

'Hogfather', Ann Pars
(www.annpars.deviantart.com).



Death and a Pickled Onion: The construction of fan culture and fan identity in the Hogswatch celebration of Wincanton

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I have been a fan all my life. I have participated and displayed in a wide variety of fandoms for as long as I can remember. But only since I began my doctoral studies in folkloristics have I really reflected on my participation in fandom, and started to ask questions like: 'What is a fan?' or 'What is fandom?' Being a folklorist, I began to suspect that fandom is a form of folklore.

It was while working on my Master's thesis that I by chance stumbled on a particularly special display of fandom. Searching the internet, I discovered a shop trading exclusively in Discworld paraphernalia that happened to be located in Wincanton, Somerset. Finding the shop might have been exciting enough, but my interest was heightened when I learnt that the town of Wincanton sported an annual festivity known as Hogswatch.¹ Here was a town that seemed to celebrate a fictional midwinter fête from a fictional world, the Discworld, created by the English author Sir Terry Pratchett, whose Discworld series currently runs to 39 novels. I have been a fan of the Discworld since I was old enough to read, and there are millions of similar fans of all ages across the world. Together we form an assembly that can loosely be termed Discworld fans, and it is this form of fandom I want to explore here, specifically during Wincanton's celebration of Hogswatch, in which I participated as an observer and fan in 2010, 2011 and 2012. The purpose of the article is to demonstrate how fandom culture is constructed by means of intertext and context, and is contingent upon the construction of *common sense*, which is itself contingent on a *communal stock of knowledge*. My fieldwork for this article was made possible with the financial help of the Swedish Literature Society in Finland.

Concepts and theory

Before I take you to Wincanton, some central concepts and the theoretical perspectives need clarification. Let us start with folklore. A definition of folklore I've always found to be concise, veracious and relatively uncomplicated is Dan Ben-Amos' definition of folklore as 'artistic communication in small groups'.² Ben-Amos recognises that this communication

entails something more than just plain communication; he calls it 'artistic'.³ Moreover, he identifies that the communication takes place in a 'small group', or between people who are 'part of the same reference group'.⁴ This definition also hints at the etymological roots of 'folklore'.⁵ The 'small group' Ben-Amos speaks of could be viewed as the 'folk' and, consequently, the 'artistic communication' would then be the 'lore'. Therefore, folklore can be viewed as a form of communal communication within a 'reference group'⁶ used to convey a group identity.

A second central concept for this study is fandom. Today there are two conflicting schools of fandom research, one psychological and one social constructivist. The psychological school defines and debates fandom in terms of affection and sensibility. Scholars like Lawrence Grossberg and Matt Hills define fandom through the fans' affective relationship with the object of fandom. In Grossberg's definition, fandom operates on affect and affective investments,⁷ in other words, fandom is seen as a result of the emotions and desires of the fan. Matt Hills is another psychologically inspired fandom scholar. In his book *Fan Cultures*, Hills furthers Grossberg's definition and introduces the term 'affective play',⁸ whose definition includes two central elements: an affective emotional attachment towards the object of fandom and an element of play with said affection. Henry Jenkins in turn views fandom as a socially constructed phenomenon. In *Fans, Bloggers and Gamers*, he sees fandom as part of a bigger map of different social affiliations. What distinguishes fandom from other social affiliations is the participating and constructing elements of fandom. Jenkins sees fandom as a participatory culture with an active audience.⁹ In my view, fandom is a product of both an affective relationship between the fan and the object of fandom, as well as a participatory social affiliation. Like Hills I acknowledge a playful component based on affection, but I also subscribe to the idea that fandom is constructed and a participatory social affiliation.

This article also uses the American folklorist Susan Stewart's theories of intertextuality, common sense and nonsense. Stewart understands intertextuality as a borrowing process between two 'domains of meaning',¹⁰ and divides her world into two universes of discourse: the common sense and the nonsense world.¹¹ The common sense world is our perception or organisation of reality, which is contingent on 'the stock of knowledge at hand',¹² or 'the communal knowledge of a certain group'. The common sense world is everything we take for granted as reality or the *ordinary*.¹³ Common sense also contains traditions within its domain because 'Tradition lends us a set of expectations [...] for evaluating what will count and not count in forming the horizon in any situation',¹⁴ and so helps in indexing our perception of reality.

