

Periodizing *Doctor Who*

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Abstract

This article critiques the tendency to periodize *Doctor Who* into particular eras. Although a convenient shorthand for understanding changes in production staff, regenerations of the main character, or behind-the-scenes script editing, the meaningful articulation of ruptures in the continuity of this television series acts reductively on story interpretation. Using background in genre theory and historiography, I show that periodization disciplines audiences to articulate particular assumptions about eras of the show. Rather than do away with periodization, however, I argue for a more nuanced understanding of the practice within *Doctor Who* fandom, looking specifically at archontic principles of *Doctor Who*, where periodization joins continuity, canon, and context as concomitant ‘multi-spectral’ organizational factors.

Periodizing *Doctor Who*

As the fiftieth anniversary of *Doctor Who* [UK 1963-1989; US/UK 1996; UK 2005-present] fades into the past, *Doctor Who* fans can chalk up one more milestone for the now omnipresent BBC franchise. During ‘The Name of the Doctor’, the finale of Season 7B, companion Clara Oswald is revealed/retconned to have infiltrated all the previous Doctors’ eras. Although unseen, she permeates his past. Such a revelation/revision requires a shift in the conception of all *Doctor Who* knowledge, and perhaps one day we’ll even look back at ‘The Name of the Doctor’ as a major turning point for the series; a pivot that marks (and is marked as) a rupture between two eras of *Doctor Who* – pre-Clara and post-Clara.

If we did this, we wouldn’t be unusual. *Doctor Who* fans, scholars, and producers have, since the earliest days of the series, catalogued *Doctor Who* into eras based on production characteristics. The most obvious periodization of *Doctor Who* is by the Doctor himself, perhaps initially taking the cue from the shift in leading actor, the regeneration cycle, and the resulting changes in characterizations of the titular hero (Booth and Burnham). From a production standpoint, the shift in the lead actor often came with it a shift in behind-the-scenes personnel, and each new producer or script editor might offer his take on the show (Steward 313). This is how Chapman organizes his historical analysis of *Doctor Who*: ‘While the character and performance of each ‘star’ has done much to influence the nature of the series, the role of key production personnel, particularly the producer and script editor, is even more significant in shaping the content of the series’ (10). Beyond production staff, there could be even more ways of constructing the periodization of *Doctor Who*: through technological changes (pre-colour and post-colour; see Miles and Wood 9-11), through audience viewership (from children to adult

viewers; see Bignell, 'The Child'; O'Day), through shifts in fandom (Hills, 'Foreword'); through medium shifts (from television to books, from audio to multi-media; see Booy; Britton), through recording technology (film and videotape to digital; see Rolinson 187), or through intertextual connections (see Miles and Wood 9-13).

Any categorization helps us understand the meta-diegetic 'story of the series' (Wood, *About Time* 3), what Parkin calls the 'metanarrative' of *Doctor Who* ('Truths' 4). Seeing *Doctor Who* as broken into parts rather than as a coherent whole may not be an incorrect assessment of the show. *Doctor Who* might more accurately be described as a loosely connected series of programs than one coherent text. Wood goes so far as to call it an 'anthology' series (*About Time* 6 15). Indeed, the 'multi-vocality' (Britton 12) of *Doctor Who* has prompted scholar-fan Matt Hills to differentiate between classic and new *Who* 'on the basis that these were produced in radically different industrial and cultural contexts, as well as therefore exhibiting significant textual differences' (*Triumph* 4). What other show has such a complete shift in tone and atmosphere over fifty years, such a tremendous turnover in behind-the-scenes personnel, and still manages to maintain a coherent identity?

Despite the inherent usefulness of periodization, however, there are issues with any set of coherent categorizing principles. Periodization teaches us about ruptures in the categorical systems, but illuminates assumptions and conventions within those systems. *Ultimately, periodization helps create the very evaluative system used to periodize.*

This article looks at the significance and consequence of periodizing *Doctor Who*. It is impossible to escape periodizing *Doctor Who*, and the point of this article is not to moralize or be polemical. I'm not trying to change anyone's categorization system of *Doctor Who*, nor am I making the argument that we shouldn't organize *Doctor Who* in such ways. Not only would this

bring with it the real possibility of re-opening and implicitly condoning fractious continuity debates within fandom and scholarship, but it would also fly in the face of accepted facts about *Doctor Who*. It is incontrovertible that *Doctor Who* has been made with different people at the helm, different actors in the lead role, and different technologies shaping the ‘extensive approach’ (Tulloch and Alvarado 2) of the unfolding narrative (Britton 2). As *Doctor Who* script writer, long-time script editor, and prolific author of the Target novelizations Terrance Dicks describes (quoted here in Tulloch and Alvarado 3):

‘*Doctor Who* is like a saga. Every few years there will be a new something. There will be a new companion. There will be new writers. There will be new script editors. There will be new producers. And every chunk of years there will be a new Doctor. So all of these things bring change’.

But articulating these changes at the expense of other organisational factors places undue emphasis on those changes, and serves to prescribe, rather than describe, production knowledge.

