



Grand Jeté

(Source: [theplumtrixter](#), via [loveofbeauty](#))

Illustration 1: A Tumblr blog page.

The second view is the user's “dashboard.” Here, the blogger can experience a constant feed of new posts from other users that they follow:¹⁵

¹⁵Images taken from author's personal Tumblr page, <http://therubythroatedsparrow.tumblr.com>, accessed March 29, 2014.

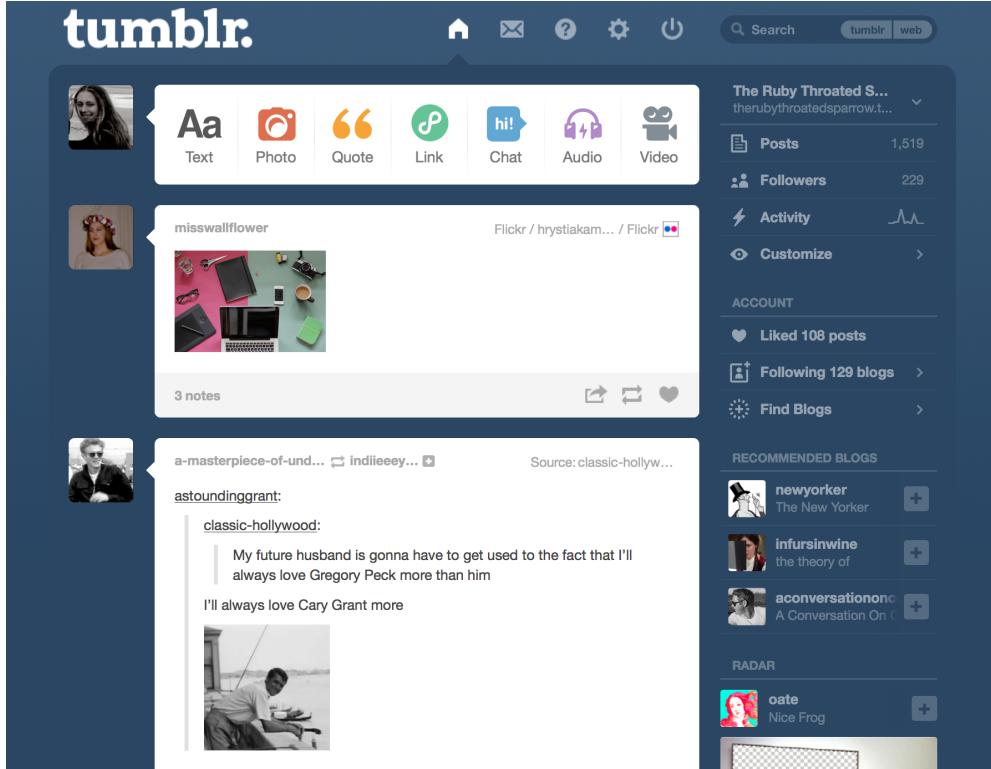


Illustration 2: The Tumblr dashboard.

At the top of the page are buttons that allow the user to post the content that they wish to feature on their blog—text, photos, or video. Below, the user is able to see a long line of new posts (the white boxes pictured above) from the blogs they follow. This list, or “newsfeed” is automatically updated as new content is posted. There are icon arrow buttons at the bottom right of each of these posts (shown in greater detail below) which prompt the user to either “reply to,” (post a text reply) “reblog,” (copy to the user's page) or “like” (heart) the post. At the top left of each post is information about the name of the blog posting the image, where *they* got the picture, (double arrow icon) and at the upper right is the original source of the picture (the person who originally loaded the picture onto a website.) In the bottom left hand side of the picture are “hashtags”—or the

classification that the blogger has given the picture (name of actor, film, etc.) and “notes,” a number that conveys how many times (and by whom) the picture has been liked or reblogged:¹⁶

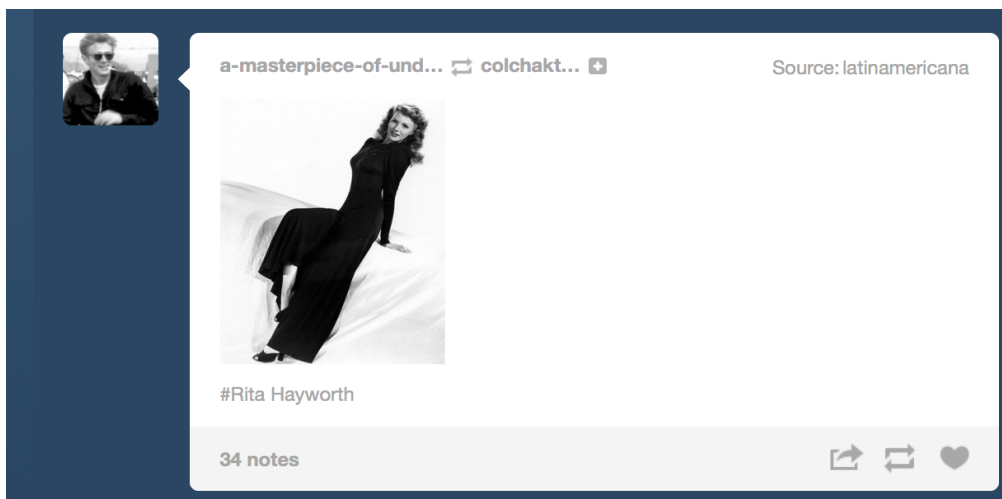


Illustration 3: A Tumblr post.

The “reblog” feature is especially useful in defining the interactions within the Tumblr community. By “reblogging” a picture, quote, text, or video that the blogger likes or to which they especially respond, the material is copied from its original source or location to the blogger's page. The origin of the material is immediately linked to the material itself, so by clicking on a reblogged picture, a user can peruse the daisy-chain network of sharing and re-sharing through which the picture has passed:¹⁷

¹⁶Images taken from author's personal Tumblr page, <http://therubythroatedsparrow.tumblr.com>, accessed March 29, 2014

¹⁷Ibid.

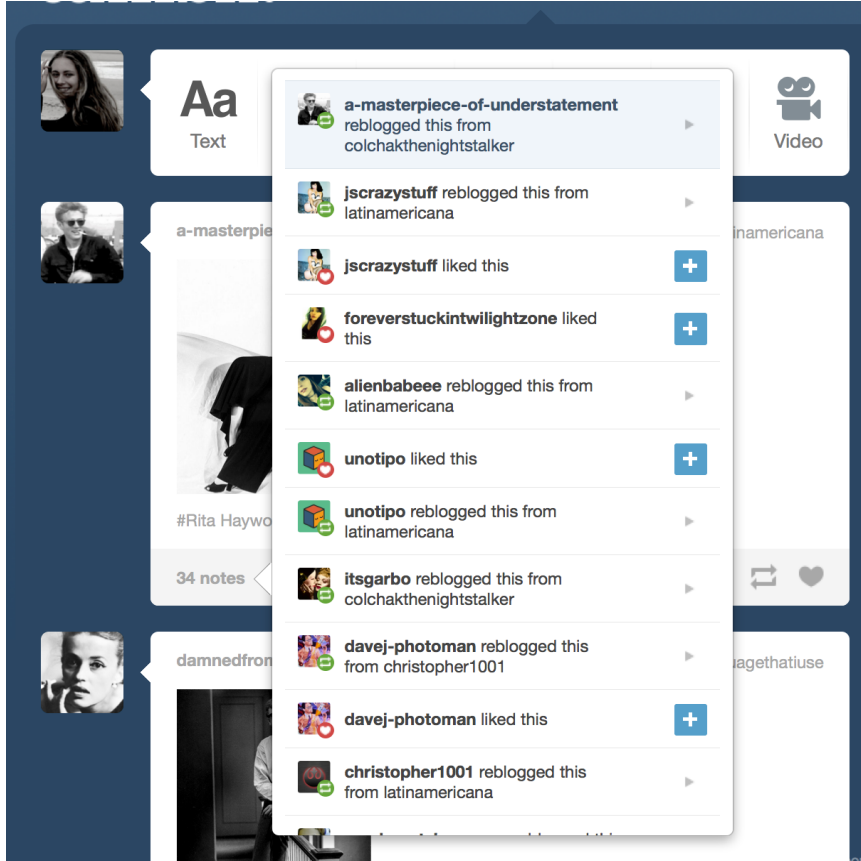


Illustration 4: The “likes” and “reblogs” of a Tumblr post.

While traditional corporate owners may squirm at the thought of images flying back and forth without so much as a copyright notice to be seen, Tumblr's users rarely acknowledge the issue of ownership or copyright. Occasionally a blogger will post a disclaimer that they own none of the images, giving contact information in the event that someone wishes a picture removed. Tumblr itself has a policy toward copyright infringement in accordance with the Digital Millennium Copyright Act, and will respond to copyright takedown notices submitted to them. The reality is simply that there is too much content exchanging hands too quickly for it to be policed in any conventional sense. Journalist Marisa Meltzer, in an article about Tumblr, sees the positive side of this

development, describing the site's "delightful collectivity" and remarking that, "Perhaps Tumblr's greatest innovation is that it has settled the question of who owns content on the Internet by eliminating the idea of ownership altogether."¹⁸

One of the unique features of the Tumblr platform, besides its scope and the quantity of its visual content, is a design that enables remarkable connectivity among the users of its massive network. Users are notified whenever another user "likes" or "reblogs" one of their images, or if a user chooses to follow them (a gesture which can be returned as a form of social media courtesy). Furthermore, bloggers are able to communicate with one another through the "ask" function on each page; either anonymously or not, they can ask questions that, if answered, have the option of being posted to the blogger's page, their interaction becoming a part of the scrolling collage of the blog itself. By tracing back through the history of a shared image, other like-minded bloggers can be found and followed.

Despite the fascinating possibilities that the Tumblr platform presents to a media researcher there has been very little academic scholarship focused on Tumblr as an area of study. Perhaps this is because the visual nature of Tumblr's content is can be difficult to describe; perhaps it is because the site isn't as highly trafficked, immediately recognizable or buzz-worthy a name as Facebook or Twitter.¹⁹ Tumblr has been featured in academic surveys regarding trends in social media and is used as nothing more than a point of comparison for sites such as Facebook or Twitter. One such scholarly article, entitled "Microblog Sensation: The Growing Popularity of Tumblr" provides a general

¹⁸Meltzer, Marisa. "The Curated Web." *The American Prospect*, February 26, 2010. <http://prospect.org/article/curated-web-0>. Accessed February 20, 2014.

¹⁹Only 13% of Internet social media users utilize Tumblr. Duggan, Maeve, and Joanna Brenner. *The Demographics of Social Media Users, 2012*. Vol. 14. Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project, 2013.

overview of the Tumblr platform in the context of a wider dialogue regarding microblogging, and outlines unique design features that have contributed to Tumblr's popularity among youth bloggers.²⁰ However, like the other articles of this kind that seek to “introduce” Tumblr, this piece does not extend beyond superficial observations or statistics to investigate exactly what is happening on the website.

Commentary about Tumblr or the practices of those individuals who frequent the site has largely been relegated to the popular press. Though Tumblr was founded in 2007, the mainstream press is still only gradually becoming aware of the site and its potential. In 2011 *The New York Times* featured Tumblr alongside Twitter in an article describing the drift of today's youth from traditional “longform” blogging to content-heavy, fast-paced “microblogging” sites.²¹ In a January 2013 profile of Tumblr founder David Karp, *Forbes* magazine states:

If Facebook is where you check in with your real-life friends and Twitter is how you keep up with current events, the Tumblr experience can be boiled down to people expressing themselves publicly...sensory and emotive, a swirl of photographs, songs, inside jokes, animated cartoons and virtual warm fuzzies.²²

Forbes estimated at the time of the article's publication that Tumblr's users created 120,000 new blogs every day, with some 18 billion page views per month. Other articles describe Tumblr as a way to introduce new users to the concepts of microblogging or the website's particular format—typical titles are, “Twitter, Tumblr, Yammer, Huh? How to

20Marquart (2010): pg 70-75.

21Kopytoff, Verne G. "Blogs wane as the young drift to sites like Twitter." *The New York Times*, February 21, 2011.

22Bercovici, Jeff, “Tumblr: David Karp's \$800 Million Art Project.” *Forbes Magazine*, January 21, 2013. URL : <http://www.forbes.com/sites/jeffbervovici/2013/01/02/tumblr-david-karps-800-million-art-project/>

Navigate Massive Information Streams and Have a Life” or “Do you Tumblr? Tumblr Could Change the Way You Blog.”²³

While Tumblr's representations in both scholarly articles and the popular press are limited to these general overviews and introductions, there is one hot-button topic that extends from the realm of Instagram and Tumblr all the way to other, newer sites such as Pinterest; a topic that challenges the vocabulary used to describe the identities and practices of many active social media participants. This is the issue of *online curation*. It is here that Tumblr finds itself in the midst of a heated debate and the activities of its users are brought under close scrutiny. Many individuals, from online users to artists to museum officials like the one quoted in the introduction to this chapter, take offense to the use of the term “curator” or “curation” to describe the work that is being done by millions of online bloggers. Why is this the case? To understand this debate and venture past a discussion of mere semantics, it is necessary to start at the beginning: understanding the origins of the museum and the curator by closely examining their modern-day interplay with social media and bloggers.

THE MUSEUM AND ITS CURATOR

The term “museum” is familiar in the collective cultural consciousness, playing “a central and important role in the way Western culture is defined and understood.”²⁴ For many Westerners the word immediately conjures up mental images of immense pillared facades and hushed, reverential interiors. However, establishing exactly *what* a museum

²³Karch, Marziah. "Twitter, Tumblr, Yammer, Huh?-How to Navigate Massive Information Streams and Have a Life." (2009); Matteson, A. "Do You Tumblr? Tumblr Could Change the Way You Blog." *School Library Monthly* 27.5 (2011): 54-56.

²⁴Schubert (2000): pg15.

is and what its purpose today may be is considerably more complex.²⁵ Sharon Macdonald, in her introduction to *A Companion to Museum Studies*, provides a fine definition of the traditional duties and purpose of the classical museum:

It [the museum] selects cultural products for official safe-keeping, for posterity and public display--a process which recognizes and affirms some identities and omits to recognize and affirm others. This is typically presented in a language spoken through architecture, spatial arrangements, and forms of display as well as in discursive commentary--of fact, objectivity, superior taste, and authoritative knowledge.²⁶

It is the “authoritative” and “superior” tone described by Macdonald in the passage above that conveys the most about role of the museum as a cultural institution. The museum is, almost by definition, endowed with a cultural weight and responsibility to be the final authority on its subject—art, history or even the natural world. By commanding this role with gravitas the museum can set out upon its lofty mission: to achieve (as scholar Tony Bennett puts it in his history of museums) “by the ordered display of selected artifacts a total representation of human reality and history.”²⁷ It is no small task.

The authority and superiority of the museum is conveyed to the visitor not only by the precious objects or artwork it displays. The *space*, the atmosphere and appearance of the museum itself, matters immensely in successfully conveying its message and purpose. Writes Eilean Hooper-Greenhill in her survey of museums and their relationships to its visitors, “Museum experience is made up of many different aspects that operate in relation to each other: the people, the site, the material.”²⁸ As conveyed by Hooper-Greenhill and,

²⁵This study, because of the largely Westernized cultures of its subjects and interviewees, will refer to the Western concept of the museum. For additional reading, see Kreps, Christina. “Non-western models of museums and curation in cross-cultural perspective.” *A Companion to Museum Studies* (2006): 457-72.

²⁶Macdonald (2001): pg 49.

²⁷Bennett (2004): pg 82.

²⁸Hooper-Greenhill (2004): pg 220.

indeed, the vast amount of scholarly literature that has been devoted to the study of the museum space, every aspect of a museum has a specific purpose, from the architecture, to the lighting to the display of the materials. Museum studies scholars, including Alan Morton, have argued the way in which museums are a medium, conveying messages implicitly and explicitly to their audience.²⁹ Echoes exhibition scholar Lawrence Alloway, “Museums have to be seen in relation to the rest of the art world as a system of information.”³⁰

If museums are systems of information themselves then curators are the individuals responsible for shaping and interpreting that information. The defining characteristic of the curator is that he carries with him the weight of the museum and its societal responsibilities; as Hooper-Greenhill puts it, “Their words and deeds have a legitimation and a power that is accorded them by this institutional context.”³¹ The curator is an expert in his field; one endowed with the knowledge and the resources to select exactly *what* is important and what aspects of it and its original context will be preserved. These individuals must negotiate the interpretation of art between their establishments, their artists and their publics. As cultural representation scholar Mari Carmen Ramirez puts it:

Curators are, above all, the institutionally recognized experts of the art world establishment, whether they operate inside an institution or independently...they establish the meaning and status of contemporary art through its acquisition, exhibition and interpretation.³²

As defined by Lawrence Alloway, the traditional duties of the curator are as follows: “1) acquiring work for the museum 2) supervising its preservation in store and 3)

²⁹Morton (2004): pg 129.

³⁰Alloway (1996): pg 160.

³¹Hooper-Greenhill (2004): pg 222.

³²Ramirez (1996): pg 15.

displaying it, putting it on exhibition.”³³ Expanding upon these ideas, scholars Nathalie Heinich and Michael Pollak detail the more specific tasks of the curator: “acquiring, protecting, circulating (materials) and, generally speaking, exposing (them) to public scrutiny either materially (hanging, framing, lighting) or symbolically (attributive research, documentation, analysis, cataloguing).”³⁴ They then go on to describe the larger scope of the curator's responsibility, which is “not only the safeguarding, analysis and presentation of a cultural heritage; it includes enriching it.”³⁵

The two main questions arising from analysis of content posted on and about Tumblr are whether the blogger can, in fact, be considered a curator and whether or not Tumblr and its blogs can be viewed and utilized in the same ways as that of the museum and the exhibition. Tumblr and its bloggers deviate to a considerable degree from the classical notions of the museum and curator. However, in aligning the museum space alongside that of Tumblr it becomes evident, especially in light of a great deal of modern museum scholarship, that the two platforms are not nearly as disparate as one would imagine; indeed, the two seem to be converging.

“Curator” may be the closest thing we have in our vocabulary to describe what happens on Tumblr. In an article by Marisa Meltzer of *The American Prospect* entitled “The Curated Web,” Meltzer notes that, “with blogs, everyone became a critic. With Tumblr, everyone's a curator.” Or, as suggested elsewhere in her article, these curated blogs are *zines*, *scrapbooks* or *streams of consciousness*, a combination of original content and re-appropriated materials. “The average user creates 14 original posts, half of which are photos, and reblogs three,” states the article.

³³Alloway (1996): pg 159.

³⁴Heinich and Pollak (1996): pg 167-168.

³⁵Heinich and Pollak (1996): pg 167.

In an article entitled “Pinterest, Tumblr and the Trouble with 'Curation,’” author Carina Chocano takes to task the budding “curators” of sites such as Pinterest or Tumblr, challenging both their right to claim that title and their motivations in creating blogs. She describes finding herself lost amid “dozens of obscure, exquisite, utterly pointless but oddly compelling Tumblrs...devoted to the wordless and explanation-free juxtaposition of, say, cupcakes and teapots and shoes with shots of starched shirts and J.F.K.” and chalks their popularity up to a sort of widespread “visual addiction” on the parts of both the creators and the consumers.³⁶ However, though she ultimately classifies blogs on Tumblr and Pinterest as nothing more than “longing machines” Chocano does momentarily consider an alternate mode of appreciation for the Tumblr blog: “Like other forms of pastiche—the mix tape, the playlist, the mash-up—these sites force you to engage and derive meaning or at least significance or at the very least pleasure from a random grouping of pictures.”

What is interestingly prevalent in popular articles such as Chocano's is the subtle tone of condescension that the observer takes towards the bloggers and their practices. Tumblr is merely (to quote an interviewee in Chocano's article) an “avenue for procrastination.” Chocano goes further to quote the founder of Pinterest as stating, “collecting online is a form of self-expression for people who don't create.”

A surprising aspect of these discussions is the amount of emotion or offense that is taken at a perceived misuse of the term “curator.” While some articles have celebrated online content curation and the advantages it grants individuals in a content-besotted

³⁶Chocano, Carina. “Pinterest, Tumblr and the Trouble with 'Curation.” *The New York Times*, July 20, 2012. http://www.nytimes.com/2012/07/22/magazine/pinterest-tumblr-and-the-trouble-with-curation.html?pagewanted=1&_r=0

online environment, others have not been so supportive.³⁷ For instance, Chocano quotes Choire Sicha, co-editor of online magazine *Here's the Awl*, as saying:

As a former actual curator, of like, actual art and whatnot, I think I'm fairly well positioned to say that you folks with your blog and your Tumblr and your whatever are not actually engaged in a practice of curation. Call it what you like: aggregating? Blogging? Choosing? Copyright infringing sometimes? But it's not actually curation, or anything like it. . .³⁸

The differences among these terms, and what they mean to both the bloggers' own identities and the popular understanding of these individuals' online activities, has stimulated debate in the popular media and among members of the online community. Chocano herself concludes that:

“Curation” does imply something far more deliberate than these inspiration blogs, whose very point is to put the viewer into an aesthetic reverie unencumbered by thought or analysis. These sites are not meant (as curation is) to make us more conscious, but less so...they have a lot more in common with advertising than they do with curation.

Blogs on Tumblr, and those who create them, therefore, are simply satisfying the need to create a point of yearning: an outlet for one's longings that remain unfulfilled by everyday life. Even Meltzer, a Tumblr user herself, who generally has positive things to say about the platform, acknowledges that, “the blogging platform can feel bogged down by its users' devotion to prettiness. Tumblr at its worst is even more casual and careless than the wider blogosphere.”

