Time and relative dimensions in serialization: *Doctor Who*, serialization, fandom and the adaptation of a police box

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Abstract

This article investigates the aesthetic of the twentieth-century Metropolitan Police box and its ongoing association with the TARDIS time machine from the BBC's television science-fiction show, *Doctor Who*. *Doctor Who* fans explore the police box aesthetic through its multiple identities, where it is celebrated, investigated and recreated. This article draws on Catherine Johnson's theories of pseudo-diegesis and extra-diegesis to

demonstrate how such fan interests have a visible effect on *Doctor Who*'s ongoing production decision-making. In doing so, this article argues for greater attention on non-human social actors within adaptation, and how consumer interest, enacted in multiple ways, has potential power in the shaping and reshaping, of the diegetic worlds of ongoing serializations.

Keywords: *Doctor Who*, adaptation, fan studies, convergence, production cultures, serialization, television studies

This article explores the adaptative process of serialized television production and its relationship to fan audiences through an exploration of the TARDIS police box in *Doctor Who*. It will argue for greater attention to be given to non-human actors within the study of serialized television production and its long-term consumption by exploring how fan discourse, engagement and activity can be adapted into ongoing commercial and production practices. Adaptation can speak to how the engagement with an object or actor inside and outside a textual continuity can (re)shape the ongoing diegetic world.

As British television's longest-running science-fiction series with a lifespan of over 56 years and 38 seasons, *Doctor Who*'s continuity has been sustained through its ability to change. Over thirteen actors of different ages and across gender having played the titular role of the Doctor. Yet against these variations on a theme, the show's time-vehicle, the TARDIS, has maintained its outward appearance throughout the show's tenure. For over half a century, global audiences have seen the Doctor standing next to a twentieth-century Metropolitan Police box. The police box was an iconic landmark on

the streets of British society, now lost to history and culturally memorialized through *Doctor Who*. Despite the TARDIS's consistency, some fans of the show are keen to discuss the ongoing changes within the time machine's appearance. For them, the TARDIS does not have a fixed exterior state and has a history of changes and revitalizations. These are researched, historicized and celebrated by fans. As a discursive topic, the TARDIS has agency and that agency feeds back into the show's production and future diegetic content.

Fandom's agency towards television franchises has been argued to leave fans as a 'powerless elite' (Tulloch and Jenkins 1995) and thereby reliant on wider audience bases to secure their franchise's commercial ongoing viability. With the rise of interactive social networks, and the increasing convergence of fans and professional practice, this article argues that fan discourse is far from powerless and has an influence on the *Doctor Who* franchise. As Matt Hills (2010) has argued, the importance of fans to producers and distributors should not be dismissed. *Doctor Who* fan activity can impact the show's ongoing narrative, become part of its promotional discourse and be utilized in its merchandising; market strategies that seek to prolong the value of the serialized production.

From this position, the article will explore theories of adaptation beyond the diegetic, looking at both pseudo-diegetic and extra-diegetic (Johnson 2007) applications in television production and fan communities. Whilst adaptation is common to textual analysis, adaptation can be considered within production practices. Adaptation in *Doctor Who* can be steered by external forces to the production, such as fan agency,

situating adaptation as a part of the reciprocal relations between television production and audience interactivity.

Adaptation can also speak to how fan communities adapt the police box to their purposes. Within specific fan communities, the police box itself can be identified in multiple ways; as a material prop within a production culture; as branding for a franchise; an object of British history; as a time-vehicle for an ongoing television serial. Furthermore, the police box can also be adapted for different 'fan' purposes, such as cosplay, domestic functions or personalized designs. Whether fans are celebrating the police box, or recreating the police box, these pleasures are often serialized and explored within online cultures.

A key relationship in all these modes of identification is the police box's material aesthetic. Fans can create, debate, research, historicize and fetishize the police box aesthetic, publicly celebrating its form and giving it value. The police box aesthetic and its multiple identities have tacet value for *Doctor Who* fan cultures, engaging them in mechanisms of adaptation that have currency within the show's ongoing production processes.

Sympathetic to the analytical approach advocated by actor-network theory (ANT; Latour 2007; Law and Hassard 1999), this article addresses the police box as a non-human actor, arguing for the same level of social address as a celebrity figure or creative worker. ANT has been frequently deployed by social scientists as a remedy to the perceived shortcomings of positivism (O'Mahoney et al. 2017). ANT functions as an empirical ontological analysis of social objects by tracing the networks of social actors

that sustain them. ANT seeks to unravel the realm of the actual by deprioritizing human agency and social structures to reveal the actors that sustain that matrix (O'Mahoney et al. 2017). In doing so, the non-human actors existing within a social network become visible actants of transformation. Technology is commonly evidenced as a non-human actor that should not be overlooked in any empirical analysis of the Social (Latour 2007; Caldwell 2008). This article seeks to utilize some of the basic tenets of ANT to counter assumptions or values on props and their role in ongoing television production.

