# Dissonant Fabulation: Subverting Online Genres to Effect Socio-Cognitive Dissonance

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*Abstract*
"Dissonant fabulation" describes an emerging genre of fictional narratives in online spaces whose generic conventions construct expectations of realism. This genre is defined not as a form but as a mode of written communication that uses its genre's conventions and expectations even while subverting them to inspire social and political questions and discourse. Two case studies are analysed for their creation of socio-cognitive dissonance leading to social discourse: Amazon.com reviews of BIC Cristal For Her pens and the faux Target customer service Facebook profile "Ask ForHelp". The genre of dissonant fabulations is discussed and contextualised within critical digital intertextual discourse and fictional narratives.

*Key-words*: social media, participatory culture, culture jamming.

## 1. Introduction

The participatory and user-generated content functions of the Web 2.0 create a unique overlap of social and commercial spaces in terms of written communication, such as product reviews or customer service on social media. While most of these spaces are primarily used for their designed purposes, occasionally they become host to more colourful, creative contributions and interactions. What purpose do these subversions serve, and how can they be generically classified? This article argues that the participatory and interactive spaces of the Internet afford producer-users the opportunity to subvert those spaces for the purposes of social discourse and criticism in the form of satirical personal narratives. Recognition of these texts as a mode of written communication allows for recognition and evaluation of the social discourse that occurs in either unexpected spaces (such as e-commerce), or through unexpected means (such as fictional characters on social media). I propose the term *dissonant fabulation*

for this new genre of fictional narrative emerging in online spaces whose generic conventions construct expectations of realism. These texts build upon artistic traditions of parody and satire in creating either fictional representations of real people or narrating stylistically exaggerated fictional events. The novel distinction of these online dissonant fabulations lies in their publication and dissemination in generic forms that convey expectations of authenticity and non-fictionality, afforded by the participatory nature of the modern Web.

Dissonant fabulations also contribute to the social activist tradition of "culture jamming", the practice of using media hoaxes, corporate sabotage, billboard liberation, and trademark infringement to "undermine marketing rhetoric of multinational corporations" (Harold 2004: 190). Unlike activist "pranks", dissonant fabulations are often created initially for the sole purpose of entertainment, a significant motivation for many Internet writers (Chen 2009: 150), rather than activism or social discourse. Of course, even texts written just for laughs can generate social discourse, as writing "is a profoundly social enterprise [...] best understood in relationship to the social event that he or she [the writer] is in the process of accomplishing" (Brandt 1989: 152). Whether or not the original intent was to contribute to social discourse, dissonant fabulations nonetheless participate in and inspire such contributions.

The following sections establish a framework for defining the genre of dissonant fabulations, based on Carol Berkenkotter and Thomas Huckin's work (1995), as well as Rosemary Jackson's delineation of the fantastic as a mode of subversion (1981) and a recent discussion of emerging personal media genres (Lüders, Prøitz, Rasmussen 2010). The case studies are presented, followed by a discussion of how they subvert the genre of their publication to effect socio-cognitive dissonance and social discourse.

## 2. Genre: frameworks, conventions, and expectations

Communication, written or otherwise, relies upon cues and signals, or compositional structures, that enable communicator and receiver to not only understand the denotated meaning, but also the connotations of any given speech act or text. In order for the message of any text to be communicated, it generally conforms, reproduces, or subverts its genre (Lüders, Prøitz, Rasmussen 2010).