In assessing these claims, it is important to first make some stipulations and definitions of terms. The argument posed in this study is that many bloggers on Tumblr *do* act as curators, and the Tumblr platform allows them the mechanism with which to do

³⁷For an example of a more supportive stance, the following article: Deshpande, Pawan. “Why Curators Matter Now More than Ever.” *The Huffington Post*, October 3, 2013. http://www.huffingtonpost.com/pawan-deshpande/why-curators-matter-now-m_b_4037594.html

³⁸Chocano, Carina (2012).

so. However, with 170 million blogs on the site, it would be naïve to suggest that every blog demonstrates the knowledge, research, and attention to detail that constitute the designation of “curator.” The arguments and comparisons presented in this study are specifically in regard to the individuals who *do* possess the attributes of a curator. They may be identified on Tumblr, as blogs (like museums) are inextricably tied to popular appeal; those of higher quality and greater artistic discrimination have greater followings and longer endurance than those that do not. When one searches for a particular film or subject on Tumblr the most popular, and generally most well designed and dedicated blogs are displayed at the top of the search results. Typically, these well-curated blogs have been lumped together with less-conscious bloggers by those who casually dismiss the existence or importance of collection/curatorial practices on Tumblr as a whole. Such blanket statements decrying the frivolity of the bloggers and the platform are made without investigating the blogs themselves or interviewing the bloggers about their methods or intentions.

An article on the news/entertainment website BuzzFeed entitled “Why We Need Curators,” is more objective in presenting both sides of the debate:³⁹ “The biggest debate in media over the last few weeks has been about the concept of 'curation' vs. 'aggregation' vs. 'creation.’” The article chronicles the debate between Maria Popova, a self-described “online curator,” who took the argument one step further by suggesting that curation is a form of authorship, and many detractors whose arguments boil down to: “Please spare the rest of us all this moralizing on why we should be giving people who share links anywhere near the same amount of credit we afford [the] singularly special act of original

³⁹Bustillos, Maria. “Why We Need 'Curators.’” *Buzzfeed*. April 3, 2012.
<http://www.buzzfeed.com/mariabustillos/rise-of-the-net-jockey-why-we-need-curators>

content creation.”⁴⁰ Author Maria Bustillos notes that, “traditional notions of authorship are no longer adequate. They no longer describe the way we create or distribute information in the Internet age,” and an interview with Popova later in the article suggests that online curation is “giving form to the culture through guiding the focus of attention...(a) job deserving of both honor and remuneration.” Later she likens the work to that of a collagist or a DJ, “and yet,” notes the article, “...traditional notions of 'authorship' are all being defended furiously.”

CHANGES IN CURATION

Why is “curator” such a loaded title? Why does its perceived misuse spark such outrage? The answer appears to be because the *popular* notion of a “curator” is also the most classical and idealized one. What's more, it is a notion that bears little resemblance to the realities of the curatorial profession today, even in the more standard areas of museum operation. What seems to have escaped authors such as Chocano and those she interviewed is that in the museum world itself, traditional notions of the “museum” and “curator” are very much in flux. A common thread of much museum studies literature today is the attempt to determine precisely where the museum as an institution and curatorship as a profession are going.

The very concept of the museum was born out of a time of considerable political upheaval and has continued to change as the times have demanded. As Karsten Schubert observes in his history of the museum:

It is generally forgotten how relatively new—and complex, as well a fragile—a concept it [the museum] is...The museum is changing. In the past it was a place of absolute certainties...a place not of questions but of authoritative answers. Today,

⁴⁰As quoted in Bustillos, Maria, “Why We Need 'Curators.'”

the museum is at the centre of a heated debate...its very purpose is questioned-- and denied.⁴¹

The British Museum and the Louvre were established in the mid 1700's, "as the result of changing social circumstances and in order to satisfy the cultural needs of an emerging...class."⁴² How better to describe the emergence of social media? Like the museum, social media platforms such as Tumblr were constructed to adapt to an increasingly youthful and technologically oriented culture; a culture of people that wished to share and to express themselves quickly and at great volume.

The celebrated art theorist André Malraux wrote as early as 1965 in his essay *Le Musée Imaginaire* about the importance of envisioning the museum as a space extending beyond its conventional physical limitations. The basic idea of an infinite museum without walls is in some respects a precursor to spaces such as Tumblr. As interpreted by Kevin Hetherington in "Museum," Malraux envisioned a museum that was "liberated from the space of the universally concerned yet location tied museum and be made accessible to all in virtual form."⁴³ This removal from the dedicated museum environment would result in "an appreciation of art in such a context, new styles, new ways of seeing and also a new experience of the ideals and values of civilizations as a whole...deepening and enriching our cultural experiences in a modern society."⁴⁴ Many museum studies scholars have acknowledged the innate artificiality of the museum space, arguing that by removing the work of art from its original context and placing it within the frame of the museum the innate "truth" of the work has been lost. Donald Preziosi in "Art History and Museology" sums up this juxtaposition: "a) the object is quite obviously materially part of its position (situation) in the historiographic theater of the

⁴¹Schubert (2000): pg 15.

⁴²Schubert (2000): pg 22.

⁴³Hetherington (2006): pg 597-598.

⁴⁴Hetherington (2006): pg 598.

museum...yet at the same time, b) it is unnaturally abstracted there from some 'original' situation: its present situation is in one sense fraudulent.”⁴⁵ This provides a counterpoint to those who would claim that by using and re-using images found on the Internet bloggers are callously ridding the digital object of any sense of historical or original context when museums have been doing the same thing since their inception. The truth of the de-contextualized digital object is perhaps even more telling than an object that has been framed and labeled and exhibited in the context of the museum.

This topic of artificiality raises questions not only in terms of a museum's artistic artifacts but also in the museum's overall environment and “aura.” Much as Chocano described Tumblr and Pinterest as sites of advertising-induced yearning, so did famed philosopher Walter Benjamin describe museums as “dreamhouses of the collective” and “fetish spaces that offer a phantasmagoria of experience.”⁴⁶ Adds scholar Kevin Hetherington:

Museums may create a spectacle of experience that is false and imaginary but they produce the effects that can unsettle and challenge these effects just as much as critique from outside can. It [the museum] seeks...to provide people with a sense that they are living in a world where our uncertain and complex set of experiences makes sense.⁴⁷

In other words, the purpose of the museum may indeed be to educate and to preserve, but it may also be to provide *comfort* through a unified human narrative connection and experience. Benjamin points out that the engagement of the viewer (rather than the curator) is a vital element in garnering a “true” engagement with the art. Museums, as Hetherington's analysis suggests, provoke an authentic reaction from the audience whether the art itself is authentically contextualized or not; the same could be said for

⁴⁵Preziosi (2011): pg 155. Additional scholars include Blanchot, who wrote upon this subject in “The Museum, Art and Time” (1997) and “Museum Sickness” (1997)

⁴⁶Quoted in Hetherington (2006): pg 601.

⁴⁷Hetherington (2006): pg 600-601.

interactions, communities or images constructed and displayed within the online space. In fact, by encouraging responses and discussion about the content, Tumblr may provide a much more welcoming space for engagement than does the hushed environment of a traditional museum. Whether or not the Tumblr audience reflects this type of engagement or whether they are (as Chocano argues) merely passive mass consumers is a debate that will be discussed in more detail within later chapters, but the point still stands that our traditional conception of the museum can no longer apply to the realities of our modern world. Hetherington concludes his history of the museum by echoing Malraux's prescient conception of the virtual *Musée Imaginaire* by observing that museums today have “spilled out beyond their galleries and neoclassical columned entrances into the world of the modern city beyond.”⁴⁸

EXHIBITIONS

Paralleling the alterations in the physical space of the museum is the nature and subject of their exhibitions. These exhibitions have altered in ways that directly reflect the movement towards the content-hungry consumers of the Tumblr sphere. Traditionally, the curator was responsible for the maintenance of a museum's permanent collection of art and the organization and exhibition of temporary exhibitions. While the permanent collection was the primary focus of the museum in its formative years, recent trends—a growing focus on the needs and wants of the audience, plus the need to generate revenue rather than rely on government funding—have resulted in the temporary exhibition becoming the financial lifeblood of the museum; meaning that the emphasis is now on items that are only on display for a short period of time and then removed, as opposed to items which are permanently on display.⁴⁹ Schubert explicates: “Whereas

⁴⁸Hetherington (2006): pg 602.

⁴⁹Schubert (2000): pg 168.

'high culture' in the past had needed no further justification than its very existence, [the museum] now had to prove itself in the marketplace...steering a course between [mass entertainment] and scholarly education."⁵⁰

Much the same way as the blogs on Tumblr provide a never-ending well of constantly increasing and updating content, Schubert notes that, "[museum] displays have gone from static to forever changing...collections need to constantly be refreshed."⁵¹ Additionally, rather than a few massive institutions possessing a broad survey of art styles and periods, more and more museums have been built with focus on a certain artist, style or theme; a diversification that reflects the (admittedly larger-scale) variety of blogs and their subjects within the Tumblr space (for example, blogs whose subject is a single celebrity as well as those devoted to an entire era of film.) During the museums' recalibration towards the needs of the consumer they discovered that, according to Schubert, "instead of a single core audience they discovered myriad audiences, their diversity mirroring modern society at large."⁵² Heinich and Pollak further note "the growing specialization of exhibitions being made by cultural institutions," which reflects the current online trend of a desire for precise, organized, easily categorized information systems.⁵³

In her 2010 essay observing the trends and changes in and around the museum institution, Nancy Proctor reflects on not only the increasingly temporal nature of the museum's exhibitions but metamorphoses in their styles as well, noting that increasingly they "shift from substance and solidity towards activity and performance, and from history to the contemporary...exhibitions that focus on creating events and sensations

⁵⁰Schubert (2000): pg 71, 74.

⁵¹Schubert (2000): pg 172.

⁵²Schubert (2000): pg 80.

⁵³Heinich and Pollak (1996): pg 169.

rather than generating knowledge.”⁵⁴ These changes are borne out by a need to attract visitors' attention and get their feet through the ticket line even as more and more individuals are consuming cultural content online.

MUSEUMS AND NEW MEDIA

In an attempt to approach and attract new audiences, curators have increasingly turned towards the integration of new media into the stodgy old world of the museum as a way in which “they [can] be given a new identity and their staffs find novel ways of appealing to the public who would find it more worthwhile and interesting to visit them...”⁵⁵ Technology and the classical museum structure (with the exception of science museums, in which new media is increasingly popular) make a rather uneasy pair. As Alan Morton notes in “Tomorrow’s Yesterdays: Science Museums and the Future”:

Sometimes new inventions, like moving pictures or television, have appeared which compete with museums for their audience and one consequence has been that museums have become outmoded and almost the victims of the very progress they collectively applaud.”⁵⁶

Furthermore, media scholar Michelle Henning elaborates on the decreasing priority of the *object* itself within the museum's space and an increased desire for communication and information.⁵⁷ Museum academic Nancy Proctor points out that, “this transformation is happening whether or not the museum chooses to be part of the conversation...some museums have embraced the trend, even sourcing 'citizen curators' and user- generated content.”⁵⁸

⁵⁴Proctor (2010): pg 37.

⁵⁵Henning (2011): pg 128.

⁵⁶Morton (2004): pg 128.

⁵⁷Henning (2011): pg 651

⁵⁸Proctor (2010): pg 36.

In discussing the rise of new media and the increasing interaction between the visitor and the digital representation of the museum or artifact (as it is seen on a Tumblr page, for example), Henning suggests that although new media is able to store vast amounts of data (much like a museum), unlike a museum, troubling issues of authenticity arise when considering the “reality” of the object within the database.⁵⁹ Questions regarding the artificiality of the museum/online context have already been enumerated, yet there still stands the fundamental issue that being able to physically interact with and see a three-dimensional object is a radically different experience than interacting with a two-dimensional digital version of the same object online. This is not to say that one or the other is more “interactive” than the other; as celebrated media scholar Lev Manovich illustrates in his analysis:

All classical and even more so modern art, was already interactive in a number of ways...When we use the concept of “interactive media” exclusively in relation to computer-based media, there is danger that we interpret "interaction" literally, equating it with physical interaction between a user and a media object (pressing a button, choosing a link, moving the body), at the sake of psychological interaction. [This ignores] the psychological processes of filling-in, hypothesis forming, recall and identification, which are required for us to comprehend any text or image at all.⁶⁰

The issue of digital authenticity and interactivity applies not only to discussions of the Tumblr database of images and its users but also to museums and archives whose online digital databases are increasingly becoming the point of contact for visitors. Manovich suggests that the online database should not be seen or presented as a *replacement* for the archive or museum but rather an entryway for the visitor. There are myriad implications of this “entryway” approach and the ramifications it has for the individuals on Tumblr and, from a larger perspective, those who seek to preserve and

⁵⁹Henning (2011): pg 652-653.

⁶⁰Manovich (2001): pg 71-72.

promote classic cinema. Seeing a costume from *Gone With the Wind* on a Tumblr site, for example, may prompt a desire in a viewer to go out and experience the real thing if such an opportunity should arise; it is understood that no two-dimensional picture could accurately convey the size and the detail that an in-person experience could.

The advantage of bringing the “new media approach” to the museum is that it assists in making sense of the vast stores of information and objects with which the museum must contend. The museum’s major problem, as Henning puts it, is “not just a crisis in storage, it is a crisis in knowledge--in how to make sense of the unmanageable mass of stuff accumulating in museums and archives.”⁶¹ This is a problem that the Tumblr-museum model has little difficulty overcoming. Each individual Tumblr page possesses its own “archive” which can be searched by category, by date or by the classification (the “tags” or “metadata”) given each image by the blogger. In fact, when viewed through the framework of the desires and business plan of the modern museum, Tumblr's platform is a thing to envy. It acts as a perfectly hybridized “exhibition-archive,” satisfying not only the user's demand for constantly changing, updated content but also an organized, effective mode of storage with the ability to classify the content and information to which the user is exposed. However, new media scholars such as Lev Manovich caution against unquestioningly celebrating the freedoms afforded the digital museum user: “Do we want, or need, such freedom?...Making a choice involves a moral responsibility. By passing these choices [what to display, access to all the museum’s content] to the user, the author also passes the responsibility to represent the world and the human condition in it.”⁶² Does the shift to digital eliminate the need for a curator? Or have the museum visitors/website users themselves become the curators in this scenario?

⁶¹Henning (2011): pg 654.

⁶²Manovich (2001): pg 62.

CHANGES IN THE CURATORIAL PROFESSION

New media, argues Henning, ultimately is the catalyst in breaking down the seemingly immovable museum hierarchy and granting power to visitors who, instead of passively consuming materials, now have the chance to access and view them on their own terms. This breakdown in hierarchy affects not only the viewer's position within the museum but the curator's as well.

Echoing the shifts in museum exhibition style and visitor awareness already discussed, Heinich and Pollak explain that:

A rapid and spectacular evolution such as this (in less than a generation) cannot but have repercussions on curatorial practice...the exhibition offers an autonomous area, a margin of personal maneuvering in comparison to other aspects of the profession; the curator can permit him or herself things that would be impossible in a museum...⁶³

With this newfound freedom and autonomy comes a certain measure of fame; the *style* and *name* of a particular curator becomes another method of attracting visitors to a museum's newest (temporary) exhibition. "The exhibition curator's function authorizes a measure of fame which eludes other colleagues to the extent that an exhibition assumes the guise of cultural event whose positions and merits are publicly discussed by a cultivated audience," note Heinich and Pollak.⁶⁴

The curator's shift from relative anonymity to that of *auteur*, of a central figure of equal or greater importance than the exhibit itself, mirrors the scope of experience of the blogger on Tumblr. The platform affords its users almost complete anonymity, if they so choose; time and again, however, users express interest in the bloggers *themselves*. Just as Heinich and Pollack describe a curator's style as "effectively to be found in the curator's remarks and in the conscious choices regarding the installation," likewise the

⁶³Heinich and Pollak (1996): pg 170.

⁶⁴Heinich and Pollak (1996): pg 170.

blogger's style is found in the way they caption or hashtag their images, or the precise images they choose to post.⁶⁵ The more personal details the blogger chooses to share the more the followers' interest is piqued. On Tumblr the bloggers are indeed the *auteurs* of their little worlds and they remain as much a subject and part of the conversation as the content they post. As if in answer to this trend, Heinich and Pollak note that “celebrity” curation is becoming more and more prevalent in the museum world:

Hitherto out of the question at the institutional level [is the possibility] of taking on this position without actually being a curator. Academics, philosophers, critics, public-relations consultants, artistic directors and theatre and film directors now have the ability--as well as the desire--to act as exhibition curators.⁶⁶

Furthermore, the negative reactions engendered by this practice are nearly a mirror image of those provoked by the idea of online “curation,” in that there are “denunciations of 'abuse of power', of 'a lack of humility' in relation to the works, of 'spectacularization' or the liberties taken with historical truth on the part of 'distinguished amateurs' bearing undeserved titles.”⁶⁷ However, Heinich and Pollak make a critical point that strikes a blow against these criticisms: “The sociology of professions should also include the notion of *individual creators of status*, people capable, in periods of crisis or of redefinition of the professional landscape, of creating and incarnating new positions, generalized and formalized from the outside.”⁶⁸

The vital point here that must be recognized is that this shift in authority, in the previously immovable hierarchy of the museum is not just an online trend; it is a shift that is occurring in all forms of exhibition and presentation. As a culture and a society we are in that “period of crisis” or “redefinition of the professional landscape” and if

⁶⁵Heinich and Pollak (1996): pg 174.

⁶⁶Heinich and Pollak (1996): pg 170.

⁶⁷Heinich and Pollak (1996): pg 170.

⁶⁸Heinich and Pollak (1996): pg 176.

bloggers do not adhere to the traditional notions of the curators, it must be noted that *museum curators* no longer adhere to that description either. So what of the cultural weight that imbued the term “curator” with a sense of authority, a weight so championed by the “blogger/curator’s” critics? Nancy Proctor, in her insightful overview of the state of the profession put it thus:

Looking through the lens of contemporary art museum practice...[we would] posit the role of curator as increasingly one of “storytelling” or generating narratives rather than producing classical art historical knowledge. If this trend continues under the impetus of social media and other twenty-first-century influences, the changing functions of the museum and the role of the curator might indeed change the very role of art in society as well.⁶⁹

Maybe, as Proctor suggests, traditional hierarchies of cultural authority are simply no longer compatible with the movement of today’s society. What we want is a story or a narrative; and lest we think that this is somehow a lesser cultural or artistic experience than what was previously found at a museum, it is critical to remember that it is not so much a difference in what is being told than *how* it is being told. For many bloggers, *knowledge* of their subject is not an issue; it could be easily argued that the blogger behind JamesDeanDaily has done as much research and knows as much about Dean as many traditionally published scholars. Proctor acknowledges this as well, calling these individuals members of “communities of passion,” “amateur experts whose knowledge of any given subject areas may be as deep as (or even deeper than) that of curators.”⁷⁰

Even so, the most enduring argument against the recognition and appreciation of these bloggers as curators remains that the major difference between these “amateur experts” and the traditional curator is that the traditional curator has some kind of formal education or other credential that guarantees that he or she will be knowledgeable on

⁶⁹Proctor (2010): pg 38.

⁷⁰Proctor (2010): pg 40.

his/her subject. This establishes a kind of trust between the curator and the audience, and bestows that elusive “cultural weight” so vital to the societal functionality of the museum. This dichotomy also highlights the major differences between the museum space and that of Tumblr, and illustrates an enormously crucial point: the bloggers addressed in the study are the curators of their particular platform, but that their activities are *no less vital* to our modern shared culture than those of the traditional curator. Each platform has different requirements and practices, but their functionalities are nevertheless parallel and can inform each other in myriad ways.

The issue remains that “curator” as a word, as a title, still conjures up a very particular traditional image, and it may yet be some time before the term loses that traditional elitism and cultural weight to more closely mirror the realities of the practices of today—a reality in which traditional curators still exist and operate beside individuals whose backgrounds and practices are anything but traditional, but whose function is no less culturally valuable. Proctor wrestles with this situation and finds resolution in the idea of coexistence and mutual support:

It seems that a conceptual shift is necessary to reconcile these seemingly contradictory intentions: to democratize control of and access to culture through programs involving “citizen curators” and “user-generated content,” while preserving and valuing the subject expert and a traditional curatorial role. Perhaps we need to recognize that expertise does not necessarily entail a curatorial elite speaking from a remote Temple of the Muses...‘communities of passion’—working in partnership with museum curators, can provide critical data as well as the impetus to enhance the quality of information and content publicly available.⁷¹

She suggests the adoption of the term “citizen curator” as a solution to this deep-set semantic issue.⁷² However, assigning these individuals a separate title only widens the divide of social significance between the more legitimate “curator” and the more amateur

⁷¹Proctor (2010): pg 40.

⁷²Proctor (2010): pg 39.

(and, implicitly, inferior) “citizen curator.” Perhaps the first crucial step in breaking down the seemingly immovable traditional connotation of the title is to refer to these bloggers as what they are: *curators*. They are not collectors; they do not accrue content only for themselves, instead they curate and exhibit the content, placing it within particular contexts or historiographies, for the benefit of their audience and with the purpose of expanding their community. They are “new curators,” to be sure, but curators nonetheless. What we, as a culture and society, must do next is acknowledge that “curator” no longer has a single definition or a single identity, that it has many forms both on- and offline.

CONCLUSION

Ultimately, all of the shifting components illustrated here—in the museum space, the exhibition itself, the relationship with the audience, the presence of new media, the role of the curator—point to one surprising conclusion: that it is not the bloggers whose activities and practices are gradually orienting themselves in the direction of the museum, it is the museum that is turning in the direction of the blogger. Traditional institutions, particularly in the fields of classic cinema exhibition and preservation—the “museums” of film—would do well to take note of these shifts and to take advantage of the vast network of support and enthusiasm Tumblr and its curators have to offer.

These trends suggest that the museums of all kinds, both in intent and in practice, must continue to adapt and evolve in order to survive and remain relevant in today's culture. The original intention of the museum, recalls Schubert, and one that is easy to forget, is that of, “making an elite culture available to all” (and while cinema has historically been the culture of the public it can be argued that “old cinema” has today become an elitist art form—less the media of the masses and more the interest of a select

few.)⁷³ While Schubert decries the recent trends in commercialization and the eagerness of the museum to please its public, oftentimes at the cost of its artistic or scholarly integrity, this issue is rather surprisingly one that bloggers on Tumblr are able to sidestep with great ease. Bloggers on Tumblr are not reliant upon visitors for funding; they are beholden to no sort of institutional standard or hierarchy; they are not branded by an outside company or in thrall to a sponsorship. They do not do what they do or spend countless hours blogging because they are paid or because that is their job; they are doing it because they *love* to do it, and because they have a genuine passion for their subject.

