Between Mourning and Ridicule: The Odd Phenomenon of “Hodoorstops”

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1. INTRODUCTION1

George R.R. Martin, the creator of the fantasy series ‘A Song of Ice and Fire’ (1991–ongoing), and the team of writers adapting it into the popular television series Game of Thrones (2011–ongoing) are well-known for killing off their characters (Fig. 1). On the one hand the high mortality rate has garnered critical admiration and the series has been saluted for its boldness. Particularly in the Game of Thrones television series the celluloid death has been elevated into a new level of realism, as the writers have defied the predictable formula of drama: this is the gritty world where even central protagonists can die in the middle of their journeys, their life missions unfinished and incomplete. The contrast to the regular formula in which main characters tend to be presented as undying symbols of futurity, while supporting characters function as their sacrificial substitutes, is striking. In Game of Thrones it is accepted anyone could die, his or her narrative left “incomplete” in the traditional sense – even the promising young king of the north, Robb Stark, slaughtered on his wedding day (season 3 ep. 9).2

While the transgressive novelty of these deaths has delighted some audiences, the bloodshed has been known to cause outrage and even sadness among other readers and viewers of the series. In the western context, where grief outside family ties tends to be disenfranchised3, and both fandom4 and the mourning of “fan objects”5 are often ridiculed, speaking of the death of a fictive character in terms of real loss might seem ludicrous. Yet the affectivity of the viewing experience has been endorsed by the creator of the story, who invites the readers and viewers to mourn the characters as if they were their friends:

”I try to make the readers feel they’ve lived the events of the book. Just as you grieve if a friend is killed, you should grieve if a fictional character is killed. You should care. If somebody dies and you just go get more popcorn, it’s a superficial experience isn’t it?”6

The high mortality rates and Martin’s endorsement of grief, combined with the immense popularity of the show, have contributed to the rise of a public memorial culture where the deaths of these fictive characters are shared and mourned in various ways. At times the online “fandom” has mimicked the cultural conventions of mourning, as in the case of the virtual graveyard dedicated to dead GoT characters, opened by the Slate-magazine in June 2015, at the end of the 5th season of the television series. At other times their commemorations have been more experimental in form, as, for example, in

May 2016, when the death of the well-loved character Hodor was followed by a production of different kinds of memes, which imagined the character as a doorstop.

The reactions to these ”memes” were varied and, as such, fascinating. Some accepted their carnivalistic spirit as a coping mechanism, although complaints were raised about them appearing “too soon”, therein breaching the western conventions of mourning, which tend to cover death in solemnity if not in silence. To others, the doorstops instead seemed like trolling, that sought to render laughable the audience’s grief as well as Hodor’s moment of valour. The doorstops were thus seen to fluctuate ambivalently between commemoration and ridiculing, and the question of whether the memes were instances of mockery or homages to a character and series well-liked was raised from different aspects in the many entertainment site reportages and twitter comments making Hodor’s death a cultural phenomenon.

This instant of ambivalent internet “mourning” is where we find our cue. For two researchers situated at the intersection of visual culture and death as it is represented and ritually dealt with, the Hodor-doorstops and their reception offer a highly interesting research subject both as an aesthetic and as a theoretical phenomenon. This article is enlightened by questions and concepts arising from the varied fields of cultural studies, such as fan studies and the study of internet cultures, and from the socio-cultural side of the thanatological study of death and mourning. The phenomenon itself we approach from the fields of aesthetics and visual cultural studies, therein complementing the analysis of online mourning with a focus on its ironic or pathetic sensibilities. Methodologically, the study rests on discourse analysis and visual analysis. First, we seek to outline the context of the phenomenon by describing the fictive event from which it arose and by dissecting its discursive framing through analysing how the doorstops were presented in various reportages. After this, we study the Hodor-as-doorstop -memes’ affective registers, forms and materialities, as well as in their performative uses. In this, our methodology reflects the meme research guidelines proposed by Eliisa Vainikka in her introductory analysis of internet memes as well as Anu Harju’s key points in the analysis of mourning in fan communities.7

The aim of this article is to examine the interesting oscillation between “grief“ and “ridicule” in the memefication and mediation of Hodor’s death, and to offer potential concepts for the better understanding of this phenomenon. By studying the memes in their aesthetics and reception in the “mourning” of Hodor we seek to tie the subversive potential of online memes8 to the disenfranchised forms of affective involvement with the world. Although the versatile socio-cultural potential of memes on the one hand and the online politics of death and mourning on the other have been studied in varied disciplines, for the moment being the memetic mourning of fictive characters still remains an uncharted territory. Since we feel the understanding of this controversial topic is inhibited in the lack of suitable concepts, in this article the case of Hodor will serve as a starting point for a theoretical discussion that combines investigating “aberrant” mourning customs with the analysis of the explanatory power and the shortcomings of varied aesthetic concepts such as “camp” and “kitsch”. We also offer the idea of “carnivalesque” mourning and the aesthetic mechanism of “sublation”, a willful lowering of a sublime or

overwhelming experience such as death, as conceptual templates through which to interpret these ambivalent forms of involvement – memetic forms of mourning that might connect fans as disenfranchised grievers to each other in more and less ironic and sincere ways.

2. THE DEATH OF HODOR

In the fifth episode of the sixth season of the popular fantasy series Game of Thrones, May 2016, the grand audiences were agitated with the surprising death of Hodor (Kristian Nairn), one of the secondary characters of the amply casted show.

Hodor, also known as “the gentle giant”, is a servant and stable boy of House Stark at Winterfell. For the biggest part of the series, he has acted as a semi-silent escort to his master and protegé, the physically handicapped character Bran Stark (Isaac Hempstead Wright), whom he has carried on their exposition out into the North to meet a prophet-like character called Three-eyed raven (Max von Sydow). Despite his striking size, Hodor is gentle and non-violent, which has made him one of the most likable characters of the otherwise fairly violent show. Hodor’s character is characterized by simplicity; the fact that he possesses no language aside the expression “Hodor”, which lacks any intelligible meaning. “Hodor”, uttered in different inflections, covers all of Hodor’s attempts to communicate, and in this has become his moniker.

Hodor meets his end in the end of the 5th episode of the 6th season of the series, and his death combines all three characteristics that viewers all over the world have gotten to associate with his character: strength, simplicity and loyalty. He dies while trying to protect his protegé Bran and Bran’s friend Meera (Ellie Kendrick) from an army of white walkers, a mysterious zombie breed of the series, that break into Three-eyed raven’s lair and kill him and his companions. Bran, Meera and Hodor manage to escape through a tunnel, but in being commanded by frantic Meera, Hodor stays behind and uses his strength to hold shut the door to the tunnel, already swarming with white walkers. While Bran and Meera escape into the snow, Hodor is grabbed and killed by the zombies breaking through the door. Hodor’s is thus a death categorizable as a glorified martyrdom: it is a death that can be seen to elevate a mentally handicapped and otherwise "low" character. The audio-visual elements – Hodor’s facial expression against the cold blue background of snow and stone and the sentimental music – emphasize his martyrdom, and frame it as a death that stands apart from the banality and gore that many of the other deaths of the series are treated with (Fig. 2).

