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Heidegger and Fan Activism Unveiling the Presence of *Poiēsis* in Contemporary Online Social Mobilization

Abstract: This article draws its inspiration from both Heidegger's theses introduced in his landmark essay, "The Question Concerning Technology" (1977 [1956]) and his interpretation of *poiēsis*, a concept discussed throughout a range of works in the later portion of his career, in order to demonstrate the multidimensional foundation that drives successful online activist campaigns. Fan activism, in contrast to the so-called mouse-click solidarity (or slacktivism), is a form of online social media engagement that relies upon a user's previously established devotion to a text, as well as an understanding of how its themes are applicable to understand real world issues. A Heideggerian interpretation of *poiēsis* is the critical component that sparks and sustains fan activist campaigns, as this concept unveils how we are both affected by world and compelled to engage, or dwell, with it. Through an analysis of fan activist campaigns, this paper argues that revitalizing *poiēsis* in our everyday life, in particular as it concerns our communal self, is critical for reviving a sense of commitment in the world and, subsequently, to once again position and understand human beings as uniquely transformative agents.

Keywords: fan activism, mobile social media, Harry Potter Alliance, Heidegger, *poiēsis*

Introduction

A vast number of social media mobilizations are spurred nowadays via dedicated fans drawing inspiration from media texts and celebrities. Fans of a media text may find themselves driven to support a public initiative because a celebrity they admire has chosen to do so or because of noticeable parallels between the content contained within their favorite media text and understood everyday world. In addition, fans may opt to support a cause because it offers an opportunity to proactively celebrate their fandom with likeminded others. Henry Jenkins advises that these practices, frequently regarded as fan activism, should be considered

as “forms of civic engagement and political participation that emerge from within fan culture itself, often in response to the shared interests of fans, often conducted through the infrastructure of existing fan practices and relationships, and often framed through metaphors drawn from popular and participatory culture.”¹ This chapter takes this definition as its starting point to uncover the critical role *poiēsis* (ποίησις), the word Martin Heidegger thought best encapsulated activity as a multifaceted, poetic bringing-forth, plays in sustaining fan activist campaigns. When participants of fan activist initiatives engage with one another to celebrate their adored text and to foster public good, it is through *poiēsis* that their efforts are capable of being apprehended, comprehended, and performed. Consequently, *poiēsis* thus serves as the means by which activists can recognize multiple motivators of their actions – the positive promotion of their adored text, the role it plays of igniting positive social change, the social change itself, as well as how their own involvement is crucial for the success of each. To demonstrate the presence of a Heideggerian interpretation of *poiēsis*, we will specifically explore how it manifests via the three components contained within the aforementioned definition provided by Jenkins.

To explicate our position, a multilayered methodology has been implemented; netnography serves as the primary mode of investigation, and is supplemented by an interview conducted with a high-ranking organizer of a prominent fan activist organization. Netnography, as outlined by Robert Kozinets, is predicated on the steady digitalization of social worlds. As he defines it, netnography is “a specialized form of ethnography adapted to the unique computer mediated contingencies of today’s social worlds.”² Although netnography is typically employed as a tool for online marketing research, it has equally been used for a wide variety of studies related to the communication between people online, both as it concerns content and platforms utilized. In the contemporary social world, where the majority of social movements are fostered, sustained, and proliferated via digital platforms through publicly sharing and privately sending content, netnography proves to be both a vital and necessary form of data collection. Specifically, we relied upon content analysis of Twitter by identifying popular hashtags associated with our selected fan activist organization. These hashtags proved to be a productive avenue to uncover fans’ testimonials about their inspirations to participate in fan activism, as well as their experiences of what occurred when mobilizing alongside others. The interview, conducted via an email, was initiated in order to provide

1. Henry Jenkins, “‘Cultural Acupuncture’: Fan Activism and the Harry Potter Alliance,” *Transformative Works and Cultures* 10, no. 3 (2012), <<https://doi.org/10.3983/twc.2012.0305>>.

2. Robert Kozinets, *Netnography: Doing Ethnographic Research Online* (London, UK: Sage Publications, 2010), 1.

further context into the reasons why these participants have chosen to involve themselves in various fan activist initiatives.

Poiēsis: A Brief Explanation

Etymologically, the term *poiēsis* has its most recognizable roots with Aristotle, who used it to describe a human being's creative production/cultivation. It should be understood, however, that Aristotle's employment of *poiēsis* as a creative act is saturated with *mimesis*, meaning that it is grounded by a distinct imitation component. This imitation, or representational mimicry, speaks specifically to the disconnect that occurs between a Platonic idea and the (inferior) material form it ultimately assumes during and upon the conclusion of the creative process. To explain, when a carpenter, for instance, wishes to construct a chair or a table, there first must exist a universal idea of what a table or chair *is* – in terms of its shape, purpose, and so on, that which is both envisionable and capable of guiding the carpenter along as he or she handles the wood and carving tools. Following the completion of this object, the carpenter has not, in fact, produced a chair, but rather a representation of the chair. The idea that stood as the guide throughout the entire process, from the blueprinting, the collecting of the materials, and finally the actual carving and whittling has not been fully realized, and ultimately never will be. Whereas Plato viewed *mimesis* with a hostile attitude, as in his view it further separated a person's ability to experience the *real*, Aristotle appears to value it, proclaiming it to be a vehicle that allows a human being to become closer to the abstract *real* throughout the creative process. For Heidegger, grounding *poiēsis* through the lens of *mimetic* activity was an egregious mistake, as it prioritizes a human being's relationship with the correctness of the actual (*orthotēs*), or how close a representation matches with the abstract real. Heidegger therefore sought a more original understanding of the word. This led him to a number of Pre-Socratic philosophers, namely Parmenides, Anaximander, and Heraclitus, where by way of deconstruction he was able to conclude that *poiēsis*, in its initial conception, as well as widest sense, did not strictly delineate the activity of producing or constructing a tangible object based on an idea. Rather, *poiēsis* was intended to draw attention to the moment of transformation, the temporal happening of one thing manifesting into another, such as the melting snow becoming flowing water, a lump of clay transforming into a ceramic jar, and even a human being's mood as the seasons alter. *Poiēsis* also draws attention to role the separate parts play in processes of transformation, including the human being, whose responses to what lies within their phenomenological horizon are necessary to drive it.