The myriad voices to be found on Tumblr are the *authentic* expressions of the bloggers (or at least the bloggers' idealized online realization of themselves); their activities demonstrate freedom of integrity. The very worst that could happen to a blogger is that an individual could dislike and not return to their blog; a minuscule rejection that goes by completely unnoticed by the blogger. Furthermore, unlike the ever-slowng art marketplace (which makes it difficult for museums to acquire new materials for their collections) the users of Tumblr literally have the world at their fingertips.⁷⁴ Perhaps it is this near complete amount of freedom, this seeming lack of accountability that has resulted in their perceived lack of curatorial authority; that the lack of conflict and opposition somehow lessens the significance of their activities. In reality, the conflict *is* the sheer amount of information available to the blogger; the daunting task of picking and choosing from among millions of images is no small task and one that should not be considered lightly.

⁷³Schubert (2000): pg 158.

⁷⁴Werdigier, Julia. "Christie's Cuts Costs as Art Market Slows." *The New York Times*, January 12, 2009. Accessed April 24, 2014. URL: http://www.nytimes.com/2009/01/13/business/worldbusiness/13auction.html?_r=2&scp=2&sq=Christies&t=cse&

What's more, the Tumblr arena beautifully satisfies the projected intent of Schubert's museum, of making elite artwork and cultural artifacts accessible to a wider public; unlike a museum, the internet's potential audience is not constrained to the limitations of a physical space.⁷⁵ Blogs that feature images of famous artworks, or in the case of this study, images from classical cinema, have succeeded in making that elite culture available to many—even to those who live without access to a traditional museum. These blogs have piqued interest and created familiarity with its content. In some cases, they have acted as gateways through which new users have sought out and watched a film they first encountered on Tumblr. Expanding upon Schubert's central tenet of the museum, Nancy Proctor lists four guiding principles with which museums can effectively transition into the future:

[Recognize that] they're our collections, [that] many voices are critical to the interpretation of culture; we [the museum] will attempt to go where participation takes us, [and that] we will provide the platform for culture, the training and advocacy to support it, and we would like to work together (with our audiences) to construct the content.⁷⁶

The type of cooperative future that Proctor foresees is one in which the Tumblr curator will have little trouble finding a vital role to play and there is no way to predict how far this alliance may go. Proctor herself half-jokingly suggests that, “perhaps the curator will...turn into a hobbyist or blogger,” albeit one who is paid for her work.⁷⁷

When Nancy Proctor asked her Twitter followers to answer the question, “What is curatorial voice in the age of social media?” a follower responded that the curator is

⁷⁵It is important to note here that there are still limitations as to those who have the leisure time and technology with which to access the Internet and sites like Tumblr. Despite these limitations, the Internet has nevertheless made this content available to many who would not otherwise be able to travel to a museum and experience artwork firsthand.

⁷⁶Proctor (2010): pg 39.

⁷⁷Proctor (2010): pg 41.

today the “assembler of many voices.”⁷⁸ How better to describe the bloggers on Tumblr, who consume, aggregate and publish vast stores of content from millions of different sources and individuals every day? And though it may yet take some time before these bloggers can be universally agreed on as “curators” within our culture at large, they are, to reiterate a previously made point, undeniably curators *within their particular community*. They decide which information is the most important, the most resonant; they catalogue it and exhibit it within a space of their own construction, and their peers gather to view, engage with and manipulate that content.

If the next step in curation and exhibition--one of democratic, cooperative passion for its subject--mirrors the world of Tumblr and its network of bloggers, the future that lies before the world of the museum and artifact is bright indeed. There is something rather wonderful about the thought that, with the seemingly endless sea of data, images, knowledge and resources that the Internet has made available, the role of the curator is no longer the province of the elite few, but rather the work and pleasure of millions. And, by extension, cinema appreciation and fandom are no longer fettered by geographic access to a dedicated arthouse cinema or classic movie theater or the means to rent and watch said movies, but has blossomed into a thriving, multifaceted entryway into a global community of classic film fandom and appreciation.

⁷⁸Proctor (2010): pg 39.

Chapter Two: The Classic Cinema Tumblr Community

Anonymous: I love that here people can share theyre [*sic*] love together of james dean. In real life I have nobody to share my feels with.

JamesDeanDaily: OH SAME, thats [*sic*] one of the reasons I made this blog! :)⁷⁹

-Exchange on Tumblr blog JamesDeanDaily

INTRODUCTION

Looking at the usernames populating the cinema fan community of Tumblr, it is as if the stars of Hollywood's studio system had been reincarnated into a sort of second digital life: LeslieHowardForever, HumphreysBogart, JeanMarilynSimmons, GreggPeck, MissVeronicaLakes. The subjects of these blogs are diverse; the individuals running them are no less varied. LeslieHowardForever is run by an Italian woman in her mid-forties; CaryGrantsLover is 16 (though, as her page states, she was “supposed to be born in 1924.”)⁸⁰ These individuals illustrate the work of “New Curators” whose intimate insight and knowledge of their subjects are combined with deeply personal relationships to the stars and the films about which they blog.

Like curators of a museum, they select images, they exhibit them and they interact with members of their community. Unlike museum curators, however, these individuals must navigate the intricacies of identity, fandom and community on an extremely personal level in the dynamic forum of online space. As a result, remarkable practices are evolving, particularly among youth, whose abilities to socialize and interact are developing, for the most part, online. While each online or social media platform offers a user a different interface upon which to express their interests, experiences and opinions,

⁷⁹Retrieved from JamesDeanDaily. Accessed April 13, 2013. URL: jamesdeandaily.tumblr.com/post/39095906033 (exact dates of publication are not supplied for all Tumblr posts.)

⁸⁰Retrieved from CaryGrantsLover, main page. Accessed February 2, 2014. URL: <http://carygrantslover.tumblr.com/>

many theoretical tenets and practices remain the same across the board. From Facebook to Twitter to MySpace it is crucial to note the importance of interaction, of community, of reinforcement and support, of visibility and of online identity in the networked sociability of these young adults. The users adapt the tools of each online platform to express and fulfill their interests, experience opinions and needs.

To study the communities and blogs on Tumblr, an in-depth ethnographic analysis was conducted by distributing a questionnaire to selected bloggers and analyzing observations and reflections from the bloggers themselves (see Appendix A). The findings of the study were interpreted to examine the cultural importance of “collecting” and “curation,” drawing upon traditional museum scholarship regarding these activities. The findings of the study were then used to evaluate identity, fandom and community as they are incarnated and acted out within the online space, compared with social intercourse and hierarchies within the traditional museum. Further, to provide a greater understanding of this community and its relationship to traditional museum practices, this study incorporated a focused analysis of a particular Tumblr blog entitled “JamesDeanDaily,” a celebrity fan blog that is run by a 25-year-old girl named Emily and which features a vast quantity of text, pictures, GIFs and video of the late movie star. The results of the interviews and case studies demonstrated that the unique nature of the Tumblr platform allows these individuals to constantly interact with, repurpose and reuse visual and textual content, paving the way for new understandings of the futures of image curation and film appreciation.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

To investigate the community, practices, interactions and languages of the Tumblr classic cinema community, bloggers were contacted for participation in this study. Blogs

were found by searching the Tumblr search engine for the terms “classic film” and “classic Hollywood,” as well as searching for the names of popular classic film stars such as James Dean, Elizabeth Taylor or Audrey Hepburn. Bloggers who consistently posted 1-5 new pieces of content per day and whose blogs showed up within those searched hashtags were contacted through their Tumblr “ask” boxes. To find related interacting blogs, popular photos from the first round of blogs were examined, and individuals who had reblogged these images and whose blog names indicated that their blogs were also related to old Hollywood or classic film (such as being named after a classic film star) were invited to participate. If it was evident that a person habitually reblogged images from another classic cinema blog, the original blogger was also contacted.

Thirty-two bloggers were contacted and invited to participate in filling out an interview questionnaire relating to their blog. Questions in the questionnaire included demographic information, information about the blog's following and the origin of the blog's content, and then short answer questions about the blogger's relationship to classic film, the subject of their blog, and their own feelings about the Tumblr community. Twelve responded out of the thirty-two contacted; ten ultimately completed survey questionnaires. Because the purpose of this study is to focus on the motivations and practices of young people within this particular community (i.e., those who did not grow up at a time when these films were released, and who have come of age in our current media landscape), respondents were limited to those between the ages of 13 to 25 (when the blog was begun). Because not every blogger provided personal information (such as name, age, location) on their public page, the individuals who were contacted were random in terms of age, background and nationality. Other than age, the one major criterion for selection to participate in this study was that the blogs' subjects had to be classic film related; meaning that in any random sampling of posts on the blogrolls the

majority of images (six or more out of any ten) had to be of or related to American and European films and film stars, relating to movies that were released or were active before 1966.

JAMESDEANDAILY

JamesDeanDaily was chosen to serve as the major case study for this investigation because of its high number of followers (nearly 25,000 at the time of the interview, according to data provided by the blogger).⁸¹ This blog has a variety of frequent (visible) community interactions and feedback between the blogger and her followers. Because of this, clear observations and connections could be drawn between the personal forms of curation and exhibition on display and the ways in which those practices encourage new visitors to become a part of the community. Thus, the results of the study will be presented as an in-depth analysis of JamesDeanDaily, with support or contrast from the other responses obtained.

JamesDeanDaily is a blog devoted to the late 50's movie star, and is run by Emily, a 24-year old American woman. Emily was 21 when she began the site in February 2011, and many of her (mostly female) peers and followers indicate that they are the same age as Emily. Many of the bloggers interviewed for this study recounted that their interest in old Hollywood stemmed from seeing a photograph in a magazine or being exposed to a star or film by a parent or in a class. This holds true for Emily as well. On her site, Emily explains the genesis of her blog:

I was working on a group project in one of my college classes, and my partner suggested we do a James Dean/1950s/Greaser theme. So I watched *Rebel Without a Cause* for research and I just loved that movie so much and really related to the

⁸¹Figure supplied in survey questionnaire dated February 1, 2014. At the time of the interview, Emily reported her blog as having 24,884 followers.

characters in it. I watched Dean's other two films and fell in love with him and just started to read everything I could about him!⁸²

In addition to this recollection, Emily offers further insight into what draws her to James Dean as an individual and as a persona:

There are several reasons, I think. First and most obvious, he was an incredible actor...Secondly, I think the time in which he came about...in the mid 50's, teenagers were either shown as...kids who got along just swell with their parents, or on the other extreme, terrible juvenile delinquents on motorcycles tearing up the town...No one had really shown what young people were really like...Thirdly, that fact he died so young and so suddenly definitely helped in making him iconic...Also, it would be pointless not to mention how good looking he was...his look is timeless...I admire just how much he **lived**. Really lived life. He was a completely original human being...Finally, even though I joke about how perfect he is, the truth is that he wasn't perfect, and I think a lot of people relate to that.⁸³

This explanation mirrors the sentiments of the other cinema bloggers, many of whom turned to these stars as a source of inspiration, emulation and desire (nearly all of the bloggers at one point or another professed that they were "in love" with a favored star—usually Cary Grant).⁸⁴ Their relationships support many theoretical understandings of celebrity and celebrity identification. Celebrity scholar Jonathan Cohen describes the specific identification with a film, character or actor as an audience member's experience, reception, and interpretation of the text from the inside (rather than watching as a spectator from the outside), in essence, feeling as if the events were happening to them.⁸⁵ Emily identifies with the persona that is James Dean, understands his role as a historically important cultural figure, and fashions him into the traditional object of projected desire or romance.

⁸²"FAQ," JamesDeanDaily, accessed April 24, 2013. URL: <http://jamesdeandaily.tumblr.com/post/10079891043>

⁸³"Why James Dean?" JamesDeanDaily, accessed April 24, 2013. URL: <http://jamesdeandaily.tumblr.com/post/15578996585>

⁸⁴Data collected from personal survey questionnaires completed by the bloggers for the purposes of this study.

⁸⁵Cohen (2001): pg 251-252.

Visual Content

Emily expresses her identification of and with the persona of James Dean through many forms of (primarily visual) content. The content of Emily's site is remarkable in its scope, considering its narrow subject. The blog has been active for three years, and in those three years Emily has amassed an impressive collection of photographs of Dean, video clips from behind-the-scenes DVD featurettes, writings, songs, GIFs (made both by Emily and by others), quotations from biographies of Dean and from Dean's peers and contemporaries, and the "asks," in which Emily interacts with her users and provides them with information and content. The volume of content that has been amassed and shared on this site, in addition to its maintenance and response to queries, requires a major commitment of time and effort. Emily reportedly spends 1-5 hours per day blogging on Tumblr, though she has recently attempted to scale down her operation, focusing on a "quality rather than quantity" approach. "I find a lot (of pictures) all over the internet, of course," writes Emily in the FAQ on her blog. "But I also screencap a lot of films and documentaries, and I scan photos from several books that I have."⁸⁶

Unlike a fashion blog, in which images can be discovered and reblogged based solely on their appearance, the social hierarchy of a fan community is, to paraphrase many assertions made by fan scholars such as Fiske and Soukup, dependent on knowledge and expertise.⁸⁷ To cultivate this type of expertise requires leisure time, research, and a command of the archive of information that allows the blogger to recall and share specific facts and content within her community. "I have tried to read as much as I can about Dean," explains Emily, "especially since I started my blog...Most of my information comes from books...If I come across a quote or passage that I think is really

⁸⁶"FAQ," JamesDeanDaily, accessed April 24, 2013. URL: <http://jamesdeandaily.tumblr.com/post/10079891043>

⁸⁷See Fiske (1992), Soukup (2006)

interesting or descriptive of Dean, then I'll bookmark it.”⁸⁸ By educating herself in such a way and applying this kind of care to her choice of content—seeking out the rare and the undiscovered, rather than settling for the commonplace, Emily perfectly embodies many of the qualities of the “New Curator”—part fan, part budding historian and educator.

Collecting and Curation

Emily’s careful selection of her content helps to illustrate the hotly debated differences between “collection” and “curation.” Many of Tumblr's detractors quoted in the previous chapter maintain that the activities of the Tumblr bloggers are more akin to “collecting” than they are to “curation.” “Collecting,” as used by the detractors, carries with it an implicit connotation that it is an action of lesser cultural value than “curation,” and the distinction is of great importance to individuals such as Emily. Curation bears the significance of coming from a place of education, careful selection and authentic knowledge—the exact kind that Emily seeks to cultivate and express to her followers through the content she chooses for her site.

Upon closer examination, however, both “curation” and “collection” have played important roles in the shaping of human culture and experience, as the gathering of materials in any form speaks pointedly towards understanding the nature of an individual and the culture in which they live. Spectators from Freud to modern-day sociologists have speculated upon the motivations behind this urge to “collect.” In his study of the sociology of museums, scholar Gordon Fyfe emphasizes the importance of such behaviors in society as a whole: “...rituals of collecting and display are the means by which societies manage the relationship between the mundane world of everyday social intercourse and the invisible spiritual world,” in essence stating that a simple, mundane

⁸⁸Blogger “JamesDeanDaily” Emily. “Cinema Blogger” Survey Questionnaire. February 1, 2014.

object--such as a spoon, for example--is suddenly elevated to something higher in stature and importance when an individual announces that “this is *my* spoon and it is part of my collection.”⁸⁹ It is implicit that by being collected this particular spoon possesses peculiar and unique qualities that are of importance to the collector. The symbiosis extends so that not only does the collector attach meaning to the spoon but the spoon also attaches meaning to the collector; the viewer understands that “this person, the collector, has a special relationship with spoons, especially of *this* particular kind.” Fyfe further notes that, “the compulsion to collect things is traced to the collective character of social life, and accumulations of artifacts are theorized as realizations of implicit cultural rules of discrimination between things.”⁹⁰ Therefore, by collecting a certain *worth* is suddenly placed upon an object; by being collected “ordinary things are made extraordinary.”⁹¹ By imbuing everyday objects with value, as in the example of the spoon above (or a particular picture of James Dean, as on Emily’s blog), “social boundaries are materialized and the disenchanted modern world re-enchanted.”⁹² Therefore the mere *act* of collecting, even if it is on a personal level (rather than on the cultural level, as with a museum) grants the collector the agency to distinguish between that which has worth and that which does not.

Making the decision to collect becomes increasingly more tricky the more content or material is available. At least in the world of art collection, writes Sharon Macdonald, the collector (particularly that of the 18th and 19th centuries), needed a discerning eye and taste to sift through the amount of artwork available. She notes that, “the Museum faced its own problems of selection: of how to identify the significant and meaningful amidst

⁸⁹Fyfe (2011): pg 125.

⁹⁰Ibid.

⁹¹Leach (2002): pg 153.

⁹²Fyfe (2011): pg 127-128.

the excess of both things and information.”⁹³ This “problem of selection” is exponentially increased for bloggers on Tumblr who have untold amounts of information available to them. The constantly updating design of the Tumblr blog assuages this problem to some extent; by allowing a never-ending stream of information, bloggers no longer have a finite number of slots available to fill in their collection. And as Macdonald points out, the intent even in a museum always is “to create a collection; and a collection in turn is a set of objects that forms some kind of meaningful though not necessarily (yet) complete 'whole.’”⁹⁴

Collecting on a personal level (rather than an institutional) provides as a way of expressing and understanding the *self* as much as anything else. Susan Pearce's assertion that “collecting [is] a language through which a whole range of meanings may be articulated,” is supported by Baudrillard's observation that, “it is inevitably oneself that one collects.”⁹⁵ Ultimately, what we collect and why is an attempt to materialize the self, to make the concept of the self tangible, to express that concept through a different media than traditional social interaction. This speaks particularly to the motivations of online curators, specifically those on Tumblr. They are seeking to express and understand their own identities (both on- and offline) through the images they collect. Their practices may mirror those of the museum but this type of collection and curation is infinitely more personal. To like the content on someone's blog is, by extension, to like *them* as an individual; therefore the sociological stakes of creating an identity, generating response and establishing community are, for the blogger on Tumblr, much higher.

⁹³Macdonald (2011): pg 217, 219.

⁹⁴Macdonald (2011): pg 209.

⁹⁵Pearce and quoted in Pearce (2013): pg 225.

The JamesDeanDaily Community

Emily's skill and care in curating her content, combined with the wide appeal of Dean's celebrity, has led to her blog's vast following. The size and scope of JamesDeanDaily's Tumblr community and its networked public extends beyond the reach of Emily and her immediate followers. A networked public, according to danah boyd is, “a group bounded by a shared text, whether that is a worldview or a performance...the spaces and audiences that are bound together through technological networks.”⁹⁶ In the case of JamesDeanDaily, there are the individuals who consistently interact with Emily, those who profess to be fans of the blog and of the blogger, but there are also those who repurpose and provide the content for the blog. Some of the photographs she has posted to her site have gone on to be liked or reblogged thousands of times (black and white photographs of Dean's face or of the actor posing shirtless are especially popular) by an extensive network of users who may never actually visit or interact with Emily's blog itself.⁹⁷ Furthermore, there is the consideration of the Tumblr (and non-Tumblr) sites from which Emily collects and repurposes the content for her site. When all of this is taken into consideration, the sheer size of the networked public is staggering.

But while her posts may travel outside the ephemeral boundaries of Tumblr's official James Dean fan community, Emily and her followers still engage in more traditional practices of policing and challenging outside constructions of James Dean. Fiske describes the policing of the boundaries of fandom as “strongly marked and patrolled” by fans.⁹⁸ Like many of the bloggers interviewed for this study, Emily herself is passionate in revealing what she feels to be the “true” James Dean—in her words, “I

⁹⁶boyd (2007): pg 8.

⁹⁷Personal author “Ask” of JamesDeanDaily's blogger, April 24, 2013, JamesDeanDaily, accessed April 24, 2013. URL: <http://jamesdeandaily.tumblr.com/post/42604814649>

⁹⁸Fiske (2011): pg 34-35.

want people to get to know James Dean the person, and not just the 'myth' that our culture has created,” and that one of her hopes for the blog is “to make new Dean fans, to bring together old fans, and to keep people informed with accurate information instead of rumors and myths!”⁹⁹ Describing herself as “frustrated” when others misattribute information to Dean, this type of community control and patrol is exemplified through her reactions to errors in other users' incorrect “taggings” of James Dean on certain photographs:

blue-rose-society: Hi...I've been in the James Dean tag and everyone keeps saying this image...is Jimmy but I don't think it is. Am I right...?...

JamesDeanDaily: You are right! That photo is NOT James Dean but a male model named Taras Koltun...I don't know why people constantly post that picture and think its James Dean...I really don't think it looks like him (and Dean never owned glasses that looked like that but WHATEVS)¹⁰⁰

In the hashtags of the post, Emily describes her intention in tagging that post as “James Dean” in the hopes that outside users will see it and stop reblogging the incorrect picture. This both critiques the other “inaccurate” representations of James Dean on Tumblr and reasserts Emily's standing as an authority on the subject. Similar interactions extend to clarifying misattributed quotes and exposing the artificiality of Photoshopped images of Dean and Marilyn Monroe.¹⁰¹

Also key to maintaining the sense of community and interaction on JamesDeanDaily is the perceived authenticity of Emily's fandom and expertise. “One of the main reasons young people concern themselves so much with authenticity in their self-presentations on their personal sites is because, ultimately, they seek social

⁹⁹Blogger “JamesDeanDaily” Emily. “Cinema Blogger” Survey Questionnaire. February 1, 2014.

