Will Fans Blend: Issues of Access and Participatory Culture within Online Visual Effects Tutorials

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It's never been cheaper or more accessible to learn how to do advanced special effects. With a laptop, a copy of Blender, and some YouTube tutorials, you can get started playing around with CGI yourself. Turning your hobby into a job, however, might require something more powerful than your trusty MacBook (Ravenscraft, 2021)

Abstract

This article looks at how special effects fans access the learning materials and develop the skills to recreate the objects of their obsessions. Utilising an autoethnographic approach and taking the 3D modelling software Blender and special effects teacher Andrew Price (aka The Blender Guru) as case studies, the article explores how the platform YouTube affects both Price's standing within the continuum of fan and professional, and how this affects the mode of address Price uses to teach his viewers, blurring the line between teacher and student.

Résumé en français à la fin du texte.

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For the most part, fan studies in academia focus on the fans of specific properties. This makes sense: it is easy to explore the relationship a group of people have to specific franchises in order to understand fan behaviour and creativity. However, as this special issue seeks to explore fans of special effects, the connection between property and fan becomes broader, for it is not the characters or the lore that special effects fans covet and recreate; rather fans engage with industrial processes, collecting and disseminating information about how certain effects were created. As Michele Pierson (2002) argues "special effects emerge from the annals of *Scientific America* as an aesthetic form that not only rewards but demands the studied attention of the connoisseur" (33). However, there is another dimension that is added to special effects fandoms that is not as obvious or overt in other fandoms. As Pierson (2002) again describes, and I have previously argued (128), there is a chain between fans of special effects and those that make them (69). This leads to an important question: how does a fan traverse the line between amateur and professional? What tools and skills can be accessed by fans? What this article seeks to present is that, rather than a binary, the distinction between amateur and professional is a continuum that fans travel.

The starting point for the paper was going to be an autoethnographic study charting my own process in following a YouTube tutorial—*Blender 3.0 Beginner Donut Tutorial* series, provided by the channel *BlenderGuru* aka Andrew Price—on the 3D modelling software Blender to make a 3D glazed and sprinkled donut. I started out as, and still am, a novice in terms of 3D modelling; I have no professional experience with special effects production and as a scholar have focused on the historical perception of special effects. Thus, I thought of myself as a tabula rasa, to engage with the efficiency of Price's teaching, and the first steps from fan to practitioner. That journey revealed unexpected results and so I will be dividing this article into two sections: first, I will look at the teacher, Andrew Price, and his relationship to the YouTube space and how he presents himself to his viewers within this binary of amateur and professional. Then I will investigate how YouTube itself affects the way in which students learn and how this challenges the teacher and student hierarchy.

I chose an autoethnographic approach because, much like Henry Jenkins, I am an acafan, an academic and a fan of special effects, and I have dedicated a large portion of my life to studying this media form. Furthermore, I am, in a way, going on a similar journey to those fans that dabble in 3D modelling in the hopes of professional aspirations: as a media scholar. Autoethnography therefore offers a unique perspective for this study: as Tony E. Adams, Carolyn Ellis and Stacy Holman Jones (2015) write, auto-ethnography "offers nuanced, complex and specific knowledge about *particular* lives, experiences and relationships rather than general information about large groups of people" (21). Thus, this article charts my specific experiences engaging with Blender and the tutorials in order to learn how the YouTube space has changed our approach to learning and how it specifically affects the way in which special effects fans engage with and learn the skills of their idols in order to think about following them into the professional sphere. More than that, we must also address "the tension between insider and outsider perspectives, between social practice and social constraint" (Reed-Danahay 2009, 32). Thus autoethnography is a perfect tool to look at sites of tension, such as that of amateur and professional in the activity of fan learning.