Looking at non-human actors within a human social network has some ontological obstacles. ANT argues for social science to recognize the symmetry between human and non-human actors (Latour 2007). However, Dave Elder-Vass (2008) argues whilst both human and non-human actors can generate casual effects, symmetry cannot be achieved when non-human actors are unable to reason like humans. The police box cannot socially engage with other actors nor itself reason. However, the police box does generate agency with *Doctor Who* and *Doctor Who* fans, not simply in the relations connecting to other social actors, but in how its causal properties may affect a social network. As a production prop, the material nature of the police box is subject to damage and ageing that may require it to be repaired or replaced. Such changes are noticed, catalogued and acted upon by fans, shaping the social network.

Police box aesthetic discourse between fans and production often relates to questions of fidelity and authenticity within the practice of serialization. Discourses of fidelity and the police box are common within *Doctor Who* fan communities such as Tardisbuilders.com, an online forum for discussions on the TARDIS. Sub-forums speak of

both the TARDIS's exterior aesthetics in respect of history, design or (re)construction. Here, the police box aesthetic has multiple origin points making fidelity problematic. The aesthetic can relate to twentieth-century policing in Britain, its ongoing use as a production prop or its diegetic role in *Doctor Who*. Will Brooker's (2012) concept of the franchise adaptation matrix can help make sense of *Doctor Who* fan engagement. Brooker argues 'adaptations occupy a network rather than a simple pairing' (2012: 84), refuting the need to place a dyadic value on a source text and its adaptation's fidelity. The adaptation matrix is a post-structuralist nod to the intertextual network that informs, shapes and reshapes the cultural dialogic value of related texts. Brooker's matrix is applied to the *Batman* franchise, yet it fits with the equally complex, ongoing re-iterative franchise of *Doctor Who*. As *Batman*'s adaptation can be perceived through a matrix of texts, the police box aesthetic exists as a matrix of interconnected texts and extratextual entities. The police box exists inside and outside of the *Doctor Who* franchise; as part of a network of dialogic values that determine what is authentic, and what is not, and by what means authenticity is determined.

Considering the police box aesthetic through its value to social groups repositions adaptation from a matrix of media texts, to a network of social actors. Matrix and network are terms that can operate interchangeably, however, ANT speaks to actors and agency of social groups, making the term network more applicable. Networks speak to the connected complexities of social practices, agencies and interconnectivity of audiences, television producers and their actors, human or otherwise. Matt Hills also looks to networks emphasizing *Doctor Who*'s interconnections

to Foucauldian discourse theory, as a node within a network of discourses (2010: 15). Hills further notes how fan discourses have been drawn into production discourses via fans in charge of production. These are textual poachers (Jenkins 2012) who have become gamekeepers (Hills 2010).

Douglas McNaughton's (2010) research into Who fandom speaks of the above-the-line fans within *Doctor Who* production. '[A] small subset of fans has converted its fandom into real agency over the text and conditions of production and distribution by entering the television industry that first inspired their creativity' (2010: 208). However, this case study will underpin the importance of the below-the-line fan creative practitioners who are not in franchise decision-making roles but have professional credentials and inside knowledge that elevate their fan capital. These practitioners hold no power to reshape serialization directly but elevate the visibility and fan-credibility of the police box discourses. Through them, fan interests and practices flow into the franchise, reshaping its unfolding world.

Methodology and reflexivity

This study examined fan discourses in digital public spaces. No personal accounts were generated to access these fan communities. TARDISes are a popular topic in *Doctor Who* fandom, and research was delimited to social media platform Twitter.com where TARDIS experts are followed and engaged with, and a more localized space for TARDIS interest, TARDISbuilders.com. In both these public interactive spaces, fans generate, discuss and perform their knowledge. The former has a hierarchical interaction of expert and followers, whereas TARDISbuilders is collaborative in their discussion (but not

without its visible power relationships and culture capital). An exploration of these spaces provided a snapshot of fan interaction in and around their topic; how they collaborate on knowledge, disclose knowledge and what knowledge has value.

To demonstrate how these discourses have historically related to production cultures, relevant critical reception material was subject to discourse analysis (Gee 2007). These included above-the-line production interviews and press resources archived at the BBC website. These were retrieved from a mixture of internet search queries and snowball results from online fan spaces where verifiable sources were used to evidence their arguments or demonstrate production knowledge.

As the police box exists as both a material object of production and a diegetic actor, textual material from the show and its official merchandise provide evidence of how fan discourse on the police box/TARDIS and *Doctor Who* production are intertwined into the shaping, and reshaping, the show's aesthetic, production strategies and the fictional world of *Doctor Who* itself.