¹⁰⁰JamesDeanDaily, accessed April 24, 2013. URL: <http://jamesdeandaily.tumblr.com/post/44161264136>

¹⁰¹JamesDeanDaily, accessed April 24, 2013. URL: <http://jamesdeandaily.tumblr.com/post/44556940064>, <http://jamesdeandaily.tumblr.com/post/40184179768>

validation from their audience,” youth media scholar Susannah Stern explains.¹⁰² This sort of “authenticity” within the JamesDeanDaily community is evidenced in the breadth of the “authentic” knowledge possessed by Emily, who describes herself as “very flattered” when asked for her expertise.¹⁰³ The visibility of these comments within the Tumblr community and the social capital--the sum of the resources and power granted an individual by virtue of their network and visibility--of both the users who ask and the blogger who answers is vital in understanding the structure of these online hierarchies.¹⁰⁴ Fan community scholars such as Hamilton and Hewer and Nancy Baym illustrate that, like the ability to communicate in a common “language,” the more active and knowledgeable an individual is within a particular fan community, the more “capital”--respect and influence among online peers--that individual will accrue.¹⁰⁵ In the particular case of JamesDeanDaily, in which a single blog/blogger have become a nexus of interaction for a particular community, this implies that the knowledge of the blogger, the curation of the blog's visual and textual content, and the interactions between the blogger and her peers are of the utmost importance in negotiating a place of authority within her fan community.

On her blog, Emily is asked a range of questions specifically about Dean; by her account the most common question is about the best books to read about him or details about his personality or his sexuality. Frequently, these “asks” (questions via her Tumblr page) also consist of content requests for extremely specific photographs or photographic themes:

¹⁰²Stern (2007): pg 108.

¹⁰³Blogger “JamesDeanDaily” Emily. “Cinema Blogger” Survey Questionnaire. February 1, 2014.

¹⁰⁴Bourdieu (1992): pg 14.

¹⁰⁵See Baym (2000), Hamilton and Hewer (2010)

goddonna: ...I wanted to ask you do you have any pictures of jimmy with kids he was so adorable with kids, he would've been a great daddy.

JamesDeanDaily: Thanks so much!...Here is a photoset where I tried to compile pictures of him with children and here's another cute story about a kid he met while filming Giant :)¹⁰⁶

Alongside these sorts of photoset requests, Emily often is able to provide a follower with individual books or quotes that may support or dispute a claim about James Dean's biography or persona.

Fellini: Is it true that Rock Hudson didn't like James Dean? Do you know why?

JamesDeanDaily: Yeah I read that the two of them didn't get along...Rock Hudson also said to a reporter, “[Dean] never smiled. He was sulky, and he had no manners...”¹⁰⁷

In this way, Emily is able to formulate her own conception of “James Dean” within the community of her blog, and is further able to cement the authenticity of that construction by providing specific evidence and support from outside sources. In addition to providing specific content and constructing particular information, Emily responds with information regarding minute details of Dean's life, from his shoe size to the brand of sunglasses he wore to his beverage preferences:¹⁰⁸

Anonymous: Do you know how he liked his coffee?

JamesDeanDaily: I think it was black with sugar (I KNOW ITS WEIRD THAT I KNOW THIS—JUDGE ME)¹⁰⁹

In these examples, Emily cultivates social capital by being able to publicize her expertise regarding James Dean; it is important to realize that unlike a traditional blog in which comments are relegated to the bottom of the page, comments on Tumblr are

¹⁰⁶JamesDeanDaily, accessed April 24, 2013. URL: <http://jamesdeandaily.tumblr.com/post/45638181832>

¹⁰⁷JamesDeanDaily, accessed April 24, 2013. URL: <http://jamesdeandaily.tumblr.com/post/48018624050>

¹⁰⁸JamesDeanDaily, accessed March 10, 2013. URL: <http://jamesdeandaily.tumblr.com/post/76260587529>

¹⁰⁹JamesDeanDaily, accessed April 24, 2013. URL: <http://jamesdeandaily.tumblr.com/post/40308326033>

published with exactly the same visibility and importance as any other piece of content. By choosing to respond to (and therefore reblog) asks such as these, Emily cements her reputation as a reliable and knowledgeable source of information and of content. Her follower is granted the excitement and visibility of seeing his/her comment posted on a popular online blog for all the other followers to see.

Nancy Baym, in her examination of online soap opera fan practices, indicates that like any other global community, each of these online communities have specific forms of expression and social hierarchies.¹¹⁰ Certain terms, etiquettes, emphases, abbreviations and phrases crop up and are used as a form of social capital within these highly visible community interactions (in the exchanges above and below, for example, Emily expresses her ardent love of James Dean with the same misspelled, overzealous exuberance as her follower—essentially speaking the same “language.”) The more adept one is at “speaking the language” of a particular community, the more a part of the community they will appear to be. Hamilton and Hewer even go so far as to describe the activities and identifications of these fan groups as a type of “tribalism.”¹¹¹

As a way to illustrate this point, the most common asks on JamesDeanDaily are those in which a user simply extolls the virtues of James Dean either as an icon or as an object of desire or romance. Here, Emily commiserates with her users and visibly cements the bonds of community and mutual interest:

deanieloomis: Natalie and Jimmy babies. ASDFGHJKL;

JamesDeanDaily: ugHHHH I know right?? IMAGINE THE BEAUTY OMG¹¹²

¹¹⁰Baym (2000): pg 152.

¹¹¹Hamilton and Hewer (2010)

¹¹²JamesDeanDaily, accessed April 24, 2013. URL: <http://jamesdeandaily.tumblr.com/post/48701736780>

Again, what makes this interaction compelling is both the language and the authenticity with which Emily expresses her fandom of James Dean. She is not above swooning; while she has an almost encyclopedic knowledge of Dean's life and habits, it is made obvious to the observer (and to the rest of her community) that her fandom is completely genuine and this thereby fosters further interactions and networking. Unlike a museum environment, in which the teachings of a curator or design of an exhibition may be overwhelmingly pedantic to the visitor, the Tumblr hierarchies (while still very firmly in place) are welcoming, open, peer-driven. And whereas traditional fan practices—gushing, outwardly obsessing—may discredit an individual within the more academic context of the museum, the opposite is true here. Emily, though she is the authority on her subject, is still quite visibly a fan; and as such her social capital increases within her community. Because she is open about her fan practices and enthusiasms, her blog becomes a safe entryway through which like-minded individuals can enter into and participate with the community.

As can be proven by the variety of interactions and hierarchical social structures illustrated within the world of JamesDeanDaily, Charles Sokuup suggests that the very nature of online fan spaces and virtual communities indicate a point of convergence for a number of different modes of textual and social interactions and identifications.¹¹³ Steve Jones in his book *Virtual Culture: Identity and Communication in Cybersociety* describes this “virtual community” as a social space extant within an online network; in Tumblr's case, for example, the network of classic cinema blogs who follow and reblog one another's content within the Tumblr Network. Online consumption scholar Robert Kozinets explains that identification with the community depends heavily upon the

¹¹³Soukup (2006): pg 320, 322.

person's relationship with consumption practice and with the “intensity and character of the social relationships and emotional interactions that consumers express and share with other members of the virtual community.”¹¹⁴ Essentially, if a particular community is highly active and visibly knowledgeable in its expressions and interactions about the subject, a less knowledgeable visitor may choose not to participate within the community, as he is not comfortable with expressing his fandom on the same level as the others. Rhiannon Bury, in her examination of online *X-Files* fan spaces, goes on to indicate that individual participation in these communities is absolutely crucial to their survival within the immateriality of the online space, requiring “consistent engagement of *communal practices* by a majority of its members.”¹¹⁵ Therefore, the most successful online communities are those that, like JamesDeanDaily, are highly, consistently interactive and generate a great deal of content that is networked and spread outside of the immediate community to attract new participants and members.

While the online community spaces described here may seem considerably distanced from the more ordered, physical world of the museum, closer inspection reveals that the two are not at all disparate. As Gordon Fyfe writes in *A Companion to Museum Studies*:

Nineteenth-century exhibitionary spaces were novel places of public social intercourse. The public exhibition was a space of crowds who were invited to think of themselves as spectacle to each other and as self-regulating civilized individuals for whose benefit the museum's exposition was presented.¹¹⁶

Here again are the concepts of public visibility, awareness of the visitor, of the exhibition space as a space in which to gather, to share, to interact, to monitor one's peer group. The

¹¹⁴Kozinets (1997). Accessed through: <http://www.acrwebsite.org/search/view-conference-proceedings.aspx?Id=8088>

¹¹⁵Bury (2003): pg 270.

¹¹⁶Fyfe (2011): pg 112.

term “community,” too, has seen recent traction in museum studies, as noted by Elizabeth Crooke, where it has replaced the more classical terms “visitor,” “public” or “audience.”¹¹⁷ Like the museum, online blogs draw together individuals from extremely different backgrounds, ethnicities and geographic locations in the attempt to share and identify with a common interest. This idea of the “democracy” of the museum was one of its founding tenets—to make, as Schubert described, the elite world of art available to the masses. But while today some museums are slowly turning away of that universal democracy—the Metropolitan Museum has been given the ability to begin charging admission, possibly eliminating a demographic that cannot afford to pay to enter--the Tumblr space upholds the early ideals of the museum by making these communities and this content free to all.¹¹⁸¹¹⁹

Again, it is important to note that in no way are these hierarchies, community spaces and exchange of cultural capital exclusive only to the online Tumblr platform. Instead, they are extensions and evolutions of the ways in which we have relied on the museum space as a cultural gathering place to exchange thoughts about and identify with works of art. As previously noted, the traditional power structures of the present-day museum have gradually begun to break down so as to invite greater audience participation and input. However, the curator and the museum director still hold a place of importance within that society—particularly in the case of the curator *auteur*, in which

¹¹⁷Crooke (2011): pg 385.

¹¹⁸This freedom implicitly requires access to the Internet; however, Internet access may be available in schools and in public locations such as libraries; furthermore, Tumblr does not charge for admission or require the visitor to physically travel to a set location.

¹¹⁹Kennedy, Randy. “New York City Amends Fee Policy for a Visit to the Met.” *The New York Times*, October 24, 2013. http://www.nytimes.com/2013/10/25/nyregion/city-amends-fee-policy-for-a-visit-to-the-met.html?_r=0

the curator becomes as much a focus of attention as the art itself.¹²⁰ Eilean Hooper-Greenhill writes in her examination of museums and their visitors that:

Museums...position the curator firmly as expert in 'his' subject, and the visitor equally firmly as 'below' this level of knowledge. Once this hierarchical position is established...[the curator] offers opportunities to the visitor to improve and reach up to the higher levels of knowledge and virtue that the museum [and the curator] represents.¹²¹

In the case of the *auteur* blogger-curator on Tumblr, this same hierarchical structure is strongly evidenced. These individuals are respected by members of their communities as experts in their particular subjects. They are asked to recall facts and content, to post certain pictures or answer questions relating to their subject. The follower, though equal in many ways to the blogger (she may have her own blog and her own followers) is, within the immediate networked community of the “*auteur*-curator's” blog, in an inferior position and can only elevate her standing within the community by increasing her knowledge of the subject through interaction with the curator. Though the online space is outwardly democratic, these social structures are still strongly enforced by the blogger's authority on her subject, her visibility within the virtual community, her manipulation and control over the content that is posted and how that content should be interpreted by the community.

Blogger Identity

While her community building and networking interactions remain easy to observe, it is more difficult to pinpoint where exactly *Emily* as a youth blogger expresses her own creative agency and negotiates her sense of identity alongside the celebrity construction of James Dean. This dichotomy recalls Heinich and Pollak's construction of

¹²⁰See Heinich and Pollack's construction of the “curator *auteur*” in Heinich and Pollak (1996)

¹²¹Hooper-Greenhill (2004): pg 221.

the “curator as *auteur*” and the way in which the curator's own persona is stamped upon both the artwork and the exhibition itself.¹²² Like the celebrity “*auteur* curator” Emily as a person is a source of interest and fascination for her followers; her motivations in choosing certain photographs and her personal viewpoint regarding Dean are subjects of great interest within her community. In their interactions with her on her blog, Emily's followers visibly attempt to navigate between the two personalities informing the content; Emily states that one of the most common questions she is asked on her blog are the things about herself that she feels are similar to James Dean.¹²³

As evidenced in the examples above, Emily has constructed her personality as both a fan and an authority figure on the subject of James Dean and has cultivated social capital amongst her online peers through the presentation of her content and her community interactions. Unlike many fashion or personal bloggers, Emily does not often post pictures of herself to the blog (even though these instances are regarded with fascination and encouragement by her followers). The information section of JamesDeanDaily links to Emily's “personal blog,” which contains a greater variety of content, including pictures of classic film stars, art and fashion. The linkage of this personal blog to JamesDeanDaily seems to indicate a desire to preserve the authenticity and focus of JamesDeanDaily's subject while still providing users a way to step closer to Emily as a peer blogger.

The *constructed identities* of Emily and her online peers play an enormous role for any individual participating within the online space. In many cases, the online identity satisfies a sort of wish fulfillment or a version of the perfect, idealized self. Susannah Stern explains in her study of online youth bloggers that, “...young authors demonstrate

¹²²Heinich and Pollak (1996)

¹²³Blogger “JamesDeanDaily” Emily. “Cinema Blogger” Survey Questionnaire. February 1, 2014.

considerable awareness of how they project their “real,” internal sense of themselves into their online self-presentations. Generally, they view their public selves not as fabrications, but as 'touched-up' versions of themselves.”¹²⁴ Weber and Mitchell concur that:

One of the most salient characteristics of identity processes to emerge across the cases is the 'constructedness' of the various media productions...whether it be of the virtual components of websites or the constructing and deconstructing of gender as part of on- and offline role play.¹²⁵

And while, as media scholar David Buckingham notes in “Introducing Identity,” identity negotiation plays a particularly key role during stages of adolescence, the same struggles of identity within the online space can be seen in the practices of adults and of young adults as well.¹²⁶

Nor is identity solely the work of an individual. “Identity is developed by the individual, but it has to be recognized and confirmed by others,” Buckingham notes. “In seeking to define their identity, people attempt to assert their individuality, but also to join with others, and they work to sustain their sense of status or self-esteem in doing so.”¹²⁷ In order to validate this “constructed identity,” therefore, the blogger is in need of a community with which to participate. In the case of Tumblr, finding such a community is an easy task. “A part of Tumblr's appeal lies in the fact that while it is incredibly easy to find yourself a suitable digital community, it is also just as easy to control the information you send and receive,” writes Marquart in her overview of the Tumblr space.¹²⁸

¹²⁴Stern (2007): pg 106.

¹²⁵Weber and Mitchell (2007): pg 39

¹²⁶Buckingham (2007): pg 2

¹²⁷Buckingham (2007): pg 3-6.

¹²⁸Marquart (2010): pg 74.

Within the realm of JamesDeanDaily, Emily's personality and personal experience is best evidenced in her interactions through the "Ask" feature, her personal commentary within the posts and her creation and manipulation of the blog's original content. In addition to supplying facts and content to her users, Emily is often asked about her personal relationship with James Dean:

ifuckedthejoker: Weird question but, what would you do if you were suddenly told you were about to meet James Dean? Like, what would you say to him and how would you act?

JamesDeanDaily: Oh godddd...I would *want* to be like, really cool and witty and totally chill. BUT I would be so nervous that I would probably forget what I wanted to ask/say and just, I don't know, fall over.¹²⁹

This type of interaction both reinforces the sense of community and of the genuine fandom discussed above, but also provides insight and access to Emily as a personality and as an online influencer. Through these types of personal question-and-answer interactions, Emily establishes herself not only as an authority on James Dean but also as a relatable, likable individual who uses language similar to that of her online peers. This results in compliments directed not only to the authenticity and quality of the blog, but also to Emily as a person:

belforts: Hello, so first: I really love your blog and you are a wonderful person!

JamesDeanDaily: Thanks so much!¹³⁰

By reblogging these sorts of posts and giving validation and exposure to users who write in with these comments, Emily establishes herself as popular, well-liked and well-respected peer within her community even aside from the content she posts. This

¹²⁹JamesDeanDaily, accessed April 24, 2013. URL: <http://jamesdeandaily.tumblr.com/post/45953370968>

¹³⁰JamesDeanDaily, accessed April 24, 2013. URL: <http://jamesdeandaily.tumblr.com/post/47984759064>

encourages a greater desire for peers to follow or interact with her and establishes a greater amount of social capital for her and her blog.

Content Manipulation

The richest evidence of Emily's projection of her creative agency within JamesDeanDaily are the ways in which she manipulates the GIFs or photos that she has created or appropriated for her blog. Fandom scholar Charles Soukup notes that it is in this manipulation and dialogue with the text that the blogger gains his power both within his community and with the media culture writ large:

Fans choose to influence the meanings of media texts rather than simply accepting the meanings provided by powerful media producers. Further, the pleasure associated with fandom is derived, at least in part, from the fan's ownership or control over representation and, thus, identification...¹³¹

Here, too, fan "expertise" comes into play; in order to manipulate a text in a way that will be compelling or entertaining for other individuals within the community, a blogger must not only have access to the text but a knowledge of which moments and images will gain the most traction from his or her followers. This manipulation of the text is another point of divergence between the online world of the "new curators" and the traditional museum space, in which the artifact itself remains largely unaltered, though it may be reframed and exhibited in a specific context. This point of divergence is an important one: the ways in which these individuals manipulate and alter original texts to suit their aesthetics argues for the bloggers' creative agency and against the passive, unconscious blogging practices alleged by detractors of online curation.

Soukup indicates that online fandom takes on three themes: a dialogue with the "artist" and community, controlling the representation of a celebrity, and personal

¹³¹Soukup (2006): pg 332.

identification with the celebrity.¹³² He goes on to point out that, far from being passive consumers of celebrity and celebrity text, fans play an active role in reshaping and participating in celebrity and fandom, arguing that, “...Fans can significantly influence the meanings, uses, and even production distribution of media texts and manipulate the complex iconography of celebrities to 'visibly' participate in public discourse.”¹³³ Eminent fandom scholar Henry Jenkins has written extensively on the subject of such “textual poaching” and argues that in the case of online fandom the *fan* becomes the true “author”—the celebrity loses control of his/her persona or public image, which is now cultivated by the blogger.¹³⁴ Paul Théberge broadens the scope of the importance of this textual participation and manipulation: “...In their quest to know everything possible about stars and their personae, fans develop a significant potential for cultural awareness and critique.”¹³⁵

Emily's creation of GIFs demonstrates a considerable amount of control and agency over the content and celebrity. GIFs (“graphics interchange format”) display a short animated series of constantly repeating still images, allowing a user to capture a specific moment, expression or exchange from a favorite film or other visual media. Emily reports that GIFs on her site are reblogged and liked as much as more traditional still photographs.¹³⁶ JamesDeanDaily's homepage displays a link to the GIFs made by Emily for her blog and is separated into the categories of Dean's three films and one of miscellany. By creating a GIF, Emily points to and personalizes what to her are the most relevant, moving or important moments, images or quotations from Dean's movies; it is a

¹³²Ibid.

¹³³Soukup (2006): pg 320.

¹³⁴Jenkins (2000).

¹³⁵Théberge (2005): pg 491.

¹³⁶Blogger “JamesDeanDaily” Emily. “Cinema Blogger” Survey Questionnaire. February 1, 2014.

shaping and cultivating of a certain presentation of celebrity, but the act of cultivation is extremely personal. By arranging these GIFs on her blog either alone or in collages, with the hashtags, captions or commentary she dictates, she exercises strict control and manipulation of the presentation and intended consumption of this content.

Hashtags are another way in which Emily expresses her personality and individual interaction with the content. While hashtags are traditionally intended to act as a way to sort and classify and sort posts or information, many bloggers have taken to utilizing hashtags as a sort of meta-commentary on the content of the blog post. In Emily's case, hashtags act as a way for her to further express her overwhelming love and fandom for James Dean, and from a sociological standpoint, allow her the opportunity to express a sense of humor that will further endear her to and attract followers. For example, a GIF series taken from *Rebel Without A Cause* is hashtagged not only as “#Rebel Without a Cause” but also as “#this movie makes me puke rainbows you guys I LOVE IT SO MUCH.”¹³⁷ By utilizing hashtags in this way, Emily not only maintains the official integrity of her content but also is able to put her own perspective and personality into conversation with the images and with Dean's celebrity. It is rare to find any piece of content on the site that is not hashtagged with some form of Emily's personal humor or commentary.

The ownership and critique of media culture that pervades these practices suggests the complicated relationship between these online fan communities and the celebrities they consume. Celebrities are, after all, primarily constructions marketed for the consumption of an audience; the most enduring celebrity icons (Marilyn Monroe, Audrey Hepburn, James Dean) have been branded, commodified and sold more

¹³⁷JamesDeanDaily, accessed April 24, 2013. URL: <http://jamesdeandaily.tumblr.com/post/46694570374>

extensively than the films in which they starred. However, it is suggested by scholar Greg Taylor that fandom is ultimately a resistance activity, stating that, “fans are not true cultists unless they pose their fandom as a resistance activity, one that keeps them one step ahead of those forces which would try to market their resistant taste back to them.”¹³⁸ In essence, rather than being spoon-fed a celebrity persona and mindlessly consuming the associated products and texts without discernment, the *true* fan takes what has been made and reconstructs their own conception of a celebrity and identity. Hamilton and Hewer concur: “Here, the commercial value of celebrity, we argue, collides with and feeds off its cultural and social value to produce a nexus of connections, investments, and effects.”¹³⁹ Fans, particularly on Tumblr, are therefore completely unlike those mindless rebloggers of “pretty things” disdainfully described above. They are active participants, who consume, critique and create. They reject the prepackaged images and brands created by the movie industry and become creators and co-owners of those images through creative re-appropriation and reinvention. Like the curator, a blogger selects and exhibits content but, particularly in the case of the cinema fans on Tumblr, she is also involved in shaping, personalizing and re-contextualizing both the artifact and the original film or film star in a manner unique to her particular perspective, aesthetic or historiography. This extra layer of activity—interaction with the text and reclaiming the artifact—results in a series of fascinating negotiations between these fan identities, celebrity constructions and the surrounding online community, providing a wealth of texts and practices to analyze and evaluate.

¹³⁸Taylor (1999): pg 161.

¹³⁹Hamilton and Hewer (2010): pg 276.

The Blending of Identities

Most fascinating to observe is when the lines between Emily's identity, her manipulated content and the celebrity persona of James Dean become blurred. For example, consider Emily's response to the following ask:

audreyhepburner: Your blog's setting is now infinite scroll and I can't seem to get off it any more...well played emily ;)

JamesDeanDaily: hahah, you've figured out my plan...¹⁴⁰



Illustration 5: The blogger appropriates the celebrity's image.