'Nonsense', on the other hand, is a universe of discourse in which reality is disorganised and rewritten.¹⁵ This is of course what fiction does. The relationship between universes of discourse is intertextual. Stewart believes that 'The concept of intertextuality relies on two basic assumptions: first, that various domains of meaning are contingent upon one another and second, that the common-sense world may be considered as a base, on which other provinces of meaning are formed.'¹⁶ This implies that a fictional universe is contingent on and derived

Fig. 1



Fig. 3



Fig. 2



Fig. 4



Fig. 1 'The Hogfather', illustrated by Paul Kidby © Paul Kidby.
 Fig. 2 'Death masking as the Hogfather', illustrated by Paul Kidby © Paul Kidby.
 Fig. 3 Hogfather (photo by Jakob Löfgren).
 Fig. 4 The auctioning of the sacred pickled onion (photo by Otto Chriek).

from its intertextual connections to common sense. In contrast, concrete human events, Stewart suggests, are dependent on their situation and therefore have a contextually determined meaning¹⁷ 'determined through interpretive procedures that have evolved through prior experience with "contexts" or "texts"'.¹⁸ In short, common sense derives its meaning from context and fiction derives its meaning from intertext.

To summarise, Stewart's thoughts on intertextual relationships draw on two separate ideas. First, that our understanding of the connection between folklore and literature merits a division into universes of discourse. Second, that an intertextual relationship occurs in a continuing process of borrowing and transforming,¹⁹ which results in the meaning of fiction being dependent on its connection to reality. In addition, Stewart suggests that the meaning of human action is contextually derived. By applying Stewart's theories to the collected fan-folklore I aim to illustrate two things: (1) the complexity in the intertextual relationship between Discworld and the fan-folklore; (2) that the intertextual and contextual constructs of the fan-folklore can be described as 'making common sense'.

Robert de Caro and Rosan Augusta Jordan describe how Stewart's idea of intertextuality as a borrowing process works when exercised by an author. The process is called 're-situation'.²⁰ De Caro and Jordan suggest that borrowing and transforming is a conscious act by an author²¹ whenever they pick a text (be it an actual text, imitation of form or a plot adaptation) and use it in their own work of literature.²² In this way folklore is re-situated from a socio-cultural discourse into a literary discourse. However, as certain traditions are borrowed from Pratchett's fiction into the Hogswatch celebration, it can be seen that re-situation also works the other way round: *from* a literary discourse *into* a socio-cultural discourse; in other words the participants deliberately pick parts of fictional folklore and re-situate them in a new socio-cultural context.

Stewart's distinction between the notions of 'context' and 'intertext' is no longer obvious today due to the development of textual theories within culture studies, but I have chosen to keep the distinction because both are apparent in the Hogswatch celebration. Because of the celebration's quality as a human event, the parts that are not apparently intertextual will be described as contextual, in what linguistics would call 'social' or 'socio-cultural context'.²³ Social context is constituted by 'for instance participants, the immediate concrete, physical surroundings including time and location'.²⁴ Context is connected to social action and a construction of common sense. Furthermore, it can be seen as both a process and a product (as described by, for example, Anita Fetzer).²⁵ This description resonates well with Stewart's understanding of context as 'interpretive procedures'.²⁶

Intertext and context in this article are both considered procedures of communication, and both are needed to illustrate differences in the construction of meaning during Hogswatch. I hope to show that 'what is communicated' is fandom common sense.²⁷

Hogswatch in Wincanton

With the theoretical perspective in mind, the place and the celebrations to be studied can now be introduced. First mentioned in the Domesday Book, Wincanton is a small town in Somerset with about 5,000 inhabitants. It is known for the local racecourse and is an important stopover on the main route from London to Essex.²⁸ In 2001 Bernard Pearson and his family opened the Discworld Emporium on the High Street in Wincanton.²⁹ The shop trades in Discworld paraphernalia and artwork made by Mr Pearson and his family. Soon after the shop was established, Wincanton gained a reputation among Discworld fans as a destination worthy of a visit. In 2002 the town council twinned Wincanton with the Discworld city of Ankh-Morpork,³⁰ and took the connection one step further in 2007 when it announced the streets in a new housing project in the town were to be named after street names from Discworld, such as 'Treacle Mine Road' and 'Peach Pie Street'.³¹