In seeking to reveal the connections that stretch between cultural sectors of production, critical reception and fan audience discourse, the article applies a broad historical reception methodology and acknowledges the author's position as an aca-fan (Hills 2002) of both the show and the TARDIS. As an academic with a long-term interest in *Doctor Who*, locating relevant resources has been guided through a personal connection to the show as well as experience of their online cultures and resource sites. This interest is a combination of being a long-term audience member, a long-time podcasting critic for the show and some production experience within the franchise

itself. Such exposure invariably guides analysis and methodology providing a knowledge base that snowballs a researcher's ability to locate relevant material to support their argument.

The TARDIS: Historic artefact of the streets and television

The TARDIS is a time machine that has transcendental dimensions, being bigger on the inside than the out. The TARDIS exterior can change to match its local environment, however for production budgetary purposes, this idea was dropped, and the fixed 'broken' shape of the Metropolitan Police box became its iconic visage (Kistler 2013).

Historically, the police box was a public telephone booth used by British police forces as an urban communication point providing policemen on their local beat with a direct line to divisional headquarters (Stewart [1994] n.d.). It would also provide members of the public access to emergency services via an exterior phone point (Stewart [1994] n.d.). The police box was introduced in the late nineteenth century, although the kiosk-style box did not surface until the 1930s, with the first erected in Newcastle in 1929 (Stewart [1994] n.d.). The design of this box, by Gilbert MacKenzie Trench, has been the template for the schematic used in *Doctor Who* (Tranter 2013). By 1953, 685 boxes existed in metropolitan London (Tranter 2013). The boxes were eventually phased out in the latter half of the twentieth century due to technological improvements in mobile communications (Stewart [1994] n.d). In 1980, the then-current *Doctor Who* production had planned to use a real police box as part of filming but by the time of the location shoot, 22 December 1980 (Foster n.d.), the box had been demolished the previous month (Russell 2020). The links and associations between

historic police boxes and the show are of great interest to fan groups. The TARDIS and the police box have become symbolic of the show and are celebrated, discussed and historicized, both as an artefact of television and British society.

In recreating this historical (and then contemporary) artefact for *Doctor Who*, a production prop was created to characterize the time-vehicle. The prop was not built to the specifications of the Metropolitan Police box, but to operate effectively in a studio environment (Sibley [2004] 2018). Over 55 years, the prop has been fixed, repaired, rebuilt and reimagined by various designers. The original prop, designed by production designer Peter Brachacki, was used on the show between 1963 and 1976 (Hickman 2017; Rymill 2010a; Scarfwearer 2017). Its long tenure saw the prop go through a range of modifications; some for maintenance, as the prop saw heavy use; some were aesthetic, such as new paintwork; others have been argued through error, with pieces having been removed for story requirements then lost (Farrell 2018; Hickman 2018a; Sibley [2004] 2018). From 1976, a lighter, even more, studio-friendly build was constructed, designed by Barry Newbery (Scarfwearer 2017). The new model shifted further from the historical schematics. 1980 saw this design phased out in favour of a fibreglass build designed by Tom Yardley-Jones. This prop was later interchangeably used with a duplicate until the show was put on hiatus in 1989 (Farrell 2016). Richard Hudolin designed a stand-alone prop for the 1996 television movie (Rymill 2010a) before a new prop was constructed for the series return in 2005 designed by production designer Colin Richmond (Rymill 2010a). The 2005 design, taller than all previous (and larger than its historical counterpart) stayed in service, with minor modifications for

aesthetics and repair, alongside prop duplicates until 2018 (Brooks 2017a). Production designer Arwel Wyn Jones designed the latest show model (Brooks 2018). This range of designs has provided fans with subjective preference, historical comparison and an avenue into production analysis. As an example, Terry Farrell's (2016) exploration documented that history of the Yardley-Jones police box prop demonstrates the high-end detailed historical analysis and researcher discourse that can populate the topic. Farrell critiques the established fan-history of this prop through a close reading of the prop's appearances on-screen, through production documents, production stills and screen-caps. Such a dissection looks for markers (damage, alterations and methods of assembly) on the prop to generate a historical timeline for the prop and retroactive blueprint measurements. What may seem overly nuanced and irrelevant by more casual viewers, generates a rich dataset of information. Fan research has been utilized by the *Doctor Who* production (Brooks 2017b) to match the high expectations of its fanbase, shaping the show's content and aesthetic.

Fans, the TARDIS and serialization: The transcendental love of the police box

While the police box aesthetic has multiple nodes of engagement, these nodes can be engaged simultaneously. Linda Hutcheon (2012) argues adaptation can have multiple pleasures that can be shared in the same instance. 'Part of this ongoing dialogue with the past, for that is what adaptation means for audiences, creates the doubled pleasure of the palimpsest: more than one text is experienced – and knowingly so' (2012: 116). For fan studies, Henry Jenkins also speaks of this double pleasure, '[f]ans see the fictional characters and their actions as simultaneously "real" and "constructed",

adopting a strategy of “double viewing” that treats the show with both suspended disbelief and ironic distance’ (2012: 66). Whereas Jenkins speaks of the palimpsest intertextually I will argue multiple pleasures are intertextual and extratextual, going beyond the hyperdiegesis (Chapman 2013; Hills 2010) formed through a franchise of texts. It will be argued that multiple pleasures exist through a franchise of networked actors interconnected through discourse. The complexity of the police box is in its function as both a material and a diegetic artefact.

