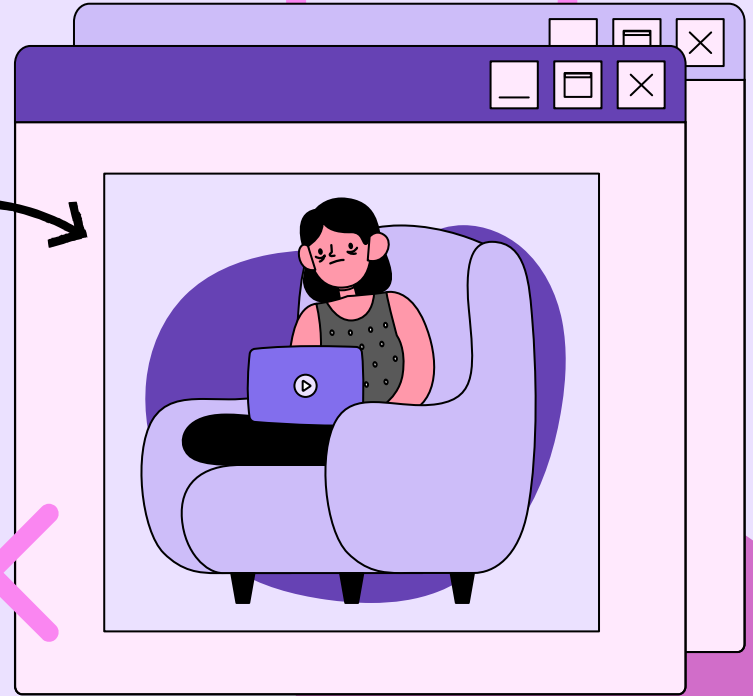


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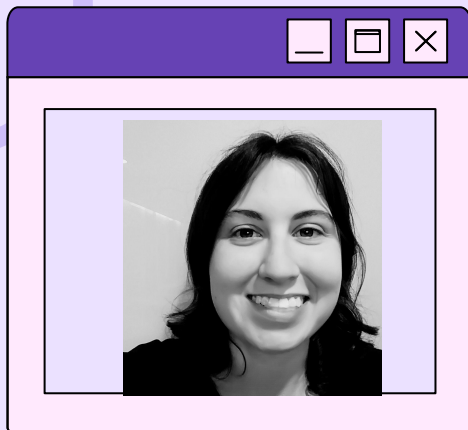
**CATCHING SMOKE IN
A BOTTLE:**

**FANDOM, COMMUNITY
AND THE DIGITAL SPACE**

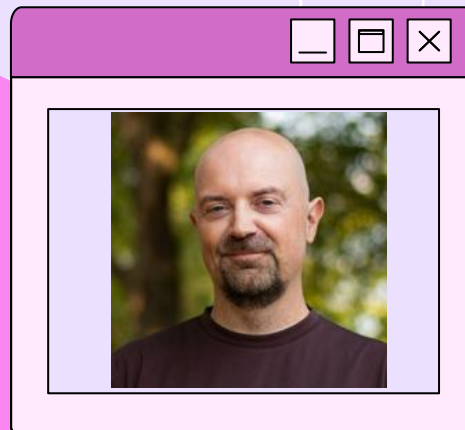
Alyssa Schomber
University of Washington iSchool
Capstone | Spring 2024



PROJECT LEADER AND SPONSOR




**ALYSSA
SCHOMBER**
Writer for project and
part-time Library Technician in
Houston, TX

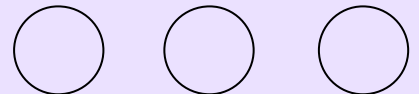


DOUG PARRY
Editor for project and
Assistant Director of Content
at the University of
Washington

INFORMATION PROBLEM

Bolstered by the uncertain digital landscape of social media platforms, an example being the destabilization of Twitter/X, this project emerged with the intent of defending the concept of preserving ‘space’ in the process of archiving fan-created works. Currently, the digital preservation practices of fan archivists are concerned with archiving the work itself. However, due to the deep connection between fan works and the space they were hosted on, the importance of preserving said digital space is not always considered in that process. The ephemeral reality of fan spaces and production, as well as the informality and anonymity of its communities, means that it is difficult to develop preservation tactics or best practices.

 Thus, I chose to prove the connection between context, space, and community by tracing the history of fanfiction and its tailored terminology, the digital spaces themselves, and the history of fan archival practices, so as to show the importance and validity of three potential solutions: disclaimers, introductions, and emulators.



GOALS



HIGHLIGHT CONNECTION

Show the interconnectedness of space, community, and text



POTENTIAL SOLUTIONS

Provide potential solutions for archiving context



COMMUNITY BENEFIT

Join the greater conversation

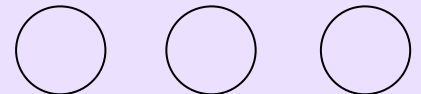


PROJECT JOURNEY

For this project, many avenues had to be considered. First, it was conceived as a paper and then transformed into a series of blog posts as a ‘form meets function’ situation. Images were also very important to the project intentions, and a blog format displayed them better.