Emily's response appropriates the image of James Dean to illustrate her own emotions: in this instance, a comically sly expression on the part of Dean to articulate the sneakiness of Emily's "plan." Occasionally, the image of James Dean is the only thing Emily will use to respond to an ask or comment. For example, when an anonymous user commented, "I'm sure wherever Jimmy is, he is very proud of your blog," Emily responded not with text, but with a GIF of Dean joyfully grabbing and twirling Sal Mineo around on the set of *Rebel Without a Cause*.¹⁴¹

¹⁴⁰JamesDeanDaily, accessed April 25, 2013. URL: <http://jamesdeandaily.tumblr.com/post/44078485716>

¹⁴¹JamesDeanDaily, accessed April 25, 2013. URL: <http://jamesdeandaily.tumblr.com/post/41717178322>

Sandra Weber and Claudia Mitchell suggest that these sorts of actions (and, indeed, the very act of blogging visual and textual content) connect directly to the individual's attempt to understand, create, and *embody* an online identity:

Young people most certainly understand that identity is always embodied...These web postings demonstrate or even constitute a form of embodiment. The posting of photographs extends their bodies into cyber space...a signpost to who they think they are or who they want you to think they are or who they would like to become...Indeed, if there is anything that gives a sense of permanence and stability to the flux of identity processes, it is the body, which even as it changes in appearance, remains at the heart of identity.¹⁴²

Weber and Mitchell go on to describe the ways in which both the images and the act of assembling the images serve to assist in this embodiment of identity. In Emily's case, her identity is embodied largely through the persona of James Dean; in the exchanges described above she manipulates his image as a *tabula rasa* upon which she can project her own personality and expressions. In this way, it is clear that Emily is by no means a passive consumer of celebrity or an uncritical participant in the media cycle. Emily's creativity, image appropriation and construction of celebrity make her an active, vital agent within a thriving, highly networked, highly sociable online community.

CONCLUSION

Through the case study presented above, an examination of this community and its bloggers is able to come into conversation with the museum and its curator. Chapter one primarily drew points of similarity between the modern-day evolution of the museum space, the curator and the exhibition and their counterparts within the Tumblr platform, arguing that the term “curator” should be applied to many individuals participating in the blogging and exhibition practices on the site. Here, it is more telling to note points of divergence between the traditional museum model and the practices on Tumblr, for these

¹⁴²Weber and Mitchell (2007): pg 30-31, 42, 43.

divergences demonstrate critical implications particularly for the future of classic cinema appreciation and fandom.

What is most interesting to observe within this community are the ways in which the community (and the blogger) function in traditionally understood patterns of sociability (similar to that of the museum) and the ways in which their practices are unique to their particular online community. Both art museums and Tumblr blogs are seen as gathering spaces, places to interact with artifacts and to establish an identity through the presentation and appreciation of art. Just as museums were originally intended to bring “elite” culture to the masses, Tumblr now provides a platform upon which communities that may have no way of physically coexisting in the physical realm can find means to take root and thrive. Particularly compelling to note are the exchanges in which individuals on Tumblr express how important the online community is to their own sociability and sense of personal identity. Blogs such as JamesDeanDaily give them the opportunity to socialize and engage in a fandom that is unavailable to them in the “real world”—even in the context of a film archive or museum, which traditionally requires access to a central physical location and/or the ability to pay an entrance fee in order to participate in the immediate community.

In fact, it is this desire for a sense of community, the desire to share this marginalized culture with “the masses” that motivates many individuals to start their blogs in the first place. Writes Emily:

I'm still shocked that there are so many James Dean fans out there! One of the reasons I started the blog was because I didn't know anyone else who liked James Dean...When I first started the blog, I was really excited when I got 60 followers. Now I almost have 25,000 and still can't believe it!¹⁴³

¹⁴³Blogger “JamesDeanDaily” Emily. “Cinema Blogger” Survey Questionnaire. February 1, 2014.

And, unlike the museum, which is imbued with an imposing cultural weight and an often pedantic attitude towards the conveyance of information, blogs on Tumblr—while organized by many of the same internal hierarchies—are a place of welcome, where there is peer support, where a common language is used by all; but also where information about a subject is shared in a way that is not “dumbed down” for the follower—it is merely “translated.” While many traditional museum studies scholars may scoff at the thought of youthful “social media-speak” and abbreviations or hashtags being used to place visual artifacts in a context or convey an authentic historiography of a subject, it must be understood that in the current age of social media this is the type of peer-driven community that, arguably more than a traditional museum setting, sparks interest in or participation and interaction with the text itself. This is the type of community that must be approached and accessed in order for classic cinema appreciation to survive and continue to evolve alongside our changing media environment.

As important as the community at large are the individual “curators” of this space, those who painstakingly accrue, organize and exhibit content and who additionally cultivate those crucial online relationships between themselves, the text and the community. Emily, as the curator of her page, engages with her followers and generates content both to construct an image and historiography of “James Dean” the celebrity and man, both to explore the performance of her own online identity and to participate in the exchange of online social capital with her followers. Likewise, the traditional curator uses his knowledge and authority to select culturally relevant artworks and to present them in a way that will engage and enlighten the museum visitor. What truly sets this type of “new curation” apart from the more traditional model is the extent of the expressed fandom about the subject and the breadth of the crossover between the text and the identity of the blogger. *Because* these blogs are constructed in the online space it is

almost required for the blog's subject—be it a film era or a single celebrity--to become, as expressed before by Weber and Mitchell, an extension or embodiment of the blogger's own online identity. The connection is much more extreme and the stakes for the curators, both in promoting their subjects, interacting with the texts and increasing the networks of their communities, are much higher.

Because their identities and sociabilities have become so interconnected with fandom of their subjects, these bloggers are exactly the type of motivated, highly-networked, eager individuals to help spur a classic cinema revolution (in fact, it could be argued that one has already been started on the Tumblr platform itself.) Through creating and maintaining these sites, film and classic cinema appreciation and preservation has become the *mission* of individuals from a variety of backgrounds and interests—not just those who went to film school or had early access to a local independent movie theater. Kelly, the seventeen-year-old blogger behind LadyEveSidwich, passionately explains: “I want to spread the love of old movies because they are so underappreciated. They’re becoming forgotten history...I can’t stand when people put down old movies just because they’re old.”¹⁴⁴

These individuals have arrived at their fandom from dozens of different avenues. They are of different ages, nationalities and genders, of different professions and educational backgrounds. And, for the first time, they share a common locus around which they can orient and share their interests. What's more, they have the tools (the Tumblr platform), the method (the shared language, the participation in an established, shared community, the authentic fandom) and, most importantly, the motivation to promote local screenings, new DVD releases, recently unearthed films—or even to

¹⁴⁴Blogger “LadyEveSidwich” Kelly. “Cinema Blogger” Survey Questionnaire. February 10, 2014.

simply continue to encourage new visitors and members of the communities to seek out and watch classic films.

Chapter Three: The Aesthetic Bloggers

Honestly, I think a lot of people who like/reblog those photos aren't even familiar with James Dean. They just see a really beautiful photo and/or a really handsome man in it.¹⁴⁵

Emily, JamesDeanDaily

INTRODUCTION

The digital image is, itself, the artifact of Tumblr's curated exhibition spaces, the object that is exhibited and consumed and shared, the curiously tangible digital record whose existence provides the basis for this particular type of cinematic fandom. Exploring the image's relationship to both its subject, creator and consumer, this chapter will analyze the ways in which the image, as it is shared and consumed throughout outlying networks on Tumblr, can provide a method of access to classic film fan communities, and help continue to grow an audience for classic film.

Not *all* participation with the films and stars of classic cinema requires an extensive knowledge of the actor's history, especially on Tumblr. Due to the daisy-chain nature of the content on Tumblr, an individual may be exposed and interested by the image of James Dean without actively seeking his image out (unlike traditional fan pages or websites, which are typically accessed through search aggregation). Individuals who have little to no knowledge of James Dean as a celebrity but who nevertheless reblog an image of him because they respond to its aesthetic or thematic qualities are participating in the same fan practices, albeit from a significantly different perspective. These individuals will be titled “aesthetic bloggers.”

A group of these “aesthetic bloggers” participated in this study, further clarifying the motivations behind their practices. Aesthetic bloggers were selected for participation

¹⁴⁵Blogger “JamesDeanDaily” Emily. “Cinema Blogger” Survey Questionnaire. February 1, 2014.

in this study in a similar way to that of the cinema bloggers. Three major hashtags were searched on the Tumblr search engine—those of James Dean, Audrey Hepburn and Marilyn Monroe. Popular (over 1,000 reblogs/notes) photos within the hashtag were selected, and users with non-cinema specific blog names who had reblogged--not just “liked”--the photo were selected for review. The focus for recruitment lay again in the content of the blog, rather than targeting any particular age group, nationality or gender (though once surveys were returned, they were restricted for the purposes of the study to those participants who listed their ages as being between 15-30, as the interest here lies in youth bloggers). If the majority (more than six out of ten on the immediate blogroll) of images on those blogs were unrelated to classical cinema, and if the blog description or overall focus was on art or photography rather than a focus on cinema, the bloggers were contacted and invited to participate in the study. Out of seventy-five bloggers contacted, nineteen responded and thirteen completed surveys (Appendix B).

By combining these ethnographic analyses and interviews with the various “aesthetic bloggers” and charting the usage of a single image across a wide variety of Tumblr blogs, this study examined the ways in which an image taken of a classic film star or a still from a classic film represent or relate to that film or star as an entire entity. The bloggers were questioned as to their relationships to classic cinema, and their evidence assisted in parsing out how consumers relate to the film or star after seeing the image, as well as their understandings of the original moving image text with reference only to a still image. Drawing upon traditional theories related to the museum object and its exhibition, further examination of this evidence demonstrated the different ways in which images from classic films are displayed and exhibited among the myriad blogs in which they are shared. By tracing the path of a single image as it is passed and shared through a network of blogs on Tumblr, and comparing this progression to notions of the

traveling museum artifact, this chapter examines the shifting contexts in which these images are displayed and, moreover, the “aesthetic bloggers” who choose to display them.

While this sort of “aesthetic fandom” still requires the same access to Internet and leisure time, it opens the door for individuals with varied cultural educations to enter into and participate in this conversation. The repercussions of this image-sharing occur in a ripple-out effect that connects the blogger, the original text, the image and the fan community: the celebrity's (or film's) image is shifted by its adoption and curation by these “aesthetic bloggers,” and the aesthetic bloggers themselves are brought a step closer towards the networked fan community by their participation with the image. By combining ethnographic analyses of these blogs with interviews with the bloggers themselves, this chapter connects these points of convergence, investigating the identities of these aesthetic bloggers and their connections to the text.

UNDERSTANDING THE IMAGE

Understanding the cultural impact of the still photographed image plays a critical role in this study primarily because it is the still image, not the moving picture, that is the primary content medium traded, collected and viewed on Tumblr. Therefore, understanding why still images appeal to a viewer, and what they tell that viewer about the original text from which they were taken, may do much to explain the connections between these bloggers, the digital content to which they are exposed on Tumblr, and their relationships to the original text or celebrity.

The *image*—along with the human desire to capture, to reproduce and consume it—has maintained a place of great importance throughout the course of human experience. From cave paintings depicting herds of ancient animals to Monet's water lilies to the

development of high-tech photography, humans have sought to interpret, reproduce and thereby preserve, in one form or another, fleeting moments of shared human experience. The photographic image especially serves this cultural purpose; capturing in a split second a fleeting moment in time. As Dewdney puts it in his examination of networked online photo-sharing, photography has, on a cultural level, traditionally been a method of ritual and record as well as a technology that produces cultural texts and signs.¹⁴⁶ This function can easily apply to many of the visual arts. However, photography, and by extension the cinema, allows for an even more “real” representation of a particular moment in time. Writes Susan Sontag in her celebrated essay “On Photography,” photographs are:

...the experience captured...photographed images do not seem to be statements about the world so much as pieces of it, miniatures of reality...While a painting or prose description can never be other than a narrowly selective interpretation, a photograph can be treated as narrowly selective transparency.¹⁴⁷

There is, she argues, an innate *truth* to the captured photographic image, one that suggests (albeit falsely) an objective perspective on the part of the photographer that surpasses that of the painter.

This concept of innate truth helps to inform an understanding of why the images in question within the framework of this study—stills and portraits from classic films—may yet resonate even with individuals who are not familiar with the original stars or films. They tap into a deep-set nostalgia, a desire to experience, relive, or capture an idealized shared cultural past. Unlike the physical object or artifact, which gradually ages and deteriorates over time, the easily replicated photograph acts as a tangible, immortal souvenir of the past. “Photographs give people an imaginary possession of a past that is

¹⁴⁶Dewdney (1995): pg 95.

¹⁴⁷Sontag (2005): pg 8.

unreal, they also help people to take possession of a space in which they are insecure,” writes Sontag.¹⁴⁸ “After the event has ended, the picture will still exist, conferring on the event a kind of immortality (and importance) it would never otherwise have enjoyed.”¹⁴⁹

Although photographs seem to convey objectivity, a truthful and honest connection to a lived experience, what may be even more compelling about the still image is the emotional weight the photograph conveys. Explains Sontag, “A photograph is both a pseudo-presence and a token of absence. Like a wood fire in a room, photographs—especially those of people...are incitements to reverie.”¹⁵⁰ Sontag's thoughts still hold true when broadened to describe still *cinematic* images.

For many young people on Tumblr, these images are the only real connection they have to understanding popular culture in decades such as the '20's or 30's. What these images convey—impossible glamour, femininity, elegance--belie the harsher realities of the time period: a country in the depths of a depression, a time of harsh racial and gender inequalities. These images were created by an industry that hoped to offer an escape from those realities to the people of those eras. Today they function in an ironically similar manner; though the modern era is arguably much more comfortable and egalitarian than any time in history, in speaking with many of the bloggers, there is the undeniable sense of longing for that never-experienced bygone time as presented through these impossibly perfect—but, by virtue of their medium, innately truthful--images. Continues Sontag, “It is a nostalgic time now and photographs actively promote nostalgia. Photography is an elegiac art, a twilight art. Most subjects are, just by virtue of being photographed, touched with pathos.”¹⁵¹ When the natural pathos of the image is framed within knowledge of plot

¹⁴⁸Sontag (2005): pg 9.

¹⁴⁹Sontag (2005): pg 11.

¹⁵⁰Sontag (2005): pg 16.

¹⁵¹Sontag (2005): pg 15.

or placed within the context of a story or actor's biography, the connection, the nostalgia, the emotion invoked by the image becomes all the more compelling.

CINEMA AND THE IMAGE

The two major types of images examined in this study are film stills (captures or close reproductions of scenes from a film) and celebrity images (studio portraits or candid images of classic-era stars). Turning away for the moment from studio portraits and classic celebrity images, it is first important to consider the still image against the spectrum of cinema. How does the film still—a minuscule, instantaneous moment captured from among thousands of others within the duration of a feature motion picture—connect both to the viewer and to its parent text?¹⁵² *Can* a still image provide an accurate representation of an entire film? Just as photographs may be souvenirs of a shared human or cultural reality, still images from film can be thought to be souvenirs of the cinematic experience; though they are understood to be constructs and that this may actually contribute to the enjoyment on the part of the viewer.

Furthermore, notes scholar James Lastra, “Although [human] experience is best understood as transitory, as fluid, each instant can be understood as an organized image.”¹⁵³ Similarly, the cinema, while still a moving, fluid medium, can be broken down into a simple, single image. Tellingly, director King Vidor, as quoted in Joseph Cotten's autobiography, maintained that, “In the history of films, every great moment that shines is a silent one,” suggesting that although dialogue and music play an enormously important role in film, it is the images that truly endure within the cultural consciousness.¹⁵⁴ Favorite scenes, interactions and shots can be preserved in that perfect

¹⁵²Occasionally these “stills” were staged, but the questions regarding the selection and privileging of one particular moment among countless others within a film narrative still stand.

¹⁵³Lastra (1997): pg 279.

¹⁵⁴Quoted in Lastra (1997): pg 279

summary moment of the still image; they can be remembered by those who have experienced them and become a part of a communal language and understanding, thereby enriching those communities, networks and interactions. As an illustration, attempt to envision some of cinema's most replicated film stills and examine what those film stills convey about the film as a whole. Consider why *those* in particular become the most famous, the seeming shorthand to encapsulate the film. While a recognized image from a favorite film may evoke feelings of affection or nostalgia for an avid cinemagoer, there is still a shorthand context present that speaks to the uninitiated viewer.

The “aesthetic bloggers” of this study were asked to complete such an exercise as part of their survey questionnaire. The bloggers were presented with three images, one from Chaplin's *City Lights* (1931) one from Hepburn's *Funny Face* (1957) and one from Godard's 1961 film *À Bout de Souffle* (English title: *Breathless*). The bloggers were asked to select the image with which they were the *least* familiar and pose a guess as to what they believed the film to be about. The majority of the bloggers (many of them female bloggers interested in fashion) were already familiar with *Funny Face*. Of the three images, the one with which they were the least familiar was *À Bout de Souffle*, and many chose to describe that image rather than that from *City Lights*. The image they were given depicts a scene between stars Jean Seberg and Jean-Paul Belmondo:



Illustration 6: A still from the film *À Bout de Souffle*.

Here were the descriptions, as provided by bloggers who had never seen the film:

AP: I think the film might be about love...the woman...seems to be very independent and some kind of mystery to the man. I think it's about a complicated love story with a lot of tears.¹⁵⁵

Nova: I think it looks like a Mod 1960's drama...[the] characters look like a couple, boyfriend or girlfriend, who have been together long enough to know each other and feel comfortable.¹⁵⁶

Katherine: I'm guessing they are lovers and it's maybe a story about the two forming a relationship, or breaking it...it looks like it's from the 1960's, so the style may not be as bright and sweet as some of the more popular films of the 1950's.¹⁵⁷

Jessamyn: [It] seems like a love affair. The woman looks mischievous and seductive, and the man looks enticed by her. I am, for some reason, enamored with her hair cut. This makes me believe it isn't very old, possibly 60's? 70's?¹⁵⁸

Not only were the bloggers able to pinpoint the era and overall genre of the film (a romantic drama made in 1960), but they were also able to pinpoint many of the film's

¹⁵⁵Blogger "VelvetandBones" AP. "Aesthetic Blogger" Survey Questionnaire. February 10, 2014.

¹⁵⁶Blogger "BohemianDark" Nova. "Aesthetic Blogger" Survey Questionnaire. February 1, 2014.

¹⁵⁷Blogger "OneMoreMoondance" Katherine. "Aesthetic Blogger" Survey Questionnaire. February 15, 2014.

¹⁵⁸Blogger "AttackedByAWolff" Jessamyn. "Aesthetic Blogger" Survey Questionnaire. February 8, 2014.

minute peculiarities simply by studying the still image. The main characters, within the film's free-floating, heavily stylized storyline, fall in and out and in to love, both (as Katherine put it) “forming a relationship and breaking it.” Furthermore, the style of the piece was a major departure from those sunny, colorful musicals of the 1950's and was revolutionary in instigating the more realistic, less rigid era of the “French New Wave.” Particularly telling is AP's observation about the Seberg character, who remains a lovely, largely unknowable, ultimately duplicitous enigma to Belmondo's small-time crook.

What can ultimately be concluded is that the still image of the film, more than anything, hints at a larger story being told and becomes an invitation to delve deeper into that world and learn more about the people or events displayed therein.¹⁵⁹ The difference in the film still is that the story behind the photograph is twofold. There is the story of the film, the interactions of characters and plot, *as well as* the story of how the film was made, the director, what had happened to the actors the day before the image was captured. And, unlike the conventional photograph, whose backstory or dramatic context can only be imagined and guessed at by the viewer, the film still *can actually be experienced*, can be animated with that particular magic only cinema can deliver. Therefore the truly great film still, one that encapsulates the spirit and the attraction of the text as a whole, acts as both a brand *and* a gateway. It is the perfect small, consumable, shareable, malleable object to be sent out, create community and recognition, attract attention, invite participation, and compel new viewers to seek out and experience the cinematic world beyond the photograph.

¹⁵⁹Photographer Cindy Sherman, in her series “Film Stills” flipped this situation on its head; she dressed up as a fictional “actress” and shot a series of portraits, presumably from the actress's films, and invited viewers to invent the plots and styles of the films from which the still were taken.

THE CELEBRITY BRAND

Like the film still, studio celebrity portraits and candid photographic images may act as gateways into cinematic exploration and discovery, yet they function in a very different way. The celebrity image acts as a “brand” for its subject: an easy way for a consumer to interact with and appropriate the brand image to his or her own liking. Here it is useful to examine the relationship of the celebrity and this “branded” celebrity image to our society at large. In this way, the connection between a non-cinema enthusiast and the images taken from classic cinema and stars may be further developed and explicated.

Celebrity scholar Elizabeth Barry notes that celebrity has always been bound up to some extent with the *visual image*—from early Roman coins and statues to portraits and prints, and finally to photography and film. “New technologies of printing meant that both text and image...could circulate as early as the seventeenth century in Europe, and faces began to appear everywhere, allowing for widespread recognition for the celebrities of the day.”¹⁶⁰ But with the photograph, Barry is quick to point out, “‘form is henceforth divorced from matter’...the image can circulate without the weight and value of the material object.”¹⁶¹ Therefore, much like the de-contextualized images traded by these so-called “aesthetic bloggers” within the Tumblr platform, it is no longer necessary to have engaged with or consumed the text for which the celebrity is famous—the photograph becomes the point of reference or fetishized object, its importance eclipsing that of the actual artistic output of the actor or director. Guy Debord perfectly sums up the celebrity-image-blogger relationship in his introduction to *Society of the Spectacle*: “The spectacle is not a collection of images; it is a social relation between people that is mediated by images.”¹⁶²

¹⁶⁰Barry (2008): pg 253, see also Braudy (1986)

¹⁶¹Ibid

¹⁶²Debord (1994): pg 7.