This is an important time to be thinking about the changing ways in which people learn. The COVID-19 pandemic forced people to change the way in which they engaged with learning, the majority of lectures are pre-recorded and there is a lot more asynchronous and independent learning (Munday 2021; Nartiningrum and Nugroho 2020). Similarly, the rise of video tutorial sites like MasterClass and SkillShare have meant that more people can learn remotely and simultaneously share their skills with others outside a traditional classroom environment. Blender itself has had some interesting recent developments, including the release of version 3.0 in December 2021. But perhaps more important are the changes in industry perceptions of the software. A Spanish produced miniseries animated on Blender, *Maya and the Three*, was released on Netflix in October 2021. Just this year[1] Warner Brothers Animation published an advert for a technical director for a project *Wings of Fire* with "experience with Blender preferred" (LinkedIn). These remarkable developments suggest that this open source,

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[1] As of writing in March 2022.

free to download software could become an industry standard, meaning fans of special effects who learn Blender are gaining skills that can be used in their professional careers using other software (like Houdini or Cinema4D), which further complicates this boundary between amateur and professional. This paper aims to be the first step in examining this area, providing a theoretical hypothesis that can be taken and applied to a wider study with more tutorials and other software.

Theory Smoothie: Issues of Fan Studies, Special Effects and Participatory Culture

Before we explore the process of learning how to bake a digital donut, we must examine the theoretical and historical context to create a framework in which to answer our key questions.

Firstly, let us discuss the platform that the tutorial is on, YouTube. According to Pelle Snickars and Patrick Vondeau (2009), YouTube wants to be seen as an "'empty' platform to be filled by the YouTube community with originally produced content of various kinds" (10), meaning the site's content is purely generated by its users. This leads some to view YouTube as a site that best exemplifies Jenkins's theory of participatory culture, which he states is a space where "fans and other consumers are invited to actively participate in the creation and circulation of new content" (Jenkins 2006, 290). However, academics like Burgess and Green (2009) point out that "in practice the economic and cultural rearrangements that 'participatory culture' stands for are as disruptive and uncomfortable as they might be potentially liberating" (10). They go on to say that while technologically, YouTube's platform provides the site for this fan-generated content, it raises rather complicated cultural and political questions like "who gets to speak, and who gets the attention; what compensations or rewards there are for creativity and work; and the uncertainties around various forms of expertise and creativity" (11). These last two questions are vitally important for this study, but also in general, with the rise of NFTs and changes to the way people engage with and compensate digital artists. However, for our purposes here, what is important to note is that while in theory, YouTube and sites like that allow for a greater

democratisation of media production blurring the line between media consumer and producer, there are still levels that create barriers for entry.

As a software, Blender is like YouTube: while it provides a more tangible service and is not a platform for displaying work as YouTube is, Blender actively encourages user and fan participation, because of its open-source nature. According to Balka (2011), "an open-source software program grants access to the source code, and not only the object code (the sequence of 1s and 0s that computers actually use), and allows that the modifications by its users are turned back to the community" (3). The ease of access to Blender is certainly part of its appeal to those seeking an entry point in learning how to create digital scenes or make binary-based baked goods. It also contributes to participatory culture, though in a slightly different way, as after all there is a rather high skill wall that fans need to scale in order to contribute.

Here we should discuss in more detail the way in which fans of special effects engage in their topic of interest. Early studies on the spectacle that special effects provide have had less than kind things to say about these spectacular images. Indeed, Dan North (2008), in *Performing Illusion,* provides a compressive overview of these opinions in order to challenge them. Quoted by North (2008), Adorno states that "that admiration for cinematic spectacle triggers an awed deference to industrial power" (10). Similarly, Guy Debord (1983) states that engagement with spectacle "in principle is passive acceptance which in fact is already obtained by its manner of appearing without reply, by its monopoly of appearance." (12) Many of these criticisms of spectacular images come from a Marxist critical perspective, which suggests that larger-than-life images pacify the audience to accept the dominant ideology. However, myself and other special effects scholars, like North and Pierson, wish to challenge this notion. As North (2008) writes, through special effects we are invited "to marvel at a complex technical achievement, and challenged to locate discrepancies in the illusion" (2). Pierson (2002) continues the discussion of fans of special effects in her highly influential book *Special Effects: Still in Search of Wonder* where she states that "even some effects that are intended to be invisible may be apprehensible to the practiced eye of the connoisseur" (105)*.* Furthermore, she concludes the book by discussing Barbara Klinger's (1998) studies of Home Video DVD extras and cinephilia and how "domestic consumption of films represents an opportunity for more studied, attentive forms of viewing" (165).