In this article, I’ll start by taking a cue from Hills’s articulation of Foucauldian discursive analysis by examining *Doctor Who*’s multiple discourses. I’ll then explore the larger issue of historiography within cultural studies, looking specifically at Jason Mittell’s cultural theory of genre as a way to appreciate the expanse of *Doctor Who*. Following this review of periodization, I’ll demonstrate how the assumptions about particular eras in *Doctor Who*’s history actually create the very strata they seem to describe. Finally, I’ll look at periodization from a slightly different perspective; not ignoring the work of Mittell and Foucault, but augmenting it with an archontic look at the program through a Derridean lens.

Rather than do away with periodization, however, I argue for a more nuanced understanding of the practice within *Doctor Who*, where periodization joins continuity, canon,

and context as concomitant organizational factors. Rather than analysing single moments, I want to take a step back to look at the show's heterogeneity. We can never escape periodization, but we can integrate it more fully into our understanding of the show. My discussion centres on viewing *Doctor Who* as a corpus, as it emerges out of what Mittell calls 'specific cultural relations, rather than abstract textual ideals' (23). This article is an attempt to situate *Doctor Who* into the 'larger contexts' of periodization as discursive in and of itself. To determine the entity known as '*Doctor Who*', we must articulate the binary between continuity and fragmentation; we must see *Doctor Who* as *both* a continuous program split into fragmented parts *and* as a series of fragments cohered to a whole at the same time.

The *Doctor Who* Corpus

Periodization is uniquely positioned to highlight the changing evaluative and contextual understanding of *Doctor Who* across multiple cultural/historical moments (Barron; Charles, 'Crack'; Cranny-Francis and Tulloch). There are more than just production personalities at the heart of the periodization of *Doctor Who*, as 'stark contrasts... need to be explained in terms of the forces much more powerful than individual whim or intention' (Tulloch and Alvarado 4). *Doctor Who*'s eras help to determine the audience they engenders, as Sandifer describes: '[a]ll attempts to cobble together pet theories out of existing evidence are as much a product of their own eras as the "errors" that they attempt to correct' (*Volume 3* 172). Although a useful heuristic in *deepening* segmented forms of knowledge, periodization also acts reductively, *disciplining* various contextual meanings into particular articulations of significance.

Multiple discourses are necessary for a more coherent picture of *Who*, as Hills discusses (*Triumph* 14-15). This multi-discursive approach was also illustrated in the first major academic analysis of *Doctor Who*, John Tulloch and Manuel Alvarado's *The Unfolding Text*, when they investigate the program through a 'wide range of institutional, professional, public, cultural and ideological forces' (2). Such discursive categorization is also a classic precedent in Foucauldian theories, in which he argues that the *way we articulate determines what we know*. We understand knowledge through different discursive lenses. Each lends colours what we see and how the various discourses informs us. Foucault's discursive theories 'resist ... the impulse to seek an origin or transcendental subject that would confer any special meaning on existence' (White 105). As Foucault describes in *Archaeology of Knowledge*, "Discourse is not the majestically unfolding manifestation of a thinking, knowing, speaking subject, but, on the contrary, a totality, in which the dispersion of the subject and his discontinuity with himself may be determined" (55); in other words, each era of *Doctor Who* discursively determines its own audience. All knowledge is experienced and known through the multiple discourses through which they are constructed. Hills looks at *Doctor Who* via Foucault to establish that 'the text of *Who* is inevitably "caught up in a system of references to other ... texts... it is a node within a network ... It indicates itself, constructs itself, only on the basis of a complex field of discourse"' (*Triumph* 15, citing Foucault, *Archaeology* 23). To examine *Doctor Who*'s eras is to prescribe meaning to each era; to examine the *Doctor Who* corpus through one particular lens is to delimit always-already the terms of analysis. Periodizing underscores – but does not create – the mechanisms by which categories are established. Only by looking at how categories 'operate within the practices of critics, audiences and industries', as Mittell states, and examining the

multiple discourses such operations engender, can we fully articulate *Doctor Who*'s multiple categorizations (13).

Although much has been written about the way individuals create and organize value *between* texts (see Hills, *Fan Cultures* 58-63), relatively little analysed has been the way they may analyse value *within* a text's corpus itself (McKee, 'Which Is', being a notable exception). One case of the latter is Henry Jenkins's discussion of *Beauty and the Beast* (US: 1987–1990) fandom, in which he describes fans' frustration with their inability to 'protect their favourite series from being radically altered' in between Seasons 2 and 3 (123). In contrast, while many fan discussion boards illustrate differing opinions about particular episodes, few programs have been as long-lived as *Doctor Who* to invite the kind of complete production turn-over that responds to this sort of macro-level comparison.