Keeping in mind all the myriad components of celebrity identification and presence within our modern culture, what can be concluded about the ways in which an aesthetic (non-cinema specific) blogger may approach the image of a classic film celebrity? Primarily, their engagement must be understood through *aspirational brand consumption*. Brand consumption is the recognition of or active participation with a brand; a behavior which, as discovered in a 2010 study conducted by a team of brand researchers, serves an active way through which an individual's sense of self is formed.¹⁶³ The celebrity is a consumable object, so therefore the more popular and commercial and familiar the brand is to the blogger, the more likely the blogger is to engage with it and identify with it. Furthermore, keeping in mind the context of the celebrity-saturated culture of today, it only makes sense that enduring classic stars make their way into the content-driven lexicon of modern bloggers, especially when those stars play upon idealized notions of glamour and independence. "They add some kind of grace and forgotten elegance..." wrote AP, an aesthetic blogger interviewed for this study. "I just love how beautiful these old films are and everything around it, like the make-up or the costumes. It's so pleasing to the eye."¹⁶⁴ ThursdayLane, one of the cinema bloggers interviewed for this study, has a different perspective of this phenomenon:

I don't know why some actors and actresses are better remembered than others. For Marilyn it was because of her enormous sex appeal—but people don't like her for *her*, they like her because of what she symbolizes...it's easy for our culture to grab onto the stars who have that superficial image—even though there's so much more to these actors and actresses than their faces and bodies, the vast majority of people won't care to look deeper than that—they'll see Marilyn's curves, Audrey's little black dress...and stop.¹⁶⁵

¹⁶³Schembri (2010): pg 624.

¹⁶⁴Blogger "VelvetandBones" AP. "Aesthetic Blogger" Survey Questionnaire. February 10, 2014.

¹⁶⁵Blogger ThursdayLane. "Cinema Blogger" Survey Questionnaire. January 26, 2014.

This aspirational brand identification is furthermore combined with a cyclical cultural nostalgia for the previous iteration of “achieved” celebrity (celebrity attained through personal merit and achievement) rather than the “attributed” celebrity—those sensationalized celebrities so common today who are “famous for being famous” rather than possessing any particular kind of talent.¹⁶⁶ Tumblr, with its vast network of visual imagery and countless avenues into celebrity brand interaction, provides these individuals with an excellent platform upon which to explore, discover and interact with these images.

Understanding the celebrity and the celebrity image as a brand has an enormous bearing on the central question of this study, namely whether exposure to the images of classical films and celebrities is enough to spark interest and participation in an uninitiated viewer. There is a strong academic basis to suggest that familiarity--merely seeing a face or looking at a picture--can change an individual's perception of a certain brand, text, or entity. “Brand familiarity” as defined in a 1986 marketing study about brand familiarity and advertising is, “a unidimensional construct that is directly related to the amount of time that has been spent processing information about the brand, regardless of the type or content of the processing that was involved.”¹⁶⁷ Cultural ubiquity, therefore—the *presence and repetition* of the brand image--breeds popularity and success and vice versa; the more we see an image, the more time we spend looking at it, the more we are attached to it. It is no surprise, therefore, that the most celebrated films, those that frequently top “Best of” critics' polls are among the best recognized and celebrated; similarly the most marketable (and marketed) stars—Dean, Monroe, Audrey Hepburn—are still prevalent in our culture today. In looking for academic evidence of the *effects* of

¹⁶⁶Rojek (2001): pg 17-18

¹⁶⁷Barker (1999): pg 637

brand familiarity, one marketing study in particular (about the importance of brand familiarity and purchase) neatly summarizes the relationships between the image, brand and consumer. In that study, concerning the brand familiarity/consumer relationship, author Michel Laroche discovered that, “A consumer's knowledge confidence about a specific brand will increase as his/her familiarity with the brand increases...a consumer's attitude toward a specific brand will be positively affected by his/her familiarity with the brand,” and furthermore that, “A consumer's knowledge confidence about a specific brand will positively influence his/her intention to buy the brand.”¹⁶⁸ While it is unusual to apply such precepts to concepts such as cinema fandom and appreciation, the relationships still hold true; after all, the film's brand, as discussed earlier, is embodied in the film still and the celebrity “brand” is his/her stylized photographed image. In essence, to paraphrase Laroche's findings, increased *familiarity* creates *knowledge* and a *positive relationship* towards the brand, which then makes the individual more likely to *purchase or consume* the brand. How does one “consume” a celebrity or film brand? By watching it, and by engaging with the text within like-minded fan networks.

OBJECT AND EXHIBITION

The most tangible evidence of the relationship between brand image and the blogger is found through display of the image within the blog; specifically, how it is framed and categorized, the ways in which it aligns with the blogger's specific aesthetic and how these frameworks influence the *story* conveyed by the object. Elaine Gurian, in her essay about the museum object, points to the fact that when she began museum work, “the definition of museums always contained reference to the object as the pivot point around which we justified our other activities.”¹⁶⁹ The fact that the museum held the

¹⁶⁸Laroche (1996): pg 116

¹⁶⁹Gurian (1999): pg 35.

authentic or the *original* was a matter of great pride and acted as justification for the museum's existence and cultural importance. However, Gurian argues that “like props in a brilliant play [they] are necessary but not sufficient...the larger issues revolve around the stories museums tell and the way they tell them.”¹⁷⁰

This argument is of great importance in examining exhibition on Tumblr, in which the images are anything *but* the original or authentic object—they are digital artifacts that have been utilized (in some cases) thousands of times by various individuals. Gurian points to the troubling intersections that form the conception of the “image object”:

With the invention of digital technology, many identical images can be reproduced at will...the notion of authenticity...becomes problematic as images indistinguishable from those in museums are easily available outside the museum. It is the artist's sensibility that produced the image. It is the image itself, therefore that is the object.¹⁷¹

However, as Gurian suggests, the important thing is not to quibble over whether this lack of authenticity affects the legitimacy of this form of exhibition; instead, the most enlightening process is to examine the various forms of exhibition (or “storytelling”) and parse together what those stories tell us about these individuals and their relationships to the original texts. Susan Sontag echoes this point, noting that the relationship between display and the photograph is even more critical than that of paintings. “Because each photograph is only a fragment, its moral and emotional weight depends on where it is inserted. A photograph changes according to the context in which it is seen.”¹⁷²

In beginning to examine those myriad ways a single image may be exhibited and framed on the Tumblr platform, it is extremely helpful to turn again to museum studies

¹⁷⁰Ibid

¹⁷¹Gurian (1999): pg 38.

¹⁷²Sontag (2005): pg 105-106.

literature, specifically that which pertains to the presentation of the artifact within the museum space and the way in which that framework affects its interpretation and the relationship of the viewer to the object. Writes Emma Barker in her introduction to *Contemporary Cultures of Display*:

The context of display is an important issue for art history because it colors our perception and informs our understanding of works of art...museums and galleries are not neutral containers offering a transparent, unmediated experience of art...different ideas and values...can shape their formation and functioning.¹⁷³

Again, Barker recalls Malraux's *musée imaginaire*, the removal of an outside context that allows the artwork to be appreciated primarily for its formal aesthetic qualities. However, while this study does celebrate the notion of removing the art from the architectural context of the museum building, the notion of art *completely* without context, particularly in a case where brand recognition and cultural awareness are so crucial in instigating interactions between the user and the image, is troubling. French philosopher Michel Foucault wrote that:

Objects lose their meaning without the viewer's knowledge and acceptance of underlying aesthetic or cultural values...the discomfort of novice visitors to art museums has to do with their lack of understanding of the cultural aesthetics that the art on display either challenges or affirms.¹⁷⁴

Similarly, French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu argues that, contrary to Malraux's assertion that art can be appreciated without any context or historiography, art can only be appreciated by those who have expended the necessary “cultural capital” in educating and familiarizing themselves with the artistic context (this, according to his argument, is why museum-goers form such a small demographic within the general public.)¹⁷⁵ Bourdieu's theories of the exchange of social and cultural capital, so crucial to an understanding of

¹⁷³Barker (1999): pg 8.

¹⁷⁴As paraphrased in Gurian (1999): pg 39.

¹⁷⁵Bourdieu (1986)

interactions within the online space, prove extremely helpful in conceptualizing the intersections between Tumblr's ostensible *musée imaginaire* and the branded images exhibited within it.

The acts of display and looking (both in museum and on sites such as Tumblr) have been ingrained into our societal consciousness as more than just mere recreation or cultural enlightenment. “The condition of being on display is fundamental to the construction of the category 'art' in the modern western world,” asserts Barker. “The museum, which, in displaying works of art, stops them being used for any purpose other than that of being looked at.”¹⁷⁶ Carol Duncan, in *Civilizing Rituals*, elaborates upon this ritual of “looking,” likening the museum-going experience to a religious practice within a secular world and drawing into question the museum's resemblance to a temple or religious edifice. “If museum facades have imitated temples or palaces,” she asks, “is it not simply that modern taste has tried to emulate the formal balance and dignity of those structures, or that it has wished to associate the power of bygone faiths with the present cult of art?”¹⁷⁷ Similarly Henry Jenkins, in *Fans, Bloggers and Gamers* (2006), examines fan practices and interactions with the celebrity brand and the ways in which they may act as religious (or mythological) ritual.¹⁷⁸ Understanding the importance of the fan ritual and the “looking” of the museum ritual and witnessing the ways in which those rituals blend together on Tumblr helps to fully express the sociological importance of these activities. More than amusement or simple recreation, these activities fulfill necessary cultural needs in the individuals who actively curate, exhibit and consume the content of a celebrity brand.

¹⁷⁶Barker (1999): pg 13.

¹⁷⁷Duncan (2005): pg 7.

¹⁷⁸Jenkins (2000): pg 17-18.

How exactly does the exhibition of the artwork affect its interpretation for these individuals? As previously discussed, the negotiation of the celebrity image as both brand, individual and artwork (specifically in reference to the physical photograph) create a number of textual intersections that delve deep beyond the viewer's primary appraisal of an image. Likewise, the traditional museum object is rife with interpretive contradictions. Writes museum studies scholar Donald Preziosi, "The object's significance, how it may be construed or constructed or behaviorally deployed, is both present and absent...its semiotic status is both referential and differential; it is both directly and indirectly meaningful."¹⁷⁹ Emily Barker elaborates: "The display is always *produced*...it is necessarily informed by definite aims and assumptions and evokes some larger meaning or deeper reality beyond the individual works in the display."¹⁸⁰

In fact, it is ultimately most helpful to look away from the objects themselves and focus instead on the motivations and practices of those who created and selected them. Individual works of art, writes Samuel Alberti in "Objects and the Museum," while still discrete objects, are nevertheless ultimately the product of human agency. "I do not attribute too much power to the things themselves," he writes. "Things did not act in their own right...people imbued things with value and significance, manipulating and contesting their meaning over time."¹⁸¹ This attribution of significance, as both Barker and Alberti suggest, takes form through its selection by the curator, its classification and its display within the exhibition—which, as Barker notes, oftentimes acts as a work of art in itself. He writes, "The artfulness of modern display can produce an intensified

¹⁷⁹Preziosi (2011): pg 155

¹⁸⁰Barker (1999): pg 13.

¹⁸¹Alberti (2005): pg 561.

aestheticization: careful spacing and lighting isolate works of art for the sake of more concentrated contemplation.”¹⁸²

Victoria Newhouse, in her 2005 analysis of three separate exhibitions of the same collection of Egyptian artwork, concluded that although some museums chose to frame the artifacts as archeological artifacts and some as art each “decision brings its own assets and liabilities.”¹⁸³ She analyzed the lighting of the object, its presentation within the room, any descriptive labeling accompanying the artifacts, and whether certain pieces are privileged above others from exhibition to exhibition. Through these choices and these frameworks, the *meaning* of the photograph or object itself shifted from viewer to viewer. “An object on display had relationships not only with other items and with its collectors and curators but also with its audiences,” explains Alberti. “Viewers observed and reacted to the object, and these responses (and their traces) are symptoms of the relationship between thing and observer.”¹⁸⁴ Sometimes the intention of the curator and the reaction of the viewer align, sometimes they diverge. Reactions shift from person to person, culture to culture. The same can easily be said for online exhibition and visitor interaction; those who recognize the subject of a particular photograph may have a very different reaction than those who do not; they may choose to reblog it or they may take offense if the photograph is mislabeled.

FOLLOWING THE PATH OF A SINGLE IMAGE

The method of Newhouse's study--tracing the different exhibition techniques of different display spaces--provides illuminating results when applied to images on Tumblr. Following the path of a single photograph and observing the different ways in

¹⁸²Barker (1999): pg 14.

¹⁸³Newhouse (2005): pg 19

¹⁸⁴Alberti (2005): pg 568-569.

which is its framed within a display (specifically, the Tumblr blog) reveals a host of remarkable design aesthetics and implied meanings. Much can be discovered about the effects of a blog's page design (whether it has music, what kind of background or frame is in place, how the images are arranged on the page) on meaning or interpretation of the image itself, and the way in which the image contributes to the overall style or meaning of the blog as a whole? Furthermore, by making inferences between page design and the usage of the celebrity image, many disparate and revealing relationships can be derived between the image and the bloggers who chose it.

The image selected to be traced was one of James Dean; the most popular image Emily had ever posted on her blog. The image, originally posted on August 16, 2013 as of March 11, 2014, had 31,051 notes:¹⁸⁵

¹⁸⁵Accessed March 11, 2014. URL: <http://jamesdeandaily.tumblr.com/post/58439863040>

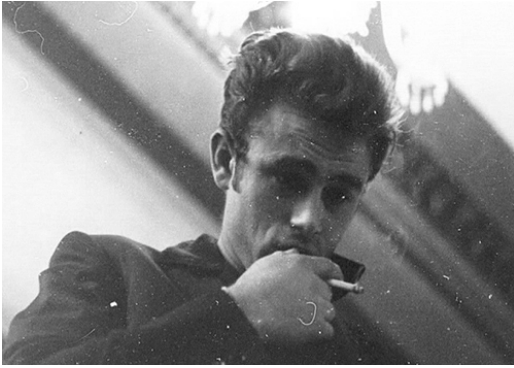


Illustration 7: Images of James Dean.

The post in question consisted of two conjoined photographs of Dean smoking in a heavy black overcoat, taken in a grainy black and white. This image in particular serves the purposes of this study very well as it is relatively neutral (candid, rather than on the set of a particular film) and embodies the popular persona of James Dean: he has a serious, “cool” expression, the collar of the black overcoat is popped, a cigarette dangles from his lips. To trace the exhibition image and to get an idea of the various ways this photograph has been utilized by individuals on Tumblr, the notes of the photo were examined and the source of every fifth reblog (for the sake of randomness) was opened. Each blog will be briefly examined in terms of its design (background, theme), content, blogger presence, and framing—looking at the post before and after that of Dean and deducing, if possible, the relationship of the blogger to the image.

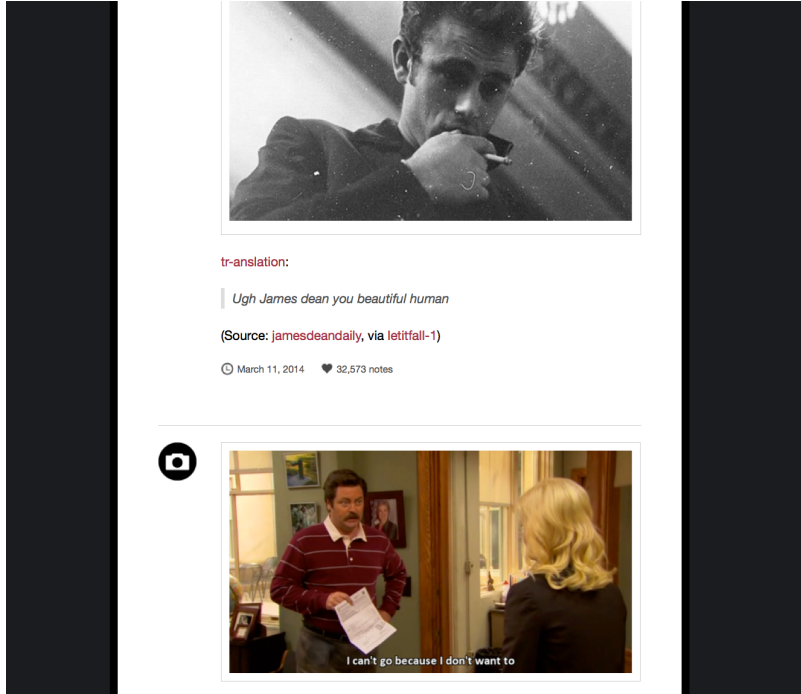


Illustration 8: Laurawwr’s reblog of the James Dean photograph.

The fifth reblog, Laurawwr, is extremely content heavy with an emphasis on video, GIFs and popular television.¹⁸⁶ It has a stark black and white background, no blogger image or description, but a rather aggressive invitation on the blog banner to “stop being a little biatch and ask already.” Dean's image is placed between a GIF taken from the animated television *Bob's Burgers*, depicting a cartoon girl slapping a man's behind, and an image from the television show *Parks and Recreation* with an image of manly character Ron Swanson.¹⁸⁷ Dean's image is not hashtagged, but does feature a caption given by another blogger, tr-anslation, that reads “Ugh James dean you beautiful human.” The snarky “ask” invitation and the humorous, stark nature of the content imply that the blogger sees herself as a bit of a rebel, which may help to explain Dean's appeal.

¹⁸⁶Accessed March 11, 2014. URL: <http://laurawwr.tumblr.com/>

¹⁸⁷Accessed March 11, 2014. URL: <http://laurawwr.tumblr.com/post/79237963859/tr-anslation-ugh-james-dean-you-beautiful-human>

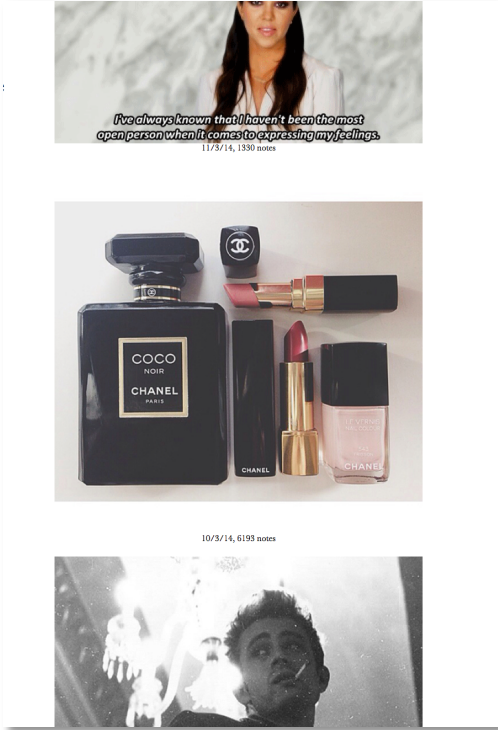


Illustration 9: 1230brentwoodlane’s reblog of the James Dean photograph.

The tenth reblog is 1230brentwoodlane, created by a 21-year old blogger named Crystal.¹⁸⁸ The blog describes itself as “Southern Made” and there is a blogger image of an attractive girl (presumably the blogger) lying down and making “kissy lips” at the camera. The background is plain white, and there is an emphasis on romantic, pretty fashion content--flowers and ruffled beds, makeup products and lyrics by singer Lana Del Rey. Dean is between a photograph of Chanel makeup and perfumes and a mysterious, romantic GIF of mist and clouds passing in front of the moon.¹⁸⁹ Here, he has been repurposed as more of a sex symbol, a romantic image of desire rather than any reflection of personal rebellion or iconoclasm.

¹⁸⁸Accessed March 11, 2014. URL: <http://1230brentwoodlane.tumblr.com/>

¹⁸⁹Accessed March 11, 2014. URL: <http://1230brentwoodlane.tumblr.com/post/79230853713>, posted March 10, 2014

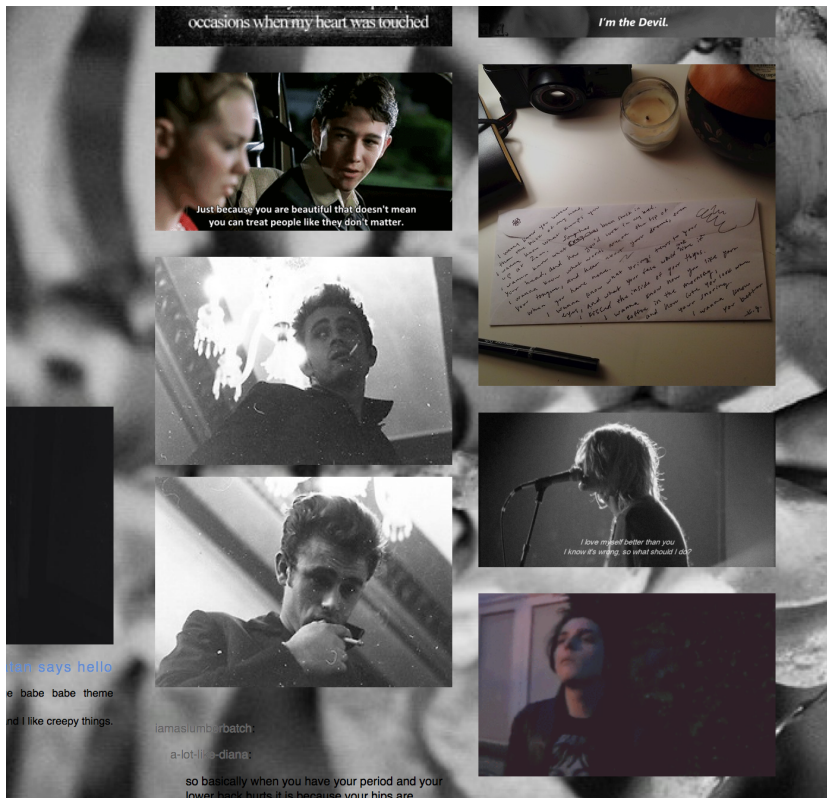


Illustration 10: ForeignFlesh’s reblog of the James Dean photograph.