Drawing upon Bakhtin, Carol Berkenkotter and Thomas Huckin argue that "[g]enres are 'typical forms of utterances' [...], and as such, they should be studied in their actual social contexts of use" (1995: 2). This article uses their genre framework as a guide to define a specific genre of online written communication in which fictional narratives are incorporated into non-fictional online spaces to subvert them for the purposes of dissonance and discourse. In that framework, Berkenkotter and Huckin identify five principles of genre: *dynamism*, as genres react to user responses and evolve to meet changing needs; *situatedness*, in that communicators' knowledge of their genre is derived from everyday immersion within it; *form and content*, acknowledging that communicators' knowledge of their genre includes how its structures influence its efficacy; *duality of structure*, noting that we constitute genres even while reproducing them; and *community ownership*, noting that communicating through a genre signals discourse on that community's norms and epistemology (p. 4). *Form and content* is often used interchangeably with the term *conventions*, which encompasses features of style, rhetoric, and materiality that emerge because of intertextual discourse and references within the genre; by the very duality of their structures, conventions are dynamic, evolving over time (Lüders, Prøitz, Rasmussen 2010). Because *situatedness* applies not only to the composer but also the receiver of communication within a genre, this shared knowledge creates *expectations* on behalf of the receiver; by subverting these expectations, the composer creates a cognitive dissonance in the reader leading to a particular effect, including emotional responses such as humour, as well as socio-cognitive responses.

These socio-cognitive effects comprise the "dissonant" component of the dissonant fabulation genre. While Berkenkotter and Huckin's framework is largely concerned with how genres are implemented, Rosemary Jackson defines genre based not on its structures but on its functions, specifically the socio-cognitive effects on the receiver (1981). In defining the genre of fantasy as a mode, she builds upon Todorov's definition of the fantastic as balanced on the hesitation between the marvellous and the uncanny, noting, however, that it "fails to consider the social and political implications of literary forms" (1981: 6). Jackson's definition focuses on how fantasy's inversion of the real "permits 'ultimate questions' about

social order" (p. 15), inspiring Bakhtinian dialogue in its exposure of otherness and interrogation of singular perspectives. This notion of subversion as a functional mode of genre can be expanded to any written communication that uses its genre's conventions and expectations even while inverting them to inspire social and political questions and discourse, and has been applied here to online fictional narratives that subvert their genre conventions to effect socio-cognitive dissonance.

As communication has expanded online, new writing genres both within and without the literary sphere have arisen in a dizzying array, from blogs to electronic literature to video mashups. While Mikhail Bakhtin ([1979] 1986: 61) notes that more attention has been paid to literary genres than any other sort, for the purposes of research and academic discourse, in the age of new media scholars hardly have a chance to recognise emerging, often experimental and evanescent, genres of written communication before they evolve into something else, much less analyse and discuss them. Also similar to literary genres, online communication genres tend to be defined by form and content: blogs, wikis, news sites, forums, e-commerce, social media, etc. Even experimental or emerging genres such as electronic literature tend to be categorised by conventions, labelled by features or platforms (hypertexts, Flash fiction, code poetry; see Tabbi 2007).

Online genres based upon offline forms are often the most identifiable, their familiar conventions remediated to suit the environs of the Internet. Personal journals and op-ed pieces find their way into blogs, encyclopaedias into wikis, sales catalogues to online shops, books to static websites or eBooks, and newspapers to news sites. Social discourse occurs in these online spaces, much as it does in their offline parallels, in essays, feature articles, news articles, treatises, and books. The expectations of these genres, whether online or offline, is that they are non-fiction, based either in researched fact, informed opinions, and/or personal experience; our belief in the veracity and permanence of print has survived the transition to digital (Kibby 2005; Ong 1982). That is not to say that fabulation never occurs in these genres; it is certainly inherent in texts communicating personal experiences, as those are prone to false memories and unverifiable assertions (Ryan 2006), and it is certainly present in the current era of "fake news" and political

propaganda bots. Nonetheless, the expectation is that deliberate fabulation does not occur, and that where it does, it is clearly demarcated as fiction; this expectation is the reason Internet trolls and propagandists have had such a shocking effect, as readers' inherent trust for the nonfictionality of news sites and social media comment is used against them.