Expanding on this point in his analysis of the new series of *Doctor Who*, Matt Hills describes the difference between traditional fan analysis of the show (which he terms 'intratextual') and scholarly analysis (which tends to be a 'intertextual') (*Triumph* 4; see also 'Dispersible' 35). Fannish intratextual analysis tends to look inwards, examining what makes the show 'unique' – it is an ontological analysis of *Doctor Who*. In contrast, a scholarly, intertextual approach looks at the relationship between *Doctor Who* and other texts, often reading the show through specific theoretical frameworks. His attempt to combine intra- with inter- approaches:

can allow *Doctor Who* fandom to sidestep one of its bugbears: the issue of what counts as 'authentic' *Who* ... Fan criticisms involve shaping an image of 'ideal' *Who*, a kind of Platonic essence of the series (which may never have been realized fully in any one story) (*Triumph* 5).

This ‘unattainable’ goal is the approximation of the quintessence of *Doctor Who*, something that one could point to and say *this is what Doctor Who is*. Different fans may be able to articulate particular eras as the most ideal (e.g., the Hinchcliffe/Holmes ‘gothic horror’ era: Chapman 98; Hills, ‘Gothic’; Andy Murray 223), but no value judgment can be said to be authoritative. The point is that, if one particular era of *Doctor Who* may or may not be described by a particular fan as the essence of *Doctor Who*, then *any* era could be said to be ideal *Who* – and therefore none actually is.

Historiographic Methods

Probably the most common form of viewer periodization is the change in lead actor (e.g., Leach). The Doctor’s regeneration cycle offers a visible and highly ordered mechanism by which periods of the show can be separated: for each Doctor, a different era. Useful in a superficial sense, the lead actor certainly influences how the show is perceived. Sixth Doctor Colin Baker’s rather brash portrayal colours (no pun intended) that era of the show. The ‘erratic’ Fourth Doctor is characteristic of the schizophrenic nature of his long tenure. This organization can be problematic, however: how to define the Eighth Doctor era, when only one televised text but hundreds of hours of non-televised material exists (Parkin, ‘Canonicity’)? Indeed, categorizing *Doctor Who* not only tells us about the show, but also tells us about the categorizer, and what they consider important (Kilburn 167). Additionally, trying to understand the character of the Doctor as separate from the production staff elides, as Wood suggests, the important behind-the-scenes elements that historicise and periodize the show into even more eras (*About Time* 6 11). Chapman organizes his book *Inside the TARDIS* through this type of production history,

subdividing *Doctor Who* into the tenures of various production personnel, and mainly focusing on the interaction of the producer and the script-editors. For example, he defines the era of the first producer/script-editor, Verity Lambert (1963-1965) and David Whitaker (1963-1964) as reflective of the split between historical and science fiction adventures. Similarly, the production team of producer Barry Letts (1970-1975) and script-editor Terrance Dicks (1968–1974) saw the start of Jon Pertwee as lead actor and his “Earthbound” adventures. Such an argument is echoed by Tom Steward, who asserts that ‘producers and script editors are associated with marked shifts in the tone of drama’ (314; see also Rolinson 179). And the producers of *Doctor Who* themselves have used this production method to periodize. New *Who* regenerator Russell T. Davies, in describing the transition between the end of his tenure and Steven Moffat’s incoming one, supposes that each new production team creates a new show:

the best thing that a new [production] team can do is move in, trample over the way that we did things, and find new ways for themselves ... they’d be better off packing up our stuff and throwing our boxes into the street. New show! New team! New start! (133; also 469)

This type of production-based examination of the show stems from an inherent historiographical analysis. Historiography is the study of how history itself is made – how human beings, as individuals and as collectives, construct, develop, and write a ‘narrative’ of history. We must always construct history, as to be understood, historical events must be ‘narrated as well, that is to say, revealed as possessing a structure, an order of meaning, that they do not possess as mere sequence’ (White 5). History, in this way, is not what happened in the past, but rather a reflection of a contemporary understanding and construction of ‘past-ness’ (see Booth, *Time* 109-175). This reflection, as film historian Charles Altman notes, helps to categorize

history, but does not explain it past the organizational tools used for that categorization. That is, periodizing history is a ‘procedure which is reassuring in its neatness, but provides only an approximate fit to historical phenomena – we need to recognize that each type of history writing implies its own periodization’ (Altman 24; see also Bentley 749). His solution to this historiographic principle is to see both the process of periodization and its contextual understanding together within ‘the complex web of relationships’ that are uncovered during analysis (24). Easier said than done, especially when *Doctor Who*

has no ... single authority or anything much like it. When the TV series was in production from 1963 to 1989, the producer usually had the power to approve merchandise and insist on changes, but there were twelve producers over the course of that run, and there were dozens of script editors and writers, each with different ideas about *Doctor Who* and attitudes to the audience and fans of the series (Parkin, ‘Canonicity’ 252).

Where does this sort of historiographic organizational principle lie ‘in a programme without an auteur-creator to guide it through all its history?’ (Booy 4).

