TWC Transformative Works and Cultures

Praxis

Transformative (h)activism: Breast cancer awareness and the *World of Warcraft* Running of the Gnomes

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[0.1]   *Abstract*—Players of the massively multiplayer online role-playing game *World of Warcraft* (*WoW*) are accustomed to a transformative culture that appropriates off-line events and personas into virtual-world representations inside of the game. Following this culture, players have transformed an off-line event—the Race for the Cure, to benefit breast cancer charities—into an online event called the Running of the Gnomes with parameters and participation properties appropriate for the virtual world. This transformative event is a disruptive form of civil disobedience including elements of hacktivism. Though the event conforms to the game's culture and rules, the mass collective action of the Running of the Gnomes disrupts the player experience by flooding the game's chat boxes with messages about an off-line concern (breast cancer) and also disrupts the game itself by crashing the server through the sheer volume of player participation. This disruption is embraced as an integral part of the event and is one of the primary causes for the event's success as a fundraising activity.

[0.2]   *Keywords*—Fan community; Hacktivism; Video games

1. Introduction

[1.1]   Rebecca Carlson (2009) challenged fandom scholars to move beyond concrete creative productions like fan fiction and fan vids by considering digital games as a site of transformative works. She suggested, "Video games, as well as gaming and play more broadly conceived and experienced, demand that as both researchers and fans, we explore questions that continue to challenge our preconceptions—and fears—about the ways people use, negotiate, and appropriate technology and media." In this work, I take up Carlson's suggestion and explore the ways that players of *World of Warcraft* (*WoW*), a massively multiplayer online role-playing game, have appropriated a famous off-line event and transformed it into an online phenomenon that raises awareness for an important cause through collective action and (h)activism.

[1.2]   The phenomenon I discuss is the Running of the Gnomes (RotG) event, an in-game charity event hosted by a team of organizers and players of *WoW* to benefit breast cancer research. I describe its beginnings as a transformation of an off-line event, the Race for the Cure organized by the Susan G. Komen Foundation, and its transformation over seven years into a (h)activist event. The transformative work is not only the event itself, but also the game space during the event; the enactment of a breast cancer charity race in *WoW* changed the environment from an immersive fantasy-style world to a place with tangible links to real-world issues, where concerns for women and health take center stage and personal stories are needed and valued. The event's disruption of the game space is transformative, existing at the intersection of collective activism and disruptive hacktivism, or (h)activism.

[1.3]   Here I first describe the event itself and its history, then I describe how the event is an example of transformative activism that fits into the ecology of *WoW,* and

finally I describe how its staging in the game acted to transform the game itself, as an act of (h)activism.

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2. The history of the Running of the Gnomes

[2.1]   The RotG began in 2009. At the time, I was working on my participant-observation ethnography of the *WoW* guild <SeeD>, the field research site for my dissertation on communication strategies and identity in online games (Collister 2013). The ethnography was done in the style of Boellstorff (2008); I participated in online events and gatherings while conducting interviews with members of the community via Ventrilo, a voice-over-IP program favored by members of the guild. A chat log was recorded using the /chatlog function built into *WoW* and permission to use it was gained from members of the guild being studied. During my research period, members of the guild decided to participate in Breast Cancer Awareness Month (October) with a symbolic tribute: the changing of the guild's tabard color from blue to pink. To accompany this change and spread knowledge about the event, guild members posted information about breast cancer screenings and other information on the guild's Web-based forums. Screenshots were taken of guild members sporting their pink tabards during events, and an in-game giveaway was orchestrated for members who were seen in their pink tabards during the month.

[2.2]   In 2010, the race component of the event was founded: guild members created new level 1 characters, pink-haired gnomes sporting pink guild tabards, and raced them from the *WoW* city of Stormwind through dangerous countryside to Booty Bay. The winner of the event was awarded an in-game prize. The first race had approximately 80 participants. This event was not the first of its kind; level 1 races of many varieties have existed in online games even before *WoW.* Guilds in the online game *EverQuest* held level 1 races for a variety of reasons and purposes, and they are mentioned on message boards such as Allakhazam's EverQuest forum (http://everquest.allakhazam.com/forum.html?forum=1&mid=1088206164119934440). In *WoW* specifically, many level 1 races predate the RotG. One example is the Hogger raid, in which a 40-person raid group of level 1 characters attempt to defeat the in-game enemy known as Hogger (note 1). Pink-haired gnomes were included in some level 1 races, such as the 2009 event on the Sargeras server that awarded the winner a free pizza (http://seriouslycasual.org/forums/viewtopic.php?p=4136&sid=8feb6754247ed42be118544a3a9c0894). Using level 1 characters to take on a seemingly impossible task was thus a familiar element of the game's culture.