Yet Hodor’s sentimentally framed sacrifice is not the most tragic part of his death. The actual tragedy is that within the same scene depicting his death the audiences are introduced to Hodor’s life’s story, so far left a mystery. Bran's ability to travel through time had earlier in the season introduced Hodor in his healthy teenage years, as a young stable boy, then called Wylis. Now, at the moment of his death the cause of Hodor’s handicap is finally revealed, and it tinges the heroism of his martyrdom with a sense of tragedy. Key both to the discovery and to the tragedy are Bran’s abilities to “greensight” and to “warg”,

that is, to time travel and occupy someone else's mind in order to see through their eyes and to control their actions, respectively. As Hodor is dying, his younger self sees this death through the action of Bran Stark, who is, at the time of Hodor's death, inside Hodor's head and time traveling to his past. By accident Bran opens a time loop in which Hodor experiences his death years before it actually happens. Through this time loop the audiences witness young Wylis falling into a seizure, in which he is only able to repeat the instructions given to him at the time of his death. "Hold the door", he is told, and hold the door he does, and in the past his younger self collapses to the ground repeating the words, which, in his mouth, melt into one single word, the only word we've heard him say, and the one word that became his moniker: "Hodor".

The audiences reacted to Hodor's death with surprise and agitation. That Hodor's death was perceived as surprising rests largely on the fact that Hodor's storyline is one of the ones to have met its closure in the televised adaptation sooner than in the book series, that is still in the process of writing. That the death turned out to be agitating, may, in turn, be explained by the fact that the character of Hodor has been one of the few unambiguously "nice" characters in the series with a wealth of characters involved in amoral politicking and vendetta. From his position of being a simple sidekick with a tendency to communicate with his unintelligible moniker only Hodor has been framed as a light and humorous character, and the memes produced by "fandom" have often reproduced just that. Attached is, for instance, one meme that presents a quote by Hodor (Fig. 3), being funny in that it repeats the only word that the character is able to say, which, as we already learned, happens to be that same as his name.

3. HODOR STOPPING DOORS: A CASE STUDY

Many of the early memes succeeding the tragic episode of Hodor's death are "tributory" ones and can be seen to function as kinds of memorials, as conventional vehicles of shared mourning and remembrance. In continuum to the commemorative tradition, these early memes honor the "memory" of Hodor by focusing on his "lived life"9. What is more, they present Hodor a hero precisely by pairing the narrative of heroism with the characteristically "simple" act of holding the door. But Hodor's death did not only spark an avalanche of affective tweets and tributory memes. It also produced a variety of offline activities such as the creation of different kinds of Hodor-themed doorstops that then took over the online sites of Twitter, Etsy and Kickstarter and quickly became mediated on the entertainment sites with commentary analysing their relation to the grieving fandom. While in our visual analysis we shall focus mostly on the doorstops, we shall study them in the contexts provided by the other Hodor-memes and the "media circus" where these memes, doorstops and tweets became rationalized primarily through the label of "fan practises".

All in all our data consists of 30 entertainment site reportages introducing the ways in which fans and viewers of the show reacted to Hodor's death on the internet, primarily on Twitter. The reportages usually presented the repertoire of doorstop-memes through a cavalcade of tweets, arranged into in a storified narrative and spiced up with witty commentary. Six of the reportages precede the "sensational

news" of Hodor having been rendered into doorstops and thus can be approached as "the first wave" of reactions to Hodor's death, whereas the last twenty-four are focused primarily on the coverage (and occasional promotion) of these doorstops. As for the doorstop-memes, at the time of writing this article we have analyzed in total 37 doorstops. The total amount of Hodor-themed doorstops is unknown to us, for the idea circulated quickly to Etsy where hundreds of similar doorstops made of plastic and wood continue to be on sale. Noting the saturated nature of the data in our categories, however, we believe to have gathered a representative selection.

By our analysis the doorstops could be roughly divided in five categories. In addition to the aforementioned doorstops made for sale on Etsy (1) the doorstops consist of DIY-doorstops with Hodor's name written on readymade doorstops by hand (2) or with stickers or images of Kristian Nairn's face attached to readymade doorstops or the "Hold the door" -buttons of elevators (3), reused Hodor-merchandise photographed holding doors (4) or photo-manipulated doorstops where Hodor has been "photoshopped" into a doorstop (5). Moreover, there are instructions for 3D-printed Hodor-doorstops and two campaigns in Kickstarter for crowdfunded production of Hodor-doorstops. One was fully funded and yielded an amount of simplistic, wood-carved and white-painted memorial doorstops with the official Game of Thrones-symbol "Ø" on them (See fig. 12), and the other one, for the production of a gilded doorstop with a full-body figure (See fig. 16), was cancelled due to HBO having licensed the production of official doorstops to another provider, presumably to the former campaigner. In addition to these, there are many tributary tweets and image macros, and Twitter and YouTube gags, featuring a fake commercial for Hodør-doorstops by Ikea, and an official Ikea campaign for their Patrull-stops.

In this paper, we speak of the aforementioned doorstops as well as the jokes and the image macros connected to Hodor's death as memes. By this we maintain that they are all manifestations and modifications of the same piece of cultural information, shared, modified and circulated by various individuals – mostly online, but also in other everyday contexts from the public space (such as elevators or gym entrances) to the privacy of homes. According to the evolutionary biologist Richard Dawkins, who coined the term in 1976, a meme is a "unit of human cultural transmission" spread "from brain to brain" in the form of, for example, tunes, ideas, catchphrases, fashion trends and beliefs10. As a cultural equivalent of 'gene', meme thus draws "an analogy between cultural and genetic transmission"11. Dawkins' conception has been criticized for it's cultural and biological determinism, but the term itself has been approved of as applicable, as long as one acknowledges that memes do not spread in a self-copying way, but through the active participation of people, who reappropriate and reiterate them12.

In online contexts, this process of cultural information transfer becomes especially traceable, since internet memes leave "footprints"13. As our examples shift between online and offline contexts, we choose to drop the prefix 'internet' when speaking of the memes in case, although most of the time we focus on analysing the footprints that the memes have left precisely in the online environment. Furthermore, while contemporary common parlance often reduces the term "meme" to denote only digitally shared image macros, we argue for a wider view that encompasses the whole phenomenon of Hodor-doorstops from actual, tangible doorstops to the spreading of similar ideas via photoshopped

images and catchphrase references. These we refer to as Hodor-as-doorstop-memes, Hodor-doorstops and Hodoorstops.

Next to this, there are two further terminological choices worth explaining before we get going with our analysis. Terms such as “fan” or “troll” were used in the reportages in describing the people whom the doorstops might interest or who might produce them. This partially justifies their use also in our article. However, not all viewers of the show might choose to term themselves fans even if they might share the deep enthusiasm usually associated with “fannish” consumption,14 while not all who were entertained by the wittiness of the Hodoorstops necessarily share a “trollish” attitude. Although we remain rather doubtful as to whether we can title the producers of the Hodoorstops “trolls” or those who seemed to be “mourning” Hodor “fans”, these concepts remain important to our study for a couple of reasons. On the one hand, the question of whether the sharing and multiplication of Hodoorstops can be termed “fannish” or “trollish” becomes important, because it affects the analysis of the aesthetic impact of the production and circulation of the Hodoorstops. Subcultural groups may, for instance, harbour tastes and evaluative practices that differ from mainstream evaluative practices, as in the case of trolling, which can be described either as a taste for malevolence or as entertainment, depending on the “side” on which one stands in the game15. Moreover, the positions of “fan” and “troll”, and the statements made in regard to these two groups in the entertainment reportages, become important when the memefication of Hodor’s death is related to grief and mourning – in particular in their disenfranchised forms. Thus, distinctions between “fans”, “consumers” and “trolls” are made in the course of this article whenever it seems relevant to the discussion of the aesthetics of the different Hodoorstops. In the following two subchapters we introduce the phenomenon through the two discursive frames introduced in the reportages: in the first subchapter through “ridicule” and in the second one through “mourning”.