Whatever historiographic principles we use to characterize a particular era of *Doctor Who* will inherently be biased towards those very principles. We might watch a Pertwee episode and see the ‘Earthbound’ criteria in the Letts/Dicks story, watch a McCoy episode and see the ‘master manipulator’ characteristics of a Nathan-Turner/Carmel production, or watch Tom Baker in a Williams/Adams produced script and expect humour – because *we’re already expecting that characteristic*. The characteristic has become canon, rather than the unique elements of the narrative (Hills, ‘Gothic’). These characteristics thus arrive at the expense of other, perhaps just as relevant, characteristics. To deny that there aren’t predominantly Doctorish

manipulations within the Cartmel period, or that the Letts/Dicks period wasn't primarily Earthbound, would be ludicrous. Obviously, these are both true. But centralizing the periodization to that characteristic only *typifies* that particular era, it does not define it (Bignell, 'Exemplarity'). Lest we forget, the Third Doctor is not 'Earthbound' for the entirety of his tenure (and indeed, during his exile manages to get offworld on multiple occasions), but using the term colours our interpretation of his other adventures as well. Similarly, the 'mercurial' of the elements of the Seventh Doctor are only really present in some of his final episodes. And while there are definitely moments of humour in the Williams/Adams era, there are monsters, horrific elements, and other non-comedic elements that are elided in discourse about the era – the face emerging from the foliage in 'The Nightmare of Eden' is horrifying, not humorous, for instance.

Generic Methodology

As the *Doctor Who* corpus grows, genre might be a more convincing way of understanding *Who* than one based in production personnel (O'Mahoney 56-57). Ultimately, generic discourse leads Hills to note the fannish claim that '*Doctor Who*'s essence lies in the very fact that its format cannot be pinned down generically' (*Triumph* 7; see also Butler, 'How to' 20). Beyond format, the actual episodes themselves of the show can range from historical fiction to science fiction; from romance to comedy; from horror to western. The multi-genre argument recalls Tulloch and Alvarado, who argue that 'the uniqueness and ...durability' of the program lies in its 'range of different genres' (5).

For *Doctor Who*, there are multiple ways for fans and audiences to periodize by genre. Individual episodes may follow more or less in a particular generic template (e.g., 'The Robots

of Death' and 'Terror of the Vervoids' are inherently murder mysteries; 'Blink' and 'Midnight' are generically horror episodes). Further, whole seasons may be constructed around generic elements (e.g., the 'entropy' theme of Season 18; the 'time-travel paradoxes' of Series 6). But as Mittell has shown, genre characteristics are themselves problematic in asserting classification strata, as categories can exist only to organize texts, not to delineate what is contained within them:

The members of any given category do not create, define, or constitute the category itself. Categories link a number of discreet elements together under a label for cultural convenience. While the members constituting a category might all possess some inherent trait binding them into the category...there is nothing intrinsic about the category itself. (Mittell 7)

Doctor Who is emblematic of this generic issue. 'Blink' might be a horror story, but that doesn't really tell us about what that means. And it's a different type of horror than, say, 'The Nightmare of Eden'. What might be a more telling example of generic periodization of *Doctor Who*, as described by Andy Murray, at least, is the way the script-editor functions to impact the development of the show. The script-editor oversees the scripts for a particular series, often rewriting (or even writing) individual episodes to keep a consistent tone throughout (Davies 150).

Perhaps the most-cited (or celebrated) script-editor in terms of *Doctor Who* is Robert Holmes, who script edited during the mid-1970s, wrote individual episodes for Doctors Two through Six, and 'became a linchpin of the series' writing pool' for the Third Doctor (Andy Murray 219). But it's during his tenure as script-editor, when he worked with Philip Hinchcliffe and Tom Baker, that he solidified what fans often call the 'golden age' of *Doctor Who*, with its

reputation in the ‘gothic’ genre (Hills, ‘Gothic’ 3; Hills, *Triumph*). This genre focused on, among other things, an ‘uncanny’ sense of the body (Charles, ‘Crack’) and remaking classic horror stories in a science-fictional context (e.g., *Frankenstein* becomes ‘The Brain of Morbius’ while *The Mummy* becomes ‘Pyramids of Mars’). If we can identify the Baker/Hinchcliffe/Homles period as one filled with monsters and versions of horror, however, it tells us only about that one trait; not the genre in and of itself. Further, it only describes one generic aspect of these scripts – namely, that many rewrite or refer to classic monsters. Identifying each episode in this generic manner reduces the episode to that genre, eliding characteristics of other genres that may also be present. For example, reading ‘Pyramids of Mars’ as a gothic horror elides the important time travel narrative at the heart of the story, and glosses the narrative discussion of paradoxes (Booth, *Time* 155).

Other script-editors follow similar generic lines; for example, another influential script-editor, Douglas Adams, is often featured as a key shaper of the series’ generic development, moving it from Holmes’ gothic sensibilities into an era of ‘undergraduate humour’ and ‘silliness’ (Rolinson 179). Again, identifying the genre within the series (or even the episode) reduces articulation of other generic characteristics. Focusing on the silliness of, say, ‘The Creature from the Pit’ disguises the underlying emotional elements (especially the pathos of the plight of the monster). Alan McKee’s discussion of ‘what makes the best *Doctor Who* story’ illustrates the mutable nature of value in periodizing *Doctor Who*. His answer, ‘The City of Death’ (an Adams-penned and script-edited story), makes liberal use of many key genre characteristics of the era: strong plotting, wittiness, humorous portrayals, guest stars, e.g. (‘Why Is’ 243). Value judgments notwithstanding, each characteristic could be applied to multiple eras (e.g., the tenure of the Second Doctor saw plenty of witty, humorous plots with guest stars).