Thus while there was a perception that those interested in special effects observed the effects passively, in actuality, special effects fans actively engage in collecting information on the effects they find fascinating.

However, this is only one half of the engagement as there is also a link between fans of special effects and those that make them. As Pierson (2002) writes, "it was not only fans who frequently imagined fandom to be preparation for a career in animation; animators' own accounts of their careers tended to confirm this view" (69). She then describes how, upon watching Willis O'Brien's animation in *King Kong* (Merian C. Cooper and Ernest B. Schoedsack 1933)*,* Ray Harryhausen, special effects pioneer behind the likes of *Clash of the Titans* (Desmond Davis 1981) and *Jason and the Argonauts* (Don Chaffey 1963), "the vision of its monstrous couplings [fed] the young Harryhausen's fantasies of re-enacting them himself" (70)*.* Fans of special effects, instead of passively accepting these spectacular images, both try to work out how an effect was done, collecting the knowledge to be disseminated amongst the fandom, and also attempting to create the effects themselves in order to pursue professional careers, just as Rick Baker and Ray Harryhausen did. Indeed, this is not limited to special effects, as Marc Joly-Corcoran (2019) uses the term "pro'fan'ssional to identify this category of fans who are working in the industry" (97), which perhaps points to the idea that while fans progress down this journey of media consumers to media producers, they never truly leave the fandom aspect of their identity behind.

In terms of my own position in this discussion and as this paper's author in the introduction of this piece, I used the term acafan, borrowed from Henry Jenkins's blog *Confessions of an acafan*, but what does this mean, and how does this relate to this specific study? Perhaps defining acafan as a term is to misunderstand what it is, as Louisa Stein (2011) states it "is not a category of scholar or a defined community, nor even a fixed position, but rather a descriptor of an ongoing, ever-shifting critical and personal process". Even so, Ross Peter Garner (2021) argues that the term acafan allows "the scholar [to] provide outsider readers with nuanced insights concerning how particular fan groups negotiate a commercial(ized) media(ted) object". This suggests that much like the act and method of autoethnography, the acafan can provide an interior story and greater depth of understanding to the topic. However, this stance is slightly problematic as it, as Matt Hills (2002) argues, "transforms fandom into an

absolute other" (21) that would be servicing academia rather than as a thing for and of itself (26).

It is therefore crucial to recognise my closeness to this study and relationship to this term, acafan. What Sam Ford (2011) argues

> whether "acafan" becomes a label for a scholar's relative position to an object of study; a mode of engagement with particular methodologies and approaches; or a label for a distinct kind of scholar or a sub-field of work under "fan studies." Sometimes, there seems to be slippage across these uses.

Much like Louisa Stein's response, my own usage of the term may be part of that "slippage". However, I see it as an acknowledgement of the complex relationship I have to this topic. I am a fan of special effects; I have engaged in the active collection of knowledge around techniques; I have peaked round the curtain of production of my favourite movies. However, I am also an academic focusing on special effects and the changing perception of them in film reception; thus I fit into both of these and I was advised by a colleague to try to learn Blender for future career prospects, as the nature of media studies in higher education focuses more and more on employable skills "that bridge the gap between industry needs and the traditional formats of higher education" (Kornelakis and Petrakaki 2020, 291). So much like those fans who have been drawn to the Blender Guru to learn 3D skills to pursue a career, I am similarly engaging in that mentality and practice. I am more than a hobbyist and a fan, I am somewhere between the awkward binaries of media consumer and media producer, amateur and professional, fan and academic.

Amateurish Professionalism: Issues of Fantrepreneurs Between the Binary of Media Consumer and Media Producer

Let us turn our attention to our case study and teacher, Andrew Price. Given YouTube is a place where anyone can post a video, how does this person justify their credentials as an educator? How do they present themselves to their audience? How and where

do they fit on this binary of amateur and professional that those who watch the tutorials wish to travel between?