[2.3]   In 2011, the organizers of the event (including myself) decided to go more public with the race and solicit donations in conjunction with it. Modeling the event on the popular Race for the Cure (http://ww5.komen.org/raceforthecure/) organized by the Susan G. Komen Foundation, they suggested a "small change" pledge to the Foundation: players who could afford to pledged an amount that reflected the number of participants. For example, a donor could pledge to donate a nickel for every gnome who raced. In practice, most players capped their pledge at a certain amount. For example, one pledged "ten cents per gnome up to $50," meaning that if 400 gnomes did the run, the donor would give $40, but if 1,000 gnomes did the run, they would give $50.

[2.4]   In 2012, after many participants expressed concern over the spending habits of the Komen Foundation, the organizers decided to change the RotG's charity to the Cleveland Clinic's "Pink Vaccine" research program to find a preventative vaccine for breast cancer, led by Dr. Vincent Tuohy (http://www.prevention.com/health/health-concerns/coming-breast-cancer-vaccine). Both fans of and participants in the race sent messages to the organizers expressing their appreciation of the event's direct support of a research project.

[2.5]   From 2012 to 2015, attendance at the events and associated donations increased steadily, with at least 2,454 players participating in the 2015 event and raising US$4,107 for the Pink Vaccine. In 2016, Blizzard Entertainment, the game

company that owns *World of Warcraft,* itself promoted the race, with an official Web page about the event (https://worldofwarcraft.com/en-us/news/20324669) and social media posts (https://www.facebook.com/Warcraft/posts/10154505510379034:0). Whether because of this additional "official" marketing or word of mouth from previous participants, in 2016 the total number of participants increased to 2,868 and the donation total rose above US$5,000 (totals available at http://ccf.convio.net/goto/gnomerun2k16). To date, the RotG has raised nearly US$13,000 for the Pink Vaccine. Additionally, the race has spawned other similar events for charity; one such event is the Running of the Trolls, organized by the same team in 2015 in support of the LGBT teen suicide prevention charity the Trevor Project (http://www.thetrevorproject.org/). This particular spin-off event has raised over US$2,000 in two years and drawn approximately 1,000 players to its events.

[2.6]   The participants in the RotG are not just regular *WoW* players who take a break from their gaming routine to participate; Dravinna, the primary organizer of the RotG, explains,

> [2.7]   We get a lot of returning players. I have a lot of friends who don't normally play on the US realms show up, and friends who haven't played in a long time resub [i.e., resubscribe to the game]. I also see a lot of people on reddit consider resubbing for the event, as well as twitter and tumblr. People will roll [create] trial accounts, but also a lot of people will buy the game time…to attend the event. Also I've noticed that about half of my friends who attend the event who haven't played for awhile will stick around and play for some time before stopping their play time again…We do get some people who have never played before attending the event. Friends and family members of *WoW* players most often who hear about the event. (Interview with Dravinna, July 3, 2015)

[2.8]   Two factors help the event reach so many players and succeed in raising both awareness and funds: its transformative nature and the effect of collective action on both the virtual world and the off-line world. These two factors will be explained in depth in the following sections.

3. A transformative event fit for the world (of Warcraft)

[3.1]   The first factor that contributes to the success of the event is the culture of transformative events built into the ecology of *WoW.* Tisha Turk and Joshua Johnson (2012) described fan practices as an *ecology,* that is, "a system (or series of systems) within which all fans participate in various ways." Online games like *WoW* are also an ecology in the way the "various elements—from code to rhetoric to social practices and aesthetics—cohabit and populate the game world" (Salen 2008, 2). The ecology of games like *WoW* has the "participatory and social nature of gaming at its core," meaning that the players of the game, like fans who participate in a fandom, occupy multiple roles that interact with and influence each other. The developers of *World of Warcraft* have historically transformed off-line occurrences into online events, and players and fans of the game are familiar with the practice and regularly engage with these events. By following this model, the RotG fit into the ecology of *WoW.* Like the game's developers, fans were able to transform an off-line occurrence, in this case a charity race, into a popular online event.