Yet, in assigning ‘quality’ to these particular categories asserts what film scholar Andrew Tudor has called ‘The Empiricist Dilemma’, a problematic at the heart of genre studies. Before analysing a genre, critics must isolate texts:

on the basis of the ‘principle characteristics’, which can only be discovered from the films themselves after they have been isolated. That is, we are caught in a circle that first requires that the films be isolated, for which purposes a criterion is necessary, but the criterion is, in turn, meant to emerge from the empirically established common characteristics of the films. (5)

In other words, by establishing criteria, genre critics ‘merely reproduce the initial assumptions that led to establishing their primary sample’ (Mittell 11-12). To determine the humour elements of Adams era is to always-already have seen those elements in the first place; it’s a backwards way of establishing periodizing qualities, and hides other facts that go into developing a theory of generic discourse. For example, Rolinson notes how the story ‘State of Decay’ was originally written for Season 15 (clearly in the ‘gothic’ tradition of Holmes) but didn’t make it into the series until the entropic Season 18 (by then, Christopher H. Bidmead was script-editor) (182–183; see also Hills, ‘Gothic’ 7). By then, the ‘gothic’ sensibilities (at least in genre theory) had supposedly been replaced by John Nathan-Turner-produced focus on entropy. By which elements do we periodize ‘State of Decay’? Identifying the ‘gothic’ era in this generic way, we also find the very characteristics we’re trying to uncover, which colours the interpretation of the story. Establishing generic characteristics for particular eras also elides those characteristics in *other* eras.

Hierarchies and Problematics with Periodization

So far I have been describing the production history and the genre of *Doctor Who* as two of the main periodizing principles (and the producer/script-editor combination leading to specific historiographic and generic elements). Any type of categorization brings with it assumptions that discipline and determine our understanding of the whole. If *Doctor Who* is a ‘vast fictional quilt’ (Britton 5; Harrigan and Wardrip-Fuini 2), then, stretching the metaphor a bit, the more we categorize the quilt via its individual blocks, the less we know about the blanket. The more attached one gets to a particular type of block, the more fractured the view of the entire quilt one gets.

In other words, a non-generic, anti-hierarchical view of *Who* elides the Platonic ideal of periodization to focus on the show’s ability (like its protagonist) to shape-shift as a key factor in its longevity. As David Butler suggests:

it is this openness to diversity and change that is one of the great strengths of the programme... What makes *Doctor Who* particularly notable, and has perhaps enabled it to last so long, is its blurring of boundaries. *Doctor Who* has defied easy classification...’ (‘Introduction’ 8)

Hills takes this to its logical conclusion, that fans and academics alike could explore ‘new *Who*’ without getting hung up on its “essence” and on whether a given episode is “really” *Doctor Who*’ (*Triumph* 8). Because of the nature of *Doctor Who*, it is ultimately antithetical to the essence of the series to elide periodization. *Doctor Who* is, and always has been, about change, renewal, and development (see Butler, ‘Introduction’ 7; Sandifer, *Volume 1*). *Doctor Who* is never standard, which makes it always in-process.

But if periodization becomes the lens through which all *Doctor Who* is interpreted, then that too reductively facilitates a specific reading of the corpus – a reading itself based on periodization as the totalizing principle. Periodization *as* the focus elides periodization *within* the corpus.

Thus, periodization always-already brings with it a disciplining procedure; periodizaing *as* that procedure reinforces what viewers and fans think of a particularly favoured era, and what judgments to bring to any intra-fandom or inter-scholarly debates. Although previous academic research into fandom (Jenkins; Bacon-Smith) has described the homogenous groups of fans that provide useful models of community, especially online (Booth, *Digital*); other studies have shown a more fractious relationship between groups of fans and audience members (Hadas; Hills, *Fan Cultures*; Johnson). As Lindolf, Coyle and Grodin illustrate, ‘a typical media audience is not a cohesive membership that behave according to a shared code’; instead, they ‘use and interpret the ‘same’ text in divergent ways and decide when, where, and how they will engage a medium, subject to the demands and constraints of their social order’ (219-220). Audience engagement with *Doctor Who* is based not just on ‘social order’, but also on the key paradigms exposed and accentuated by periodization. Making periodizing itself the key characteristic reifies and accentuates these paradigms.