Among the many things populating a person's environment, perhaps none require more of a response than other people. Being-with other people (*mitsein*), and finding reference through them, is an essential component of being-there. Since *poiēsis* is a perceivable moment, one where the immediacy of being-there, the intimate, invested involvements of Dasein-in-the-world emerges into view, Dasein is afforded an opportunity to distinguish their investment as fundamentally communally influenced. At this moment it is perhaps prudent to indicate that the term *poiēsis* flourished in an era renown for its communal prosperity: Classical Greece. This age, in particular, saw thriving communal gatherings – banquets, congregations in the agora, and theatrical attendances. This is a time best described through the Greek word *synoikismos* (συνοικισμός) which, although now translates best as settlement, is etymologically understood as “dwelling together in the same house.” Although *synoikismos* carries clear political connotations (as it can also be translated as colonization), the main denotation is communal unity, as evidenced by the aforementioned banquets, congregations, and theatrical gatherings. In fact, under the leadership of Pericles following the defeat of the Persians in 449 B.C., the Athenians enacted numerous *Synoikia* festivals that publicly celebrated Panathenaism, paying respects to both the goddess Athena for her devout protection, as well as Theseus, the mythical and heroic unifier of Athens. As outlined by famed archeologist Charles Waldstein, “the feeling of Panathenaism reaches its highest point after the Persian War; and the consciousness of this supremacy is noticeable in all expressions of public life and in all the works of art belonging to this period. The Panathenaic festival with its procession is primarily an expression of Attic unity.”³ Aeschylus's *The Eumenides*, the final play of *The Oresteia Trilogy*, written and performed during Periclean Athens, in particular honors the goddess Athena and praises the ideals of Athenian democracy. Hubert Dreyfus and Sean Dorrance Kelly write that “*The Oresteia* draws all Athenians to participate in the unfolding of their shining new world by involving them in a celebration of the Athenian way of life and instilling in them a particular Athenian kind of pride.”⁴ The significance of a work of art like *The Oresteia* can be seen in how it proves to be a unifying force for the populace, how the attendees, those participating in the theaterical event, attune themselves to their environment in a way that ontologically commits them to each other. These Athenians, following the repelling of the Persian invaders, *were* dwelling together. Their *synoikismos* implies far more than living together (or settlement, as it does today). These individuals *understood* that they

3. Charles Waldstein, “The Panathenaic Festival and the Central Slab of the Parthenon Frieze,” *The American Journal of Archeology and the History of the Fine Arts* 1, no. 2 (1885), 15.

4. Hubert Dreyfus and Sean Dorrance Kelly, *All Things Shining: Reading the Western Classics to Find Meaning in a Secular Age* (New York, NY: Free Press, 2011), 98–99.

were being-there together, *ontologically*, and each recognized their critical role in preserving the spirit of their city. As they engage together as a community, the stakes that each individual possesses as it concerns the success and survival of that city become fully disclosed within their phenomenological horizon. Dreyfus and Kelly note that, “as the Athenians march together out of the theater, singing their praise of Athens, they not only see what is great about their city, the pride for Athens well up around them.”⁵ In such a scenario each individual appears acutely aware of what is expected of them as citizens, and thus they therefore draw on their own investment in Athens and the community. As their relationships to each other are made apparent, nurtured by their own developed understanding, the city of Athens, and what it represents, gathers in a way that further attunes and strengthens their bonds.

In recent years, several Heideggerian scholars have advocated for the reemergence of a human existence where *poiēsis* is warranted renewed attention. Dreyfus and Kelly, in particular, have argued that the postmodern world demands for the adoption of a *meta-poietic* lens in order for its inhabitants to remain open to the authentic and to recognize and embrace worthwhile and existentially significant experiences alongside others. In their book, *All Things Shining* (2011), the authors, implicitly drawing on a number of key Heideggerian (and Kierkegaardian) ideas, suggest that the widespread adherence to post-modern secularity in the contemporary world has not only threatened those tradition(s) that once anchored society by way of beliefs and recursive practices, but equally left us in a malaise and susceptible to being impotent to recognize moments that demand existentially meaningful action.⁶ Echoing Heidegger, all meaning has increasingly become leveled and we are thus losing the ability to recognize the existential demands of our being-in-the-world. The two authors reference the work of David Foster Wallace, the prominent contemporary American writer, whose literary characters perhaps best embody the crises plaguing this era. His characters seem to perpetually feel as though they wander in beleaguered isolation, searching for lives worth living. These characters do, however, find themselves stunned and awestruck when confronted with what Dreyfus and Kelly coin as *the sacred*,⁷ “a fast forming meshwork that encourages assimilation and absorption between people, things, and the temporal there.”⁸ In other words, the sacred can be thought of as temporal moments of intensity where one is called into action and compelled

5. Dreyfus and Kelly, *All Things Shining*, 99.

6. Dreyfus and Kelly, *All Things Shining*, 3–5.

7. Dreyfus and Kelly, *All Things Shining*, 190–223.

8. Justin Michael Battin, *Mobile Media Technologies and Poiēsis: Rediscovering How We Use Technology to Cultivate Meaning in a Nihilistic World* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 152.

to participate in a genuinely meaningful collective, such as it was experienced by the aforementioned Athenians. Dreyfus and Kelly's understanding of the sacred permits it to assume many forms, such as watching a remarkable tennis player perform graceful maneuvers in front of a crowd of onlookers or simply enjoying a jovial dinner party alongside others. They propose that these moments, regardless of their apparent ubiquity, provide a unique counter to the sea of contemporary nihilism, as they both provoke and demand that human beings meaningfully respond to their unveiling.

When a person responds to the call of a situation, particularly one saturated with a sense of the sacred, it should not be superficially dismissed as merely following the crowd or being caught up in a wave. Such is an easy proposition since the recognition of the sacred tends to be a deeply felt phenomenon spanning across a vast collective. The varied responses exhibited by the participants should neither be thought of as being automatic or a mere mechanical response, but rather as negotiated performances that unveil how each is capable of being affected, and how each subsequently recognizes an opportunity to meaningfully attune themselves with their environment. As individuals collectively respond to meanings that emerge from being-in an environment, a *meta-poietic* mindset permits both the recognition of how each self is profoundly involved in that environment, in addition to what precise actions are necessary to continue the profundity of that involvement. In being a part of the sacred, participants uncover that there is existential meaning in a spatio-temporal moment, as it offers opportunities to draw on established practices or previous trainings to attune one's self to the environment (and what populates it). Possessing a *meta-poetic* mindset thus allows for one's self-definition or self-concept to become astoundingly apparent, and it equally shows the path for which one's involvement in a collective can be not only sustained, but to also reach a zenith. Unfortunately, at the current moment, although such attunement still exists, it shows itself only sporadically.