[3.2]   I define the RotG as a transformative work under the definition provided by the Organization for Transformative Works: "A transformative work takes something extant and turns it into something with a new purpose, sensibility, or mode of expression" (http://www.transformativeworks.org/faq/). This aligns with the United States Supreme Court's definition of a transformative work as a work that "adds something new, with a further purpose or different character, altering the [source] with new expression, meaning, or message" (*Campbell v. Acuff-Rose Music*). This type of transformation is enabled by the culture of transformative events embedded in the ecology of *WoW.*

[3.3]   Players of *WoW* are used to having off-line or real-world events brought into their game. Developers are constantly importing events and people from popular culture and the daily news headlines into the game universe. Holidays are held that resemble their off-line counterparts, such as Hallow's End (Halloween) and Lunar Festival (Chinese New Year), even including in-game items and events analogous to those that happen off-line (such as trick-or-treating in Hallow's End and lighting firecrackers and honoring ancestors during the Lunar Festival). These events were all created by the game's developers, although their success is fueled by player participation. In importing and adapting these real-world events, the developers transformed them to fit them into the culture and setting of the game. For example, one transformative aspect of the in-game holidays is the Achievements list that accompanies each celebration (Bell, Sheth, and Kaiser 2013). Players can accomplish in-game tasks, set by the developers, and receive rewards like in-game pets, costumes, or titles; many players devote considerable energy to these tasks, effectively taking a holiday from their other in-game activities. However, celebrating the Lunar Festival online is not the same thing as celebrating Chinese New Year off-line; although the two share some similarities, the transformative aspect of bringing the event into a virtual world renders it a separate and different experience altogether.

[3.4]   Charity donations are supported by the game itself through in-game purchases; for example, in 2014, Blizzard Entertainment launched a program by which players could purchase an in-game pet and the entire purchase price was donated to the American Red Cross in support of relief efforts for the Ebola crisis (https://worldofwarcraft.com/en-us/news/16655152/coming-soon-adopt-a-pet-for-charity). Players could display this pet as proof of their philanthropy, connecting an off-line charity act to an online display. This transformative incorporation of off-line events and charitable donations into the game helped make the game ecology friendly to players doing the same. The RotG is one such player-created event. It was originally subtitled "Gnome Race for the Cure," an obvious reference to the off-line event that inspired it, and it was intended to be accessible to people who could not participate in the Komen Foundation's Race for the Cure. Dravinna explained, "I was unable to go to my usual Race for the Cure events because I was sick so frequently with migraines. I thought perhaps other members couldn't as well perhaps because of money, illness or time constraints. I've discovered that from what people have told me [at the events] this truly is the case for them."

[3.5]   However, bringing this event to the digital world was a transformative process. While participants in the off-line events wear pink clothing and adorn themselves with pink ribbons, the players of *WoW* created brand new gnome avatars with pink hair and pink tabards with a heart-shaped design. (Participants have used this symbol in more places than just their tabards, for example by forming all the gnomes into a giant heart shape at the end of the race [figure 1].)
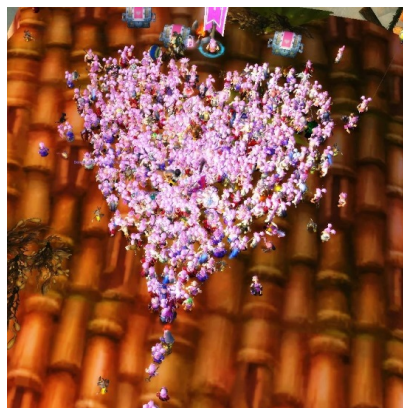

Figure 1. Heart formation created by participants in RotG 2014. World of Warcraft, copyright Blizzard Entertainment. Screenshot by the author. [*View larger image.*]

[3.6]   The "small change" pledge system of the RotG is based on the number of participants, not on the distance run. Therefore, a player can increase the total

donation just by joining in the race; they need not donate themselves or pay an entrance fee, such as the one required to participate in an off-line Race for the Cure. The fact that an individual can make a difference in this way contributed to the collective nature of the event, which led to the effects outlined in the following section.