The relationship between Discworld and Wincanton is of course encouraging for the town's economy. The former mayor of Wincanton explains in a *Daily Mail* article that 'The association with Discworld works extremely well for our town, helping to boost the local economy. I even know of three families who moved to Wincanton because of this quirky connection.'³² All of the official connections to Ankh-Morpork and the Discworld Emporium have made this small picturesque Somerset town a hub for Discworld fandom all year round, but especially during the Hogswatch weekend.

Hogswatch is the midwinter festival of Discworld,³³ and is clearly a fictional adaptation of a British or northern European-style midwinter festival. Hogswatch is in other words the result of Pratchett's re-situating Christmas from its socio-cultural context to a fictional one. Terry Pratchett and Jacqueline Simpson describe the reason for celebrating Hogswatch on Discworld, in their book *The Folklore of the Discworld*, as follows:

In the bleak midwinter, frosty winds make moan. People,
on the other hand, makes as much loud and cheerful noise as
they can [...] It's a way of telling the sun what you expect of him –
'Rise and shine, Sun, start to grow strong again, drive back the
Ice Giants, bring us the warmth of Spring.' The Sun needs a little
encouragement, what ever astronomers may say.³⁴

Hogswatch on Discworld has its beginning in pagan rituals and animal sacrifice with the purpose of making the sun rise the following morning.³⁵ It then undergoes a modernisation, from 'pagan' to 'civilised': the animal sacrifice is forgotten – it's just not civilised to engage in ritual blood sacrifice. Because of this civilisation process the personification of Hogswatch, the Hogfather (Fig. 1),³⁶ also becomes modernised. He goes from being a simple boar meant for sacrifice, to a jolly, boar-faced fat man who delivers presents to kids. The motivation of his existence is the same as before, a kind of sacrifice to make the sun rise the next morning, but

the sacrifice itself has shifted from the pagan blood sacrifice to the act of giving presents. On Discworld, gifts have to be distributed by the Hogfather putting them in stockings by the fireplace on Hogswatch night. This is done in order to maintain belief in the Hogfather. Without belief in him on Hogswatch morning the sun will not rise because a sacrifice has not been made.

The premise of the novel *Hogfather* is: what if the ritual of gift-distribution is hindered? The main plot goes as follows: the 'Auditors of reality'³⁷ hate humankind because they have irrational beliefs, such as the Hogfather. In an attempt to make the universe work according to logic, the Auditors try to have the Hogfather assassinated the evening before Hogswatch. This task is to be carried out by eradicating belief in the Hogfather. What the Auditors do not know is that in order for the sun to rise the next morning the Hogfather needs to do his rounds. The one being in the universe that realises the Auditors' plan is Death, as it is his job to collect all dying souls, including the Hogfather's. When Death realises the Hogfather is about to die (and the implications of this), he sets out to save belief in the Hogfather by impersonating him and doing his rounds. Death succeeds and ends up saving the Discworld (Fig. 2).

This is the story that inspired the Hogswatch celebrations in Wincanton and is in a sense a re-situation in reverse, where the Christmas-inspired celebration in the book is brought to life in Wincanton. Everything started about a decade ago when a group of friends of the Pearsons decided to have a little get-together in Wincanton. This informal gathering of friends and fans of Discworld was named after the midwinter festival from Pratchett's works of fiction: Hogswatch. Since then the celebration has evolved. It is organised by the fans and the Discworld Emporium staff (using the Discworld Emporium website).³⁸ Today the Wincanton Hogswatch celebration takes place the last weekend in November or the first weekend in December. This is the official celebration organised by the fans. Many fans stay in Wincanton for several days in connection to the Hogswatch weekend, which is mainly set in three locations on the High Street: the Discworld Emporium, the *Dolphin* inn and the pub *The Bear*.