Catherine Johnson’s (2007: 17) research into tele-branding leads her to consider merchandise as diegetic, pseudo-diegetic or extra-diegetic. These categories map onto the complexity of the police box aesthetic, which itself can be diegetic, pseudo-diegetic (a fan’s extended engagement in police boxes as historical artefacts) and extra-diegetic (books written about the TARDIS and its form as diegetic prose).

To best understand how these multiple pleasures are practised through the police box aesthetic, they can be framed as four distinct, yet interconnected, categories:

- Police box aesthetic: representation as a serialized production asset.
- Police box aesthetic: replication (and historic celebration) as a personal replica.
- Police box aesthetic: representation of an agent of history: the Metropolitan Police box.
- Police box aesthetic: representation as a continuing diegetic agent.

Through these discursive practices, fans circulate and generate knowledge in visible spaces that can be accessed by the *Doctor Who* production and the BBC. This activity

generates a feedback loop that sees fan practices shape and is shaped by, the adaptative process of serialization.

Police box aesthetic: Representation as a serialized production asset

Fans of *Doctor Who* explore its continuity through its changing aesthetic, and the police box aesthetic becomes a constant marker of the show's continuity through serialization. In a serialized show that explores genre and style as much as time and space, and the principal cast rotates with different actors, the police box is key to the show's continuity as a serialized, unfolding universe. Kieran Tranter notes '[t]he TARDIS' visual continuity as a blue police box, notwithstanding the occasional operation of its chameleon circuit is the defining element of *Doctor Who*' (2013: 84).

In this sense, the police box is a character that fans engage with; observing the changes to its aesthetic. Reused props in an ongoing show can become actors in sustaining a stable diegesis for audience immersion. Props and staged spaces for fiction can fulfil or deny the immediacy of an imagined world. This can be important to serialized diegesis where props and staged spaces are regular conduits into the imaginary. John Tulloch and Manuel Alvarado argue '[t]he importance of the Tardis as "place" relates to the nature of Doctor Who as series: it provides a point of coherence, ritualized recognition and exchange in much the same way of "Rover's Return" does in *Coronation Street*' (1983: 29). Fans of television have analysed fixed and regular studio sets to make sense of imagined worlds across genres. Stage sets can be scrutinized for their realness, or how they bring a realness that has not been afforded to the audience (McLean 2016). However, the police box in *Doctor Who* operates not just as part of the

stage, but as an actor upon it. A studio set will create an imagined world before the TARDIS police box exterior materializes and becomes part of that set. In doing so, it reconfigures the nature of that space. Tulloch and Alvarado argue that the police box provided something 'concrete and familiar, fitting in naturally with its environment, and yet narratively defined as "odd" and "incongruous"' (1983: 27). The police box enters the stage like any human actor, interacting and changing the world that has been revealed. The police box is both a passive and active agent of the diegesis.

Fans thereby take pleasure in how the police box exists within the artifice of a production set. They separate their interest in the character of fiction, and as an actor of production, yet see the serialization in both. Production changes themselves are serialized to the fan, as the prop is reshaped for pragmatic or aesthetic purposes. These two pleasures can be mixed, with deliberations as to how production changes can fit the diegetic (or pseudo-diegetic) space. Aesthetic preferences may be discussed, and even questions of fidelity, where one police box aesthetic is given hierarchical value over another.

Discourses regarding the police box as a serialized production asset have public visibility in digital communities such as TARDISbuilders.com or through social networks, such as Twitter or Facebook. They exist in public and private digital groups where historical knowledge is shared, contested, valued and built upon. In these social groups, speculation and observational analysis are commonplace. Social interaction, collaboration and collecting are key fan-actions that have increasing value in media industries and that interaction is evident within serialized works. These participatory

cultures, as coined by Henry Jenkins (2005), theorize the interactivity of fans and producers. ‘Rather than talking about media producers and consumers as occupying separate roles, we might now see them as participants who interact with each other according to a new set of rules that none of us fully understands’ (2006: 3).