3.1. LAUGHING AT FANS: Hodoorstops, “Trolls” and the “Zany Register”

The memetic reactions to Hodor’s death could be divided into two categories: “trolling” and “coping”, both of which were introduced also in the reportage articles making sense (and catchy headlines) of the doorstop-phenomenon. In our analysis of the aesthetics of the Hodor memes and doorstops, we will use this crude division as a springboard, from which we continue to discuss the ambivalent doorstops and their divided online reception in more detail. These two concepts take opposing sides to the humorous memes: “trolling” points to the impulse to laugh at the tearful audiences (Fig. 4), whereas “coping” refers to the aspiration of the audiences to come to terms with their “loss” through humour. In this chapter we study the phenomenon in its “trollish” aspects.

The Oxford English Dictionary defines trolling as the practice of making “a deliberately offensive or provocative online posting with the aim of upsetting someone or eliciting an angry response from them”16. Along these lines, trolling is colloquially referred to as online behaviour that seeks to inflame discussions. Etymologically, trolling can be linked to the piscatory “stringing lines of bait behind a fishing boat” or to the troll figure that has migrated into the western commonplace from Norse mythology. The first of these linkages emphasises the sportive character of the trolling game, and the second highlights

the anti-social and even monstrous side of trollish conduct.17 While much of the research on the subject of trolling has focused on the disruptive and anti-social features of trolling18, newer research is paying growing attention to the subcultural communities formed by trolls and the symbiotic as well as exploitative relationship that trolling has to mainstream culture. Phillips, for example, likens the mechanisms of trolling to those of mainstream media reporting, which, in its most spectacular forms, seeks to inflame public emotional responses just as trolling does.19 The affiliation of trolling and mainstream culture makes sense also as we consider the stereotype of the internet troll as comparable to the stereotype of the fan as an avid producer of new content 20. Thus the concept of "trolling" conveniently leads us to consider also the obvious aim of the memes in seeking to entertain a networked audience through a humorous (and even somewhat sharp or hurtful) use of words and imagery (Fig. 5).

The connection between the Hodoorstop-memes and the entertaining aspirations behind trolling can be elucidated through a look at the stylistic choices of individual posts. Many of the posts shared on Tumblr and Twitter used witty phrasing, image macros and gif-animations in expressing their viewing experience and their reactions to Hodor's death. Profane wording emphasises the irony of, for example, the following comment: "I'm not crying there's just a door in my fucking eye." In another comment similar hyperbole is used to reflect the tragedy of Hodor in relation to the conventions of fiction: "That is some strong character development for a character that can only say one fucking word." In many of the reportages the styles of narrating reflects those of the individual posts. The ironical tone of these emotional outbursts is mirrored in a BuzzFeed reportage that reads: "Discovering the truth about how Hodor became Hodor is probably one of the most devastating things to ever happen to the Game of Thrones fandom – and that's saying something. [...] Naturally, people have taken to Tumblr to express their emotions (SO MANY EMOTIONS)…"21

The connection that the Hodoorstops have to trolling as another entertaining form of online culture becomes further emphasized when one considers the fact that many of the currently circulated memes originated in subcultural troll-sites like 4chan's /b/ board22. With the accelerated permeability of Web 2.0 this "participatory culture" is not just for groups such as fans or trolls23. Therefore, it would be wrong to simply assume that the makers of these memes were all subcultural trolls aiming to "poke fun" at another distinct subculture. Circulating memes for fun has long been part of mainstream internet practices. In this light, it seems to us, that the Hodor-as-doorstop -memes can be counted as a cultural reaction that sought to network over a shared consumer experience while using a now mainstream practice of meme-making to convey the mixed feelings that such a fictional death might cause. Thus, even if we do not see this phenomenon as the kind of subcultural trolling that Phillips, for example, discusses, we maintain that many of the Hodoorstop memes are, indeed, laughing or "LOLing" at tragedy in a somewhat trollish way24.

In fact the most "trollish" reactions might have been those that commented on the jocular vernacular of Hodor-memes, not the memes themselves. One of the most obviously "trollish" reactions that sought to inflame "outrage", is a video response of the producers of the TV series that broadcasted in Jimmy

Kimmel Live just few days after the episode featuring Hodor's death had aired (Fig. 6). 25 It was framed as a response to the recurring requests to justify and even to apologize for the killings that happen in the show, but instead of the promised “heartfelt apology” the creators David Benioff and D.B. Weiss offered sarcastic regrets for creating a possibly irritating meme, if not even a real life joke. Sitting on piles of cash, they announced that they are not sorry for killing Hodor, since killing characters is something that they do “all the time”. Instead, they did apologise for the fact that people will now be shouting “Hodor” whenever they want someone to hold a door for them. A similar stance is visible in The Verge’s post26 listing “the best and worst of internet’s uninspired Hodor jokes”, which contrasts the “loving Hodor tributes” with the unimaginative Hodor-related jokes it titles “not-that-good” “attempts at comedy” before it displays them at length.

The aesthetic, or, stylistic aspects of these “trollish” iterations, that rode the hype without seeming too sincere about their emotional commitment, may be theorized through the concepts of “zany” and “camp”. According to cultural theorist Sianne Ngai the aesthetic of the zany is marked by strenuous performance. It is an aesthetic of action, fluidity and appealing freshness, but at the same time it requires continuous effort on the part of the performer and constantly risks becoming unsuccessful. In text, the zany manifests itself in the excessive use of “italics, dashes, exclamation points and full capitals”. In a wider cultural context it is visible in the breakdown of the borders between work and play, a development strongly related to the increasing prominence of affective labour in Post-Fordist capitalism. 27 But if the sharing of Hodor-memes exhibits a certain sort of zaniness by consequence of being part of a networked social world that thrives on competition and the uninhibited flow of ideas, what can be said about the sensibility that the reading of such zany performances requires? What kind of relation does it bear to the “unmistakably modern”28 sensibility of camp?

According to Susan Sontag (1964) camp is a sensibility that values style over content, reception over actual object value. It is a “way of looking at things” that are out of fashion or otherwise culturally failed. Camp expressions are flamboyant and theatrical, self-conscious, artificial and extremely sentimental, but next to this, they are also characterised by being “alive to a double sense in which some things can be taken”29. While the objects of camp may (and should) be created in a serious and sincere or naïve way, the camp interpretation itself is playful, mocking and even harmful30. This connects it to the practice of trolling. Like trolling, camp is a “queer” and even mischievous reading. Or, as Sontag notes: “Behind the “straight” public sense in which something can be taken, one has found a private zany experience of the thing”31. The ironic distance that marks camp spirit is thus comparable to the “mask” of trolling32, while the zaniness and the performative reiteration of existing cultural content of camp correlate with the way in which memes work.

The apology video might be one of the most cynical responses to the outrage and sadness felt by fans and viewers, but it only emphasizes the trollish trait that is common to many of the memetic responses to Hodor’s death. It appears to be ridiculing the sadness felt by fans, while it plugs into this emotive content in order to further escalate the phenomenon. Most of the memes might not be this contemptuous, and they certainly are not related to finding something démodé or bad enjoyable in the

usual campy sense, but many of them do seem to place the grief related to Hodor's death into quotation marks and they do target something that might be regarded as pure or naive and yet in some sense culturally failed: the mourning of a fictive character33. Also, while they might be funny or even cynical, there is real enjoyment, if not outright fandom of the show behind them, which corresponds with what camp sensibility is usually considered to consist of, even if this liking is camouflaged under a sugarcoating of irony34.