Drawing from Heidegger, Heidi Herzogenrath-Amelung suggests that western societies have witnessed a meteoric rise in click-bait activism, a phenomenon where one's commitment to a cause or protest rarely extends beyond the clicking of a mouse, changing of one's profile photo, or sharing of a story.⁹ Such is a primary reason for why, in Heideggerian terms, *poiēsis* should be warranted a stay. Camilo Prince, drawing from Kierkegaard, Dreyfus, and also Heidegger, argues that the contemporary world is plagued by a lack of commitment, especially at it concerns the activity transpiring across social media platforms. To use one of Prin-

9. Heidi Herzogenrath-Amelung, "Speaking the Unspeakable: Heidegger and Social Media's Mouseclick 'Solidarity,'" in: *We Need to Talk About Heidegger: Essays Situating Heidegger in Contemporary Studies*, ed. Justin Michael Battin and German A. Duarte (Berlin: Peter Lang Verlag, 2018).

ce's own examples, to publicly support a cause through a social media platform requires the same amount of effort as liking a curly fries fan page.¹⁰ In other words, users are free to broadcast their support, but are under no obligation to follow through with measurable action. Prince therefore makes a distinction between corporeal world commitment and virtual commitment. Whereas commitments in the corporeal world require varied sacrifices from participants and determination to achieve an outcome, virtual commitments do not. To put it plainly, the vast majority of virtual commitments are not driven by investment accumulated over time nor are they inspired by a genuine connection to community.

The widespread presence of virtual commitments incongruent with action on the ground is symptomatic of a greater issue. According to Herzogenrath-Amelung, modern social media use for activist purposes, with the emphasis on sharing, is increasingly propelled by *das Gestell* (the framework or enframing), by overt instrumental reasoning. She writes, "Heidegger's concept of enframing [...] allows us to see the passionate Tweets, Facebook profile picture filters and other signals of solidarity in a very different light: as signs that what, according to Heidegger, uniquely characterizes human being-in-the-world has been reduced to a technologized parody."¹¹ Human beings are currently wading through a rather unique epoch, one driven by an overwhelming adherence to technocratic rationality and instrumental reason. In one of Heidegger's more provocative pieces, he argued that since the philosophy of Plato and its emphasis on detached observation, western society had been steadily progressing towards a world where *being* had been forgotten. All things, including objects, catastrophes, and even other human beings have completely leveled; they become regarded as mere replaceable stock (*Bestand* [standing reserve]) and all meaningful distinctions that allow human beings to differentiate what is existentially critical for one's self simply fade away.¹² The overwhelming presence of *Das Gestell* has led to a serious lack of investment, but also a decline in communal engagement, although the two of course are interconnected.

Human beings – their purpose, their confidence, and their very being-in-the-world is tied to community and, by extension, their continued investment in that community. Prior to Heidegger's striking essay on technology, Nietzsche also spoke about how the loss of communal bonds, in the form of values, ceased being driven by the suprasensuous and supraterrestrial, and that such a state has

10. Camilo Prince, "Self-Understanding in the Age of the Selfie: Kierkegaard, Dreyfus, and Heidegger on Social Networks," in: *We Need to Talk About Heidegger*, 128.

11. Heidi Herzogenrath-Amelung, "Speaking the Unspeakable," 159.

12. See Martin Heidegger, "The Question Concerning Technology," in: *Martin Heidegger: Basic Writings*, ed. David Farrell Krell (Harper San Francisco [1977]).

led to the destruction of a range of ritualistic practices that tied people to their community.¹³ Moving forward, it is imperative to seek pathways capable of countering this loss. It should be noted that this piece is not advocating for blind conformity via acquiescing to a dominant paradigm, as the Greeks eventually (and hazardously) did with their own *synoikismos*, but rather for individuals to regain a heightened awareness of how they attune themselves to their environment, principally through those communal relations that emerge via being an active and invested *Dasein* (being-there). As Dreyfus suggests, traces of the Greek rendition of *poiēsis* still reside within us, although marginally.¹⁴ Therefore, if social change is to be sparked in the digital era, and if individuals will be driven to ignite such a spark, they must first rediscover the unique role they play in collectively disclosing and sustaining worlds. Fan communities provide a unique avenue to witness not just traces of *poiēsis*, but rather its thriving presence. Such is where this piece continues.

Fan Communities, Fan Activism, and *Poiēsis*

A fan community is generally defined as a group of people united by a common interest in and a strong connection to a *media text*. These texts can take the form of a celebrity, a book, a movie, a hobby (like a sports team), or a transmedia franchise tied together via intertextual media artifacts. Wishing to share experiences, fans often engage in various activities that permit both the celebration of the text as well as further integration into that community. Such practices of devotion have allowed scholars to distinguish different levels of fandom. For instance, in *Fan Cultures* (2002) Matt Hills proposes that fandom can assume many forms, offering a distinction between what could be considered fandom and cult fandom. He writes:

Having said that fandom and cult fandom appear to overlap, ‘cult fandom’ *does* seem to imply a cultural identity which is partially distinct from that of the ‘fan’ in general, but I would suggest that this relates not to the intensity, social organization or semiotic /material productivity of the fandom concerned, but rather to its duration, especially in the absence of ‘new’ or official material in the originating medium.¹⁵

13. Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science* (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 1974), 181–182.

14. Hubert Dreyfus, “Highway Bridges and Feasts,” in: *Background Practices: Essays on the Understanding of Being*, ed. Mark Wrathall (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2017).

15. Matt Hills, *Fan Cultures* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2002), x.

For Hills, the term cult fan denotes a long-lasting form of an affective fan relationship, and of particular importance here is the designation that cult fans sustain their involvement even without new material to rally around. This distinction is crucial for consideration because it demonstrates that fans, particularly those that regard the text as a vital part of their identity, will find and assemble ways to keep the text relevant by, for instance, discussing it and interpreting it. These motivations are not without reason.