Participants who exist within the space between fans and professional producers of a franchise can carry a guru status. Police box gurus provide hierarchical top-down knowledge to fellow fans and can interact with fans on their findings engaging in celebration, knowledge disputes or clarifications. Clayton Hickman, whose professional credits include *Doctor Who* magazine editor (2002–07), writer for *Doctor Who* franchise spin-offs, *The Sarah Jane Adventures* (2007–11, BBC) and Big Finish *Doctor Who* audios (1996–present), frequently engages with the police box exterior discourse. Hickman has recreated the exterior props digitally, using the images to demonstrate the exterior’s evolution, and occasionally provides in-depth social media analysis on the different aspects of the police box aesthetic, for example, the prop’s lamp housing (Hickman 2018a). Hickman will speculate on unaccounted changes within the prop design or provide factual data for such changes (Hickman 2018b). Hickman, as a fan, will also offer subjective criticism and personal preference on police box aesthetics. For Hickman, the props built since the show’s revival in 2005 lack fidelity to the metropolitan aesthetic (Fullerton 2018). Speaking on adaptation speaks of classic works and the negative fandom reception to these reworks, Linda Hutcheon argues ‘[f]ailure in conveying vision or tone in adaptations of classic works of science fiction seems particularly problematic

for fans' (2012: 127). Fans will consider the police box aesthetic in terms of a hierarchy of fidelity rather than as a flattened network of aesthetic preferences.

Hickman's open dislike for the police box exterior design post-1996 is counterpointed by guru Will Brooks, another professional designer for the *Doctor Who* franchise, who provides in-depth production history and prop analysis for the exterior post-1996 (Brooks 2017a). Whilst Brooks operates also on social media, his work tends to be less dyadic, using a blog interface to impart information without discourse.

Terry Farrell (2016, 2018) provides a third guru example, providing forum threads of collective data on specific prop-eras, offering schematics of builds that respond to those interested in the historical nature of the production props and to those who wish to replicate them. Farrell's was consulted on specific police box schematics for the 2017 Christmas special (Brooks 2017b), providing the production with blueprints and advice. Hickman was also consulted on the police box prop that was being used for that story (Brooks, 2017b: n.pag.). In both cases, police box fans have a first-hand experience of shaping their show.

Public fan discourses can thereby feed into the media convergence between franchise fans and franchise producers. When nuanced information is required that goes beyond the knowledge bases of production or media professionals, fans can provide that data. As Henry Jenkins has argued

> Convergence occurs within the brains of individual consumers and through their social interactions with others […] Because there is more information on any given topic than anyone can store in their head, there

> is an added incentive for us to talk among ourselves about the media we consume. This conversation creates a buzz that is increasingly valued by the media industry.
>
> (2005: 3–4)

Such convergences could be argued to raise the profile of fan interests in the public domain that can be engaged with by franchises for commercial or promotional gain. In 2017, *Radio Times* ran an online article that analysed the BBC's latest promotional image for the latest police box exterior design. It compared the design to the previous show model and the historical Metropolitan Police box. The article concluded with a question of fidelity in its design 'in this new design, one tradition burns brightly: it still looks NOTHING like the real Police Boxes of the 1960s, in keeping with every other woefully inaccurate Doctor Who TARDIS to date' (Fullerton 2018: n.pag.). The article acknowledged Clayton Hickman, profiled as 'Sarah Jane Adventures writer and Doctor Who expert' (Fullerton 2018: n.pag.) ending with Hickman's subjective opinion as to the best police box. Fan discourse can be utilized in promotional or critical material, enriching public interest in topics of adaptation of the unfolding text.

Public forum discourse can be a hive of multiple voices, where immediate responses to changes within the show's production aesthetic can be discussed, problematized and critiqued. The 2005 revival of the show saw initial publicity for the Colin Richmond police box exterior debated by fans. Arguments at fan forum Gallifrey One saw a range of criticisms. 'Oh, Dear. They've got the TARDIS wrong. It looks silly. Windows are out of proportion' (Entiem cited in McNaughton 2010: n.pag.). Such

forums were read by creative practitioners working for *Doctor Who* such as writers Steven Moffat and Paul Cornell, the former would use this discourse within his future storylines.

Fan discourse can feed into commercial ventures such as merchandise. *Doctor Who*'s official toy ranges have police boxes that match the different eras of the show. Some fans reconstruct the purchased toy models to create even more authentic replications that are then deployed in toy dioramas (MisterTom 2019). Fans can also purchase licensed 1:1 scale replicas of different police box aesthetics (thisPlanetEarth 2019) demonstrating the pleasure of fan recreation and celebration.

TARDIS pleasure 2: Replication (and historic celebration) as a personal replica

Fan interest in the TARDIS can be playful, performative and celebratory, taking specific actors from the text and making them real. In fan cultures, cosplay, a portmanteau of costume and (role)-play has been argued to be a 'craft, a subculture, and a performance' (Crawford and Hancock 2019: 17). As Barbara Brownie and Danny Graydon note, cosplay can communicate 'efficiently and specifically the subject of one's fandom and their level of devotion to that particular cultural artifact' (2016: 109). The replication of the police box as a physical artefact can be situated within this culture, however, its role can again be multiple. A replicated police box may be used as part of cosplay at fan conventions (Stulpin 2014), as part of a celebration of identity-performance as the Doctor or his companions and their time-travel machine, participating in re-enactments or improvisation as an 'audience turned author' (Brownie and Graydon 2016: 112). However, unlike costumes, police boxes cannot reconfigure

identity in the same way as cosplay. Traditionally, one cannot become the police box for authentic re-enactment; the *Doctor Who* police box is a hybridized symbol of identity and environment. The police box aesthetic is more than re-enactment and play, but the realization of an unreal signification.