The participants of the Hogswatch celebration are an assorted mix of people. The youngest participant I have encountered was a couple of months old and the oldest were in their eighties. The participants hail from all different socio-economic backgrounds. These demographic descriptions point to the fact that the one thing the participants of the celebration have in common is the *celebration itself*, and a love for the Discworld of course.

The Hogswatch celebration must contain certain components to be traditional. These are (among other things):

(1) *A kick-off ceremony.* The 2011 kick-off ceremony took the form of a sketch and an initiation into 'The Ankh-Morpork Guild of Thieves Wincanton branch'. Everyone had to swear an oath promising that if they stole anything they had to leave a receipt. This is a direct intertextual relation to the books as members of Ankh-Morpork's Guild of Thieves are licensed to steal but always have to leave a receipt.

(2) *The Hogfather (or rather Death masking as the Hogfather) giving out presents* (Fig. 3). The Hogfather's visit is the Hogswatch equivalent of Father Christmas's visit on Christmas. It is organised as a secret Santa kind of event. The members of the Emporium internet forum set up a list of participants some time before Hogswatch and then draw a 'secret Santa' (or Hogfather as it were) to buy and wrap a gift for another participant. All the gifts are put in the Hogfather's bag, and the Hogfather distributes them in an event during Hogswatch. The gift doesn't necessarily have to relate to Discworld and are often the same kind of gifts you would get for Christmas.

(3) *Hogswatch sausage supper and open mic evening*. The sausage supper is the official Hogswatch meal. It consists of sausages and mashed potatoes. The meal itself needs to be pre-booked and is consumed at one of the pubs in Wincanton. The open mic evening takes place after dinner and is an event in which anybody can take to the stage in *The Bear's* back room and entertain with songs, dance, sketches, poetry and so on.

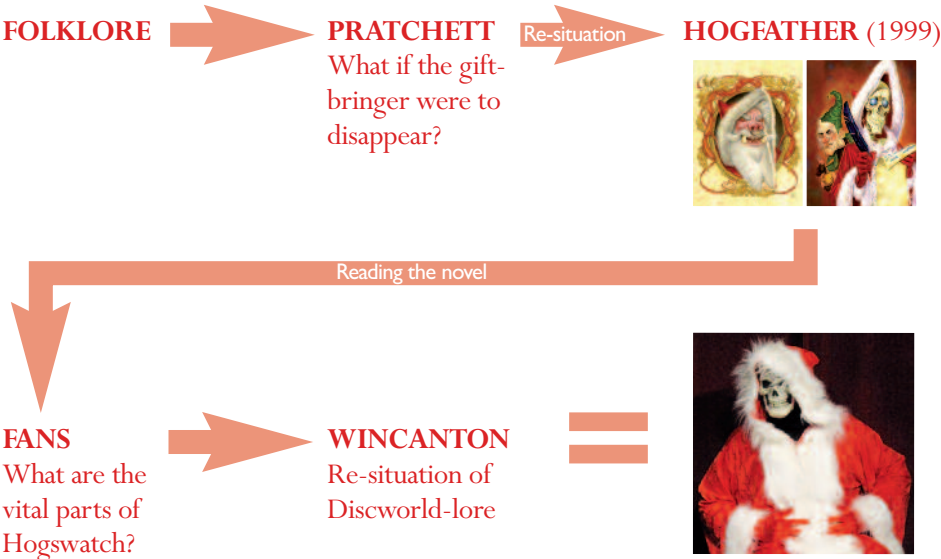
(4) *The charity auction*. Another tradition surrounding Hogswatch is the annual charity auction. Discworld paraphernalia and whatever people put in the auction box are for sale. In 2011 the auction brought in just short of £3,000 to be distributed among charities, both local and national.

(5) *The traditional send off*. The last part of the traditional Hogswatch celebration is the send off, where Bernard Pearson holds a long 'thank you' speech, followed by the words: 'And now ladies and gentlemen ... PISS OFF!'