Online participatory spaces, where producers, spectators/consumers, and their respective written texts can interact with one another (Jenkins 2006) have few gatekeepers to deny the publication and dissemination of texts, and thus provide opportunities for fabulation. The participatory culture afforded by the Web 2.0 platform leads to comment functions on blogs and articles, joint editorial practices and discussions on wikis, and reviews and discussions of products and services on e-commerce sites. User-generated data, content, and dissemination through sharing drive the modern Internet, keeping social media feeds rolling, helping customers select their next purchase, and spreading information and cultural memes, including social discourse, around the world.

An Internet reliant upon user-generated content also provides ample opportunities for those same users to subvert platforms and spaces to their own purposes. While abusive purposes such as trolling or cyber-bullying are highly visible topics of cultural discourse, they are outside the scope of this article; rather, I focus here on subversions that are often embraced by producer and consumer alike, and even by the subverted space as well, leading to reproduction and repetition and eventual emergence of an identifiable genre of written narrative. This type of subversive activity is not new; Christine Harold's article (2004) describes social activist pranks or culture jamming in events such as "billboard liberation" (altering billboard advertising to subvert its message) and hacking toys' voice chips to bely the binary gender expectations established in Barbies and G.I. Joes (see Bing 2013). Parody, of course, is one of the oldest and most recognised forms of social discourse through (usually) fictional narrative or representation; Craig Stroupe (2007) examines some of the ways in which parody has moved online, in the form of humorous eBay auctions and parodic social media accounts. Dissonant fabulation is a type or subgenre of culture jamming specifically referring to

written fictional narratives or representations that deliberately subvert expectations of the genre in which they appear for the purpose and/or effect of social discourse. Written parody can fulfil this functional role, as it is "a mode of aesthetic or elaborated authorship that appropriates, disrupts, and thus calls attention to the conventions and ideology of information space" (Stroupe 2007: 434). Not all parodies, however, cause socio-cognitive dissonance; some serve purely entertainment purposes, and as such do not fall into this specific genre of subversion.

## 3. Case studies: subversion of online genres

In the early days of the Internet, online commercial spaces, or sites of e-commerce, generally referred to those that sold products or services over the Internet – essentially, online sales catalogues. As the Web has grown more ubiquitous, and as more commerce-related activities have moved to computer-mediated networks, the definition of e-commerce has expanded to include "the use of electronic communications and digital information processing technology in business transactions to create, transform, and redefine relationships for value creation between or among organizations, and between organizations and individuals" (Andam 2003: 7). Essentially, anywhere online that commercial entities come into contact in official capacities with their clients or consumers can be defined as "commercial spaces", whether on the company's own pages or elsewhere such as social media.

The case studies in this section describe the subversion of two such spaces: Amazon.com and Target's corporate Facebook Page. It is uncommon for commercial spaces to be used for narrative or discursive purposes at all, though the participatory functions of Web 2.0 have greyed the boundaries between marketing rhetoric and consumer-generated comments. Social media, conversely, is predicated almost entirely upon the notion of shared personal experiences, which generally fall into the category of "natural narrative" (Fludernik 1996). Nonetheless, these online social spaces establish conventions that seek to remediate face-to-face interactions, and thus carry with them certain expectations of veracity and authenticity. The use of fictional personas or narratives therefore presents subtle, sometimes undetectable, subversions.

### 3.1. Product reviews as fictional narratives

Bryan Ray identifies the 2012 Amazon.com reviews of BIC Cristal for Her pens as "a trend among Internet users to engage in stylistic play online", an example of "practices in which writers innovate genres for the purpose of rhetorical intervention" (2016: 43). As of 3 August 2017, these products differentiated as "for her" by their pastel colouring, "elegant design - just for her!", and "thin barrel to fit a woman's hand" (BIC n.d.) have garnered 2,162 customer reviews and 118 answered questions, most of which are satirical responses to the perceived innate sexism of the product (Ray 2016; Skalicky and Crossley 2015). The reviews include variations on misogynistic themes of women as girlish, weak, maths- and science-averse, subservient to men, overly body conscious, and even hysterical. The reviews were widely shared in both online and traditional media, and prompted similar feminist satire for other products online (Ray 2016).