[3.7]   The parameters of the off-line Race for the Cure were changed enough in its transformation into the Running of the Gnomes that most participants do not immediately see the relationship between the two. The RotG is a transformative event in that it transforms an extant event (the Race for the Cure) into a new mode of expression (a virtual world, with all of its associated distinctions from the physical world) with a new sensibility (collective action by the mass of participants rather than individuals) and, after its initial years, a new message (preventing breast cancer through research into a vaccine, rather than raising funds to cure breast cancer and support victims). Another transformative aspect of the RotG is its disruptive nature; one of its primary effects is to disrupt the game experience for other players, reminding them of off-line concerns and obligations. This disruption requires the collective action that the event is predicated upon as well as the interacting modes of communication and play in the game's ecology, and creates the (h)activist outcomes of the RotG.

[3.8]   The RotG will evolve on October 17, 2017, when it will be formally incorporated into *WoW* as a one-day event called "The Great Gnomeregan Run" alongside its other holidays (http://www.wowhead.com/news=263333/the-great-gnomeregan-run-7-2-5-early-preview). The holiday will feature a quest to complete the race and nonplayer characters (NPCs) with the iconic pink hair and clothing associated with the RotG. This incorporation was facilitated by Dravvie and the game's developers; the race event and charity components will remain player-organized with in-game infrastructure to support the event. Whether official incorporation of the event will change the (h)activist nature or the charitable foundation of RotG is a question for future study.

4. (H)activism and collective action

[4.1]   Before describing the (h)activist nature of the RotG, I must offer some background in digital activism. Jones (2006), describing *mediated citizenship,* has argued that a move toward interacting through online media has opened up possibilities for activism that do not involve physical presence. Since fan communities thrive on the use of digital media, the fannish environment is already ripe with potential for digital activism. Zoonen (2005) has described the similarities between the actions of fans who are emotionally invested in their chosen fandom and the actions that underlie democratic citizenship. Fans connect around shared media experiences, and some organizations of fans extend their experience in fandom by taking up activism that speaks to central tenets of their canon. Prior studies of fan activism have centered on the organization of fans around a central celebrity figure and the message of their medium. Examples of this are political engagement by fans of Stephen Colbert (Schulzke 2012) and support of feminist causes by fans of Joss Whedon's various television shows (Cochran 2012). Jenkins (2012) has studied the activism promoted by the Harry Potter Alliance, a fan-created organization with 501(c)3 nonprofit status in the United States, which has had success by drawing parallels between the stories of the Harry Potter universe and real-world concerns and struggles.

[4.2]   These studies show how fan cultures can have an impact on off-line concerns, and vice versa. In 2007, after the death of Du'a Khalil Aswad in Iraq, Joss Whedon encouraged his fans to support Equality Now. Tanya Cochran (2012) showed how fans of Whedon's television shows felt that their activism was an extension of the themes and messages that they connected to in the shows: "through their activism, many enthusiasts of the Whedonverses extend the worlds of Whedon's stories by consciously constructing a sociopolitical, feminist identity." Bethan Jones (2012) has shown how fans of *The X-Files,* particularly of Gillian Anderson and her character Dana Scully, have been similarly motivated to activism, in the form of purchasing fan-

made items with their money going to charity. Some fans in Jones's study said that their mutual adoration of the character was what inspired and motivated them to participate in these charitable events.