The intertextual common sense of Death

Several of the above described events can be understood from the perspective of intertextual common sense, for example the gift-giving ceremony, which is organised by the fans, for the fans. The distributing of gifts during a midwinter holiday is not specific to Hogswatch; in Wincanton, however, it is traditional during Hogswatch for *Death* to deliver the midwinter gifts. This might strike the uninformed as odd since the traditional gift-distributor on Discworld is the *Hogfather*. If the goal of the fans is to recreate an accurate Hogswatch celebration from Discworld, the 'correct procedure' would be to emulate the Hogfather giving out gifts. The reason for not doing so is twofold. Firstly, the Hogfather in the book never makes any public appearances. His gift-distribution is of a more subtle nature. Like Santa Claus or Father Christmas in the tradition of the Anglophone world, the Hogfather distributes gifts by descending and ascending through the chimneys of Discworld, leaving gifts in a stocking hung by the fireplace. The only public appearance by any gift-bringer in any Discworld novel is made by Death disguised as the Hogfather, in an Ankh-Morpork department store called Crumley's Emporium, in an attempt to boost belief in the Hogfather. Due to the nature of the Hogfather's gift-bringing, intertextual common sense suggests that he could not appear during the Wincanton celebration either.

Secondly, the gift-giving ceremony in Wincanton is re-situated to suit reality. The re-situation process here starts with the re-situating of British Christmas-tradition, a form of folklore, into the Discworld by Pratchett. The Hogfather's method of gift-distribution is derived from British tradition, and Pratchett also writes a pastiche of commercial displays during Christmas in the scene where Death gives out free gifts in Crumley's Emporium's grotto. This scene is subsequently cherry-picked by the fans and re-situated into the Wincanton celebration. The re-situation process can be illustrated by the following flowchart:



The key to understanding how the intertextual elements of the Wincanton Hogswatch celebration work lies in the fact that the participants constitute a 'small group' of people and the gift-giving ceremony can be defined as 'artistic communication'.³⁹ To understand why it is meaningful to have Death as gift-bringer for the event, we have to consider how the intertext works as common sense (common sense in the sense of common knowledge or what everybody already knows),⁴⁰ which is contingent on the stock of knowledge at hand. A big part of this stock of knowledge of the small group we can call 'participants of Hogswatch' is derived from the Discworld novels.

Without this communal stock of knowledge, having a character such as Death giving out presents would be nonsensical.⁴¹ The communal stock of knowledge transforms this nonsense so that, for the participants of the Wincanton Hogswatch celebration, it makes common sense that Death brings gifts. The understanding behind Death as gift-distributor is dependent on intertext and only meaningful for the fans because of it.

The context of a pickled onion

Not all ceremonies and traditions of the Hogswatch celebration derive meaning intertextually. The subsequent example shows that some of its traditions have a contextually derived meaning. The event described here took place during the Hogswatch charity auction on 27 November 2011.

Picture a charity auction in an English rural pub. The auctioneer's helper holds up a small jar of brown liquid. The auctioneer tells the public that the liquid contains one pickled onion and that the jar, the liquid and the onion are seven years old. He then informs the bidders that it is not for sale, but they may bid on the right to lease the jar for a period of one year. Then the bidding war starts. The jar ultimately brings in the price of £100 (Fig. 4).

Without the proper context the act of leasing a seven-year-old pickled onion may be viewed as a nonsensical act. Before I tell the explanatory narrative I want to add that this is not merely the auction of a seven-year-old pickled onion. What is actually auctioned out is a seven-year-old sacred pickled onion. The story told by Dr Pat Harkin when the auction takes place goes something like this:

Ladies and Gentlemen! The Sacred Pickled Onion! In this jar there swims one pickled onion and on the jar is a label that says: 'This jar contains a Sacred Pickled Onion, grown and pickled by Mr. Terry Pratchett himself.' Now there is a story behind this. About seven years ago Terry gave Bernard a jar of pickled onions for Hogswatch. Bernard proceeds to eat all but one pickled onion. Then Bernard, knowing how to make money out of anything, puts a label on the jar that says: 'This jar contains a Sacred Pickled Onion, grown and pickled by Mr. Terry Pratchett himself', and enters the jar in the charity auction. Well, well, the jar is sold. The next year the jar is put back in the auction. After some discussion Bernard and I decide that, from now on you are only allowed to lease the jar for a period of one year. So how much do I get for the Sacred Pickled Onion? [Proceeds to auction it out.]⁴²