The periodizing consistency of *Doctor Who* fans emerges through the ascription of value to particular eras, stars, producers, or functions of the text. Any assertion of value is thus ‘specific to the particular regime that organizes it’ (Frow 145), the text shaping the ‘social hierarchy’ of the fan community that follows (Hills, *Fan Cultures* 46). This does not occur just via the mechanism of interpersonal communication; technology can engender fragmentation as well. Far from uniting fandom, online technologies and social media often reveal the ‘non-

homogenous' nature of fandom, where 'the fans' love for the text separates them as much as it unifies them' (Chin 97). As Leora Hadas illustrates in terms of *Doctor Who* fan communities, new fans will flood the internet with characteristics that older fans will not like, and consequently, 'the community will lose its distinction and its members will have less and less in common – certainly not a defined ethos that unifies them on any level' (3.5). Following a text with a fifty-year history, the 'community' of *Doctor Who* fans must create strata in order to self-actualize. The positioning of individual membership in any fandom depends on the relationship with others' organizational principles.

Periodization emerges as a key factor in determining those organizational principles. But as we've seen, there are inherent issues with periodization, ones that ascribing value to particular eras of *Doctor Who* both engender and reify. To summarize so far:

- Periodization establishes temporal and spatial boundaries for a text that may or may not conform to those actual boundaries;
- Periodization engenders the very characteristics that are used to develop those periods;
- Periodization emphasizes division rather than continuity, encouraging the development of criteria of differentiation rather than unity;
- Periodization emphasizes production strategies (celebrity, producer, script editor), eliding other characteristics that might also be relevant (audience, technology, context).

This final point deserves some more exploration. In terms of the production strategies, periodization puts an emphasis on dividing *Doctor Who* into eras based entirely around white, male hierarchies (with the notable exception of first producer Verity Lambert). Excepting Lambert, all the producers, stars, and script editors of *Doctor Who* have conformed to the traditional system of cultural privilege. This may be an issue with the BBC production system

itself rather than with periodization, but examining the series from a production standpoint emphasizes and reinforces this privilege.¹

Archives, Palimpsests, and Periodization

So what? What does it matter that there are some issues with periodization? Can't we just accept that every organizational system has some problems and have done with it? Indeed, this accept-and-deal-with-it solution is often the most viable in fan and scholarly discourse. If every organizational or periodizing force is problematic in its own way, then offering alternates simply reifies the problem. However, I'd like to posit a way to think around organizational and periodizing issues. Instead of focusing on periodization as a totalizing force for categorization, I'd like to examine what Abigail Derecho has defined as 'archontic literature' as a way of 'thinking otherwise' (Gunkel) through these issues. Archontic *Who* – looking at the archive-like qualities of *Doctor Who* – provides a mechanism for integrating periodizing tendencies within a continually-expanding corpus. And this, I believe, provides a post-structuralist methodology for conceptualizing *Doctor Who*'s 'unfolding' text as a key exemplar of a 'hyperdiegetic' narrative space (Hills, *Fan Cultures* 137).

The term 'archontic' comes from Derrida, who describes the properties of an archive that allow it to continually open up to allow new and varied inclusions. An archive can never be completely closed, for it must always allow the continual renewal of new information. As Derecho describes in her analysis of the archontic properties of cult texts, 'any and every archive remains forever open to new entries, new artifacts, new contents' (64). She uses the term to connect fan fiction to a larger corpus, as 'the archontic principle never allows the archive to

remain stable or still, but wills it to add to its own stores' (Derecho 64). In other words, the existence of an archive *encourages* contributions to enlarge and develop that archive (see Booth, *Digital*). I would make a correlated argument: that the archontic properties of *Doctor Who* allow it to be continually added to as an archive, not (just) through ancillary texts, but also through canonized and ret-conned information. In this, for example, Clara both *did* and *did not* influence past *Who* at the same time.

For Derrida, the primary 'archontic principle ... is also a principle of consignment (3). Thus, the first archontic principle is the 'breakdown' of memory into *inscription* (11). For *Doctor Who*, inscription is key to the way periodizing functions: individuals and communities group the 'endless transformations and complex weavings' (Tulloch and Alvarado 5-6) together, inscribing meaning into each 'entry' as a unique unit of data within a *Doctor Who* 'database'. The archive is not just a thing but a process; is not just a device for reproduced information but for production itself (Booth, *Digital* 108). Clara literally (re)inscribes herself into the corpus, coherent it together. Far from escaping the issues of periodizing, *inscription provides sanctuary for inscribed cultural meaning*.

The second property of the archive in its relation to *Doctor Who* is its ability to be *rewritten as it goes*. Archives record but they also work to construct the nature of the content. 'Archive' is both a noun and a verb, and to archive something means to write its place within an already-extant structure (Derrida 17). This inherent rewritability applies as *Doctor Who* continually reinvents itself: the notion of particular eras thus flourishes under archontic principles. As Britton notes about *Doctor Who*'s continuity:

What is striking about *Doctor Who* is the extent to which the process of defining the texts' internal universe is palimpsestic. In other words, key elements have not always

simply been brought into alignment with existing ‘truths’, or vice versa; some of them have effectively overwritten earlier histories, albeit leaving the original elements partially visible. (23)

The notion of the palimpsest highlights that not only are archives about inscription, but they are about *reinscription* as well. Changing the categorization doesn’t alter the text, it alters the category into which the text has been placed. Thus, re-categorization invites, rather than elides, re-evaluative discourses. *Doctor Who* thrives on this re-evaluative situation. Each era of the show – however it is defined – undergoes a ‘cycle of evaluation’, in which its value is ‘continually reworked’ (McKee, ‘Which Is’ 12–14).