[4.3]   Digital activism can thus inspire fans to act in the off-line world. It can also be disruptive, and such activist disruptions have been dubbed "hacktivism" or "electronic civil disobedience." Manion and Goodrum (2000, 14) write that electronic civil disobedience "does not condone violent or destructive acts against its enemies, focusing instead on nonviolent means to expose wrongs, raise awareness, and prohibit the implementation of perceived unethical laws by individuals, organizations, corporations or governments." Electronic civil disobedience is distinguished from digital (or electronic) activism in this way:

> [4.4]   If a US citizen wishes to speak out against the government's actions in Kosovo, it is legal to publish a Web site or host mailing lists or chat rooms for this purpose. This activity does not constitute an act of civil disobedience, electronic or otherwise. These types of activity are usually referred to as "electronic activism," which uses the Internet in fully legitimate ways to publish information, coordinate effective action, and to directly lobby policy makers. Running a program such as FloodNet, however, that posts the reload command to a Web site hundreds of times a minute, constitutes an act of symbolic ECD since the intended aim of such programs is to create an electronic disturbance akin to a sit-in or blockade. (Manion and Goodrum 2000, 15)

[4.5]   A more recent term for electronic civil disobedience, *hacktivism* ("a combination of the terms hacking and activism" [Held 2012, 19]), is a popular term for the act of disrupting an online system of some sort in order to advance a particular cause. Hacktivism is defined by Manion and Goodrum (2000, 14) as the " (sometimes) clandestine use of computer hacking to help advance political causes." Hacktivists are not motivated by financial gain, but rather have political reasons for their civil disobedience—protests against governments and corporations prime among them (McLaurin 2012). An important distinction exists between hacktivism and cyberterrorism, the latter of which can be defined as "highly damaging computer-based attacks…against information systems…to intimidate or coerce governments or societies in pursuit of goals that are political or social" (Denning 2006, 124). One example of cyberterrorism is shutting down critical national infrastructures (e.g., transportation and government operations) (Weimann 2005, 130). One example of a hacktivist group is Anonymous, which originally started as a group of online trolls but then developed into something different and divorced from trolling culture (Phillips 2015). Hacktivist efforts are often positioned as more of a nuisance than a threat, intended to gain attention through calls to action such as signing petitions, donating money, and sharing information (Lindgren and Lundström 2011). Manion and Goodrum argue that hacktivism is a form of civil disobedience if it displays the following traits:

> [4.6]
>
> - No damage done to persons or property
> - Non-violent
> - Not for personal profit
> - Ethical motivation—i.e., the strong conviction that a law is unjust, unfair, or to the extreme detriment of the common good
> - Willingness to accept personal responsibility for outcome of actions
>
> (Manion and Goodrum 2000, 15)

[4.7]   On the basis of these definitions, I argue that the RotG, while not framed as hacktivism by its organizers, contains aspects of hacktivist culture. The collective nature of the event, with thousands of players convening on one digital space, has a disruptive effect on the gameplay of others, analogous to that of a sit-in or blockade as described by Manion and Goodrum. Players who are not aware of the event are often surprised as a large group of gnomes runs through their area; sometimes they

join the event out of curiosity and learn about the charity cause along the way. One example was recounted on Reddit in 2013 (figure 2).
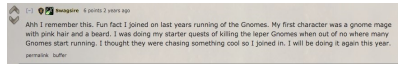

Figure 2. *Comment on Reddit in 2014 about the Running of the Gnomes. From*
https://www.reddit.com/r/wow/comments/1p3z2t/oh_goodness_just_two_more_days
[View larger image.]

[4.8]   As well as concentrating many gnomes in one small space, the participants also disrupt the local conversation in the chat channels. The path of the race leads through two major cities in *WoW,* Ironforge and Stormwind City, and as players enter these cities they are able to join the large chat channels devoted to them, as well as Trade Chat, a multilocation channel. Many players on the server participate in these channels, and the participants in the race take advantage of this. Messages about the event itself as well as exhortations to have annual check-ups and learn about self-examination for breast cancer flood these chat channels, demonstrating participants' strong conviction that the event is important. Participants also sometimes share personal stories about recovering from breast cancer or about family members who have battled cancer in these chat channels. In an interview about the event, Dravinna said that such stories had the most powerful impact on the online community:

> [4.9]   At first I wasn't really certain what it would do, until I had the chance to see what people were yelling as they were running or typing in guild chats. I think for people who have lost someone, or are going through the process of having someone who is sick with any form of cancer, seeing so many people together from so many locations, even the EU realms rolling starter edition accounts can make people feel like they aren't alone. A lot of people will say that they've beat cancer, or shout that they're there in memory of a person. And for a moment they aren't shouting into the void. It's the expression of love and support as a community. We don't often see it, so seeing it in a large fashion is deeply powerful for people. (Interview with Dravinna, July 3, 2015)

[4.10]   The donation link and information about the vaccine research project are also shared in the chat channels, to direct interested parties to the charity. Players not involved in the RotG are often frustrated by the "spam" in the chat channels, while others complain about the resulting lag on the server. Some cheer on the gnomes or move to join the run themselves. This is one way that the RotG group collects "escorts," or higher-level players who follow the herd of gnomes to protect them from hostile creatures that may attack and even kill the low-level characters.