Andrew Price (or as he is better known: BlenderGuru) started out as a fan of video games. In an interview with the YouTube channel *Art Side of Life,* he states that while playing *Need for Speed*,

> I was looking at the car on the turntable as it rotates. And I was like I want to make my own 3D car… If I made one myself, it would feel like I owned it. So I wanted to make one. So I went to the internet and I just looked up 3D software… I kept searching and I found this red car this beautiful render of a red car and it was hosted on Blender.org. I realised it was open source, it was free, you could learn everything by yourself reading manuals and things online.

This story is repeated on his website, but more interestingly, the "About" section of Price's website charts his career as a 3D Artist and an educator, a long and rather difficult journey. Price states that after school he "had no serious job prospects" (Price). He started making tutorials in Blender in order to get freelance work, though none came, even after a year of producing them. However, after attending a 2009 Blender conference and discovering that people liked his instructional videos, he began to pursue Blender and his channel BlenderGuru full time. Andrew Price is also the founder and CEO of a digital texturing and asset-building company called Poliigon, which, through memberships, allows users access to a library of 3D models and textures to use in professional and non-professional projects.

As Andrew Price is a creator on YouTube, it is also important to discuss how he relates to his audience and explore a concept attached to this form of celebrity, the idea of authenticity. While many academics who engage with and study the "microcelebrity"[2] discuss this in relation to vloggers and how that interacts with their celebrity, I believe that this concept of authenticity is vital to anyone who is creating online, especially those who produce content which is used to impart information. Smith (2014) argues that vloggers,

> supposedly capture everyday life and various aspects of the vloggers' ordinariness, their celebrity relies more and more on what their ordinariness is able to draw upon for its self-commodification… the

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[2] To borrow a term from Senft (2013).

YouTube celebrity simply highlights the tightrope walked between ordinary and extraordinary, person and celebrity. (257-260)

Price shares a lot about his personal life on his public Instagram and his own website, including his hobbies, his marital status and life as a father. Similarly, in his "About" page on his personal website, he uses a ":p" (Price) emoticon. This casual presentation endears him to his audience, allowing for a more relaxed teaching environment. Price's presentation on his YouTube is as someone who is just like his audience; he is casual in his mode of address, presenting his viewers with this idea of his authentic self. Price presents himself as approachable and not infallible; he is just excited to share his love of 3D modelling. This authenticity is what attracts many of his viewers, me included.

However, more than that, Price is a perfect example of the fan turned practitioner as described by Pierce and could also be seen as one of Suzanne Scott's Fantrepreneurs. According to Scott (2019), a fantrepreneur is "one who openly leverages or strategically adopts a fannish identity for their own professional advancement" (169). While the examples that Scott uses are figures like Felicia Day, who are tied into more obvious fan and nerd communities, Price fits into this definition as he leverages his status as a user of Blender and an educator in Blender to also sell a service that he provides. Specifically, as Scott (2019) puts it "fantrepreneurs centre their fan identities in their self-brand, automatically imbuing their efforts with an 'underdog' quality" (169). This fits perfectly with the notion of authenticity which appears in his tutorials and other media posts.

Another tenant of the fantrepreneur is the idea that, as Scott (2019) argues, "the fantrepreneur, like the fanboy auteur, commonly serves as a liaison between industry and audience, though their connections to 'official' industrial fan outreach initiatives can range in degree" (171). You can see this in how Price uses his position as an educator and YouTube personality in order to engage with professional 3D visual effects artists and other effects-based YouTube channels. Price has hosted interviews with the likes of Daniel Orive, who was at the time of the interview (23 March 2018) a Senior Character Designer at Riot Games (the studio behind *League of Legends*), and is now Art Director at Phoenix Labs (the studio that made *Dauntless*)*,* and Michael Vicente, who at the time of the interview (8 June 2018) worked as Senior 3D Environmental Artist at Blizzard Studios (the game studio behind *World of Warcraft*

and *Overwatch*), and is now the Principal Artist also at Phoenix Labs. Here, Price acts as a link between his students and professional 3D artists. This provides his audience with specific stories about entering the industry via skills in 3D art, suggesting pathways Price's viewers can follow. Here, he acts like a school or university teacher in a sense: Price is providing skills for employment to his students whom he teaches through his tutorials. But more than that, he also brings in guests to talk about how to get from an education to a work setting.