The fifteenth reblog is ForeignFlesh, whose young female blogger, Kennedy, is shown smiling at the camera in a black and white photograph.¹⁹⁰ The blog's description reads “I’m Kennedy and I like creepy things.” There is an element of the romantic macabre to the site, which features a great deal of black and white imagery and whose background is a black and white photograph of a human spine. There are images of couples kissing alongside shots of body alteration and Kurt Cobain. Dean is beside a GIF of Cobain, a GIF of a young man smoking and an image of an envelope with a love letter written upon it. In this case, the juxtaposition of Dean beside Cobain makes sense; both

¹⁹⁰Accessed March 11, 2014. URL: <http://foreignflesh.tumblr.com/>

were publicly depicted as tortured, romantic figures that died too young and thus may hold a certain appeal for this blogger.

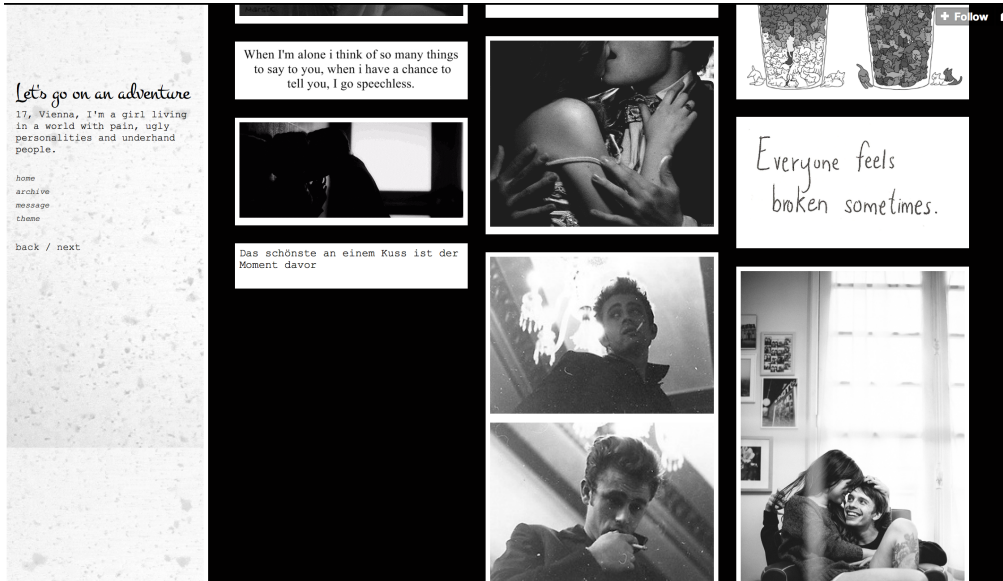


Illustration 11: TakeMeToPetersNeverland's reblog of the James Dean photograph.

In some cases, the connection between Dean's celebrity brand and the blogger is more ambiguous. For a brief example, the twentieth reblog (shown above) is on TakeMeToPetersNeverland, whose content is primarily romantic black and white images and GIFs of couples kissing interspersed with angst-ridden poems and quotes about loneliness and lost love.¹⁹¹ Here, Dean's cool isolation and romanticism (and the aesthetic appeal of the black and white grainy image) fit right in to the user's aesthetic.¹⁹²

¹⁹¹Accessed March 11, 2014. URL: <http://takemetopetersneverland.tumblr.com/>. Posted March 10, 2014.

¹⁹²Accessed March 11, 2014. URL: <http://takemetopetersneverland.tumblr.com/post/79176643976>



Illustration 12: NakedEye’s reblog of the James Dean photograph.

On the other hand, the twenty-fifth reblog, “NakedEye,” sandwiches Dean between a couple spooning and the cover of a Sonic Youth album, juxtaposed against a bright wallpaper of cartoon junk food, cigarettes and bones.¹⁹³ It is difficult to see how Dean’s classic image plays into a blog whose main icon is a repeating cartoon GIF of a garishly psychedelic television screen reading “Sick, Sad World”—perhaps it is Dean’s lonely, rebellious persona that appeals here. Whatever it may be, it is fascinating to see the way in which these facets of the “Dean” brand are adapted to fit each blog—the romantic loner, the rebel, the tragic, flawed icon. In each case, the photograph is

¹⁹³Accessed March 11, 2014. URL: <http://nakedeye.tumblr.com/>, <http://nakedeye.tumblr.com/post/79196368727/tr-anslation-ugh-james-dean-you-beautiful-human>. Posted March 10, 2014.

pointedly de-contextualized; there are no hashtags specifying the picture's date or photographer; in some cases the “beautiful human” caption is employed, in some cases it is not. James Dean is no longer a part of any particular historiography; instead, he has been appropriated and adapted in whichever way best suits the blogger.

THE AESTHETIC BLOGGERS

As with the cinema bloggers, it is important to move beyond mere observation and supposition to really attempt to understand these bloggers' practices from their own points of view and in their own words through survey interviews. The most surprising result of these surveys was that, contrary to the ignorant, uninformed image perceived by many of the cinema bloggers that participated in this study (who took a very dim view of those who were not within the professed fan community), the individuals who responded had *all* seen at least one or two of the films of the individuals whose images they blogged. Furthermore, with the exception of only one blogger, all of them considered themselves either “familiar” or “very familiar” with classic cinema pre-1966. Not all were as familiar with international cinematic movements such as the French New Wave, but each was able to cite a favorite film from their particular chosen era. Interestingly, the three bloggers who cited themselves as only “familiar” or “somewhat familiar” with classic cinema listed either Audrey Hepburn or Marilyn Monroe as the star they liked to blog the most. This is likely because they were recruited through those particular hashtags; however it is notable that others, who described themselves as “very familiar” with classic cinema, tended to mention Hepburn and Monroe as well as other stars such as Cary Grant or Clark Gable.¹⁹⁴

¹⁹⁴All data collected from survey questionnaires completed by participants in this study.

These results send a mixed message. The immediate reaction may be to assume that the cinema bloggers been unjust to those users outside their immediate fan network and that perhaps every person who blogs an image of Marilyn Monroe is actually a closet classic cinephile. However, the odds of this are unlikely. Finding willing participants for this part of the study was a great deal more difficult than finding those who were willing to participate from within the cinematic community; therefore, it stands to reason that those individuals who *do* have a knowledge of and interest in classic cinema would be more likely to participate in a study having to do with classic cinema images.¹⁹⁵ Furthermore, it is a certain kind of blogger who would be interested in participating in an academic study *at all*; those individuals who chose to participate may have different cultural backgrounds, nationalities, and familiarity with classic American pop culture than those who did not. It is difficult to guess why a German language Tumblr reblogs an image of James Dean alongside those of flowers, sidewalks and painted trains.¹⁹⁶ Or, for that matter, why a Photoshopped image of Marilyn Monroe and Elvis Presley on a New York City rooftop has 154,912 notes.¹⁹⁷ Yet even without being able to question each blogger individually, deductions can still be made utilizing scholarship regarding the exhibition object.

Donald Presiozi reminds us once again of the importance of self-reflection in the object, particularly in the context of exhibition: “The art museum object is a screen for dramaturgy of the desiring self, a demonstration of ostensification of someone's seeing—a someone whom one may learn to wish to coincide with or to emulate; a someone whom

¹⁹⁵Aesthetic bloggers were recruited with a message that described the study as one examining “the different ways classic celebrity images (James Dean, Marilyn Monroe) are used on Tumblr” and inviting them as “fashion/art/photography” bloggers to participate and share their views as individuals who have utilized those images on their blogs.

¹⁹⁶Accessed March 11, 2014. URL: <http://nacht-von-freitag-auf-montag.tumblr.com/post/77922352538>

¹⁹⁷Accessed March 11, 2014. URL: <http://malgoskurka.tumblr.com/post/79045412430#notes>

one might recognize as one's 'self.'"¹⁹⁸ In a sense, all blogger activity—cinematic or aesthetic—comes down to brand participation, manifested in significantly divergent ways. The aesthetic bloggers interviewed were very conscious of their own blog “brand” and were quite choosy about which images they'd blog—some would reblog an image of Seberg but not Hepburn, many would rather reblog images of Seberg and Hepburn rather than one of Charlie Chaplin, for example.¹⁹⁹ In explaining why she preferred Richard Avedon's portraits of Marilyn Monroe more than others, an 18-year-old blogger named Jessamyn explained that they added “class, emotional depth, and feeling to any blog.”²⁰⁰ Cinema bloggers fuse their own identities with that of the celebrity or the film era and present their expertise on their subject as a form of social capital among their networked peers. Aesthetic bloggers (even those “familiar” with classic cinema), take this identification to a higher level by removing the object and placing it in a removed and personalized context, manipulating the celebrity image into acting as an emulation of their own projections of desired online identities rather than adapting their identities into and around the celebrity's (as JamesDeanDaily's Emily did with James Dean). Without the specific historiography supplied by the captions so frequently employed by the dedicated cinema blogger--specifying the date of a photograph, the names of those featured in the image or an accompanying quote to provide it with an historical context--the image and the text are reduced to their most basic and easily consumable cultural understandings. Therefore, even to someone “familiar” with a cinematic celebrity brand (i.e., having seen his/her films), James Dean becomes the symbol of *rebel*, Audrey Hepburn is *innocent beauty*, Marilyn Monroe is *glamorous sex*. These basic descriptors

¹⁹⁸Preziosi (2011): pg 152.

¹⁹⁹All data collected from survey questionnaires completed by participants in this study.

²⁰⁰Blogger "AttackedByAWolff" Jessamyn. "Aesthetic Blogger" Survey Questionnaire. February 8, 2014.

are employed by aesthetic bloggers as a way to reflect themselves, their tastes, their own desired identities, rather than to enter in to any particular conversation with or construct any particular historical context for the text or celebrity itself.

CONCLUSION

The intention of this study has been, all along, to outline the various ways in which Tumblr provides avenues into new and previously undiscovered film fandom. It does so by fostering an environment in which fan networks can develop and flourish, and, as a result of their practices, create ways by which new users can become familiarized with cinema and celebrity images and text and brought in to participate with the existing fan networks. The most critical difference between Tumblr and the traditional fan website or forum is that its platform allows individuals to come into contact with content that they *have not actively sought out*. Before Tumblr one of the only ways to find content related to celebrities such as James Dean or classic films in general was to search for it on a search engine or actively engage in discovering like-minded communities on dedicated websites. This activity implies that an understanding of or interest in the celebrity or film must have been in play *before* the interaction itself occurred—individuals would need to have a preexisting knowledge of the name of the celebrity or film, and would need to invest the time and effort in trawling through various websites until they came across the content they wanted. Therefore, the online network may have provided the environment for the fandom to flourish but the *spark* in all likelihood needed to come from somewhere else—a parent, or an image in a magazine, for example.

Tumblr, however, functions in a completely different way; a way that centralizes all fan practices and entryways and acts as a direct conduit for first time experience and contact with the celebrity/film image. Because of Tumblr's network these images may

pop up in a user's blogroll whether the user him/herself wanted them there or not. Because the blogroll is made up of images posted by individuals that the user is following, there is automatically the assumption that this image (even if its subject is unknown) may be of interest to the user and is implicitly recommended as having social or cultural worth because of its endorsement by a network peer.

Furthermore, because of the classification and tagging mechanisms available for each picture, a user can look at the image, look at the caption or tag and learn that this image is of "James Dean" or "Greta Garbo," all the while observing the relationship of her network peer with the image. For example, if a user unfamiliar with James Dean suddenly sees an image of him pop up in her blogroll (thanks to the user network of images), sees the caption, learns to associate the name with the face, *and*, particularly in the case of Emily and her followers, sees additional effusive hashtags or captions extolling James Dean and his desirability, the user is told that within her social network "James Dean" has worth and knowledge of him will increase her social capital within that network. Again, this functions to make the celebrity/film an item of worth within that individual's close networked peer group—rather than belonging to some distant "cinema fan" entity with which the user may not identify. Then, in keeping with the aforementioned "brand preference and familiarity" alignment, the next time an image of James Dean pops up in the user's newsfeed she will be able to identify him, and because of her familiarity will be able to begin forming a brand relationship with his image. If the user's interest is strong enough and if James Dean holds enough appeal for her personally, she may then choose to seek out additional pictures of him, may find a route in to those traditional fan networks, and may eventually choose to watch his films.

This, of course, is a hypothetical situation, but as has been evidenced in a number of the interviews presented in this study, it is a common scenario and has proved to be the

case for a considerable number of cinema/aesthetic bloggers. For example, out of four aesthetic bloggers who were able to identify Jean Seberg in her picture but were unable to identify the film as *À Bout de Souffle*, three of the bloggers replied that they knew Seberg because they had seen her name and image frequently blogged on Tumblr (the fourth had found a picture of her while looking for haircut inspiration). And while the functionality of the brand image/new user interaction described above may seem outwardly simplistic, it is important to understand that this type of personal, peer-recommended yet unsolicited brand interaction has never really been allowed to take place before. Television commercials, which recommended unsolicited brands, are understood to be from a third party with third-party interests. *These* brands—the celebrities and classic cinema images—are recommended from peer to peer as a form of social capital with no apparent commercial agenda. As a result, these brands are made much more appealing to a new user and may foster a great deal more interest and interaction *because* knowledge of the brand functions as a form of social capital within the peer network.

It can be concluded, therefore, that Tumblr's platform provides a unique avenue into classic cinema fandom and appreciation. Reusing the relationship flow outlined by Laroche's marketing study, Tumblr allows an individual to be repeatedly exposed to a peer-endorsed brand image, which creates familiarity. This familiarity creates a positive relationship between user and image, and, when coupled with the photographic image's textual information (caption, hashtags, and the original source blog of the image), increases the knowledge the user has about the brand (identifying the celebrity, film, etc.) This, then, gives the image/brand a certain amount of social capital within the peer network, and, as proved by the conclusions of Laroche's study, makes the user *more likely* to interact with and consume the original text. By centralizing these points of entry and interaction, Tumblr provides a new user with the ability to go from uninitiated user,

to fan of James Dean, to participant in Tumblr's fan network, to new viewer and fan of *Rebel Without a Cause*, *Giant* or *East of Eden* all while barely having to leave the site. This user, armed with this new brand identification and knowledge-based social capital, may then be more likely to post images of Dean or his films to *their* Tumblr, thus reaching users in their far-flung extended networks, drawing new individuals back into the traditional fan spaces and beginning the cycle over again. This study has sought to examine the ways in which we can encourage new users to watch old films, and Tumblr has shown us the way this can be achieved.

Conclusion

This study has unequivocally confirmed that, far from being the waning passion of aging film enthusiasts, there is in fact a thriving, ever-expanding interest in classic cinema and classic film stars. The enormous breadth of this community (JamesDeanDaily's 25,000 followers or OldFilmsFlicker's 62,000) and the youth of many of its participants flatly contradict the popular misconception that classic film history is in danger of being forgotten.²⁰¹ By dedicating themselves to sharing content and encouraging their peers to take part in their own fan practices, these bloggers have invited a new wave of young individuals into the niche world of classic cinema appreciation, in which the social hierarchy is defined by the quality, knowledge of and interaction with classic film content. Because the Internet allows traditional restrictions of geographic location and cultural hegemony to be pushed to the side, blogs celebrating these films and stars have cropped up across the globe and, through Tumblr, have been provided a locus around which they can flourish and become a part of like-minded communities. Emily of JamesDeanDaily eloquently expresses this sentiment:

I really feel that Tumblr is helping to keep classic cinema alive in a younger generation. It allows people to connect with others who love the same films/stars, and it helps them introduce other people to those films/stars too. Again, I've discovered so many new films and actors that I love through other bloggers! Also the Internet in general is great because it allows us to find and watch films that we might not have had access to before.²⁰²

For others, the richness and rarity of the content is what makes Tumblr a particularly captivating community. Writes Kelly (LadyEveSidwich), “Rare photos and scans are constantly circulating through the old Hollywood fandom. I’m especially

²⁰¹Statistics supplied by cinema bloggers in survey questionnaires completed for this study.

²⁰²Blogger “JamesDeanDaily” Emily. “Cinema Blogger” Survey Questionnaire. February 1, 2014.

thankful for that.”²⁰³ Vivian of Miss-jitterbug explains, “Most of the bloggers are posting photographs and information about their subject because they feel kind of closer to it by doing so.”²⁰⁴ Others reiterate the fact that Tumblr provides them a place of active involvement and a sense of shared interest and community that the “real world” does not. Blogger ThursdayLane explains this further:

For me, Tumblr was the only place I had where I could see classic film being actively appreciated by people my own age. This platform allows cinema enthusiasts to obsess over classic film as much as they want without the pressures of being judged by people who know them in real life—the anonymity allows us to be completely truthful and devote themselves to their passion without any restraints.²⁰⁵

Finally, many of the bloggers express the fact that Tumblr has not only provided them a platform and the tools with which to express their interests, but has also created an environment in which their interests can constantly expand and develop thanks to the input and tastes of their community peers. Writes Vivian:

The fact that since the last 3 years I have become obsessed over classic cinema is directly associated with blogging...cinema fans, no matter how experienced and knowledgeable they are, can receive even more incentives and find out about even more movies of world cinema. Finally, this vast community of cinema enthusiasts is brought together by the Tumblr platform. I have met so many great people in there with whom I share similar interests--it is absolutely extraordinary.²⁰⁶

By framing these bloggers and their consumptive, exhibitivite and participatory practices alongside those of a traditional museum space, they have demonstrated that these practices of collection, curation and exhibition are in no way something new or strictly a trait of the “millennial” generation. The desire to reflect oneself and one's community through collecting and displaying the object, of creating historiographies

²⁰³Blogger “LadyEveSidwich” Kelly. “Cinema Blogger” Survey Questionnaire. February 10, 2014.

²⁰⁴Blogger “Miss-jitterbug” Vivian, “Cinema Blogger” Survey Questionnaire. January 26, 2014.

²⁰⁵Blogger ThursdayLane. “Cinema Blogger” Survey Questionnaire. January 26, 2014.

²⁰⁶Blogger “Miss-jitterbug” Vivian, “Cinema Blogger” Survey Questionnaire. January 26, 2014.

through exhibition, has been a vital aspect of social human intercourse as our species has developed and as we have grappled with our history and the stories we create to understand the world around us. At this juncture in our cultural and social development, we should feel privileged to bear witness to the next step forward in the evolution of social interactions, global communities and fan practices as well as embracing the new direction of the way in which we collect, display and communicate about the objects we feel tell our personal stories. Far from attempting to claim that one incarnation of these practices is more “legitimate” or “highbrow” than another, we should attempt to understand them as what they are: the same activities taking place on different platforms within different communities. The *intention*, however, remains the same: to preserve and create a context for an historical event, individual or artifact, to develop a community that celebrates and shares the existence of these artifacts and to foster an ever-increasing knowledge and awareness of these stories within the community at large.

Fostering that knowledge and awareness is the thing Tumblr does best. By disseminating content and information from fan-based communities out to those individuals who have *not* directly sought it out, Tumblr provides a peer-recommendation form of branding in which individuals have the opportunity of becoming aware of classic cinema and stars, learning to associate names with pictures, and are invited to follow the picture back to its source and become a member of the film community. Each of the cinema bloggers interviewed mentioned that they'd had many individuals asking for film recommendations relating to their featured stars. “I’ve gotten several messages from users who have told me that I was the reason they watched a movie or fell in love with an actor or actress,” writes ThursdayLane. “That always makes me happy.”²⁰⁷ Even for

²⁰⁷Blogger ThursdayLane. “Cinema Blogger” Survey Questionnaire. January 26, 2014.

those who are already members of the community, Tumblr provides a way in which new interests can be developed and encouraged. Emily of JamesDeanDaily says, “So many films that I now consider my favorites I watched because I saw someone else on Tumblr say how much they loved that film. It's opened up a whole new world for me and so many others interested in film.”²⁰⁸ Echoes Kelly of LadyEveSidwich:

I've watched countless movies after hearing about them on Tumblr, like *The Apartment*, *The Student Prince in Old Heidelberg*, *The Third Man*, and *Victor Victoria*. Before I started my blog, I hadn't even heard of those movies. The other bloggers raved about them, and I'm glad I decided to watch them too. I've experienced a lot of classics because other bloggers recommended them.²⁰⁹

Ciara, the blogger behind LindaDarnells, believes that the heavily photograph- and video-based content of Tumblr is the key to its great appeal for new enthusiasts:

I think it plays a big part in encouraging people to get interested in classic cinema and stars through images [so] the visual component is very important. Tumblr allows classic cinema fans to come together, especially younger fans, which is vital in terms of classic cinema remaining popular in the future.²¹⁰

While the community and increasing interest on Tumblr is undeniably encouraging to those who wish to preserve the legacy of these stars and films, there is still the fact that the popular media environment of today is radically different than that of the 1930's-1940's and therefore the content of those films can be a bit of a hard sell to a modern audience. Many of the cinema bloggers interviewed for this study, especially those under twenty years of age (and who publicly bemoan the fact that they have had to cope with peer dismissal of their interest in classic cinema) expressed extremely passionate views on the subject.²¹¹ Three of the bloggers cite aesthetic aversion (a refusal

²⁰⁸Blogger “JamesDeanDaily” Emily. “Cinema Blogger” Survey Questionnaire. February 1, 2014.

²⁰⁹Blogger “LadyEveSidwich” Kelly. “Cinema Blogger” Survey Questionnaire. February 10, 2014.

²¹⁰Blogger “LindaDarnells” Ciara. “Cinema Blogger” Survey Questionnaire. February 5, 2014.