Amazon.com is an online commercial space; the virtual store's purpose in its online catalogue is to sell products. The Web 2.0 features that differentiate Amazon.com from print sales catalogues are in its functions that customise the site based on user activity, adjusting recommendations and prices, as well as the user engagement functions like consumer-contributed question-and-answer and reviews, which Tim O'Reilly argues underlie its success (2007). The genre conventions of Q&As and user reviews include the poster's Amazon.com profile handle (often an actual name); annotation as to whether the review is based on a "Verified Purchase" (confirming the reviewer bought the item from Amazon) and whether the reviewer is ranked as a "Top Reviewer" (a status symbol denoting authority); use of the first-person autobiographical perspective detailing the reviewer's experience with the item; and even reviewer-contributed photographs to support their written narrative. The purpose of these reviews is to "provide experience-based information to potential consumers in order to aid them in making a purchasing decision" (Skalicky and Crossley 2015: 68); their role is in sharing actual product-related experiences, not in entertainment or discourse.

It is of note that the reviewers of the BIC Cristal For Her pens do not simply use Amazon.com's reviewing environment to construct

rants, direct protests or complaints, or even well-researched opinion pieces. Rather, the reviewers demonstrate a clear awareness of generic conventions for reviews even as they are subverting them: the reviews comply with the expectations of the genre in length, narrative perspective, and content, varying only in terms of tone and fictionality. One top-ranked review waxes poetic about the pens: "I use it when I'm swimming, riding a horse, walking on the beach, and doing yoga" (Hamilton 2012: 1), referencing oft-parodied advertising for feminine products that portray menstruating women performing such activities. Another review reads, "I used one of these pens post-hysterectomy, and my uterus grew back. Thanks a lot, Bic" (TK 2013: 1); clearly this is a fictional narrative, yet it maintains the review genre conventions in its portrayal of a negative experience with the product. These reviewers are using the generic conventions of online product reviews to subvert the genre for the purposes of social discourse, using fictional, satirical narratives to mock BIC's marketing campaign and construe it as a sexist company (Skalicky and Crossley 2015: 70).

### 3.2. Social media interactions as fictional narratives

Faux Facebook customer service accounts convey similar socially-conscious messages, though in these more nebulous online commercial spaces they are usually supporting the company and mocking individual customers. While Facebook is social media, its "Pages" function is used by commercial entities as sites of customer feedback and interaction. Like Amazon.com's pages, Facebook profiles and Pages establish genre conventions that raise expectations of veracity in their content. As a "community where people use their authentic identities", Facebook requires users to use their "authentic name" as it would appear on official identification, and "only authorized representatives can manage a Page for a brand, place, organization or public figure" (Facebook n.d.: 1). Under Facebook's terms and conditions, users cannot participate in any element of Facebook, whether in creating a profile, posting a status update, responding to others' status updates, sharing links, or posting comments on a Page, without linking that activity to their "authentic identity". All posts that appear on Facebook are accompanied by the user's name (or Page title) and a profile image. Pages representing commercial

enterprises commonly use their logo as the Page's profile image. While fake profile accounts are often created for the purposes of spamming and boosting "likes", Facebook continually updates its platform to purge fake accounts and bots. Facebook's rules, its public enforcement of those rules, and the conventions attached to posting on the site establish expectations of authenticity for the content of posts.

On 7 August 2015, Target announced they would be phasing out gender-based signage in their stores wherever feasible in response to customer requests for more gender-neutral in-store marketing (Target 2015). Customers responded on Target's official Facebook page from both supportive and negative perspectives. The negative posters received humorous and sarcastic responses from a Facebook user named "Ask ForHelp", whose posts were accompanied by the familiar branded Target "bull's-eye" logo. It would shortly be revealed that Ask ForHelp was a fake Facebook account set up by Mike Melgaard, and true to Facebook's pledge to "authentic identities", the account was shut down after only sixteen hours of activity (Nudd 2015).