Fantrepreneurism generates a perception of power. However, this power interacts with the authenticity YouTube content creators seem to require to maintain relevance. Because of the platform, YouTubers must be seen to be "just like the audience," however, being an educator and fantrepreneur mean that there is a position of authority over their audience or class. I have written about this seemingly conflicting and contradictory position before (Pinsent, 2020, 132), and here we see it again. Price is in a rather interesting position as he is both a fan of 3D work, a teacher of 3D work, and a professional 3D artist who his fans look up to. Yet, he is outside the 'standard' VFX industry, implying that there are multiple stages between amateur and professional. Indeed, there are multiple types of professionals and Price wears many professional hats since he is an educator, a business owner and a practitioner, producing and selling 3D art, teaching others to do the same and enthusing about the process. Viewers of Price's work can be placed anywhere on this continuum between fan and whatever professional they wish to be, if that is someone who makes 3D effects, animation, a texture business, or if, like me, they are learning as an educator.

As a fan, like his audience, Price's recommendations and words still hold power even if he is technically also outside the VFX industrial "mainstream" — he teaches his viewers how to use software, answers their questions about going to art schools, getting specific hardware or software, etc. — yet has advertisements for his service, Poliigon, running in his tutorials as well. This is similar to the three points Bhatia (2018) makes about beauty vlogger Jaclyn Hill, and the way she has an informal address in her videos but also emphasises her qualifications, experience, and "industry affiliations" (112). What is interesting here is that Price can flit between the idea of an amateur and professional relatively easily and quickly, taking multiple stances at once. In the same section where Price deals with issues of filming, he will state that he has

"been using Blender for eighteen years, and I still have not […] touched some parts of Blender, like scripting." This statement holds those two seemingly exclusive positions simultaneously. Price is a Blender expert, and yet still positions himself as someone who is also learning how to use it. This blurring of boundaries is something that can be seen in Price's position as teacher and student. The fact that he is a fantrepreneur with industry connections echoes Hill's position (2002) well.

This is not to discredit Price or to undermine the brand he has generated as a creator *and* teacher. However, what this section shows is the fraught position Price is in: he is a talented 3D artist, savvy business owner and a gifted teacher. His donut tutorials are some of the first results in the YouTube searches for "blender tutorial." Yet the YouTube/Internet content creation space still affects the teacher-student relationship. Price sits in a conflicted position precisely because he occupies multiple spaces on this continuum between amateur and professional. Presentationally, he is an amateur. He is like his audience, he is authentic, makes mistakes, and shares his private life. Nevertheless, under closer examination, he is a professional who owns and operates a business, as an educator, and as CEO of Poliigon, a texture and model provider. As such, Price holds a privileged position over "regular" fans of special effects trying to learn. He proves that there are steps between the two seemingly binary positions of amateur and professional, though he also shows that there are also multiple types of professional as well, as both a fan of special effects and a producer of them.

Student and Teacher Blended Together: Issues of Presentation, Interactivity and Expertise in YouTube Digital Communication

Now that we have discussed Andrew Price as the teacher and his position within the YouTube space as an amateur and a professional and the blurring between those statuses we will discuss YouTube as a space for education as I experienced it through the process of making my digital donut — how it may change the way people learn, and alter the student/teacher relationship present in other educational settings. What is this environment, and how does it differ from existing learning environments?