Other revelations arose over the course of the project. For example, the scope and limitations were too large for the inclusion of textual examples, so the paratextual terminology was chosen in its place (i.e., what describes the text—such as using ‘Teen’ to determine age appropriateness). This decision developed out of research and observing various examples of websites and platforms gone by.

This resulted in six blog posts, which include an introduction, four parts detailing the history of the digital platforms, and a conclusion.

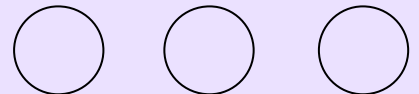


APPROACH

Early steps included intense research, which consisted of articles, journals, literature, and relevant websites (both archived and live). After extensive trimming, certain resources were chosen as the backbone of the project. Through sponsor feedback, a field-specific framework was also decided upon: this being information grounds, which looks at how locations influence information-sharing.

Initially, seven posts were considered; however, six were settled upon in the end. Beyond the introduction, which detailed the thesis and limitations, and the conclusion, the home of the solutions, four other posts looked at: Usenet and BBS, Forums and Websites, Journal communities and Automated Archives, and Social Media.

These posts were written chronologically and sent to a second sponsor for editing and suggestions. Once they were returned, the posts were then edited for changes. Once these were completed, they were published to a Wordpress hosting site and made live.



BLOG AT DIGITALFANSPACES.WORDPRESS.COM

CATCHING SMOKE IN A BOTTLE: FANDOM, COMMUNITY, AND THE DIGITAL SPACE

[Website Powered by WordPress.com.](#)

Archivists, Digital Preservation, and Online Fan Communities

Written in Feb 11, 2024 by [A](#)

Fandom, as a collection of individuals engaging in activities which center around a piece of media, reaches back as far as, possibly, humans have created things. However, choosing a starting point potentially rests on the fans of Sherlock Holmes, who took to the streets in mourning of the detective's death in "The Final Problem" (1893). We, too, could point to the early science fiction fans, who were the major forces behind the "convention" in the early 20th century, and who created the first physical spaces for their community to engage in. Physical spaces influenced the early fandoms of televised programming, most crucially *Star Trek* and *The Man from U.N.C.L.E.*, in the forms of fanzines and dedicated conventions.

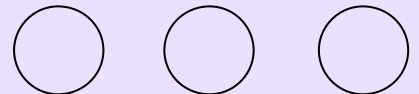
It is especially in fanzines where fanfiction first emerged, and where the concept of spatial context influencing the readers' relationship to fanfiction can first be seen. Although a fanzine, a

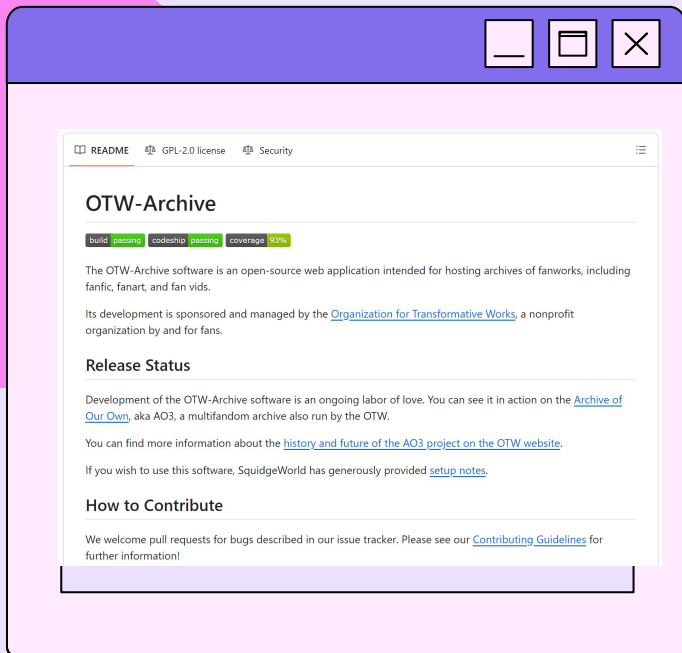
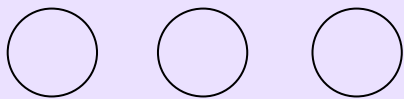
EVALUATION

Alongside changes in sponsors, in approach, and in focus, this project took many twists and turns. It resulted in a survey of the history of the internet as much as it was a history of fandom and its archiving history.

Both sponsors returned important and crucial feedback on the concept, thesis, and each individual post which allowed for the final form to be as cohesive and thorough as possible.

I was able to evaluate my own personal success for the project by how it addressed all my goals and to what extent, as well as whether it had legs to go further.





NEXT STEPS

Due to the constraints of the project, “showing” what the archival solutions looked like was not fully possible. However, with the help of the Organization of Transformative Works’ open source code, a proof of concept of these ideas may be obtainable in the future.



THANKS!

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