This cycle of evaluation leads naturally to a third archontic principle of *Doctor Who*: namely that archives *are paradoxically expansive and limited in scope*. As Derrida describes, archives always ‘open out to the future’ (68; quoted by Derecho 64). The inclusion of new material naturally engenders the desire to include more material. But an archive must necessarily exclude some material in order to be separate from the culture that created it. We know *Doctor Who* because there are things that are *not Doctor Who*, and they firmly remain outside the scope of the show. Canonicity, as Parkin notes, matters.

Parkin describes the desire of *Doctor Who* fans to continually add to or adjust what counts as ‘canon’ within *Doctor Who* (‘Canonicity’). Although he talks about the books and comics predominantly, his argument can extend to the nominally canonized material of the show itself (‘Truths’). In a historiographic or generic argument about the show, problems over quality ‘always exclude parts of the whole’, as Hills explains: some eras of *Doctor Who* are ‘less “proper” than other examples, whether it is anything broadcast after the introduction of K-9 in 1977, or seemingly anything after 2005’ (*Triumph* 6-7). One relevant example is the 1996

Doctor Who TV movie (TVM). As a singular text situated within the heart of the largest rupture in the series' history, the TVM is an exemplar of a Derridian *différance*, situated between and betwixt eras, marking a point of estrangement that reveals the artificiality of periodization. Any information within the TVM might fall prey to the categorical tendencies that elide information within a non-canonized text. For example, the TVM reveals that the Eighth Doctor is half-human. Within a historiographical or generic periodization of *Doctor Who*, such information would taint the entire Eighth Doctor period. We discursively understand the Eighth Doctor as half-human and that information would thus underscore our reading of the era. Even showrunner Russell T. Davies reveals this discourse. In his *The Writer's Tale*, a book chronicling his writing of the last two years of David Tennant's tenure, he describes an original draft of *The End of Time*, in which Davies included a line that jokingly referred this half-human assertion. However, Davies says cut the line as a 'silly reference – and kind of confusing, since most of the audience will remember the Doctor being human in *Human Nature* rather than the 1996 TV Movie' (627). Even in its erasure, the Eighth Doctor's half-human nature affects the corpus. Such a reductive move illustrates the way individual elements within a period can overshadow larger concerns.

Through an archontic lens, however, the expansive archive 'always produces more archive, and that is why the archive is never closed' (Derrida 68). There is no finality to the archive, which means an individual element can and will 'always work, and *a priori*, against itself' (Derrida 12). The half-human nature of the Eighth Doctor can thus *exist within the same system as the information that he is full Gallifreyan*. Davies could or could not include it equally, as it is always-already inscribed within the archive. The units of information that are prescribed and described within an archive thus *individually* reflect the category but do not *transfer* that meaning to other entries. Both elements become part of the archive as equally concomitant but

contradictory facts. Through a dialetheistic methodology, in which ‘both the thesis and the antithesis ... must be true’, paradoxes are maintained within the *Doctor Who* narrative (Booth, *Time* 112). Such a methodology represents an archontic understanding of *Doctor Who* periodization, structuring and delineating new reflections on the show.

The paradox of expansion/exclusion arrives with *Doctor Who*’s placement in a particular contextual time and space. Although it is constantly expanding, the *Doctor Who* archive must be limited within its culture to be recognized. We recognize *Who* not only for what it is, but for what it is not, and make arguments about canonicity to determine this placement. Is ‘Mission to the Unknown’ part of *Doctor Who*? Yes – although it doesn’t have any regular cast. We know this both because there is an ‘inside’ to *Doctor Who* – the narrative of ‘The Daleks’ Master Plan’ incorporates ‘Mission’ – and because there is an ‘outside’ to *Doctor Who* as a text – it is bounded by interstitial titles, promos, and other extra-diegetic, paratextual material (Gray). And this relates to the archive, for there can be no archive without a sense of inside and outside the archive as well. For Derrida, ‘*There is no archive ...without a technique of repetition, and without a certain exteriority*’ (11). If everything were part of an ‘infinite archive’, it would cease to be an archive at all (Pearson). Alec Charles argues that *Doctor Who* is inherently defined by ‘relatively and relativism...not continuity but discontinuity’ (‘Ideology’ 111). There must be elements that are outside the text that provide a lens to examine within. Drawing from what it is *not*, the television program tells us more about our contemporary archival of it than it does about the show itself. *Doctor Who* continually reinscribes its placement within contextual boundaries, be they generic, production-oriented, or drawn from celebrity. This ‘inherent paradox at the heart of the archive’ engenders the periodizing problematic: ‘by archiving, one must necessarily leave

something out'; an archive can only record within a culture, within a particular context (Booth, *Digital* 109).