First, YouTuber Educators utilise a different mode of address. Andrew Tolson (2010) compares the way YouTube differs from television and older media communication practices. He challenges the idea of authenticity within the television space for, while it may appear that the presenters are "being themselves", this is impossible as television "is governed by institutional protocols; nor is it interactive, because its recipients are positioned as an 'overhearing audience' (Heritage, 1985)" (Tolson 2010, 278). Instead, Tolson draws on Burgess and Green's assertion that YouTube's format encourages an "emphasis on liveness, immediacy and conversation" (Burgess and Green 2009, 54) in presentational address. From this Tolson identifies three main areas to analyse: presentation, interactivity and expertise. Let us take these three terms and see how they apply to Price's video tutorials.

We have discussed presentation partially, through Price's engagement with elements of authenticity that are so often part of a YouTube brand. However, the mechanics and lay-out of Price's tutorial videos are also key. Each episode of the Donut Tutorial for Blender version 3 ranges between 10 and 30 minutes, to allow for viewers to take an episode at a time covering one aspect of the process. They consist of Price shrunk into the corner of the video, with most of the screen taken up by Blender's user interface, so he can demonstrate what he is doing as he explains how to make a donut, because as Price says, "I think doing is the best way to learn". His causal mode of address continues to the content of the video: while he has key points that he wishes to hit, the tutorials are not scripted (in his first video in the series, *Blender 3.0 Beginner Tutorial – Part 1*, just after he relates to the viewer by complaining about how complicated Blender may seem at first and he also makes reference to a fly interfering with his set-up — and indeed it is for someone who has never done 3D modelling before — which was rather reassuring).

However, while it is easier to see the promotional machinations of beauty vloggers, the critiques of power and labour often levelled against them also have a place here. Tolson (2010) goes into detail about the limits of authenticity and makes a compelling argument for the way in which vloggers take up complicit relationships within capitalist economies (286). While not as explicit within the tutorials Price provides, there are elements of marketing involved, firstly for Poliigon which provides some free models and textures to those that sign up, though it is predominantly a subscription service,

but also slightly subversively through technological FOMO. This becomes very clear in the end stages of the tutorial series when it is time to render the donut, and it is something that I engaged with as I looked to upgrade my graphics card to speed up the time of rendering my projects.

Blender comes with two main ways of rendering. The first, Eevee, is based on estimating "the way light interacts with objects and materials using numerous algorithms" (Blender Manual 3.1), otherwise called Rasterization. Eevee has a relatively low intensity on hardware in comparison to the other render engine, Cycles, because Cycles uses Ray-Tracing technology, which "works by simulating and tracking every ray of light produced by a source of lighting" (Thomas 2019, https://www.techradar.com/uk/news/ray-tracing). As such Cycles requires a lot of power in terms of processing and a high-quality graphics card. While the PC I have (bought 8 years ago in order to run another high-power video editing software, Avid) is pretty powerful, running a Nvidia Quadro K4000 graphics card when rendering the full 300 frame animation of a donut spinning my computer took 11 to 12 hours to render all of the frames at 100 samples. However, Price, due to his professional status both as an educator and a 3D artist, has two RTX Titan graphics cards which means that his render speed is a lot quicker. While Price has no sponsorship from computer hardware companies to push products, there is a separation between those who can and cannot afford a high-end PC to render their projects in manageable times. Indeed, while going through the tutorial I found myself looking for ways to upgrade my computer. This reveals a soft barrier for entry within special effects. Despite how easy it is to access Blender and how user-friendly it is, if users wanted to shorten render time, they need to pay a significant amount of money for expensive hardware. This also challenges ideas of authenticity in the presentation, as one becomes aware of the budget Price has at his disposal.

The second part of the way YouTube educators communicate with their audience is interactively. As Tolson (2010) points out, this interactivity comes from both the content creator and from "viewer responses" (281). As Burgess and Green (2009) argue, a YouTuber's success comes from the ability to engage with "engagement with the YouTube community" (99). Price, on his podcast and longer form episodes, responds to viewer questions with regular "Q&A" videos. Similarly, he uses direct address to his

viewer, making them feel included in the learning. However, this is only one half of the interaction. While the address that Price presents can mostly be described as a "pedagogical monologue" (Bhatia 2018, 108), we must remember that "the YouTube site enables viewers to respond both with their own videos and more commonly with text comments" (Tolson 2010, 281). This is specifically interesting when it comes to the sharing of knowledge.