The explanatory narrative provides the proper context of the act of auctioning out the onion. It provides a contextual stock of knowledge and therefore transforms the act into common sense. The act itself is something of an inside joke, needing a group of people for whom the joke is meaningful.⁴³ The auctioning of the pickled onion is a prime example of human events deriving meaning from context.⁴⁴ Without the communal stock of knowledge, the auctioning of the jar is nonsensical. In order for the jar to fetch a price of £100, the buyer must understand the joke; he must agree that leasing a seven-year-old pickled onion, in the context of Hogswatch, makes common sense.⁴⁵ Context is determined 'through prior experience with

"contexts" or "texts":⁴⁶ In this instance the participants need to have prior experience with the explanatory narrative and the auction itself, to understand that the act of selling and buying the onion is a tradition of the participants.

Other ancillary traditions are now forming around the sacred pickled onion. One of these traditions is to auction out a smaller, empty jar marked: 'This jar contains the spirit of a sacred pickled onion'. The reason for this is that one year the lease-holder of the sacred pickled onion forgot the jar at home. The same rules apply to the smaller 'spirit of a sacred pickled onion' jar, but it is considerably cheaper. The price for one year's lease was £20 in 2011.

At the 2011 auction Terry Pratchett stood up and took the microphone. He proclaimed that in the course of British history garters have been dropped and therefore there is an Order of the Garter. He proclaimed that henceforth shall the renters of the Holy Pickled Onion be revered members of 'The Loyal Order of the Pickle' and be called 'Knight of the Onion'. Pratchett then commissioned Bernard Pearson to manufacture sashes, medallions and a keepsake shrine to be rented together with the sacred Pickled Onion. So the 26th of November 2011 saw the birth of 'The Loyal Order of the Pickle'.

These two latter pickle-related traditions illustrate well how fan culture works. Once you have a tradition, it can and does evolve. To understand the 'spirit of a pickled onion' or 'The Loyal Order of the Pickle', you first have to understand the context of the first pickled onion tradition. The concept of a sacred pickled onion has to become part of the communal stock of knowledge at hand administered by the explanatory narrative in the context of the charity auction, and therefore it makes common sense. The stock of knowledge is contingent on the context of the celebration, so its meaning is derived contextually.

Common sense, folklore and the identity of fandom

The fact that the meaning of the Hogswatch celebration is derived both contextually and intertextually is essential to our understanding of fan identity. In the above examples the group in question is the participants of the celebration, and the artistic communication, or the folklore, is the gift-giving ceremony and the traditions surrounding the sacred pickled onion. Folklore is communicated within a group; it is their stock of knowledge at hand. Whenever there is a small group with a communal stock of knowledge, there will indisputably exist people that do not possess it and therefore are not a part of the same small group. The stock of knowledge or folklore is a marker of communal identity, i.e., folklore defines the group's identity vis-à-vis others. The construction of the Hogswatch stock of knowledge is linked to the construction of the participants' identity as fans of Discworld.

In his book *The Power of Identity*, Manuel Castells examines the construction of identity in a way that has proven useful when studying fans as well: 'Identity is people's source of meaning and experience. [...] By identity, as it refers to social actors, I understand the process of construction of meaning on the basis of a cultural attribute, or a related set of cultural attributes.'¹⁴⁷ 'Identity', in Castells' definition, is contingent on social actors much like folklore is contingent on the small group and can be viewed as a process of *construction of meaning*, much like the construction of common sense described in my examples.

One of the forms of construction is 'Project identity: when social actors, on the basis of whatever cultural materials are available to them, build a new identity that redefines their position in society.'¹⁴⁸ Castells observes that identity has symbolic content which constructs its meaning. As I see it, fan identity can be understood as project identity.

The symbolic content in the Hogswatch celebration is the expression of the communal stock of knowledge constructed for it. This gives the events meaning and defines participants as part of the same small group, a *collective identity*. The identity is constructed from cultural materials available to the fans, which is, besides the usual contextual understanding of human situation, the intertextual knowledge of Discworld novels. If the collective identity constructed is to be recognised as fandom, the 'project identity' must derive symbolic content from the Discworld novels. Otherwise the fans' identity as 'fans of Discworld' could not be communicated within and outside the group. The fans display the intertextual, rather than contextual, connection with Discworld in order to define themselves as fans.