First, fan communities provide a sense of belonging by allowing its members to relate to one another through the sharing of mutual experiences, observations, or concerns. Regardless of whether discussing the fan text or not, participants are likely to acquire a feeling of being a part of a greater whole. Fans of the *Harry Potter* franchise refer to themselves as Potterheads, fans of the now disbanded British music group One Direction referred to themselves as the 1D family, and fans of sports teams in the USA typically place the term *nation* immediately after the team's name to refer the wider community (e.g. Red Sox Nation, which refers to the Boston Red Sox fan community). All are identity monikers that imply a strong investment and emotional bond across the fandom. Secondly, engaging in diverse fan activities can serve as an escape from everyday problems. Social media platforms such as Twitter, Instagram, or YouTube may provide a supplement to one's everyday life by specifically adding a new dimension to their corporeal world, which may be drawn upon as a source for new opportunities and solutions in difficult situations. Thirdly, a fan's strong commitment to a media text may provide a cathartic effect. Listening to favorite songs can bring immense joy to fans, thus relieving stress or anxiety. Moreover, releasing repressed emotions openly helps not only to overcome certain fears, but also to establish closer relationships with other members of a fan community, especially with those who express similar concerns. Fourthly, being a part of a fan community is likely to lead to the establishment of new friendships. The development of new media technologies in particular gives people an opportunity to communicate with diverse others across vast socio-economic differences and national borders. Typically fans become acquainted online, a meeting that later can evolve into long-lasting off-line relationships that are sustained co-presently via comic cons and fan celebration events. In some cases, a person's devotion to a text naturally evolves into fan activism. With a lack of new material, such as a new movie or a music album, one can turn to this practice in an attempt to nurture their connection and affinity for a text or fan community.

Melissa Brough and Sangita Shresthova, in their article "Fandom Meets Activism: Rethinking Civic and Political Participation," define fan activism as fan driven attempts of approaching problems of community and politics by employing the content of popular culture. In other words, it is a form of civic

participation. They also note that real-world activism and fan activism cannot be easily distinguished in our contemporary world. The reason for which may be the growing popularity of the latter and its attempts to address more serious and pressing issues. Fan activism, specifically, is strongly connected with participatory driven resistance. Having its roots in the efforts to save the *Star Trek* series from cancellation in 1969, this form of civic engagement continues to pursue its goals in the present day, either by defending a cultural text or inspiring action for social change. A group that best epitomizes the link between participation and resistance nowadays is the Harry Potter Alliance. It can be considered the most prominent representative of the fan activist movement.

Andrew Slack, the founder of this organization, refers to their actions as “cultural acupuncture,” defining it as “finding where the psychological energy is in the culture, and moving that energy towards creating a healthier world.”¹⁶ Jenkins, who explores fan activism via the Harry Potter Alliance, observes how “fans’ previous attempts to tap the power of source material have been primarily focused on the source’s power as a shared reference point within the fan community itself.” In other words, the Harry Potter Alliance uses the Harry Potter intellectual property to inform invested fans about various issues within communities in an attempt to urge them into action, transforming the Harry Potter text from being a mere epicenter for discussion to instead being the spark or thread which can ignite social change. Although the Harry Potter Alliance’s original objective was to draw attention to violation of human rights in Sudan, its scope has increased exponentially and they now address a wide range of diverse issues, such as literacy, economic justice, sexism, mental health, body image, climate change, and immigration reform (in the USA, specifically). The organization has prepared and run numerous successful campaigns for improving social and political situations in the world. For example, it sent five cargo planes of supplies to Haiti after the earthquake in 2010 and raised over 123,000 USD for a non-profit healthcare organization named Partners In Health. In collaboration with a non-profit public interest group, Public Knowledge, it also united over 20,000 fans and online video creators in a fight for Net Neutrality. These initiatives demonstrate only a small sample of their achievements.

As one should expect, a deep seeded commitment must be present for fan activism to thrive. Liesbet van Zoonen asserts that successful fan activism

16. Andrew Slack, “Cultural Acupuncture and a Future for Social Change,” *Huffington Post*, last modified May 25, 2011, <https://www.huffingtonpost.com/andrew-slack/cultural-acupuncture-and_b_633824.html>.

emerges because “fans have an intense individual investment in the text.”¹⁷ This investment shows itself through their engagement in online discussions, their planning of fan meetings, and their organizing of flash mobs, all of which help them master the skills necessary for organized activism. Describing what they do, members of the Harry Potter Alliance say they are changing the world by making activism accessible through the power of story, seeing themselves as a creative and collaborative culture that solves the world’s problems. Kate Bowers, the current Campaigns Director of the HPA, proclaimed:

We use a lot of different metaphors and allegories to look at how problems in the real world manifest themselves in the Harry Potter stories and other stories that you love, and if your heroes that you love from the books were facing problems, how would they solve it? And then [to point out] to people Harry and Ron and Hermione were just kids, you can do it, we’re ready for you to take action. That’s what we do.¹⁸

This method would not be effective without a fan community’s relationship with the text and a commitment to confronting particular issues. Brough and Shresthova, in analyzing the writing of an Italian sociologist Alberto Melucci, proclaim that “individuals mobilize for social change only when their affective and communicative needs, as well as their needs for solidarity, coincide with the collective’s goals; these are fundamental to the development of collective identity and subsequent collective action.”¹⁹ Bowers herself finds that “that personal investment in the Harry Potter texts is the key to getting new activists involved, and reinvigorating experienced activists. Using metaphors and examples from stories people already love and feel passionate about provides a great basis for understanding complex real world issues.”²⁰ In short, HPA members encounter scenarios where they can collectively apply the narrative’s lessons to real world issues, inviting the belief that they can be an integral part of a story they feel immensely passionate about. Calling our contemporary world a “muggle world” and introducing a great number of similar metaphors, they create an environment where fans are inspired to immerse themselves in the text and buy into the story’s more whimsical elements.

And what of *poiēsis*, however? What is the role of *poiēsis* in fan activist practices? Thus far in this piece *poiēsis* has been understood through Aristotle’s interpreta-

17. Liesbet van Zoonen, “Imagining the Fan Democracy,” *European Journal of Communication* 19 (March 1, 2004), <<https://doi.org/10.1177/0267323104040693>>.