[4.11]   Beyond disrupting the visual space of the game's world and the chat channels, the RotG also disrupts the physical infrastructure of the game. Participants in the race, and even the organizers (though they maintain that it is "not our intent"), react with glee as lag increases in the areas where thousands of players overload the servers' capacity to handle them. The 2014 RotG event caused the *WoW* server to crash under its strain, which is arguably prohibited by the game's Terms of Use and can result in account suspensions and other punishments (note 2). In 2016, even with the game's developers aware of the event and the potential server strain, the game still crashed at least 14 times early in the race, although it eventually stabilized with the assistance of Blizzard's server engineers (https://twitter.com/Noxychu/status/787418091865018368). This shutdown of infrastructure is an example of hacktivism's disruptive effects, analogous to the disruption of infrastructure described by Weimann and by Denning in discussing cyberterrorism but targeting noncritical systems. It also embodies another transformative aspect of the event: the off-line race often disrupts infrastructure by shutting down roads to traffic, and this disruption is transformed into a disruption in the digital space, in which the RotG calls attention to itself by interfering with the flow of play and the availability of servers.

[4.12]   Both participants in the RotG and players who are not participating may express annoyance at the disruption it causes, but they also often admire its ability to involve so many people as to cause a server shutdown (see, e.g., http://us.battle.net/forums/en/wow/topic/18706418268?page=13#post-254). However, no permanent damage is done to the servers, and they are usually easily restarted within a few minutes. The organizers of the event and many of the participants insist that the point of the event is to bring people together, not to shut down the servers, but they have also expressed willingness to "take the ban" if Blizzard decides to enforce its Terms of Use. This has never happened; in fact, in 2016, the engineers who worked on the servers were ready and willing to help and did not fault the participants for the strain levied on the servers (https://twitter.com/SeTec9/status/787464135034277888). But the strain is nonetheless caused by the increasing size of the event, and it has consequences for the game developers and other players. The popularity of the event, along with the strain and server disruption it brings, has led Blizzard Entertainment to officially incorporate the RotG course into *WoW* as a one-day holiday event in October 2017. With in-game infrastructure for the event, the server load may be reduced and the game may not crash, as it has in previous years. The ultimate outcome of the server disruption, then, is the incorporation of the event into the game itself across all game servers rather than its being isolated on one server for one span of time. The impact of this in-game incorporation on the charitable outcome of the event is a subject for future study.

[4.13]   One particular component of the event stands out as a signal of its nonviolent nature. After the completion of the run from Stormwind City to Booty Bay, many participants attempt to invade the Horde capital of Orgrimmar (an enemy city) using only these low-level gnomes. Upon entering the city, the gnomes are almost instantly attacked by the high-level nonplayer character (NPC) guards and killed. Yet the purpose of the invasion is not to conquer the enemy city, but rather to approach the NPC leader of the opposing faction and perform an in-game emote. Some players choose the /hug emote (resulting in a display such as "Gnomeracer hugs Thrall") while others choose other amusing emotes such as /lick ("Gnomeracer licks Thrall"). These players who succeed are inevitably killed by the guards or the enemy players, but the digital corpses and skeletons remain behind as a notice to the enemy players that the event came to their city peacefully.

[4.14]   The fact that the disruption is caused by the sheer number of players and not by any actions that could be classified as hacking is the reason that I have described the event as (h)activism. It follows Manion and Goodrum's definition of hacktivism as a form of electronic civil disobedience by not damaging people or property (the servers, although overloaded, are often easily brought back online), being nonviolent (relying on conversations and presence, even when digitally "attacking" the enemy faction), not involving personal profit (the event is entirely motivated by charitable contributions), and being motivated by ethical considerations (preventing breast cancer), as well as by the participants' and organizers' willingness to accept responsibility for its outcomes. It does not go as far as cyberterrorism, following Weimann's and Denning's descriptions, because its disruption targets noncritical systems and is a nuisance rather than a danger.