Thus, even if the overt aim of many of the posts, tweets and reportages seemed to be the sharing of sadness and outrage, the expressions chosen in the reportages deliberately sought to put the emotions into an ironically hyperbolic form that the online community, saturated with memes, would honour with clicks and likes. Instead of focusing on the disruptiveness of the memes as the accusations of trolling seemed to do, one might, thus, find it more rewarding to focus on the zany and camp aspects of the phenomenon. These concepts might also make it easier to discuss the memes in terms of fannish behaviour, committed to the shared commemoration and mourning of a well-liked character. Focusing on the memes as products of a zany camp spirit or a campish attitude might, thus, at least partly help us understand the ambivalent and even trollish combination of genuine sadness and arrogant sniggering.

3.2. WE ARE ALL GRIEVING VIEWERS: Authorizing and Carnivalizing Disenfranchised Grief

Next to the accusations of trolling, the ambiguously humorous Hodoorstops were, as already noted, psychologized as a coping mechanism. The media reportages quite often described the people producing both "loving tributes" and "uninspired Hodor-jokes" as "grieving fans" and in this vein, the memes were classified as grieving practices. This was reflected in the reportages, which were, to a great extend, written as if "from fans to fans", in an affective tonality of sorrow. As in the click-baiting media industry, these expressions of sadness were often hyperbolic ones as they invoked tears, the "money shot" of sorrow, both in words and images (Fig. 7). Reflecting the style of the original tweets and reiterating their choices in words the reportages referred to "bawling", "sobbing" and "weeping".35 In a similarly hyperbolic manner the tragic episode was denoted "heartbreaking"36 and accused of "tearing" or "ripping our hearts out"37. On top of this, the title of "world's saddest homeware item" that originated on Mashable was circulated from site to site. 38

As competitors and collaborators in their own kind of "meme pool"39, the tweets, memes and reportages (by virtue of being launched) sought success by displaying a) knowledge of the event in case and by b) plugging into the affective maelstrom that the event caused in a c) more or less witty manner. By their stylistic alignments the reporters circulating the memes seemed to identify with the grieving fans, laughing not just at them, but with them.40 They identified themselves as "us" and as "fans" and attested insider knowledge of the show by dropping in juicy tidbits as well as by providing their own summarizes of the course of events. Next to this, they also scapegoated Bran and insisted on shared emotions with regards to the "heartbreaking" yet "valiant" death of Hodor. Despite the exaggerated register of irony, the reportages thus seemed to imply that the sorrow over his tragic death was perceived to touch "us all" as viewers of the show. In this manner the majority of the reportages

appropriated the grief of fans as a norm, while they implied that the jocular tributes from memes to doorstops helped fans “cope”.41 If one considers the fact that both artistic mechanisms and humour are widely accepted as coping mechanisms42, the Hodoorstops, interpreted as trolling by some, could thus also be seen as the excuse and the alleviator of something called disenfranchised grief.

According to Kenneth Doka, who coined the concept, ”Disenfranchised grief can be defined as a grief experienced by those who incur a loss that is not, or cannot be, openly acknowledged, publicly mourned or socially supported43.” He continues: “The concept of disenfranchised grief recognizes that societies have sets of norms [...] that attempt to specify who, when, where, how, how long and for whom people should grieve44.” Doka’s idea of disenfranchised grief is easily extended to “case Hodor” through the disenfranchisement of intense emotions experienced in fandoms and the marginalized status of “fannish” involvement. As Anu Harju writes, in reference to Cornel Sandvoss, "More often than not, intense fandom is treated in our culture as a marginal phenomenon, often as subversive in nature”45. Additionally, the intense feelings can be seen invalidated as grief, in particular. According to Doka, there are several criteria that have to be met in order for a death to become a legitimate source of grief and mourning. First, the relationship between the lost one and the grievers should usually be one that is based on kin-ties in order for the loss to be recognised. Next to this, the loss, the griever, the grief and the death itself should all be acknowledged and understood. Given the fictitious aspect of both Hodor’s character and his death, and the fact that the relationship between him and the audiences of the show are stereotypical one-way relationships that posit “fanatical” and “irrational” reactions, one could claim that the loss of Hodor is what Doka would call disenfranchised. That is, their grieving and mourning are not socially endorsed or acceptable unlike those related to the loss of, say, a close relative.

Julie Andsager (2005) and Harju (2015) have already found disenfranchised grief a useful concept in studying grief and mourning in celebrity fandoms. Their study is preceded by the study of the disenfranchisement of public participation at the event of either high-profile or traumatic death46. Even if some distinctions must be drawn when moving from commemoration of violent death and from the celebrity cult to fiction “fandoms”, all cases can be seen united in the stereotype that views public grief and mourning as signs of obsessiveness, excessiveness and irrationality47. Of course, in fandoms such stereotype precedes the event of represented or mediated death. This stereotype likes to see fans stuck in a state of prolonged infantility, and this state is seen to render them unable to draw the line between fantasy and reality as they tie affective relationships to the characters48.

The stigmatization of these affective ties and the discounting of death as it is encountered as an image might render audiences disenfranchised in terms of the grief that goes with the psychological processes of dealing with celluloid death. For one, the disenfranchisement of fandoms tends to ignore that fan objects are not necessarily “unilateral” but might contribute to the sense of self by functioning as reflexive extensions of identity49. On the other hand, it ignores the symbolic potential of media objects to signify beyond their immediate contexts. What is more, it could be claimed today it is mostly through media most people first come in touch with death and first learn to cope with it. That these losses are “symbolic” or “fictive” does not, thus, make them less personally felt.

Yet the disenfranchised status of these emotions also tends to be replicated within audiences. Even among fandoms proper grief is known to be a cause of internal conflict50. As Racheline Maltese argues, “enchanted believers”, the specific types of fan that mourn, often evoke suspicion, censorship and disapproval51. Thus, although we live in a century of “big emotions”52 and consider mass media its feeding ground, in a culture which likes to engender emotion, effeminize fans and debase their affective involvement53, part of these dynamics might affect and complicate also the reactions and responses to the death of Hodor and his shared mourning.

As to the question of why such a “camped up” or humorous ways of remembrance, as in the case of Hodor, might be considered manifestations of grief one might, therefore, seek an answer in the possibility that the sense of loss experienced by the audiences is not fully recognized and endorsed. Few preliminary explanations might be in order before we move on to study what relations these memes might have with mourning. Firstly, death has quite universally been qualified as a life event that needs to be “worked through”, whether we are discussing psychological processes or collective social “rituals”54. It is also recognized that varied societal norms govern the manners with which these processes of grief and mourning are accomplished. These two distinct, yet affiliated, concepts of grief and mourning draw attention to two different sides of bereavement. While grief and grieving refer to sorrow and its expressions, mourning refers to the ritualized practises with which sorrow is overcome. Doka acknowledges these norms and considers abnormal mourning practises might lead to disenfranchisement: grief might not be validated if one “fails to mourn in a socially acceptable way55”. For instance in the Western history these norms have for long insisted on the privacy of grief, and tend to demand solemnity and seriousness from collective mourning56. When studying the Hodoorstops, they seem to go amiss in quite many senses: in the hyperbole of emotion and in the irreverence or their “memorials” (Fig. 8, Fig. 9).

The concept of “carnivalesque”, popularized by Bakhtin (1965), might make sense in this particular context of “zany mourning”, as it elucidates how the necessary social and symbolic transitions involved with death might be accomplished precisely with improper symbols and festive humour. The concept of carnival refers to a similar "liminal” phase also the rituals of mourning are traditionally situated in, and posits that these collective rituals are completed with a merrymaking, ludic attitude and a reversal of the established symbolic order. However unusual the carnival spirit might be to the death culture of Western modernity, carnivalesque mourning practises are more familiar in the global and historical scales. For instance the Mexican-Catholic Dia de (los) Muertos, popularized in the Anglo-American popular culture over the last decades, epitomizes such "rites of passages" that represent both mourning and carnivalization57. Similarly, The Bals de Victims of post-revolutionary French were seen to carnivalize death by decapitation with macabre dance moves58.