Such significations are not always performed. Police boxes can be purchased as domestic monuments or fan-totems, with replicas being housed in private spaces. Replication does not have to be physical agency, and replication discourses can occur within digital spaces. TARDIS builders.com has examples of fans sharing experiences, knowledge and showcasing their skills, with collected threads debating prop design through blueprints, close readings of snapshots and production stills and even rationalized guesswork (Scarfwearer 2017). Online worlds such as Minecraft (Elkad 2020; AmbientStudios 2019), Second Life (Kassner 2012; Harold 2011) and Gary's Mods (Creeper 2019) see fans replicating the police box aesthetic in its both real-life and production designs in digital domains as part of interactive sandbox environments.

In many of these cases (but not all, as fandom practices and motivations produce heterogeneous activity), there is a desire for authenticity. Brownie and Graydon argue that in cosplay '[f]andom has a cultural economy in which value is attributed to acts of devotion' and that such fan capital is acquired through authenticity (2016: 113). Brownie and Graydon also note how superhero cosplay has seen designs 'frequently redesigned for different incarnations of superhero' (2016: 113). This is also true with police box replication where design knowledge is key, and fidelity can merit value.

Such fan practices draw on the interest in both diegetic time machine and the historical artefact, both as a police communication booth and as a television production prop. The different designs are identified, reproduced and commonly valued for their authenticity. At the time of writing, the replicas of the *Doctor Who* police box props sold commercially through This Planet Earth sell for just under seven thousand pounds (thisPlanetEarth 2019). These builds are sold on their fidelity to the production props they reproduce. 'Each variant has been researched to an almost obsessive degree and built with a passion. The result is the most stunning reproduction of a prop that you can actually own and treasure' (2019: n.pag.). The authenticity of these commercial builds has had them appear in the television show itself in the story *Twice Upon a Time* (2017, BBC) as a canonical representation of an earlier TARDIS form. These builds were customized to maximize fidelity by consultation with guru Terry Farrell (Brooks 2017b). The show's production evidences an awareness as to fan scrutiny of, and the value placed upon, the canonical physicality of the police box and any retrospective reappearance of its earlier aesthetic. The visible fan pleasures within historicizing the production aesthetic have provided commercial value to police box replication that has then fed back into the show's ongoing production and serialized narrative.

TARDIS pleasure 3: Its representation of an agent of history: The Metropolitan Police box

The TARDIS police box exterior is a representation, rather than a replica, of the Metropolitan Police box, and *Doctor Who* fans have shown interest in the dimensions of the working artefacts; their aesthetic, and urban identity, and context. Online

communities will investigate the real police box measurements, differences, histories and geographical locations. Photographic historical evidence will often situate the police box in its urban environment, where the focus is not the police box aesthetic, but rather its historical context (Lym 2018). Such images are databased, archived and commented upon. One TARDISbuilders member commented on a historic photograph of a police box in Barking, 1959.

> What a lovely picture. Thanks for sharing. Looks like it must have been taken early in 1953, as everyone is wearing thick coats and there's no leaves on the ground, and barely any on the trees. I've said this before, but I love the lack of cars on the road, making everything look so wide open. Its *[sic]* funny, I was born in 1970, a long time after this was taken; however these pictures always make me nostalgic for the past.
>
> (Fivefingeredstyre 2019: n.pag.)

The user speaks of the police box aesthetic as a component of nostalgia, not simply of the show, or the police box, but British history. Similarly, within the diegetic world of *Doctor Who*, the police box aesthetic becomes part of an already structured environment, materializing into an established story-world. This ongoing relationship between actor and environment is notably similar to the engagement of the police box aesthetic in diegetic and pseudo-diegetic spaces.

The investigation and pleasures in police boxes and urban historic environments have been ironically subverted by photographer and *Doctor Who* fan Paul Dykes, whose Ghost Monuments project is significantly pseudo-diegetic. Dykes photographs spaces in

London where Metropolitan Police boxes were once erected and then adds a digital police box into the scene. Dykes places ghosts of the past, digital replicas of historic monuments, into contemporary photographs of their geographical locations (Freeman 2019; Dykes 2019). This project (sharing the same title as a 2018 *Doctor Who* episode) accrued interest from *Doctor Who* fans on social media. One fan comment 'Windows are the wrong size' (Sanders 2019: n.pag.), drawing this historical interest in the Metropolitan Police box back to the fan pleasures of *Doctor Who*. This statement refers to a canonical reference within the *Doctor Who* episode (Blink 2007) where a character, confronted with the TARDIS, notes that it cannot be a real police box because the props windows are wrong. The scripted line itself was a comment on fan discourse that emerged on the *Doctor Who* forum Outpost Gallifrey contesting aesthetic choices within the Colin Richmond police box prop design (a debate the author of this article participated in). This inclusion was commented upon publicly by the writer of the episode, Steven Moffat.