Ask ForHelp's replies, as documented in Tim Nudd's article (2015) as well as other sites like Snopes.com, complied with the conventions of customer service in terms of structure and reference. The profile name "Ask ForHelp", while in retrospect clearly a hurried attempt to circumnavigate Facebook's first-name/last-name-only profile standards, referenced a common customer service function. The profile image matched the Target Facebook Page's bull's-eye logo; in combination, profile name and image appeared to be affiliated with Target customer service. Almost every one of the responses used the original poster's first name, a common customer service tactic: "Jewel, we're sorry that you feel that way […]"; "Well, Deanna. We're sorry to hear that […]"; "Actually, Gary, you're wrong […]". The narrative perspective was first person plural, aligning Ask ForHelp with the "we" of Target; many of the replies directly reference "we at Target" or the store in general. The replies were structured as customer service scripts, familiar enough that many of the posters failed to recognise them as fake or satire: "Deanna Unruh" responds "Wow. Nice customer service"; "Debbi Kelmar Schwartz" reacts to Ask ForHelp's snarky response with "Wow, really?"

It was Ask ForHelp's compliance with the conventions of customer service replies and Facebook posting, coupled with his subversion of them in the actual tone and content of the replies, that elevated his responses into satire. Facebook user "Lisa Marie" was "EXTREMELY OUTRAGED"; Ask ForHelp's response implied that perhaps she just needed some sugar, and invited her to purchase candy bars in store. "Kevin Johnson" denounced Target's decision as politically correct (and therefore apparently offensive); Ask ForHelp replied "Kevin, there's no real nice way to put this, so we at Target will just say it: You're a real dick". To "Lisa Marie", the tone was placating, attempting to soothe the customer while still promoting the business's products. The response to "Kevin Johnson" pulled a typical one-liner joke reversal, setting up an expectation of apology, only to deliver a deadpan insult.

Mike Melgaard did not intend to offer any particular social commentary with these activities; he simply thought it would be funny (Nudd 2015). Yet his Ask ForHelp persona chose only to respond to those who reacted negatively to Target's announcement; Ask ForHelp did not reply to posts supporting the announcement. Whether he intended to be socially active or not, his own perspective led to a clear commentary denouncing the opponents of the move toward gender-neutral labelling of products. And while Melgaard certainly did not initiate the discourse, given that Target's press release acknowledges their decision was a direct result of ongoing customer exchanges, it definitely expanded its exposure into new spheres as media outlets including *Time*, *Buzzfeed*, *Huffington Post*, *Today*, and *The Daily Mail* picked up the story. Janet Bing identifies humour as a key factor for the spread of pranks such as this (2013); that holds true for both of these examples.

## 4. Discussion and conclusions

As noted, dissonant fabulation does not include subversion of non-fictional spaces for purely disruptive or entertainment effects, termed "trolling"; for example, posting negative TripAdvisor reviews with fictional horror narratives (Smith 2014). It also does not include texts created for commercial purposes such as guerrilla marketing campaigns (Levinson 1984); though these campaigns may generate social discourse on culturally relevant topics as a publicity

activity, consumers typically react negatively when the campaign is revealed, as appropriation of creative or cultural artefacts is seen as unethical if it is for the purpose of financial gain (Sinnreich, Latonero, Gluck 2009). The distinction here is in the purpose of the deception: if it is perceived as socio-cultural commentary, discourse is opened, whereas if it is perceived as profiteering on the backs of socio-cultural trends and issues, then the users are no longer inclined to engage.

Dissonant fabulation is a generic mode of written communication in which fictional narratives are posted in non-fictional spaces, subverting the generic conventions of those spaces and creating socio-cognitive dissonance in the reader. The individual producers of these texts may only have entertainment purposes in mind; nonetheless, parody and satire in popular digital forms "can represent a kind of laboratory or seedbed for new literary forms" (Stroupe 2007: 435). Like Internet memes, dissonant fabulations are "artifacts of participatory digital culture characterized specifically by an agency of consumption-production" (Wiggins and Bowers 2014: 1896). The grassroots nature of the participatory culture in which they arise, coupled with the inherent implication of closure in the written form (Ong 1982) and the easy publication and dissemination through Web 2.0 establish a generic community shared between producer and consumer (and producer-consumer).