Carnivalization also appears in other contexts where either the loss or mourning relationship has remained unrecognized. Together with the aforementioned examples of colonization and victimization,

this makes it suspect that a position of disenfranchisement in grief or in society might contribute to countercultural, misunderstood forms of mourning. LGBT relationships are often seen to epitomize such relationships that remain unrecognized in the face of bereavement59. A recent example is provided by Antu Sorainen, who pins the Orlando LGBT mass-murder down by relating it to the mourning of AIDS, as she writes: ”Treating the trauma with irony, carnivalization and the incorporation of comedy with tragedy have provided a familiar and natural way to mourn”. This seemingly nonchalant attitude Sorainen defines precisely as an act of defiance.60 Therein she taps onto the political undercurrents behind the “carnival laughter” that Bakhtin has studied as a folk cultural riposte against official culture. Carnival permits a temporary abandonment and ridicule of the official institutions and forms of culture. 61 For this reason carnivalism is a “natural” way to mourn for the low and the marginalized62.

Next to this laughter, carnival is engaged with a form of consumption we might title “camped up”. Not only is this attitude pertinent to queer culture, but such a stance towards the official culture is also shared in the general idea of “fan culture”, which endorses popular entertainment and challenges even its official canons with their own “fanons”, or DIY cultures63. According to Jenkins fan culture thus “stands as an open challenge to the “naturalness” and desirability of dominant cultural hierarchies”64. In its camped up attitude and carnivalesque laughter the entire media event of doorstops resembles such ‘highly orchestrated performances of mourning’ that manifest in other disenfranchised occasions of grief65. Like the Hodoorstops, also these earlier folk commemorations face scorn as excessive and manic66. What is more, one cannot help noticing certain similarities to the death of Harambe, the lowland gorilla whose high-profile killing gave rise to a memefication not unlike that of Hodor in May 2016, and likewise became labeled “trolling”. 67

Yet, as has been argued, although carnival succeeds in upsetting the order, the carnivalistic defiance affirms rather than subverts the order of things68. Also the aberrant mourning practices have been seen as such factors that effect disenfranchisement69. Even the appealing spectacle of the Dia de (los) Muertos has been connected to essentialist national stereotypes, producing otherness70. In the rise of the participatory “spontaneous shrines”, instead, the perceived “fetishism” of these derogatively titled “makeshift memorials” works to disenfranchise the grief of the common people producing them71.

Now, in the reportages the jocular memes following Hodor’s death were seen to express grief and to function as tools for “coping” inasmuch as they turned tragedy into humour. In the zany register acknowledged as pertinent to the culture in question, the reporters suggested a shared experience – a shared fandom if you please – as they were eager to denominate the memes precisely as coping practices and themselves as fans. The online circulation of the “post-mortem” Hodor-memes would thus seem to legitimise a sort of disenfranchised grief and its carnivalistic, campy or zany manifestations. But as the grief itself was seen to unit everyone, not all Hodoorstops were to be considered equally good and equally acceptable “monuments” of mourning and remembrance. Many of the memes and reportages were characterized by exclamations stating the memes – and the material doorstops, in particular – were made “too soon”72. The addition of “too soon” saw these objects as having interrupted the “mourning period”, that was in line with the traditional western mourning customs.

In determining why the doorstops might be interpreted as unsettling, some more than others, one cannot pass to analyze their aesthetic qualities. If we consider these artifacts such "memorials" around which mourners have been argued to gather for their signifying potential73, what separates them from the more usual forms of commemoration, or one group of Hodoorstops from another? In the following chapter we discuss the material and affective features of the various groups of Hodoorstoppers by relating them to the dominant culture of mourning through the idea of "kitsch" and the practice of "aesthetic sublation".

4. FANDOM STRIKES BACK? Kitschy Conventions, Sublate Artifacts

Throughout time, mourning has been connected to forms of commemoration and ritualization that have revolved around material objects of varied kinds. Such vehicles of mourning traditionally include physical relics, death plaster casts, post-mortem photographs, poetry and paintings74. Outside home, the deceased are commemorated in gravestones, memorial monuments and varied graveyard paraphernalia. Online memorial culture – featuring RIP-pages, memorial forums and Youtube videos – plugs into these traditional forms of commemoration75. Just as traditional death rituals, which often emphasize positive remembrance as well as life and continuity over death, online memorial culture also tends to focus on finding positive things to say about the deceased, thus alleviating emotions that might be hard to understand, express and govern by channeling them into a track of positive remembrance.

Many of the Hodor-memes are easily posited into this continuum of commemoration. One can regard them as online memorials76 or as disparaged spontaneous memorials77 but in both cases they circulate elements familiar from the aforementioned traditions of commemoration. The early tributory memes, for instance, are fraught with a positivity that links them to the traditional formulas of commemoration. They celebrate the heroism of Hodor by focusing on his lived life in sweet drawings (Fig. 10) and in the circulation of familiar imageries in a new context of glory. Often these memes are also accompanied by comments and quotes displaying appropriate sentiment. This is true of the a Hodor-meme (Fig. 11) that is circulated with a caption saying: "Hodor always had his back, no matter what. My heart is so sad now". These kind of tributary images abide to the socially acceptable manner for displaying grief and mourning. Likewise, the crowdfunded, wood-engraved doorstops mimic the solemnity of a marble tomb (Fig. 12). How can they, thus, evoke controversy by appearing "too soon"? And how do the less solemn Hodor-themed doorstops fit into the prevailing traditions of mourning?

According to our analysis, one of the most obviously controversial features about the doorstops is their kind of materiality. In contrast to the usual memorial items, which can be considered elevated remainders of a person's life and achievements78, a great part of the Hodoorstops embody a banal and lowly sort of remembrance. First of all, they are mostly made of relatively "low" materials such as plastic and wood, which pale in comparison to the stone and marble used in more conventional, "lasting"

memorials such as statues and gravestones. The ephemerality of this kind of commemoration becomes even more accentuated in the case of Hodor's cut-out faces, that some mourners placed on "hold the door" -buttons of elevators or glued onto already existing doorstops (Fig. 9, Fig. 13).

Another feature that would attest to the "low" character of the doorstops as memorial items is their price tag. The Patrull doorstop that sells at Ikea using the memetic slogan "Hold the door" costs 2,99 dollars79, while an Etsy doorstopper (Fig. 14), which featured Hodor's last scene on a slab of plastic was criticized for being too expensive at 30 dollars. The meme was also facetiously recycled into a fake commercial of an Ikea doorstop, titled Hodør and labelled to cost 1,29 dollars80. Next to these examples, price and (mass) production were causes of criticism precisely in the claims that (some of) the doorstops came "too soon"; it appeared not enough time had passed for people to start making money on Hodor's death. The media reportages drew a sturdy line particularly between the fan-created DIY-doorstops and the two kickstarter projects. The unrelated, most blatant attempts at corporate monetization were ridiculed, as a sandwich-tribute (presumably by a sandwich-shop) testifies (Fig. 15)81. This would appear to replicate Jenkins's (1992) notion of consumer capitalism's power to divide fandom. It also corresponds with the other countercultural forms of mourning: "It seems as if people are reacting to the mass industrialization of death and the alienation of contemporary society with new folk traditions, rituals and celebrations."82

Mass-production and ease of consumption, facilitated by a cheap price, are usually seen as kitsch markers. The positive readings that sought to see the doorstop-phenomenon as coping accentuate this aspect of "having your emotions on the cheap"83. After all, they seemed to be quite sure that the type of the shared emotion was one of collective sadness, expressed in a strange manner. Earlier we suggested, that by affiliating with the fans they legitimized their disenfranchised grief. Yet it must not be overlooked, that by labeling the phenomenon as grief, they turned an affective and unexpected media phenomenon into something predictable. If kitsch is seen as cultural production that deals with emotional themes in stereotypical, easily recognizable ways without enriching the associations related to the subject in any way84, one could claim, that at least part of the phenomenon of Hodor grieving does or did have kitsch aspects.