> Hello Outpost Gallifrey! I stuck in a line for all those happy people on that forum who were complaining the windows are the wrong size! As indeed us rabid aficionados know, technically they are. We think Police Telephone boxes look like one of the many different props used – in the original series of *Doctor Who*. And in fact real Police Telephone boxes were all different. So even Police Telephone boxes didn't look like Police Telephone boxes. There is no way of being right. So in fact the Police Telephone box we have in the current series of *Doctor Who* isn't any

> more inaccurate than any other. And since it's not really a Police Telephone box, it's really a disguised time machine, who cares? Well, in my heart, I do. But that's because I'm tragic.
>
> (Moffat cited in Rymill 2010b: n.pag.)

The writer, who later became showrunner for the franchise in 2010, identifies himself as a fan, not just of the show but of the police box, articulating the problem with fidelity within *Doctor Who*. Moffat justifies the differences in aesthetic through his historical knowledge of police boxes and diegetic reasoning. Tying his point back to the show's production Moffat passively notes that there is no singular authentic police box design. Like with Brooker's matrix theory, the question of what fidelity means to the police box aesthetic is multiple, and the pleasures that shape the police box within the production have little to do with its historical representation. *Doctor Who* franchise artist and TARDIS expert Gavin Rymill (2010a) examined the 1996 television prop created by Richard Hudolin and noted how the design changes were to match standards within the prop's production history rather than the real-life police boxes. 'The 1980s fibreglass plans were used as a staring [*sic*] point but some modifications were made […] taking away from that "flat" feel that the 80s version had' (2010a: n.pag.). Rymill's research into production history demonstrates how the Metropolitan Police box authenticity has limited relevance to the ongoing design of the police box. By the 2005 series, the material surface of the diegetic police box is described as wood, and the prop is given a wood finish. Police boxes were commonly constructed from concrete (Burton n.d.) and

the original Brachacki prop had a concrete finish to match. Police box fan Will Brooks quotes production designer Arwel Wyn Jones reflecting on his prop design

> I hadn't realised myself, until reading, that the original box – the prop – was painted and textured to feel like concrete, because the original police boxes were concrete. And then over time it had worn, and you could tell that it was wood. So slowly the TARDIS had become a wooden prop. So one of the things I've tried to do is give it a bit of texture so it actually feels a bit of both.
>
> (Jones cited in Brooks 2018: n.pag.)

Jones acknowledges the nature of adaptation within production design; how authenticity can be obscured by the arduous nature of production, and how that dissonance reshaped its identity once more.

Such discourses demonstrate the crossover of multiple fan pleasures of the police box aesthetic, and how both its historical and production history can be embraced or resisted by ongoing creatives. These changes do not just shape design choices, but the diegetic nature of the aesthetic.

TARDIS pleasure 4: An ongoing, reconstructed diegetic agent

As a diegetic agent, fans will debate the differences in the TARDIS design and how they have been referenced, explained or challenged in the diegesis. Matt Hills explores the relationship fan cultures has to the hyperdiegesis, a 'vast and detailed narrative space, only a fraction of which is ever directly seen or encountered within the text' (2010: 143). The hyperdiegesis enriches the fantastical worldviews, providing fans a space for

imaginative play. However, this space can only truly be possible when it has a stable and secure relationship with the viewer; '[b]reaches in continuity threaten the security of the viewer-text play relationship' (2010: 143). Alan Kistler notes '[f]ans and creators alike have joked that the TARDIS exterior occasionally alters because the old time ship tries to change shape again but can't do more than minor tweaks' (2013: 53). The tension between the fan's understanding of the TARDIS as a diegetic ship and as a production prop has seen fans seek to justify the constant alterations of the prop within a diegetic context. Fans seek to reconcile the ontological nature of the diegesis through their understanding of its construction. This is an ongoing interaction, as noted by Kistler, of production creatives and fans; a mutual acknowledgment of the discordance between the shortcomings of television production practices and their textual demands.