Working within Berkenkotter and Huckin's genre framework, and applying Jackson's notion of genre as mode, the functional genre of dissonant fabulation can be defined. The case studies presented demonstrate the dynamic quality of the genre, adjusting to different platforms from the e-commerce of Amazon.com to the interpersonal networking of Facebook, as well as different issues and forms in each. The Amazon.com reviews are fictional narratives, as reviewers represent characters and events aligning with the perception of the product as sexist, while the "Ask ForHelp" Facebook profile is an example of fictional representation of roles and people. As a genre, dissonant fabulation has a "dual capacity of reproduction and invention" (Ewick and Silbey 1995: 222), dynamically evolving with each new digital platform, issue, or message to be conveyed.

The creators of these texts are all well situated within their genre, producing communication in commonly used commercial and social spaces online. Product reviews and social media feeds are

ubiquitous; none are unique to the particular sites used as examples. It is this situatedness in the common spaces of the Internet and their genre conventions and expectations that allows these texts to subvert them. Likewise, producers and consumers alike must understand not only the generic situation, but also the situation of the social issues being commented upon; lack of awareness of gender stereotypes would render the Amazon reviews and faux Facebook profiles non-existent on the producer side and unremarkable on the consumer side. Subversion implies an understanding of "how the hegemonic is constituted" and resisting it (Ewick and Silbey 1995: 221).

Just as the fantasy genre raises questions about the nature of reality and desire, the subversion of the content within the form of these commercial and social genres raises questions about the topics under discussion. Each text presented complies with its platform's generic form conventions, from review to customer service replies; the subversion occurs in the content of the written communication. The BIC Cristal For Her reviews all read as reviews from users who have purchased and used the product; it is their hyperbole that demarcates them as fiction, and thus satire. Ask ForHelp adopts the placating rhetoric of customer service, while his tone and dressing-down of customers deliver his message opposing their perspective. Through compliance with the form of the genre and fabulation within the content, these writers create dissonance that inspires humour and ignites discourse.

This duality in the structuring of these texts, reproducing the form while creating new content, parallels the social practice of narrative. Narratives are embedded within the social interactions and culture of their context while still reflecting and commenting upon that context (Ewick and Silbey 1995); similarly, Berkenkotter and Huckin (1995: 18) incorporate this duality into their framework, drawing upon Giddens' structuration theory and observation of the recursivity of social life. The participatory spaces of the Internet are a prominent example of Walter Ong's secondary orality (1982): like tales, stories, and jokes shared orally, texts published online can be reproduced, copied, appropriated, disseminated, and discussed. The Amazon.com reviews began with one tongue-in-cheek entry, and over 2000 people (if one assumes they are all unique) picked up the banner to post new reviews with varying themes; the

parodic reviews also spread to other products on Amazon and other e-commerce sites. Each new addition, whether an entry in an ongoing thread or a new profile responding to a recently emerged social issue, acknowledges its form and those texts that have preceded it, entering into a dialogic cycle within the genre as well as contributing discourse to the social issue at hand.

By participating in this cycle, producers and consumers of dissonant fabulations are exerting their ownership of the community, both in terms of the generic forms they use to write their texts and the cultural communities upon which the texts comment. The BIC reviewers, men and women alike, signal awareness of the norms of the Western culture in terms of gender stereotyping and convey the ideology of that same culture in exposing a product's design and marketing as out-dated and sexist. Ask ForHelp's messages to disgruntled Target customers represent his ownership of customer-service-speak and of his culture's current dialogue about gender issues; though the author admits to no social agenda in the effort, the restriction of his fabulations toward only those customers commenting negatively on Target's gender-neutral efforts betray his own stance on the topic.