18. Kate Bowers, Email Interview, Nov. 23, 2017.

19. Melissa Brough and Sangita Shresthova, “Fandom Meets Activism: Rethinking Civic and Political Participation,” *Transformative Works and Cultures* 10, no. 2 (2012), <<https://doi.org/10.3983/twc.2012.0303>>.

20. Kate Bowers, Email Interview, Nov. 23, 2017.

tion (as a creative process) and Heidegger's (a multifaceted bringing forth, a sort of *gathering*). Like Aristotle, Heidegger also viewed *poiēsis* as a creative process, albeit one that explicitly emphasized the critical role human being plays in bringing something forth, an alteration that places human being at the very epicenter of being's disclosure. This more original interpretation, at least in Heidegger's view, provided a pathway to reawaken people to not only their very being-in-the-world, where attention was granted to Dasein, *but also to being itself*. Whereas Heidegger's early philosophy aimed to draw attention to human being as being-there, his late philosophy, commencing with "What is Metaphysics?" and "On the Essence of Truth," diverts the focus away from the existential analytic of Dasein and towards matters of dwelling (*wohnen*), where through the poetic unveiling afforded by *poiēsis*, Dasein is capable of fathoming the essence of being – *its temporal character*. In our contemporary times, as alluded to in the brief discussion of the omnipresence of *Das Gestell*, being has been forgotten – human kind has lost sight of how being calls to us, and although it may now only manifest as a mere whisper, the demand it makes of us *can still be felt*. It should thus be rather clear that this alleged turn from Dasein to dwelling draws attention to how Dasein is not only situated in place, but is also called upon during various intervals to nurture it. Dasein's relationship to place is always bound up with the immediacy of its own existence,²¹ as evidenced by Heidegger's elaborations on mood (*Stimmung*) and the potential for future worldly inhabitation (understanding). The difference, now, concerns how Dasein's situationally dependent mood and understanding are directed towards opportunities to nurture, preserve, and enable the world to unobtrusively be. In Heidegger's own words: "the basic character of dwelling is to spare, to preserve."²²

Similar to the examples of the Athenians at the *Synoikia* festivals, those involved in fan activism are not merely attendees, or even participants, but rather cultivators of worlds, responding to meaning that has ardently solicited them, the call to preserve what is *sacred in their world*. Like those Athenians, fan activists equally draw on what is considered most critical for their self and their being-in-the-world. Through *poiēsis* they are able to locate meaning in their being-there, digest its implications, and confidently proceed to preserve it, albeit instead of *Synoikismos*, their located meaning pertains to the media text, the messages that the media text endorses, its correlation to an issue in the contemporary world, and finally fans of the text itself. Therefore, it should be recognized that *poiēsis* is not applicable

21. See Jeff Malpas, *Heidegger's Topology* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006).

22. Martin Heidegger, "Building, Dwelling, Thinking," in: *Martin Heidegger: Basic Writings*, ed. David Farrell Krell (Harper San Francisco, [1977]), 328.

to any random scenario, but rather when Dasein is required to make a committed response in order to sustain itself.

Although the HPA has not relied upon such terminology in conjunction with their campaigns, at least to our knowledge, the recognition of this phenomenon is certainly evident in their strategic approach. According to Bowers, they approach campaigns in three different ways:

1. Sometimes, we pick an issue first and find a way to tie it into the text. For example, for our most recent campaign, A World #WithoutHermione, we knew we wanted to work on girl's access to education – so we started brainstorming how girls + education manifests in Harry Potter.
2. Sometimes, we pick from the text first and find an issue to go with it. This is usually when there is an event happening – for example, the Deathly Hallows campaign idea came about because we wanted to capitalize on the movie releases of Parts 1 & 2 of *Deathly Hallows*.
3. Finally, sometimes, a member brings a fantastic idea, and we find a way to make it work. This was the case with Not in Harry's Name, our successful campaign to make Harry Potter brand chocolate fair trade.²³

In each stated approach, it is evident that the primary component to spark participation is the tapping into the personal investment of each fan (particularly during an opportune moment). Such is the scenario described in the first approach. In order to confront an exceptionally topical and globally accessible issue – female empowerment and equal rights – the HPA attempted to develop a link between it and the world of the story. Creating these parallels contextualizes the urgency of the issue, invokes empathy, and prompts immediate action.

This campaign, titled “A World Without Hermione,” advocated for the rights of all girls across the world to freely pursue and receive an education, and drew upon the character of Hermione Granger to produce this link. Despite being a muggle-born in the story world, someone from non-wizard parents, and a group that is highly discriminated against, Hermione proved to be an instrumental ally to the titular character by being well read, dedicated, and knowledgeable. To kick off the campaign, on September 1, 2017 the HPA sent Hogwarts Waitlist Letters to female fans that had subscribed to their mailing list, informing them about their inability to attend the school because of their gender, a scenario widespread in our contemporary world.

It should surprise no one to discover that people are likely to treat an issue less seriously if it fails to draw on any accumulated investment or stir an emotional

23. Kate Bowers, Email Interview, Nov. 23, 2017.

reaction in them. For female fans of the *Harry Potter* franchise, particularly those deeply invested in the world of the story and its characters, having received this letter, they may have felt special about being chosen to participate in this campaign, but ultimately disappointed about such blatant discrimination and its tangible impacts. Such as the case with Twitter user @madiiing, who publicly expressed shock and disappointment upon receiving her letter with the statement: “wow, finding out that you’re on a Hogwarts wait list because you’re a woman is more painful than being a muggle #withouthermione.”²⁴

Unlike traditional calls for action, this approach offered the organization an opportunity to tap into potential activists’ investment in a fictional character and an accompanying fictional scenario. Moreover, it permitted the fans to locate themselves in the position of those women deprived of the opportunity to receive an education. Twitter user @dea_was_here, for instance, proclaimed “wow, literal goosebumps. This #WithoutHermione Hogwarts letter definitely puts things into perspective.”²⁵ The combination of these compatible investments appears to have produced a wave of indignation and a renewed sense of perspective over their potential involvement being stripped away.