Price's tutorials are often comprehensive and professional in their presentation, but the ability to rewind and backtrack to make sure you understand something is useful, especially when you start learning about geometry nodes. Some comments are basic positive remarks like user Antesia Leigh, who notes under the third episode of the Donut Tutorial series, "Thank you for the time in creating great tutorials! I looked at other tutorials on YouTube, but this happens to be the best by far" or user AJ who says, "Great Stuff, fun to watch, lots of details, thanks man. I would say the modifiers are like filters on top of a lens on an SLR camera." However, more interesting to us is that commenters will often post questions about or solutions to problems that have occurred to them while creating their donut.

Something a student cannot do on YouTube that they would usually be able to in a standard classroom is to ask direct questions of their teacher and receive an immediate response. This can be quite difficult if your model is behaving in a different way to Price's example. This happened to me at multiple points in the journey. Other tutorial viewers asked a similar question, for instance, when Avidan Perry wrote:

> Hi and thank you for this great tutorial. I am adding Solidify to my icing, but it's doing the opposite. What I mean is I'm changing it to 1 the solidify gets inside the mesh (with positive thickness), of course if I'm setting negative value in theickness it will go out but that's opposite. On the other hand, if I change the offset to -1 then the solidify frows outwards, again it's the opposite, I tries this 10 times and still. Thanks!

Others, like Lilithin Merria, offered tips to help those looking for issues, stating

> For those having problems with the negative offset, do not forget to disable the proportional editing objects. Try also to move the icing up and down by grabbing it with G. If it doesn't work, delete the icing after diabling the proportional editing objects then make a new icing (with peo still off)

I was having specific difficulties with the icing just as Avidan was. I couldn't get the icing to interact with the donut in the proper way. I found comments like Lilithin's incredibly useful as they were filling in the gaps that Price had unintentionally left during his tutorials.

What comments like these add to the learning process is a "conversational character" of vlogging as highlighted in Burgess and Green (Tolson, 2010, 282), but it is more than just the direct response to the video which Tolson describes most comments being. Rather, it is more like a sharing of responsibility for learning. This demonstrates an egalitarian approach to sharing skills, as those in the comments are also able to help their fellow students by answering the direct questions or problems that Price is, due to the YouTube format, unable to. It implies that the students share a similar position to the teacher on YouTube, without fully receiving the compensation of the video producer, which touches on issues of fandom, the internet and free labour that this paper does not have the space to fully address. This coupled with the ability for viewers to rewatch videos, rewind, pause, slowdown, especially during the trickier parts, like I did with the nods and texture mapping episodes of the tutorial series, breaks up the "pedogeological monologue" and places it under the control of the viewer, adding to it and restructuring to suit their needs.

The final term Tolson (2010) discusses is expertise. Price is both a fan of special effects and 3D art but is also a professional 3D artist in his own right. However, in the same way that Price fits Scott's model of a fantrepreneur, Price is also an excellent example of what Bhatia (2018) calls an "*amateur expert*, who build a community of subscribers, or in effect; learners, creating an environment of informal learning" (108). Price has amassed a following of subscribers who learn through his tutorials, but he formed that to help his own professional ambitions and demonstrate his skills as a 3D artist. Tolson (2010) argues that the introduction of this expert mode of address provides an element of contradiction. Tolson (2010) points out that the use of the word "you" in beauty tutorials, and I argue the way Price uses them in his own tutorials, is part of a generalising language associated with lectures (283). However, this is in direct conflict with the personal and direct address more commonly associated with an "authentic" creator. Thus, the mode of address itself helps to justify the expertise of a YouTube creator, more than just pointing to qualifications. Indeed, as Bhatia (2018,

115) points out, specific use of jargon can help here, as can Price's position as a fantrapreneur, or the view that Price is a step up above his subscribers on the ladder between amateur and professional. This is specifically true when Price discusses the most complicated element of Blender — geometry nodes. Price demonstrates an understanding of every option in the node menu and how that would affect the model donut. His ability to demonstrate knowledge and his experience as a professional 3D modeller as marketed through his business Poliigon confers on him a certain level of expertise, counteracting the more egalitarian view of teaching on YouTube.