Such discourse in fan cultures can be an act of social interactivity. In such spaces, fans can exist as the post-structural authors of the text, where fanfiction can seek to reconcile unfolding aesthetic errors within a show's serialization, or simply debate such nuances that for much of the audience, will go unnoticed. These debates can be enriched, or reshaped, by a focus on how the aesthetic discontinuity has been reconciled through the show's diegesis. The difference between the schematics of a Metropolitan Police box and the exterior dimensions of the TARDIS becomes a plot-point in the story *Logopolis* (1980). The script never directly speaks about the inaccuracies within the production prop's aesthetic but refers to the TARDIS systems suffering from entropy preventing it from working to specifications. The story suggests that the ship requires a real Metropolitan Police box to measure its current dimensions

accurately. More recently, *Twice Upon a Time* (2017) saw more direct references to the discontinuity with two Doctors and their respective TARDIS meeting in the same story. The Doctor and his TARDIS, from 1969 (in terms of production continuity), is aesthetically visualized with a replica of the original Brachacki designed exterior. At one story-point, it is situated next to the more recent Colin Richmond design. The difference is commented upon directly by one of the show's leads. Since the 1990s, fandoms have been considered to have embraced ironic, postmodernist tendencies (Tulloch and Jenkins 1995). This is reflected within the episode's plot and script, with production (dis)continuity being openly addressed and justified within the diegetic realm. The scene was used as one of the pre-publicity previews for the episode (BBC 2017); a comedic moment that acknowledges ironically, and knowingly, to its audiences the changes within the police box's aesthetic.

This interest in the exterior aesthetic within the diegesis does not simply feedback into the show, but the franchise's merchandise. *The TARDIS Manual* (Atkinson and Tucker 2018) is a recent official guide to the TARDIS in all its aspects. It capitalizes on the interest of the police box exterior, applying the skills of designer and TARDIS fan enthusiast Gavin Rymill to render authentic images of the ship. The book applies a postmodernist approach to its explanation of the TARDIS functions, drawing on fan discourses surrounding (dis)continuity to enrich its data. The book acknowledges the police box prop's reduced scaling for studio environments through its diegetic narrative arguing '[t]he TARDIS's version of the police box was slightly smaller so it could fit into the cramped conditions of the junkyard in which it materialised' (2018: 19). In doing so,

the book, an official franchise text, acknowledges fan knowledge and discourse, articulating this knowledge as extra-diegetic material (Johnson 2007), cementing fan-orientated discourses into the show's continuing diegesis.

Conclusions

Through an investigation of the fandom surrounding the police box aesthetic, this article has sought to demonstrate how the interests and practices of fans influence the ongoing serialization of a television franchise. By viewing the police box aesthetic through four categories: as a production prop, a historical artefact, a diegetic agent and an object of fan engagement, the article has demonstrated the multiple avenues of fan inquiry. Fans engage in the police box through multiple overlapping practices, connected to the diegesis and extending into extra and pseudo-diegetic realms. For *Doctor Who* fans, this has meant there are multiple aesthetics to the police box, all informing its meaning as a non-human actor functioning within *Doctor Who*'s social matrix. Through the non-human actor, the study of serialized adaptation can be decentred from the text and considered as part of social discourse that shapes not simply the franchise, but the practices of fans, and through fan agency, television production.

Fans often (but not exclusively) operate within participatory cultures where they can share and build on selected knowledge. Fidelity becomes highly subjective with fan spaces and a topic that has not just shaped fan discourse, but the show itself, with diegetic references and explanations to the differing police box designs. Fan pleasures can be pseudo-diegetic through a retroactive act of memory and nostalgia, using the

police box as a conduit to the past, often linking the historical artefact to the production prop and fictional TARDIS.

Yet as the convergence between the fan and the professional has narrowed, fans of the show have become part of its production, both in below-the-line and above-the-line roles. This has seen discourses about the police box become a mutual pleasure shared between these two groups. Social media have provided platforms where fan discourse on the police box aesthetic has greater visibility, particularly through the agents who intersect fan and professional spaces. These agents, operating as fan gurus, engage in below-the-line activity with the franchise and have access to above-the-line creatives. Such discourses can be taken and acted upon by the show. Police box gurus have been consulted in production decisions on *Doctor Who*, influencing the ongoing look, tone and narrative of the show.

The police box aesthetic provides an example of the transformative powers of a non-human actor. One area for future exploration is the celebrity status of the non-human actor. The police box carries star status and in many respects is treated like a human-stage actor with fans seeking knowledge or even physical contact. This can provide franchises with commercial agendas; official exhibitions and merchandise that can give fans access to information and physical proximity to the object. These acts can aid in sustaining franchises and are an important contribution to an ongoing show.

Whilst the police box aesthetic exhibits many unique qualities, its role as a non-human actor may be less unusual. Important non-human actors can exist in other ongoing franchises and can generate similar relationships between fans and creative

producers. Franchises can be influenced through the discourses surrounding their celebrity non-human actors, and this may merit further research.

As argued, a non-human actor in a television franchise does not share a social symmetry with its human counterparts. For franchises, a celebrity non-human actor offers a different ongoing relationship, with a longevity a human counterpart could not commit to. With no internal agency of their own, non-human actors depend on the show's unique social network. However, a non-human actor like the police box is not inert within its network. The multiple qualities of the police box aesthetics, described in the four criteria, engage a passion in fans that generates agency on the production. The police box aesthetics' material and symbolic value is actively transformative making it an essential actor in the decision-making processes that guide continuity in *Doctor Who*.

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