For Potterheads, eliminating Hermione from the story would leave a gaping void. This is particularly likely for the female segment of the fan base, as numerous young women across the world have grown to view Hermione as a leading archetype for female empowerment and gender equality, a position that has no doubt been fostered because of the public statements offered in support of gender equality by Hermione’s real life counterpart, Emma Watson. Twitter user @Fangirlw_oChill, simultaneously praising the #WithoutHermione campaign and advocating for the character’s worth, stated “this is powerful. Harry would have died in year 1 and Voldemort would have risen to power by year 2. Gender equality – intersectional gender equality – is so, so critical.”²⁶ Her post encapsulates the opinion of a considerable number of the fans that assert Harry Potter’s failure would be inevitable without Hermione’s contributions.

24. @madiiing. “WOW FINDING OUT THAT YOU’RE ON A HOGWARTS WAIT LIST BECAUSE YOU’RE A WOMAN IS MORE PAINFUL THAN BEING A MUGGLE. #WITHOUTHERMIONE.” Twitter, 2 Sept. 2017, 11:56am, <<https://twitter.com/madiiing/status/903904491958820864?s=17>>.

25. @dea_was_here. “omg. Literal goosebumps. This #WithoutHermione Hogwarts letter definitely puts things into perspective. :O.” Twitter 9, Sept. 2017, 10:24pm. <https://twitter.com/dea_was_here/status/906387863331155968?s=17>.

26. @Fangirlw_oChill. “This is powerful. #WithoutHermione Harry would have died in year 1 and Voldemort would probably have risen to power by year 2. Gender equality – intersectional gender equality – is so, so critical.” Twitter, 17 Dec. 2017, 2:00pm, <https://twitter.com/Fangirlw_oChill/status/942514759152304132>.

These Twitter posts not only indicate a fan response to connections between the text and real world scenarios, but also the shrewd use of the hashtag to encourage communal unity by way of similar personal experiences and thoughts in a publishable forum. While posts on social media proved useful for raising awareness, they ultimately incited a call to action, such as joining the 2018 Women’s March in DC. During this event, HPA representatives were able to identify unique messages from their cherished text in order to address the wider social issue. Twitter user @RachelChang, an attendee at the march, posted photos of her participation, affixing them with a range of politically pertinent hashtags, handles of other women’s rights groups, and examples of calls to action she witnessed from other participants; “We all need a little magic. And a little Hermione in us. Also seen: Without Hermione, Harry would have died in Book One. #HarryPotter #withouthermione #womensmarch #womensmarch2018 #thefutureisfemale #equality #notmypresident #nyc @womensmarch @nycwomensmarch @TheHPAlliance.”²⁷

The integration of the HPA’s campaign into the larger social movement demonstrates three particular phenomena: an awareness of how particular social threads can be woven in order to promote social causes, the fans’ understanding that their own invested interests are applicable to address meaningful issues, and a willingness to engage in public action. With 85% of the HPA volunteer staff being women, it seems only natural for the organization to address this issue. As elucidated by Bowers, speaking as a representative of the campaign, “when women are educated, there are healthier families, fewer community health problems, less poverty, and just more people equipped to solve the problems facing our planet today.”²⁸

As expected, congregations for the HPA are not restricted only to public protests. Several gatherings have been organized in order for the HPA volunteer staff to educate those fans that do not yet feel confident enough to participate in an action-oriented role. For this purpose, the HPA once again has drawn on the character of Hermione, this time to create the Granger Leadership Academy. Although it was created solely for the members of specific HPA chapters, the academy presently welcomes every person wishing to develop their leadership skills. Those who are willing to become activists can also complete a module at a Wizard Activist School, an educational entity created by the organization, which may later give

27. @RachelChang. “We all need a little magic. And a little Hermione in us. Also seen: Without Hermione, Harry would have died in Book One. #HarryPotter #withouthermione #womensmarch #womensmarch2018 #thefutureisfemale #equality #notmypresident #nyc @womensmarch @nycwomensmarch @TheHPAlliance.” Twitter, 21 Jan. 2018. 5:51am, <<https://twitter.com/RachelChang/status/955075341340594176>>.

28. Kate Bowers (thehpalliance) “#WithoutHermione: Support Education for Girls,” YouTube video, September 17, 2017, <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vdpfTIhdn2A&t>>.

them a chance to obtain certificates, ranging in classifications such as Visionary, Communications, Group Leadership, New Wizard Activist, or Event Planner. The skills acquired at this school are often advantageous for young activists and may provide a base necessary for applying for a volunteer staff position, in which activism is taken on a more serious level with each member having their own tasks and responsibilities. The Granger Leadership Academy provides an insightful opportunity to see how, as stated by Jenkins, fan activist practices largely thrive through existing fan practices, such as in-person celebrations, and to again reference Hills, the most dedicated fans seek outlets by which the text can progress in the absence of any new officially licensed material.

Aside from promoting leadership and further integration into the activist community by way of training seminars, keynote lectures, and social events, the Granger Leadership Academy also offers an opportunity to donate books for the Apparating Library, a giveaway that is a part of Accio Books, an ongoing campaign for the promotion of literacy. Accio Books, similar to the A World #WithoutHermione campaign, aims to spread literacy through collecting and donating books and building libraries in low-income communities. The name of the campaign originates from the summoning charm from the original story and is a metaphor intended to imply the use of magic, thus linking the HPA activist practices with those of Hogwarts wizards. This scenario invites a role-playing dynamic where each activist is encouraged to draw on the story's rules and thematic messages in order to both inspire and inform their participation, as well as develop their belief in the cause. As an example, fans can earn points for their house in the House Cup, a competition between the four houses of Gryffindor, Hufflepuff, Ravenclaw, and Slytherin. To further promote the cause and encourage participation, the HPA publicly uses their Twitter account to award points and tie these awards to the larger social initiative.²⁹

The contest, as well as its rules, is inspired by the original *Harry Potter* series, particularly the words of Professor Minerva McGonagall, one of the most respected characters in the story world:

While you are at Hogwarts, your triumphs will earn your House points, while any rule-breaking will lose House points. At the end of the year, the House with the most points is awarded the House cup, a great honor. I hope each of you will be a credit to whichever House becomes yours.³⁰

29. @TheHPAlliance. "100 points to Gryffindor! Or whatever your house is. What's your house, Cassandra? ☺ #thehpalliance.org/house_cup #NLLD17 #AccioBooks." Twitter, 3 May 2017, 3:34am, <<https://twitter.com/TheHPAlliance/status/859566878058008576?s=17>>.