[4.15]   However, the event does not rely on the technical skills traditionally involved in hacking. Rather, the disruption it brings is caused by presence, much as off-line activism relies on the bodies of protesters blocking pathways or showing solidarity. The RotG, therefore, also transforms civil disobedience into a disruption that fits within this particular virtual world.

5. Conclusion

[5.1]   The annual RotG in *WoW* is a transformative (h)activist event, enabled by the game's transformative ecology and by its players' propensity for collective action. In this work, I have described how this event is transformative, as well as the aspects of the game's ecology that have led to its success.

[5.2]   The event is transformative in three ways. First, it transforms an off-line event, the Race for the Cure, into an online event situated in a virtual world with alterations appropriate to a virtual world. It keeps components of the off-line event, such as the idea of running along a defined route, as in a race. The changes made in adapting it to the virtual world align with the capabilities of an online environment that differentiate it from the physical world. They include creating new virtual bodies with specific characteristics (gnomes with pink hair) to participate in the event, and creating digital artifacts of its presence, such as chat channel spam, heart-shaped formations, and corpses and skeletons littering the ground. These changes made to transform the Race for the Cure into the Running of the Gnomes parallel some of the changes made by the game developers as they incorporated off-line holidays and celebrities into the game's world. By following this model, the RotG fits into the game ecology familiar to players and encourages further transformation, for example the creation of spin-off events like the Running of the Trolls to benefit the LGBT teen charity the Trevor Project. The culmination of this transformation is official incorporation of the RotG event into a *WoW* holiday in October 2017. The virtual world setting also allows participation by those who are not able to participate in the off-line Race for the Cure events. This increased opportunity for participation is related to the second transformative aspect.

[5.3]   The second transformative aspect is the nature of the fundraising associated with the event. This transformation changed the pledge system to be based on the number of participants, in order to encourage collective action. With this change, individuals can contribute to the fundraising efforts even if they cannot donate themselves. This form of fundraising encourages collective action, which leads to opportunities for the third transformative aspect.

[5.4]   The third transformative aspect is the nature of the activism itself. The disruption caused by the RotG is not due to any one individual or any actual hacking of the *WoW* servers. Rather, it is enabled by the collective action of the participants and the very nature of the event itself. Because the event takes a large number of players through a virtual world, disruptions happen in the areas where other players are located, in the chat channels where they interact, and in the server infrastructure that crashes after being overloaded by thousands of players occupying the same digital space. Participation in this disruptive activity leads to charitable contributions, whether because a player makes a donation directly or because they are among the masses used to calculate the amount of a donation in the "small change" program. Situated somewhere between activism and hacktivism, the RotG calls attention to itself and its cause by disrupting the playing experience of other *WoW* players. In 2017, after its official incorporation into WoW as a holiday, requiring special infrastructure spread across all servers, it has disrupted the game itself.

6. Acknowledgements

[6.1]   I would like to gratefully acknowledge Ashleigh Ayn Sult both for her help with supplying details, information, corrections, and inspiration for this paper and for her drive to make this event grow and change every year. And, most effusively, I thank and acknowledge the organizers, volunteers, and participants in the RotG for the annual infusion of meaning and community into the game.

7. Notes

1. For more information, see WoWwiki (2015), "Hogger," http://wowwiki.wikia.com/wiki/Hogger#.22Hogger_raid.22. An example of such an event is available on YouTube: Zion Zaibatsu, "40-Man Hogger Raid (Level 1)," November 24, 2009, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Tr53GTsjPvI.

2. Section 7C of the *WoW* terms of use states that "certain acts…are considered serious violations of these Terms of Use. Those acts include, but are not necessarily limited to, the following: (i) Using or exploiting errors in design, features which have not been documented, and/or 'program bugs' to gain access that is otherwise not available, or to obtain a competitive advantage over other players; (ii) Conduct

prohibited by the EULA or elsewhere in these Terms of Use; and (iii) Anything that Blizzard considers contrary to the 'essence' of the Game" (http://us.blizzard.com/en-us/company/legal/wow_tou.html).

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