The material and aesthetic features of some of the Hodoorstops emphasized these kitsch aspects. The annulled kickstarter project, for example (Fig. 16), proposed an all chrome-colored full body sculpture in Hodor's likeness (in miniature form, of course, and standing on a doorstopper wedge instead of being wedged underneath the door himself, as in some of the other cases (Fig. 17)). This figure no longer bears any trace of Hodor's handicap. Simplicity is replaced by sternness and alertness in both his stance and his facial expression. The hardships of his long journey seem to be washed away and the metallic coloring gives his form an eternal glow. To a more critical eye, such a maneuver, of course, beautifies Hodor's violent and unjust death. A cynic might also point out, that the smooth coloring would probably wear out quickly in real use since it is only spray coating. Still, many of the reportages lamented that this particular doorstop did not reach actual production.

To attach to the “ubiquitous and inescapable” prominence of kitsch85, one does, however, not need to buy a gilded true-to-life miniature version of Hodor nor any of the plastic busts on sale on Etsy86. One can also lay down a flower at the virtual graveyard87 or make use of pre-existing Game of Thrones paraphernalia, such as Hodor-figures or -vinyl toys (Fig. 18, See also Fig. 8). The online graveyard may not share the kitschy materiality of the doorstops and the reuse of a Hodor-figure as a doorstop may give it some unexpected use value that reduces the item’s kitschiness. Yet as an imitation of a real graveyard the virtual one may be regarded as providing an easy and stereotypical, and thus kitschy, way to mourn, while Hodor-figurines may be considered kitschy because of their mass-produced nature alone.

In discussing the kitschy elements in case Hodor one cannot pass to notice, that his manner of death was the only element in the phenomenon left “un-disenfranchised” in the traditional sense88. If we look past the fictitiousness of Hodor’s death, we see a death that, according to all codes of representation, figures as a sanctified, glorified martyrdom. Sentimentally it elevates an otherwise "low" character. The Etsy doorstops created in his likeness aim to reproduce this sentimentality, attempting to “be sublime without the effort being so”89. In this they follow the line of thought Roger Scruton presents: “When tragedy enters the world of kitsch, it is denatured, purged of that absolute sense of loss that is the proper response to the death of a moral being.”90 Honouring Hodor’s death, many of the viewers of the show resorted to more established ways of commemoration, perpetuating his martyrdom in their own self-made, gilded, Hodor-look-a-like memorials, and thus creating “kitschy” readings without the help of the official cogwheels of production.

However, not all doorstops attested to this easy sentimentality and kitschy aesthetic. While most of the Etsy doorstops mimic the aesthetics of the show, showing the show’s logo or font and featuring either one or both of the following elements: a version of Hodor’s name (often capitalized) or a figure bearing his likeness (a bust, or more often, a full body figure holding shut the door), there were various DIY-doorstops that were less ambitious in their appeal. Not made for sale, these “least fancy” doorstops were simple doorstoppers, renamed, ranging from bricks to well-used wooden wedges, with the only Hodor-related feature being his name written on them (Fig. 19, Fig. 20). To us these doorstops represent the least respectful and most ironical form of remembrance, which makes it possible to read them as a kind of resistance to the “kitschifying” treatment of Hodor’s martyrdom and his sentimental and merchandised mourning. Notably, these doorstops also lack the flamboyance often related to “camp” performances. In the case of the aesthetics of these simple Hodor-doorstops, neither the concepts of kitsch or camp seem to provide sufficient explanatory power. Instead of trying to categorize them through these terms, one might thus try to understand their aesthetic performance through the idea of “aesthetic sublation”.

Aesthetic sublation is a an evaluative, expressive process, that seeks to abase or degrade a sublime or beautiful thing or event91 – for instance, by rendering it “grotesque” or “abject”. As an aesthetic

concept “sublate” was coined by Carolyn Korsmeyer92, who borrowed the term from the field of chemistry and discussed it as an aesthetic counterpoint to the sublime. In the case of death, sublation confronts the sublimity of “the great unknown” and renders it controllable by concretising it through tangible materiality. Unlike usual memorial practices, it does not, however, seek to beautify the event. Instead, it emphasises the crude, nasty or useless side of death by portraying the actual moment of dying in all of its banality and gore. For instance, instead of tactfully ignoring the gasses that escape from the dead body of a loved one, an aesthetically sublating stance might choose to emphasize them by making an inappropriate remark or joke about the sound or odour. To an audience used to the sublimation and aesthetization of death, this would, of course, seem disrespectful and debasing.

In “case Hodor”, the concept of aesthetic sublation can be used to describe, first of all, the commonplaceness of doorstops as household objects. The use of a lowly everyday object such as a doorstop as an item of mourning might appear mundane, when compared to the “consecrated” position of most memorial objects. Their “liminal” position underneath doors and between spaces, in passageways, further diminishes them. Moreover, their practical nature might distract one from the spiritual interpretations that the vehicles of remembrance often evoke. This notion is related to the second manner aesthetic sublation elucidates the nature of Hodoorstops as memorial artifacts. Next to being banal, the most well used or “recycled” doorstops incorporate a materiality that chooses to objectify Hodor. Without the sublime accompaniments – the sound of violins or the emotion on dying Hodor’s face – the doorstops reduce his death to the simple act of holding a door no matter how much feeling is read into them. In this sense the sublimity of a martyr’s death can be reduced to a body lying (in)conveniently, like a plug, in the way of a zombie horde, against a door that might otherwise open – or close.

While these actions of commemoration might, thus, be accepted as mourning customs informed by grief, their “lowly” forms easily turn the phenomenon more complicated. The reactions, which claimed that the doorstops appeared “too soon”, for instance, accentuate the fact that some of the doorstops missed the devout solemnity of traditional memorials – either by monetizing or by debasing Hodor’s death. In our view, the lack of solemn sentiment, that marked the phenomenon and divided opinions on the doorstop-memes, can be explained at least partly by the concepts of “kitsch” and “aesthetic sublation”. Aided by both of these concepts the doorstops can also be tied to the aberrant, carnivalistic mourning patterns we discussed earlier, even if the normalized coping mechanism of humour was replaced by a form of grotesqueness, that is not so easy to laugh at. As Doss writes: “Spontaneous memorials are often scorned as fetishistic for their obsessive materiality and manic mourning: their excessive physical and emotional properties are deemed “too much” for the public sphere; their overwrought dimensions seemingly strain the boundaries between good taste and vulgarity.”93

5. UNLIKELY MONUMENTS: A Conclusion

“If humour is the inner side of mourning, the external side takes the form of the monument.”94

In this article we have sought to describe the ambivalent internet phenomenon of “Hodoorstops” by applying various aesthetic terms in order to gain a better understanding of their nature and affective impact. One of our first findings was to relate them to the idea disenfranchised grieving. In our analysis, we found that the doorstops did not only flourish in various ingeniously entertaining forms, but that they also seemed to plug into a larger wave of affective online sharing and commemoration of dead GoT characters. Within this mode of memetic mourning, the existing aesthetics of mourning seemed to extend the idea of “tribute” to fictional characters, while remaining curiously inconclusive about the actual level of the “mourners” commitment. In a sense the memes even seemed to render laughable the online and offline memorial cultures, which they borrowed from, both generating and alleviating the disenfranchisement of the mourning of fictive characters.