30. J. K. Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* (Scholastic Press, 1998), 114.

Points can be earned in multiple ways, such as recruiting new members, promoting initiatives on social media, making YouTube videos, organizing events, or founding new chapters. By linking the story world with on-the-ground mobilization, the organization appears to emulate Dumbledore's Army, a secret cohort of Hogwarts students fighting against dark magic in the literary story. With the creation of the HPA being inspired by a prominent book series, it may seem natural for its members to feel passionate about reading. This is, in turn, yet another motivational reason for why its members appear so driven to help others gain access to books, as evidenced by Twitter user @SoloButNotHan, who wrote: "I'm SO CLOSE to my #AccioBooks fundraiser goal, just 5 \$10 donations away! Reaching that would mean so much to me!"³¹

The organization's stance to promote literacy no doubt includes specific attention being granted to the *Harry Potter* franchise, since it is the primary inspiration for their existence and activities. The main reason for such is simply because of the sincere belief in the messages that it provides. Dana Staves, an author at *Bookriot*, a blog featuring book-related news and reviews, has shared her own intimate experience about reading the *Harry Potter* series, interpreting its themes, yet also dealing with enthusiastic fans. In particular, she referenced how she received what initially appeared as aggression from the fans. In her own words:

Chalk all this up to the quality of Rowling's world, to the depth of people's love for Harry Potter. While I thought I was being dealt with harshly, while I cringed from being criticized for not reading them, while I sat through the sales pitch again and again, what people were really doing was showing me their love. They were sharing with me something deeper than a recommendation; they were inviting me to Hogwarts. They were passing along a chocolate frog for me to try. I finally read Harry Potter, and here's what happened: I got my Hogwarts letter. I walked the halls, and I put on the invisibility cloak, and I joined the class. And there's a special kinship in that shared reading experience that I haven't found with many other books – maybe any. And to get to experience that is a gift. So thanks for the begging and the shock and the anger, my friends. You were right.³²

Her testimony highlights an unmistakable zeal exuded by Harry Potter fans, which, although initially interpreted as intimidating, was in actuality their ardent desire to suggest that this author and book reviewer remain open to its offerings. If the abovementioned statement demonstrates anything, it is that numerous fans

31. @SoloButNotHan. "I'm SO CLOSE to my #AccioBooks fundraiser goal, just 5 \$10 donations away! Reaching that would mean so much to me! <<https://www.crowdrise.com/accio-books-20>> ... Twitter, 29 Apr 2017, 12:18am, <<https://twitter.com/SoloButNotHan/status/858067890691604480?s=17>>.

32. Dana Staves, "I finally read Harry Potter," *Bookriot*, last modified February 21, 2018, <<https://bookriot.com/2018/02/21/i-finally-read-harry-potter/>>.

possess a close relationship and a deep respect for the text and will go to great lengths to promote it. Because of this relationship, fans may equally feel the need to protect it and maintain its good name. Such is the case with the next HPA campaign.

As stated by Bowers, the HPA often relies upon an existing event to propel a campaign. Such was the case with Not in Harry's Name. Organized in 2010, the Not in Harry's Name campaign was the first stage of a nine-month *Deathly Hallows*-charged campaign intended to fight against prominent issues that paralleled with the seven Horcruxes from the original *Harry Potter* story. This particular campaign aimed to make *Harry Potter* branded chocolate frogs fair trade and was driven by Potterheads' motivation to preserve the dignity of the text and the character of Harry Potter.

In 2008, an HPA member drew the organization's attention to the fact that the cocoa used in the production of Harry Potter branded chocolate was most likely sourced by child slaves. From the fans' perspective, the *Harry Potter* series, a story about children, justice, and morality, could not be associated with violations of international child labor laws. To raise awareness of the issue, they began creating YouTube videos called muggle howlers in reference to letters containing urgent and angry messages in the fictional world. A great number of such videos were created in an attempt to address Warner Bros., the official distributor of the series, in order to express dissatisfaction with the company's policy and to persuade it to rely solely on fair trade chocolate. Fans made the following statements to voice their disappointment and to stand up for the story:

If there's one thing I learnt from Harry Potter is that the weapon we have is love. This is our weapon against greed, injustice, and evil. And when I think of child slavery, I think of all of those things. So yes, WB, I'm angry at you. I'm angry at you for using immoral business practices in the name of a book series that stands for everything opposite of that.³³

The muggle howler YouTube videos as well as the Twitter hashtag #NotInHarrysName played a substantial role in spreading awareness among fans and other activists, with the hope being that the substantial number of people involved and their unmistakable enthusiasm would garner the attention of Warner Bros. Twitter user @Franceskelley, for instance, offered a post demonstrative of this phenomenon: "so excited to be taking action for justice with @TheHPAlliance today. #notinharrysname"³⁴ Recognizing the need for communal unity and enthusiasm,

33. Maggie Needham (allshalledelight), "Muggle Howler," YouTube video, December 16, 2011, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bTAFSDf_GxI&feature=youtu.be>.

34. @Franceskelley. "so excited to be taking action for justice with @TheHPAlliance today. #notinharrysname." Twitter, 7 Feb. 2012, 11:33 pm, <<https://twitter.com/franceskelley/status/166982991934013440?s=17>>.

the HPA Communications Director, Lauren Bird suggested that “if we instead all stand up together as their fans, as their main consumer and audience base, and say that we expect better of them, that might wield some real power.”³⁵

To draw attention to the issue, volunteers gathered fans through organized Harry Potter themed flash mobs. Following one event, a journalist named Lacey Johnson observed how “nearly 100 people wearing boarding school uniforms, hooded cloaks, and pointy witch hats gathered at Columbus Circle and Central Park West in Manhattan recently. They spoke to one another using words like muggle, quidditch, and Voldemort.”³⁶ Such activities epitomize how the blending of the textual and the real acts as a unique moment where the story can provide guidance for how to confront pressing, real world issues that demand an immediate response. The driving force of each fan activists’ motivation was, of course, both the character of Harry Potter, who had always represented courage and virtue, as well as the desire to not have his name, and all that he represents, soiled. Therefore, they found it necessary to protect him, proclaiming that “maybe we can’t end child slavery altogether, but we can at least get Harry’s name out of it.”³⁷

The Not in Harry’s Name campaign can be considered especially noteworthy for the organization, for it relied not only on fans’ and volunteer staff’s devout participation, but also on the help of the author of the book series, J. K. Rowling. Being the creator and anointed protector of the narrative, she made a significant contribution to the success of the campaign by facilitating communication with Warner Bros. (she specifically asked WB to prove that their cocoa sourcing did not involve child labor). Moreover, being an authority figure for the fans, she may have served as further motivation for them to rally together and act. After four years of collective action of the HPA volunteers, fans, and J. K. Rowling, the campaign ended with a victory.