Through the discussion of how the YouTube platform affects teaching, we can see that the way viewers use YouTube as a place of learning promotes a more egalitarian and participatory atmosphere. In fact, it is a lot more complicated than that. Price presents himself in a way that endears him to his viewers. However, the way in which he performs during his tutorials somewhat complicates this, as there is a professionalism to the set-up as well as to the technology he uses as a professional tutorial producer and 3D artist that places him further up on the chain between amateur fan and professional producer than those he teaches. Though this position of power is overturned somewhat when we look at the way in which viewers interact with the videos, helping others in similar difficulties, blurring the distinction between teacher and student, turning it into a more egalitarian way of sharing information and knowledge. However, Price's expertise provides an element of difference between *The Blender Guru* and his viewers, breaking this idea of an authentic fan.

Conclusion

In analysing and exploring Andrew Price, both as a YouTube content creator and producer of YouTube tutorials, we see that there is a rather complex tapestry of positions at play within his online identity. Despite his presentation as seemingly authentic, imperfect, and casual at first glance, the nature of his content belies a more multifaceted professional quality due to his role as a 3D modeller and CEO of a texture producing company. His teaching quality is supported by how he presents his lessons, his expertise in the field and by his viewers who comment suggestions for dealing with issues not addressed within his videos. This exemplifies the complicated nature of

producing Internet content, but also in the way fans of special effects engage with and learn about the object of their obsession. It is a game of power, like most of the games played with cultural capital, those with the most knowledge are in a position of privilege in order to share it with the masses. This conflicts with the seemingly egalitarian participatory culture of YouTube, where everyone has the opportunity to post a video, but only those with a significant amount of resources to devote to growing their channel rise to the top.

However, the conclusions and observations made here are only partial. There are parts of this paper that need expanding in further research. This is a step towards understanding and exploring a rather complicated and important area of knowledge sharing, and the way YouTube and the Internet affect knowledge sharing, specifically in its modern iterations; the way that fantrepreneurs and amateur experts exist in and on a spectrum of continuums defining themselves through their relationship to their viewers. Yet, by engaging with the content, viewers are also engaged with issues of digital labour, both in terms of writing comments to help others in difficulty following the tutorial and in following the tutorial at all. After all, this learning happens outside the typical learning space, and while money is not being exchanged for the service or software, learners are encouraged to spend money to improve their technological hardware in order to progress in their career aspirations.

Through further study and exploration as Web 2 moves into Web 3, it will be vital to keep abreast of these new methods of communication and how this affects how fans of special effects learn their craft. After all, when the real and digital space are blended together in spaces like the Metaverse, what other binaries will become continuums?

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Teleography

Maya and the Three Netflix. October 22, 2021. Netflix

Benjamin Pinsent is an independent researcher with a special interest in special effects and film history. He recently received his PhD from the University of East Anglia, where he focused on the changing perception of the creature effects. He has presented on many aspects of the perception of special effects, even organising his own two-day symposium on Making Monsters (which produced a double special issue for the Journal of Adaptation and Performance*). Finally, he has also written on the notion of media producers and consumers concerning YouTuber Will McDaniel.*

Résumé

Cet article examine comment les fans d'effets spéciaux accèdent à du matériel d'apprentissage et viennent à développer des compétences nécessaires pour recréer les objets de leur obsession. En utilisant une approche auto-ethnographique et en prenant comme cas d'étude le logiciel de modélisation 3D Blender et le professeur d'effets spéciaux Andrew Price (alias The Blender Guru), l'article explore comment la plateforme YouTube affecte à la fois le statut de Price dans le continuum du fan et du professionnelle, et comment cela affecte le mode d'adresse que Price utilise pour enseigner à ses spectateurs, brouillant ainsi la ligne entre professeur et étudiant.

Mots-clés: Effets spéciaux, étude des fans, pédagogique numérique, Blender, YouTube