Human situation derives its meaning contextually and the Hogswatch celebration is of course a human situation. The tradition concerning the sacred pickled onion could have originated in a context other than Discworld fandom. The primary reason people participate in the celebration (when asked about it) is simply: 'It is a laugh'. Hogswatch participants are a group of people that already have a lot of intertextual inside jokes, as well as a communal sense of humour, so Bernard Pearson's idea to auction out a pickled onion was received within the group as a fun idea because of their collective humorous disposition. However, it has evolved as a part of the identity-confirming common stock of knowledge.

This confirmation of identity is effected by a person understanding the intertextual common sense and also the context. When a person understands the intertextual common sense behind the gift-giving ceremony, that person belongs to a group designated as 'Discworld fans'. If the person also understands the contextual common sense of the traditions concerning the pickled onion, that person is not only a 'Discworld fan', but also a part of the Wincanton Hogswatch celebrators. If an onlooker does not understand why Death is the gift-distributor, they do not possess the intertextual common sense: they have not read the Discworld books and can therefore not be a Discworld fan. Without the

understanding of the intertext, a person will not be part of the group whose identity is confirmed by understanding it. This is of course true of the contextually derived meaning as well. In both cases the result of not understanding leads the onlooker to view the traditions as nonsense.⁴⁹

If a group achieves a shared stock of knowledge they can draw from it to make events like the ones described above. In the case of fandom there already exists a common stock of knowledge, the intertextual knowledge, and so traditions can be created that make common sense for fans. The traditions in Wincanton make sure that the meaning of the tradition is intertextually bound, to stand out as a unique tradition that can be properly understood by a Discworld fan. The contextual traditions then further the uniqueness of the fandom to define the fan-group that has been to a Wincanton Hogswatch (or read this article). However, it should be stressed that the construction of intertextually bound traditions in Wincanton is of course not necessarily fabricated with the whole sense-making process in mind.

Fan-made traditions, with intertextually derived meaning, are not unique to Discworld-fandom. The reason for building traditions and events on intertextual common sense or with a base in fiction is to celebrate a fandom and to confirm one's identity as a fan. Fandom is a project identity, and fiction-fandom is, I argue, a deliberate project identity with foundation in specific cultural materials.

Shifting common sense; fandom as a project identity

Castells' description suggests that a project identity is an identity over which the social actors have control regarding how it is constructed, and therefore perceived.⁵⁰ Project identity is a chosen identity made on the basis of available cultural material. In my interpretation it is a result of an understanding of the common stock of knowledge.

The choice Castells describes is then, I argue, a choice to accept something as common sense. Furthermore, fandom is a project identity you choose to express more vigorously at certain events and certain times. A Discworld fan does not necessarily act out his or her fandom as potently during the rest of the year as they do in Wincanton during Hogswatch. The American popular culture scholar Lawrence Grossberg has described fandom as a 'sensibility':

A sensibility is a particular form of engagement or mode of operation. It identifies the specific sorts of effects that the elements within a context can produce; it defines the possible relationships between texts and audiences located within its spaces. [...] This assumes that human life is multidimensional, and texts may, in various contexts, connect into certain dimensions more powerfully than others.⁵¹

The personal choice of project identity consists of the switching or emphasising of a certain kind of common sense at a certain time. As a person can have several different identities, s/he must also have different understandings of what makes common sense for each identity. This is what Grossberg means when he speaks of human life as multidimensional.

Imagine a frequent participant of the Wincanton Hogswatch celebration. This person has attended four Wincanton Hogswatch celebrations. This fan therefore possesses the contextual stock of knowledge related to the celebrations. Apart from the act of reading Pratchett's novels, the fandom does not show in any other explicit fashion. In sum, this person is an ordinary fan of the Discworld. In everyday life, this person would not dream of purchasing groceries that have gone bad, yet when in Wincanton during Hogswatch it makes sense to bid on a seven-year-old pickled onion: why?