By looking at how the phenomenon was discussed and framed on the entertainment sites, we concluded that the reactions to the memes were roughly divided into two categories, which saw the doorstops either as “trolling” or as “coping”. We problematized the accusations of “trolling” in its malicious stereotype and noted, that the memes apply a “zany” register that can be related to a “campy” spirit, but observed, that the reportages also sought to interpret the phenomenon in terms of grief. Despite the obviously humorous or carnivalistic quality of these sorts of “remembrance” we suggested the doorstops be seen as attempts to come to terms with an emotional, tragic experience in the form of a shared – memefied – commemoration. After this, we sought to understand the uproar and the interest that these memes sparked by focusing on the material, aesthetic qualities of the doorstops. We described their generally “low” material quality and the cheap price and noted the sentimental and mass produced aspects that helped one “have one’s emotions on the cheap” in a somewhat “kitschy” fashion. Next to this, we suggested that the most banal Hodor-as-doorstop -memes, the well-used doorstops with Hodor’s name written on them or the elevator buttons and pieces of cardboard with his face glued on them, seemed to be exercising a performative aesthetic that could not be fully explained with the concepts of kitsch or camp. In their humble materiality and “low” everyday character, these doorstops appeared to degrade the heroic death of this well-liked character in an aesthetically “sublating” manner.

We find that a wide repertoire of concepts captures the aesthetic nature of the somewhat controversial phenomenon in question better than a more fixed reading. Just as the audiences in question cannot be studied as a homogenous ”fan community”, their divided responses towards the doorstops being stuck between the many labels of “trolling” or “coping”95, the nature of the doorstops themselves remains ambivalent. The laughter made visible in them can be interpreted from different positions. To a reviewer, socialized into a culture of mourning where solemnity is seen as a norm, the lowly doorstops capturing a character in his moment of death may easily seem a form of ridiculing and trolling not only Hodor’s death but also the possible grief of the fan community. To a devoted viewer or fan, they might, in turn, offer a channel for shared mourning and commemoration. And lastly, to an outsider, the whole phenomenon might seem ridiculous or uninspired. In the end, the juxtaposition between ridicule and mourning might even seem somewhat artificial. In fan communities and in fictive occasions of death grief can be disenfranchised in many ways, and thus mourning might simply not follow an established tradition.

A wide variety of concepts, thus, highlights how in the context of participatory internet culture and in disenfranchised occasions of grief, the roles of “fan” and “troll“, may blur into each other in ways that complicate such simple readings. Even a moment of hesitation in the fannish commitment may make the performance veer towards camp96, and an enhanced focus on the amusing parts of a tragic event may result in trollish interpretations. The possibility of such a fluctuation has much to do with the sentimentality that underlies both kitsch and camp consumption. The use of Hodoorstops becomes campish, when it becomes self-aware and hides behind the “trollish” mask of ironic distance. Without the ironical distance that marks camp spirit, the sentimentality of mourning, however, quickly turns to kitsch, attesting to such conventions of mourning that are “cheaply” achieved and sentimentalized. Yet this kitsch stance may also be re-evaluated and sublated as the meme multiplies, in carnivalesque or aesthetically sublating stance towards an overwhelming experience such as death.

The outcries about the doorstops being made “too soon” highlight the clash in which normative views of mourning collide with the appraisal of the online community’s prolific creativity. Despite their simple, ephemeral and humorous nature, the Hodoorstops can be treated as a way to share grief of a disenfranchised nature within a fan community. Combining readings that studied the “fan practices” in relation to varied mourning customs and the aesthetic categories of “zany”, “camp”, “kitsch” and “sublate” we have, thus, sought to make sense of the mourning that appeared to us “carnivalesque” and grief that could be titled “disenfranchised”. While the idea of carnivalesque mourning suggests that the audience is aware of its disenfranchised position and uses its humorous take on tributes both to mourn and to display defiance, the detection of kitsch elements involved in these jocular “makeshift memorials” can also appear to suggest a normalising stance towards a death, grief and mourning that resist normalization. The practise of aesthetically sublating the sanctioned kitsch of prevailing conventions and sentiments can, then, be seen as a sort of rebellion against the normative ways of mourning in a death that is deviant. In their inappropriateness, Hodoorstops may become read as trollish or campish behaviour, but as a whole, they can function as part of a larger affective reaction of a varied audience.

In this sense, then, the production and circulation of Hodoorstops can be seen as an instant of fandom “striking back”. As C.L. Harington writes, “In the context of television both creatives and fans imply that endings ultimately belong to fans[...],”97 and if something is clear in this curiously ambivalent phenomenon that reeled us in as scholars and as viewers of the show, the ending of Hodor’s life was the beginning of a hype around his character. Whether a particular doorstop is seen as kitschified or as sublated instant of mourning or trolling, it testifies to a will to participate in the weaving of Hodor’s life story in its post mortem form. We shall finish with an ever so accurate quote by the one of the sites commenting on the doorstops: “We’re not sure if all this is tasteless and tragic, or incredibly funny. So we’re just going to declare it “Hodor” .”98