Related to the principle of context, the last principle of the archive that applies most directly to *Doctor Who* is the sense of being *drawn from the real world*. Archives always come into existence within *real* places and contexts. In their 'very coming into existence' the archive 'produces as much as it records' (Derrida 17). Thus it is a part of, and existent to, the real world. So, too, is *Doctor Who*, inherently related to the real-world socio-political contexts that have developed it (Cranny-Francis and Tulloch; McKee, 'Is Doctor Who'; McKee, 'What Is'). Archives are reflective of the culture that creates them; they are, and always-are, interpolated by culture. They must necessarily make use of the very cracks within their own categorization as key elementals of their construction. Examining *Doctor Who* through this real-world contextual lens means envisioning the ruptures between eras *as part and parcel* of the archival process; they are inherent, inescapable, and ultimately undeniable.

Thus, while I would make no claim to assert the primacy of an archonic examination of *Doctor Who* over more established tendencies, it does appear to offer a way of envisioning the television series' ruptures between eras not as periodizing, nor as categorizing, but as part of a continuous archival *process* by which individual discourses and frameworks of meaning become *part of* rather than *constituent to* the development of *Doctor Who*. Ruptures take no more precedence than any other form of archived material. This also avoids the common assumption to articulate the discontinuity of *Doctor Who* as its *most* relevant factor, a feature exemplified in Britton: the 'metaphor of the vast narrative as a 'fictional quilt' ... can serve to highlight not merely *Doctor Who*'s famous flexibility of narrative premise but rather its inherent and often productive lack of narrative constraint and coherence' (26). Discontinuity and continuity work

together to cohere the *Doctor Who* archive. Ultimately, the archontic methodology allows us a way to see around textual incoherence, a way to see discourse about the ruptures between eras as *equally* productive as that between continuities, and a way to see divisive discourse about different eras as *cohering* an archontic fandom rather than dividing a periodized hierarchy.

Conclusion

The issue of periodizing *Doctor Who* is not just an academic one. The way that television shows become categorized has a profound affect on the production, distribution, and marketing of those show. For instance, the production machinery at the BBC use periodization as a key marketing segmentation, as a glimpse at the BBC's website illustrates. When David Tennant's Tenth Doctor regenerated to Matt Smith's Eleventh (and showrunner Russell T. Davies handed over the reigns of the show to Steven Moffat), the website regenerated as well, mirroring the aesthetic changes to the TARDIS, the title sequence, and even the theme song. With the close of one online era, another aesthetically begins.

Such a periodized discourse developed around the premiere of the 2005 reboot of *Doctor Who*, pervading the text of new *Who* so much so that in the new series Davies 'establishes a *fully inclusive continuity*' between the two series, bridging the rupture between the classic and new as well as between 'cult and mainstream status' (Hills *Triumph*; see also Hills, 'Absent' 334). This opens up two different avenues of appreciating and understanding the relationship between classic and new *Who*. By seeing new *Who* within a *continuity* with the classic, we proclaim connection to classic series, but inadvertently invite comparison and necessitate (implicit) evaluation. But if we instead see new *Who* as out of continuity (Hills, 'Gothic'; *Triumph*), we

proclaim that it is not part of the text and thus not subject to the same mode of analysis. Fans who augment their understanding of *Doctor Who* by contrasting new and classic are following a production-based understanding of where the meaning lies (in the production team, in authorship, in the stars), and ultimately echoing a discourse of that implicitly assumes hierarchies (Hadas and Shefrin 10).

But if cultural studies and fan studies scholarship has done anything, it's shown that meaning is co-created between audiences and authors. An archontic principle does not differentiate between professional and amateur – everything becomes added to the ongoing enlargement of an archive. To create hierarchies between elements is to 'also announce property, ownership, and hierarchy' (Derecho 64). Looking at the archontic properties of *Doctor Who* allows us, instead, to foreground what Hills calls 'special moments' which 'blur authorial, character and fan voices' ('Dispersible' 29). Ultimately, archonic principles unite continuity, canon, and context as concomitant organizational factors.

Clara Oswald's televised romp through previous Doctor's incarnations reveal an inherent archontic examination of *Doctor Who*. Each moment, each element, each point in history, is always-already in a process of revision. Time *can* be rewritten, both diegetically and non-diegetically. It's arguably impossible to separate text, audience, and context, but that's precisely the point. We make artificial separations with any scholarly or fan analyses, and thus create the very meaning that we're attempting to elucidate. Instead of viewing *Doctor Who* as a 'vast, fictional quilt' where the very bricolage nature of the program becomes its greatest asset, we can instead assert that however we view, analyse, or discuss *Doctor Who* becomes the argument by which we know the show. Perhaps, then, rather than emphasize the 'multi-vocality' (Britton 12) text of *Doctor Who*, it would make sense to develop this 'multi-spectral' scholarship. The

discursive lens delimits the view, but using the infinite lenses available via archontic principles develops multiple discourses simultaneously. In other words, *Doctor Who* is as spectacular as we write it into being.

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ⁱ However, it is notable that some of the producers of *Doctor Who* have been gay – breaking this paradigm.