What effectively happens when a fan enters the situation of Hogswatch in Wincanton is a shift of common sense. Where certain things in everyday life are not sensible,⁵² they are during the Hogswatch celebration. This shift of common sense or emphasis on another common sense is an expression of fandom. To alter their perception of what makes common sense, or what is normal and ordinary behaviour in the situation, Discworld fans must have a shared stock of knowledge. When entering Wincanton, fans, including myself, take part in the project identity known as being a Discworld fan. A different set of rules is set for what is ordinary behaviour in the everyday and at Hogswatch, and to accept the Hogswatch set of rules is to become a participant. In effect, the change in sensibility constitutes a project identity.⁵³

Conclusions

This article aimed to illustrate how the Hogswatch in Wincanton is constructed and given meaning by intertextual and contextual constructs of a common stock of knowledge. This in turn was connected to a discussion of fan identity as a form of project identity, essential to which is the way a shared stock of knowledge is understood to be common sense. Hogswatch could of course be investigated from many other perspectives; the celebration is as complex as any other, and I will continue my research in subsequent studies with the help of (and great fun with) a fan group I am grateful to be a part of: Wincanton Hogswatch celebrators. I will continue my research because for me and other fans, and now for the reader as well, it makes common sense.



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20. Robert de Caro and Rosan Augusta Jordan, *Re-situating Folklore: Folk Contexts and Twentieth-Century Literature and Art* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2004), pp.5-6.
21. Ibid., 'writers frequently and more or less self-consciously have adapted and incorporated the forms and content of folklore in creating literary works'.
22. Idem, pp.6-7
23. Anita Fetzter, *Context and Appropriateness: Micro Meets Macro* (Philadelphia: J. Benjamins Pub. Co., 2007), p.xxi.
24. Idem, p.xviii.
25. Ibid., 'context is assigned the dual status of process and product. The dynamic outlook is based on (1) the premise of indexicality of social action, and (2) the (joint) construction of a common context.'
26. Stewart (1979), p.10.
27. Idem, 'reality or the ordinary', p.8.
28. Information from Wincanton town council website <http://www.wincantontowncouncil.co.uk> 24/1/12.
29. www.discworldemporium.com 24/1/12.
30. <http://www.wincantontowncouncil.co.uk> 24/1/12.
31. www.discworldemporium.com 24/1/12.
32. 'A magic idea: Town uses Sir Terry Pratchett's Discworld as inspiration for street names', from *Daily Mail* website: www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1167987/A-magic-idea-Town-uses-Sir-Terry-Pratchetts-Discworld-inspiration-street-names.html 24/1/12.
33. The Discworld is described in Pratchett's books as an round disc atop of four elephants who stand on a giant turtle floating through space (see, for instance, Terry Pratchett and Jacqueline Simpson, *The Folklore of the Discworld* (New York: Doubleday, 2008), p.6).

34. Idem, p.340.
35. Idem, p.348; also Pratchett (1999).
36. The Discworld equivalent of Father Christmas, see Fig. 1 (from paulkidby.net 23/1/12).
37. The Auditors are described as 'the Auditors of Reality, who see it as their job to make sure the universe functions smoothly and efficiently, without unpredictable interruptions [...] They are the enemies of all imagination, creativity and emotion, and hence of life itself.' Pratchett and Simpson (2008), pp.34-5.
38. www.discworldemporium.com.
39. Ben-Amos (1982), p.14.
40. Stewart (1979), pp.8-9.
41. Idem, 'a domain of "could not happen"', p.13.
42. This is not a direct quote but a retelling of the story that I heard Dr Harkin tell during the auction of the Sacred Pickled Onion on 27 November 2011.
43. See the definition of 'folklore' in Ben-Amos (1982), p.14.
44. Stewart (1979), p.9.
45. Or perfectly ordinary behaviour.
46. Stewart (1979), p.10.
47. Manuel Castells, *The Power of Identity* (2nd edn) (Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), p.6.
48. Idem, pp.7-8.
49. I.e., 'not real' or 'should not happen', Stewart (1979), p.13.
50. Castells (2009), p.8.
51. Lawrence in Lisa A. Lewis (ed.) (1992), p.54.
52. Or it should not happen.
53. 'When social actors, on the basis of whatever cultural materials are available to them, build a new identity that redefines their position in society'. Castells (2009), p.8.