These texts thus fit within a framework of a genre as a mode and can be categorised together as dissonant fabulations. The distinction between dissonant fabulations and other fictional or deceptive texts lies in their purposeful subversion, and that subversion's contribution to discourse. Producers and consumers of these texts both have a situated awareness of the expectations of their respective genres; it is this understanding that creates the subversion, and thus the dissonance, that truly conveys the texts' messages. As Guy Debord ([1967] 1994: 206) notes, the "reversal of establishing relationships between concepts" is the manifestation of "a theoretical consciousness of dialectical movement". This reversal is the subversion that "resists less through negating and opposing dominant rhetorics than by playfully and provocatively folding existing cultural forms in on themselves" (Harold 2004: 191). By entering into their respective commercial and/or social communities online and subverting the generic expectations of these sites, these authors are contributing critical digital commentaries that then ignite further discourse, intertextual and otherwise.

Interestingly enough, the platforms and sites that are subverted often decline to denounce the texts, with some even embracing the efforts. Amazon, likely recognising the benefits of increased site traffic and a public reputation as being user-friendly, has not only permitted satirical reviews to continue on a number of products, it has also gone to the effort of collecting them for reader convenience (Amazon.com n.d.); the BIC Cristal For Her Amazon page likewise shows no effort on BIC's part to remove or respond negatively to the reviews. Facebook deleted Ask ForHelp's fake account in accordance with its authenticity policy, but Target subtly embraced Melgaard's "trolling" in a subsequent Facebook post (accompanied by an image of two toy troll dolls posed at the stern of a boat, referencing the film *Titanic*): "Remember when Trolls were kings of the world? Woo hoo! They're back and only at Target stores" (qtd. in Nudd 2015: fig. 2). By and large, the commercial entities involved seem to accept any publicity as good publicity, though studies indicate this form of publicity is just bad (Wan *et al.* 2015). And unlike many forms of cultural jamming that get appropriated by the very entities they seek to jam, such as marketing campaigns using parody or creating advertising that appears to have been defaced, platform recognition and collusion for these texts does not dilute nor invert their message; the non-profit nature of these texts leads their readers to see them as creative rather than unethical or spamming (Sinnreich, Latonero, Gluck 2009), and by permitting the texts to persist the platforms and sites gain a share of that positive recognition.

Creativity is also a defining element of these texts, and thus of the generic mode of dissonant fabulation. The genre is a form of fiction writing whose creativity is recognisable enough that Craig Stroupe (2007) incorporates writing texts like these into his creative writing teaching. Like more traditional forms of fictional discourse, from Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1884) to Chuck Palahniuk's *Fight Club* (1996), the authors are using fabulation, humour, sarcasm, satire, hyperbole, and stylised exaggeration (Harold 2004) to make a statement about current socio-cultural issues. They are undergoing creative processes in recombining familiar cultural resources in novel ways to effect impact and generate further social discourse (Burgess 2006; Johnson-Eilola and Selber 2007). In terms of narrative, the techniques used are not

novel nor necessarily of a significant linguistic quality; nonetheless, the situated playful subversion of non-fictional generic forms and the reach that these texts achieve in their communities identifies them as a form of discursive narrative fiction.

Despite frequent laments of the decline of written communication in the digital age, creative writing is flourishing in online spaces, and will continue to do so as writers experiment, play, and subvert the participatory spaces of the Internet to publish and disseminate their messages. The subversive content of these fabulations' commentaries on socio-cultural issues contrasts with their compliance with genre forms, sparking a dissonance that leads to emotional reactions, further spread of the texts, and discourse in the form of critical digital intertextuality. This modal genre is not restricted to any one type of space, site, or platform, nor any one form of narrative. Rather, it is identified by its effects: subversion of its genre to call attention to and question the topics and spaces it engages. Given this functional quality, it is inevitable that these fabulations will continue to appear in the prolific spaces of the Web, communicating creatively through novelty, dissonance, and the unexpected.

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