A World #WithoutHermione, Accio Books, and Not in Harry’s Name campaigns stand as prime examples of how an openness to being affected, in conjunction with investment in a media text, unveiled unique opportunities for people to tap into an array of communally focused energies and engage in existentially meaningful issues. In case of the HPA, the volunteers, being themselves *Harry Potter* aficionados, possesses an acute awareness of which metaphors are appropriate to spark motivation and encourage participation. Admirers of the book series,

35. Lauren Bird (thepalliance), “When Our Heroes Fail,” YouTube video, January 13, 2013, <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ub6l75MyReo&feature=youtu.be>>.

36. Lacey Johnson, “Fans Combine Fun and Social Activism For Harry Potter Premiere,” City Beats, 2010, <<http://archives.jrn.columbia.edu/2010-2011/citybeats.info/2010/fans-combine-fun-and-social-activism-for-harry-potter-premiere/index.html>>.

37. Kristina Horner (italktosnakes), “Sorry Harry Potter, we’re not done fighting,” YouTube video, February 1, 2013, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hAytce_XmY8&feature=youtu.be>.

willing to extend their fondness and devotion beyond the boundaries of the text, tend to follow the example of their favorite characters and fight against the world's injustices. Moreover, the passion for the story that each fan shares unites them, which thus contributes to the success of activism. As Bowers noted, "every person who comes to the HPA already has something in common with everyone they meet here. Everyone loves and geeks out about Harry Potter, which makes it easy to build bonds and work with folks who would otherwise be strangers."³⁸ Alyssa Rosenberg, a culture blogger for *The Washington Post*, noted: "It's a fascinating symbol of what activism might look like when it's animated by fiction rather than political parties and when fans form coalitions with devoted advocates."³⁹

These closing testimonials, which ultimately (and succinctly) recap the purpose, means of execution, and success of the Harry Potter Alliance, are indicative of a cooperative group of people united by common interests and causes. Searching more deeply, however, reveals, a group of people dwelling together, a contemporary *synoikismos* held together by the intersection of impassioned fans and social media platforms. For these fan activists, and even those who were strictly fans that transformed into activists via exposure to the HPA, a discernible attunement exists between the self and the environment. At this junction it should be apparent that these activists experienced what Dreyfus and Kelly referred to as *the sacred*. The numerous emotive responses, the irresistible drives to confront pressing issues, and the attunement achieved between individual, community, and environment provide a clear view of how these activists comprehended the existential implications of their being-in-the-world.

In our view, it is *poiēsis* that gathers the phenomenological horizon in such way as to clarify what is existentially meaningful; it is through *poiēsis* that Hermione Granger transforms from a profound fictional character to an apt vehicle capable of igniting social change, and it is through *poiēsis* that the struggle for women's rights, the fight against child labor, and promotion of literacy across borders transform from being merely comprehensible to confrontable and combatable. The affectual relationship each *Harry Potter* fan has with the text itself, the themes it explores, as well as an endless array of social issues, all gathered together in a way that provoked meaningful responses capable of not only being sustained, but nourished through communally driven cultivating practices. *Poiēsis* as a bringing-forth is what allows for us to shine at our very best; it is what allows

38. Kate Bowers, Email Interview, Nov. 23, 2017.

39. Alyssa Rosenberg, "How 'Harry Potter' fans won a four-year fight against child slavery," *The Washington Post*, last modified January 13, 2015, <https://www.washington-post.com/news/act-four/wp/2015/01/13/how-harry-potter-fans-won-a-four-year-fight-against-child-slavery/?utm_term=.c8bb9fee51c4>.

previous investments and a dedication to those with similar interests to manifest with clarity and thrust us into action. *Poiēsis* is the gathering moment that unveils the possibility to reinvigorate our sense of *Sorge* (care) in the world, to revive existential value in our lives by stimulating us to commit to our intimately held self-understanding and our being-there-in-place-alongside-others. Most importantly however, it unveils a traversable path, inviting us to become transformative agents in the unfolding of world, and to renew a sense of communal instilled confidence.

Parting Thoughts

Although this piece ultimately aimed to unveil how *poiēsis* is a critical component to consider when understanding successful social media led activism and mobilization, particularly if sustained over time, it equally aimed to raise questions concerning the role *poiēsis* plays in political protest and activism in a more general sense. Political action can only succeed if those driven to participate are able to trust how the world unfolds before them in order to assess how their involvement is, in essence, *cultivation* – the process of nurturing what one already deeply cares about, both individually and communally. Therefore, political action thus relies on an openness to affect and being affected, and a careful view towards the nebulous space between Dasein and world, the space of encounter whose threads neatly knit a path to confidently proceed. In the contemporary world where being has ostensibly been leveled, at least in Heidegger’s estimation, the necessity for the *meta-poietic* mindset, as suggested by Dreyfus and Kelly, is more critical than ever. In their estimation, “the task [...] is not to *generate* the meaning, but rather to *cultivate* [...] the skill for *discerning* the meanings that are already there.”⁴⁰ Human beings are permeated with affect and care about a whole host of things in the world. The charge before us, collectively, is to recover a heightened sense of our ongoing attunements with the world, specifically so that we can remain more receptive to the meaning it offers us, meaning that demands a response, and so that it can solicit us in such a way that draws us into existentially meaningful action.

40. Hubert Dreyfus and Sean Dorrance Kelly, *All Things Shining: Reading the Western Classics to Find Meaning in a Secular Age* (New York, NY: Free Press, 2011), 209.