²¹¹Evidenced in posts such as these: <http://classicmoviegal.tumblr.com/post/80733561355/thursdaylane-revoltmonkey>

to watch black and white films) as a reason why young modern audiences may be reluctant to approach classic cinema. But for many others, the disparity lies primarily in the content, style and the pacing of the films themselves. ThursdayLane explains:

I'm generalizing here but I think younger viewers today might have difficulty approaching and appreciating classic cinema because our culture is so fast-paced...Classic cinema for the most part moves at a slower pace—it's not all about the action...Even in classic films that are fast-paced, the film itself needs attention – you need to *think* about what you're seeing and hearing. Most younger viewers don't watch a movie to think. They just want to be entertained in a superficial way. Of course there are exceptions to this...²¹²

Agrees Emily, "People today seem to have shorter attention spans so movies are made to be shorter and more action packed. But that's a broad generalization, I still watch a lot of modern films that I think are beautiful."²¹³ Olympia of TheScrewballGirl further cautions against over-glorifying the classics of yesteryear: "I hate when people use blanket statements that all of classical cinema is great, because it isn't; there are a lot of crappy old movies. Just because it's old, doesn't mean it's better...there are good and bad films in all periods of cinema."²¹⁴

Surprisingly, many of the bloggers are quite matter-of-fact about the reluctance of young modern viewers, expressing an understanding that not all popular culture remains popular for eternity and that classic cinema may be understandably difficult for the modern viewer to approach. "Art evolves," Marya of OldFilmsFlicker says flatly. "I don't think you should compare [modern and classic cinema.]" Kelly explains it from her perspective:

Classic cinema is different from cinema today. Obviously, we don't have the censorship now that we did back then...new stars replace the popularity of old stars, and it's the same thing with content of the film. Taste has changed, but film

²¹²Blogger ThursdayLane. "Cinema Blogger" Survey Questionnaire. January 26, 2014.

²¹³Blogger "JamesDeanDaily" Emily. "Cinema Blogger" Survey Questionnaire. February 1, 2014.

²¹⁴Blogger "TheScrewballGirl" Olympia. "Cinema Blogger" Survey Questionnaire. February 2, 2014.

is made for the people...I think there's a love and appreciation for old movies, but not a prevalent need for them to be around.²¹⁵

A few other bloggers disagree with this sentiment. Ciara argues:

I think it still has a place today. When we think about glamour and what a movie star is, we always refer to classic cinema and so many great classics are revered today still and known by the general public and movie lovers, as long as this appreciation continues classic cinema will always have an important place in our culture.²¹⁶

Megan of AlwaysMarilynMonroe points to the ever-growing tendency of movie theaters (even big chains such as Regal and Cinemark, for example) to show classic films: “I do think it's still very prominent in society, lots of picture houses show old films which I think is a great way of spreading the importance, after all, without the older films we wouldn't have what we have today.”²¹⁷

It is important to note here that beyond merely acting as an important historical point in the development of the film medium, classic films are still able to provide relevant perspectives in terms of modern social debates and issues *outside* of traditional fan communities. One particularly compelling example is the ongoing debate and critique of the role and depiction of women on film. Many of the biggest classical-era stars with the biggest box-office draws were women; “women's pictures” were a genre all their own. Today, however, there has been a regression in this progress; women have been reduced to a mere 30% of speaking roles and a film with a female lead—that also makes money—is headline-making in its seeming novelty.²¹⁸ Cate Blanchett, in her Best Actress acceptance speech at the 2014 Oscars famously said that many in Hollywood “are still

²¹⁵Blogger “OldFilmsFlicker” Marya. “Cinema Blogger” Survey Questionnaire. February 9, 2014.

²¹⁶Blogger “LindaDarnells” Ciara. “Cinema Blogger” Survey Questionnaire. February 5, 2014.

²¹⁷Blogger “AlwaysMarilynMonroe” Megan. “Cinema Blogger” Survey Questionnaire. January 28, 2014.

²¹⁸Carroll, Rory. “It's a Man's Celluloid World: Study Finds Women Under-Represented in Film.” The Guardian, March 11, 2014. <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/mar/11/mans-celluloid-world-study-finds-women-under-represented-film>. Accessed March 12, 2014.

foolishly clinging to the idea that female films with women at the center are niche experiences. They are not. Audiences want to see them, and in fact, they earn money. The world is round, people.”²¹⁹ Blogger Ciara points out that this was not the case seventy years ago. “One thing I love about classic cinema is female characters and importantly female centred stories, so certain genres of film I really love, like musicals, women's films and film noir, aren't really made today.”²²⁰ This phenomenon is further evidenced by a number of extremely popular Tumblr posts that have spoken particularly strongly about the agency of the female characters and stars in classic Hollywood films. One GIF set, captioned “Barbara Stanwyck shows how to handle a sleaze” has been reblogged 34,875 times. It depicts a disgruntled Stanwyck in 1933's *Baby Face* casually pouring hot coffee on the hand of a man making a pass at her knee, followed by a faux-simpering, “Oh, excuse me. My hands shake so when I'm around you.”²²¹ Marilyn Monroe, especially, has provided body inspiration and comfort for young women unable to conform to the thin ideal of the modern screen.²²² Far from being relics of a bygone era, therefore, many of these films and stars (cut down into helpfully meme-sized, viral-ready pieces by Tumblr bloggers) are able to contribute valuable ideas and perspectives to modern conversations regarding race, gender, content and representation.

Ultimately, many of the bloggers agreed that the key to fostering an interest in classic cinema is the right gateway. Explains Marya:

²¹⁹Quoted from Telegraph UK Article. Steele, Francesca. “Oscars 2014: Cate Blanchett Wants More Women in Films, But Please Hollywood, No More 'Nice Girls.’” March 3, 2014. URL: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/women/womens-life/10672680/Oscars-2014-Cate-Blanchett-wants-more-women-in-films-but-please-Hollywood-no-more-nice-girls.html> Accessed March 12, 2014.

²²⁰Blogger “LindaDarnells” Ciara. “Cinema Blogger” Survey Questionnaire. February 5, 2014.

²²¹Accessed March 12, 2014. <http://therubythroatedsparrow.tumblr.com/post/65179193657/mariedeflor-barbara-stanwyck-shows-how-to>

²²²<http://kamrynpitcher.tumblr.com/post/74245686805/the-world-needs-to-have-an-attitude-and-confidence>; <http://pinupandpophearts.tumblr.com/post/51236088628>

I think younger viewers tend to be hesitant because they are afraid (like most people) of things that are different...but often when they give the right classic film (and that is so important) for them a chance, they can get just as hooked as when you finally read that book that speaks to you directly, or that old rock song that feels like it was written just for you.²²³

Agrees Emily:

I think the difficulty lies more in getting young people to approach classic film. But once they see that one film that really affects them, I don't think they would have any trouble appreciating classic cinema and becoming interested in more. I think it's just that first step that is hard to take.²²⁴

Vivian, 17, chimes in matter-of-factly: "If I did not have 'difficulty' delving into the magic world of classic cinema why should the [other] youngsters have?"²²⁵

One solution to overcoming these difficulties may be to legitimize film as an art form by teaching film history as part of an arts curriculum. Media programs and practical filmmaking classes are becoming available in many high schools, but film history, even at the college level, is often presented as a separate discipline. Blogger ThursdayLane believes that, "People often forget that film is art. It is just as important to study a film as it is to study a painting or a symphony. Film is art and should be treated as such."²²⁶ Adds Marya, "Art is how we distill life into something tangible and how we capture history...[Cinema] is the great art of the 20th century and should be taught just like literature."²²⁷ In the current economic climate, with so many arts programs in jeopardy, the idea of cinema history being taught in public schools may seem a bit much to hope for, but one can easily imagine the effect that teaching the filmmaking styles of Hitchcock and Kubrick alongside Van Gogh and Avedon would have on the public attitude towards film. By presenting these filmmakers and their creations to these young

²²³Blogger "OldFilmsFlicker" Marya. "Cinema Blogger" Survey Questionnaire. February 9, 2014.

²²⁴Blogger "JamesDeanDaily" Emily. "Cinema Blogger" Survey Questionnaire. February 1, 2014.

²²⁵Blogger "Miss-jitterbug" Vivian, "Cinema Blogger" Survey Questionnaire. January 26, 2014.

²²⁶Blogger ThursdayLane. "Cinema Blogger" Survey Questionnaire. January 26, 2014.

²²⁷Blogger "OldFilmsFlicker" Marya. "Cinema Blogger" Survey Questionnaire. February 9, 2014.

students as culturally valuable, we could reinforce the desire to continue to preserve and appreciate this era of filmmaking for years to come. Many of the cinema bloggers are staunchly pro-cinema arts education in schools. For JamesDeanDaily's Emily, it's no different than literary education:

It's like studying classic literature, it all comes down to the story. Films have themes, motifs, metaphors, etc. just like books do. And we can learn from the characters and their experiences. And there are so many films that are visually stunning too, and that can inspire different types of art forms too...even though decades pass and technology changes and history changes...there are experiences and emotions that people will always have, no matter what the time or place.²²⁸

Ciara agrees: “We study history so there is no reason why cinema history shouldn't be taught at schools, and it will get more and more younger people interested in classic cinema as well as getting them to appreciate its development and the history behind it.”²²⁹ In looking to the effects of this type of education, Kelly adds, “Plus, if there's a great enough demand, there will be more preservation, DVD releases, and classic movie related events and screenings!”²³⁰ Olympia believes that we must reinforce the historical significance of these films and the classical period of filmmaking:

I don't think you can live in a vacuum--it's always important to know about history. There are so many films from today that appropriate things from earlier films, so to not know film history is to miss out on all of those references...I think if you start with evocative and/or accessible films, then you will hopefully pique [the student's] interest and inspire them to expand their knowledge of classical cinema. I think it's the subject matter more than the time period that ultimately catches their interest.²³¹

The focus of this study—highlighting the community and the importance of textual appropriation and exhibition on Tumblr—is not to say in any way that these

²²⁸Blogger “JamesDeanDaily” Emily. “Cinema Blogger” Survey Questionnaire. February 1, 2014.

²²⁹Blogger “LindaDarnells” Ciara. “Cinema Blogger” Survey Questionnaire. February 5, 2014.

²³⁰Blogger “LadyEveSidwich” Kelly. “Cinema Blogger” Survey Questionnaire. February 10, 2014.

²³¹Blogger “TheScrewballGirl” Olympia. “Cinema Blogger” Survey Questionnaire. February 2, 2014.

methods of appreciation or interaction should *replace* a traditional moviegoing experience. Movies, after all, were designed to be projected on a large screen in a darkened theatre and to be enjoyed as a communal experience. There is a vast world of difference between enjoying *Lawrence of Arabia* on the big screen of a movie palace and watching it on a laptop on one's couch. The delicate balance between digital availability and going out and *experiencing* the real thing has been debated back and forth between members of the museum community as well. Charles Saumarez Smith, in “The Future of the Museum” quite reasonably points out that “there is no point in looking at a pile of old bones if you can study them just as well, if not better, on the worldwide web.”²³²

However, there are those who offer counterpoints to this particular perspective. Karsten Schubert notes that:

Information technology has not sidelined the museum but has, in fact, further increased the public's interest. Rather than being content with looking at the 'virtual Louvre', for example, the internet might actually increase the desire to visit the real thing...information technology will make the museum even more of a popular destination. As more and more aspects of our lives become virtual, our fetishist fixation on the museal object may grow in accordance.²³³

It is this perspective that the results of this study seem to support. As is evidenced by the (in some cases) “hundreds” of individuals asking bloggers for film recommendations, an individual may not necessarily be satisfied merely with the snippets or bite-sized pieces of text and content made available on Tumblr.²³⁴ These merely whet the appetite, perhaps to seek out and watch the movie at home but also potentially to go out to a movie theater, experience the film as it was meant to be seen, and financially support institutions that make these films available.

²³²Saumarez Smith (2011): pg 1138.

²³³Schubert (2000): pg 152.

²³⁴Quotation taken from multiple survey questionnaires completed by participants in this study.

It is this last connection that still needs to be made. If we want to encourage these enthusiasts to translate their fandom and appreciation from the digital world into the physical realm, an effort must be made to bridge the gap between those who own and operate classic/arthouse movie theaters or museums and their awaiting digital public. This may equate to simply building more movie theaters in a wider variety of locations (though large metropolitan areas would likely still be the most widely served) or continuing to encourage larger chains of theaters to show classic films across a greater breadth of movie houses. An alternative to this model--and one already realized through some institutions, such as the Austin Film Society's Texas Independent Film Network--would be to encourage film organizations to partner with local theaters in underserved communities around their state to bring classical or arthouse programming to those areas.²³⁵ To this end, Tumblr could be utilized to spread awareness of upcoming screenings throughout the film community; in addition to dispersing visual content across the site, information could be given (through captions) about upcoming nationwide screenings, museum exhibitions about or archival collections relating to the films represented in the blog posts. Imagine if JamesDeanDaily captioned some of her posts with the information that there would be a traveling nationwide screening of Dean's three films? The information would be shared with 25,000 potentially interested individuals at the click of a mouse. Furthermore, it is reasonable to assume that if an individual is willing to drive an hour or so to visit a museum exhibition, another individual may be willing to travel a short distance to see a screening of a favorite classic film or film star.

This model has already been enacted to some extent by the Warner Archive, a division of the Warner Bros. studio that houses a vast collection of archival materials

²³⁵TIFN homepage, <http://www.austinfilm.org/page.aspx?pid=3779>

related to past Warner productions. Warner Archive maintains a Tumblr account and releases, reblogs and otherwise circulates images and GIFs taken from the films within the archive.²³⁶ The images are well captioned and tagged, and the Archive effectively interacts with other users by reblogging their content. While the bloggers behind the account have not yet taken the step towards announcing screenings, the presence of the organization on the site may encourage more young people to become familiar with and interested in the very particular functions of an archive, and the vast research potential the archive offers an interested cinephile. The Warner Archive Tumblr page contains links to a tag directory, the Warner Archive newsletter, store and podcast. Its images are relatively popular on Tumblr and have been blogged by a number of the cinema bloggers interviewed for this study; a typical original post receives 50-150 reblogs or notes. The Tumblr account has existed on the site since August 2011; and while its “About” page states that the organization has 12,400 followers on Twitter, it gives no indication as to how many followers it has on Tumblr. What it may still need to achieve the popularity of individually run Tumblr accounts is some sort of user or blogger presence. In a highly networked and communicative social media site, the personality of the blogger and his/her interactions with followers and content (as has been demonstrated through the case studies presented here) is of the utmost importance. This social aspect may prove tricky for any organization trying to gain a foothold on the Tumblr platform. The appeal of interacting with fellow bloggers on the site lies in peer-to-peer recommendations; the Warner homepage has no “Ask” feature, and the “About” section of the blog doesn't speak about Warner's place in film history or about the archive itself, but instead reads, “Over 1800 films, TV movies and series on DVD and Blu-Ray disc...”²³⁷ The page makes

²³⁶Warner Archive Homepage. <http://warnerarchive.tumblr.com/> Accessed March 13, 2014

²³⁷“About” page, URL: <http://warnerarchive.tumblr.com/?about>. Accessed March 13, 2014

the archive come across as largely commercial; less about the pleasure, preservation and appreciation of classic film and more about the selling of DVDs.

If the Warner Archive account demonstrates anything, it is that organizations that do decide to create a user presence on Tumblr as a way to attract and interact with followers need to have an understanding of the site's social dynamics, in which a genuine love and appreciation of film is the greatest social capital available to this community. Regardless of whether any of the previous suggestions and projections for the preservation and continuing appreciation of classic film—adding cinema history to an arts curriculum, increasing classic cinema programming at large, encouraging traveling exhibitions to partner with underserved communities—are enacted, Tumblr will continue to act as a locus around which this type of fandom can be planted, take root and flourish. It will continue to do so regardless of user age, previous cultural experience or environment, economic status or geographical location. We need now only devise a method to tap into this remarkable resource, to translate this online passion into physical support and participation with organizations dedicated to protecting this incalculably important art form. Until then, the lasting, immensely comforting thought is that if the practices and communities present on Tumblr are any indication, then the love and appreciation of classic cinema is alive and well.

Appendix A

SURVEY QUESTIONS: Cinema Bloggers, *The New Curators: Fans, Bloggers and Tumblr*

Please answer the following questions to the best of your abilities. The more information you provide us the better, so please write as much as you like and be as thorough and reflective as possible!

Section 1: Biographical Information

- 1. By what name would you like to be identified in the study? (First name? Initials?)**
- 2. At what age (and year) did you begin your blog?**
- 3. What is the name of your blog?**
- 4. How many followers do you currently have?**
- 5. What inspired you to start this blog/how did you choose a subject?**
- 6. What five words would you use to describe the style of your blog? What is its tone or attitude?**

Section 2: Content

- 1. What types of media do you post on your blog? (mark all that apply)**
 photographs *GIFS* *video* *audio* *text or quotations*
- 2. How many blog entries do you tend to post per day?**
 1-5 *6-10* *11-15* *16+*
- 3. On average, how many hours per day do you spend blogging on Tumblr?**
 1-5 *6-10* *11-15* *16+*
- 4. How much research do you do about your subject? How do you find information about your subject?**
- 5. How do you find most of your content? (Mark all that apply)**

____ *Reblogs/other Tumblr blogs* ____ *Other Internet sources*
____ *scans from printed materials* ____ *Other (Please Elaborate):*

6. What quality draws you to a picture?

. Do you only post pictures of individuals with which you are familiar, or does aesthetic appeal matter the most?

7. Which tend to be more popular (more reblogged or liked), GIFs or still photographs?

____ *GIFs* ____ *still photographs*

Section 3: Community and Interactions

1. How would you describe Tumblr's cinematic community?

2. On average, how many “asks” do you receive per day?

____ *1-10* ____ *11-25* ____ *26-50* ____ *51-100*

3. What sort of content or information gets requested the most by your followers?

____ *Specific photographs or photograph types* ____ *GIFs or other content*
____ *Facts or information about blog's subject* ____ *Other (please explain):*

4. What have been the most popular (reblogged or liked) items you have posted? Why do you think this is?

5. Do your asks consist more of praises for you or your blog or questions relating to your blog's subject?

____ *Praises for me, my blog, or my blog's subject*
____ *Questions regarding blog's subject*

_____ *Other (please explain):*

- 6. Do users occasionally express interest in watching the films of or relating to your subject *after* spending time or interacting on your blog?**

_____ *Yes* _____ *No*

If you would like to elaborate further, please do so here:

- 7. Do your followers express an interest in your personal lifestyle or habits?**

_____ *Yes* _____ *No*

If you would like to elaborate further, please do so here:

- 8. What are the most frequent questions you are asked? What is the most ridiculous/outrageous question you have been asked by a follower?**

- 9. How do you feel when you are asked a personal question by one of your followers?**

- 10. How do you feel when you are asked a specific question relating to a post on your blog, or your expertise on your blog's subject?**

Section 4: Classic Cinema

1. How did you first become interested in classic cinema (hereby designated as pre-1966)?

2. Which cinematic era is your favorite/with which are you most familiar? Why?

3. Which stars are your favorites? (Name 1-5)

Why do these stars appeal to you in particular?

4. What is your relationship to your blog's subject? (Mark all that apply)

Protective *Want to spread the good word about my subject!*

Frustrated when other misattribute information to my subject

If you would like to elaborate further, please do so here:

5. Which classic films and stars do you feel are the most popular in our culture today? (Name five)

Why do you think this is?

Do you think that these stars are also the most popular on Tumblr? Why or why not?

6. Does your interest in classic cinema translate into any of your professional goals or scholastic pursuits?

7. What, if anything, do you hope to accomplish with your blog?

8. How do you feel classic cinema compares to the cinema of today?

9. Do you feel that classic cinema has a place in our society and culture today? If so, what do you think this place is? If not, why?

10. Do you think that younger viewers today might have difficulty approaching and appreciating classic cinema? Why or why not?

11. Do you feel that it is important that cinema history be taught in schools as part of an arts curriculum? Why or why not?

12. What part do you feel Tumblr plays in classic cinema appreciation as a whole? What does this particular platform allow cinema enthusiasts to do?

Any further information:

Is there anything else you would like us to know about you, your blog, its content and community? Any funny quirks or trends that you have noticed amongst your followers?

Appendix B

SURVEY QUESTIONS: Aesthetic Bloggers, *The New Curators: Fans, Bloggers and Tumblr*

Please answer the following questions to the best of your abilities. The more information you provide us the better, so please write as much as you like and be as thorough and reflective as possible!

Section 1: Biographical Information

1. **By what name would you like to be identified in the study? (First name? Initials? Pseudonym?)**
2. **What is your current age?**
3. **At what age (and year) did you begin your blog?**
4. **What is your or your family's financial status? (Mark answer with an "X")**

working class *middle class* *upper class* *prefer not to answer*

5. **What is your current level of education? (Mark answer with an "X")**

high school (or equivalent) *college* *graduate* *prefer not to answer*

6. **How do you access the internet?**

personal laptop *your own PC* *shared family computer*

public or school computer

tablet *smart phone* *other (please explain):*

Section 2: The background of your blog

1. **What is the name of your blog?**
2. **How did you first become aware of the Tumblr platform?**

3. **Why did you choose the Tumblr platform as an outlet over other social media or blogging platforms?**
4. **How many followers do you currently have?**
5. **What inspired you to start this blog?**
6. **How did you choose a subject?**
7. **Did the subject of your blog change over time or has it remained relatively the same?**

_____ *Changed* _____ *Stayed the same*

If you would like to elaborate further, please do so here:

8. **What five words would you use to describe the style of your blog? What is its tone or attitude?**

Section 3: Classic Cinema

1. **What would you say is your familiarity with cinema/cinema stars before 1966?**

____ Not at all familiar ____ Somewhat familiar ____ Familiar
____ Very familiar

2. **If you have some familiarity with cinema before 1966, how did you develop this familiarity?**

____ *Books* ____ *School/class* ____ *Friend*
____ *Parent* ____ *Film/TV/Media* ____ *Museum*
____ *Other (please explain):*

3. **With which stars from that era would you say you are most familiar?**
(Name 1-5)
4. **What, stylistically, do you feel images from classic cinema or of classic cinema stars contribute to your blog?**
5. **Which era, or era of film, do you feel mirrors the style or feel of your blog the most?**
6. **Which stars or images from films might you feature, or have you featured, on your blog? Why these stars or films in particular?**

Please examine the following film stills:



A.



B.



C.

1. **Are you able to identify any of the stars or films pictured in the film stills provided on the previous page? Which ones?**
2. **Would you reblog any of the following images to your blog? Why or why not?**
3. **Please choose one or more pictures from a film with which you are *not* as familiar. Please describe what you feel the film may be about, or the overall style of what the film may be.**
4. **If you felt you felt that you successfully identified all three, please choose the film with which you are the *least* familiar and attempt to describe it as instructed.**

Any further information:

Is there anything else you would like us to know about you, your blog, its content and community?

Any funny quirks or trends that you have noticed amongst your followers?

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