[1] We wish to thank our two anonymous referees for their helpful and inspiring comments.
[2] Robb's centricity is emphasized, for instance, in the following network visualization: "Mathematicians mapped out every "Game of Thrones" relationship to find the main character", *Quartz*, accessed March 14, 2017, https://qz.com/650796/mathematicians-mapped-out-every-game-of-thrones-relationship-to-find-the-main-character/?utm_source=qzfbarchive.
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[4] Irma Hirsijärvi "*Star Trek* ilmiö fanitutkimuksen valossa," in *Kulttikirja: Tutkimuksia nykyajan kultti-ilmiöistä*, ed. Urpo Kovala and Tuija Saresma (Helsinki: SKS, 2003), 143–165.; Henry Jenkins, *Textual Poachers: Television, Fans and Participatory Culture* (London and New York: Routledge, 1992).
[5] Julie Andsager, "Altaered sites: Celebrity webshrines as shared mourning," in *Afterlife as afterimage: Understanding posthumous*, eds. Steve Jones and Joli Jensen (New York: Peter Lang, 2005): 17–30.; Anu Harju, "Socially Shared Mourning: Construction and Consumption of Collective Memory," *New Review of Hypermedia and Multimedia* 21 (2014): 123–145.
[6] 'Game of Thrones' author George R.R. Martin: Why he wrote The Red Wedding," *CNN entertainment*, June 7, 2013, accessed March 28, 2017, http://edition.cnn.com/2013/06/07/showbiz/tv/game-martin-red-wedding-ew/
[7] Eliisa Vainikka, "Avaimia nettimeemien tulkintaan: Meemit transnationaalisena ilmiönä," *Lähikuva* 3 (2016), 60–77.
[8] See: Patricia Dias Da Silva & José Luís Garcia, "Youtubers as satirists: Humour and remix in online video," *JeDEM* 4 (2012): 89–103.; Petri Saarikoski, "Pistä natsi asialle ja mene itse perässä!" Hitler-videomeemien historia ja anatomia," *Widerscreen* (2016), accessed March 26, 2017: http://widerscreen.fi/numerot/2016-1-2/pista-natsi-asia-ja-anatomia/; Limor Shifman, *Memes in Digital Culture* (Cambridge MA: MIT Press. 2014): 129, quoted in Vainikka, "Avaimia nettimeemien tulkintaan".
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[10] Richard Dawkins, *The Selfish Gene*, 30th anniversary ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006): 192.
[11] Dawkins, *The Selfish Gene*, 2006, 189–201; Alister E. McGrath, *Dawkins' God: From The Selfish Gene to The God Delusion* (Sussex, UK, Wiley Black5): 122.
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[13] Michele Coscia, "Competition and Success in the Meme Pool: A Case Study on Quickmeme.com," Proceedings of the Seventh International AAAI Conference on Weblogs and Social Media, Copyright: Association for the Advancement of Artificial Intelligence, 2014. Cornell University Library, **arXiv:1304.1712**. Accessed March 10, 2017, http://www.aaai.org/ocs/index.php/ICWSM/ICWSM13/paper/viewFile/5990/6348.
[14] See for instance Abercrombie's and Longhurst's division of the audiences into "enthusiasts", "fans", "cultists" and "consumers" and Taalas's and Hirsjärvi's notions of the commercialization of fantasy. Nicholas Abercrombie and Brian J. Longhurst, *Audiences: A Sociological Theory of Performance and Imagination* (London: SAGE, 1998).; Saara Taalas and Irma Hirsjärvi, "Fanit ja seuraajat. Tieteiskirjallisuuden kuluttamisen organisoituminen", in *Fanikirja: Tutkimuksia nykykulttuurin fani-ilmiöistä* ed. Kaarina Nikunen (Jyväskylä: Nykykulttuuri, 2008): 200–224, p. 206–213.
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[17] Phillips, *This is Why We Can't Have Nice Things*, 17–20.
[18] Claire Hardacker "Trolling in asynchronous computer-mediated communication: From user discussions to academic definitions," *Journal of Politeness Research: Language, Behavior, Culture*, *6*(2)(2010): 215–242.; Pnina Shachaf and Noriko Hara, "Beyond vandalism: Wikipedia trolls," *Journal of Information Science* 36 (3) (2010): 357–370.; Erin E. Buckels, Paul D. Trapnell & Delroy L. Paulhus "Trolls just want to have fun" *Personality and Individual Differences* 67 (2014): 97–102.
[19] Phillips, *This is Why We Can't Have Nice Things*, 16–21, 51–69.
[20] Jenkins, *Textual Poachers*, 16–24.
[21] "19 Tumblr Posts That Sum Up How Hodor Fans Feel Right Now," *Buzzfeed*, accessed March 10, 2017, https://www.buzzfeed.com/jennaguillaume/bran-stark-ruins-everything?utm_term=.gbO3qMBvn#.upE6km3gJ.
[22] Phillips, *This is Why We Can't Have Nice Things*, 22, 137–145.
[23] Henry Jenkins "From YouTube to YouNiversity," accessed March 21, 2017, http://henryjenkins.org/2007/02/from_youtube_to_youniversity.html; Kaarina Nikunen "Televisiofanius – Verkon varassa", in *Fanikirja. Tutkimuksia nykykulttuurin fani-ilmiöistä*, ed. Kaarina Nikunen (Jyväskylä: Nykykulttuuri, 2008): 184–199, p.196.
[24] LOLing, here, refers to the not-so-ethical laughter or "Schadenfreude" that trolls use for justifying their behavior, "doing it for the lulz", Phillips *This is Why We Can't Have Nice Things*, 71–94, quotes on p. 27–33.
[25] "Game of Thrones Producers Apologize for Hodor," *YouTube*, accessed March 28, 2017, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6xpG74e_-94&feature=youtu.be
[26] "The best and worst of the internet's uninspired Hodor jokes," *The Verge*, accessed March 21, 2017, http://www.theverge.com/2016/5/25/11770886/game-of-thrones-hodor-hold-the-door-stop-jokes.
[27] Sianne Ngai, *Our Aestheic Categories: Zany, Cute, Interesting*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2015), quote on p. 184.
[28] Sontag, "Notes on camp," in *Camp: queer aesthetics and the performing subject: a reader*, ed. Fabio Cleto, (Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 1999), 53–65. Originally published in *Partisan Review*, December 1964, 515–530. Accessed March 21, 2017 in Monoskop: https://monoskop.org/File:Sontag_Susan_1964_Notes_on_Camp.pdf
[29] Sontag, "Notes on camp", 5.
[30] Sontag, "Notes on camp"; Max Ryynänen, "Pakko nauraa: camp korkeakulttuurina ja lasikattona," *Nuori Voima* 4 (2012): 38–41.
[31] Sontag, "Notes on camp," 5.
[32] Sontag, "Notes on camp," 11; Phillips, *This is Why We Can't Have Nice Things*, 33–36.
[33] Sontag, "Notes on camp;" Doka, "Disenfranchised grief".
[34] Sontag, "Notes on camp;" Ryynänen, "Pakko nauraa".
[35] There were different versions of both "sobbing" and "weeping". Some spoke of "Sobbing one's eyes out" (HUH.) others of "softly sobbing" and "weeping" (Mashable) or "hysterically weeping" (Elle Decor). See: "Too Soon? Someone's Made Hodor Door Stoppers," *HUH*, accessed March 21, 2017, http://www.huhmagazine.co.uk/11582/too-soon-someones-made-hodor-door-stoppers ; "Hodor door stoppers are surely the world's saddest homeware item," *Mashable*, accessed March 21, 2017, http://mashable.com/2016/05/25/hold-the-door-stoppers/#tW2Sgzw5Guqx ; "Are Hodor door stoppers the saddest homeware item of our time?," *Elle Décor*, accessed March 21, 2017, http://www.elledecor.com/life-culture/fun-at-home/news/a8710/hodor-door-stoppers/ .
[36] "This Hodor Doorstop Will "Hold the Door" For Every Grieving Game of Thrones Fan," *Popsugar*,

accessed March 21, 2017, http://www.popsugar.com/tech/Hodor-Doorstop-41458215 ; "This Hodor Doorstop Is the Perfect Gift for Still-Weeping Game of Thrones Fans," *Slate,* accessed March 21, 2017, http://www.slate.com/blogs/browbeat/2016/05/25/game_of_thrones_fans_are_making_hodor_doorstops_to_hold_the_door.html ; and "Hold the door: now Game of Thrones fans are making Hodor doorstops," *The Telegraph,* accessed March 21, 2017, http://www.slate.com/blogs/browbeat/2016/05/25/game_of_thrones_fans_are_making_hodor_doorstops_to_hold_the_door.html .

[37] "People Are Selling Hodor Doorstops And It's Not OK," *Buzzfeed*, accessed March 21, 2017, https://www.buzzfeed.com/andyneuenschwander/you-can-now-buy-a-hodor-door-stopper ; "Everyone Is Trolling 'Game Of Thrones' Fans With Hodor Door Stoppers," *Uproxx*, accessed March 21, 2017, http://uproxx.com/tv/hodor-doorstop-hold-the-door-game-of-thrones/ .

[38] "The world's saddest homeware item," *Mashable.*

[39] Coscia, "Competition and Success in the Meme Pool".

[40] The discursive and affective alignments shared by the tweets and the reportages would appear to correspond with the ones Harju ("Socially Shared Mourning," 136–138) had analyzed to be in use in building a sense of a shared community in the mourning of Steve Jobs, another fandom and another social media network of "weak ties"(Mark S. Granovetter, "The Strength of Weak Ties", *American Journal of Sociology* 78 (1973): 1360–1380).

[41] A Verbatim version suggested that fans were "coping with humour" ("People Are Freaking Out Over The Shocking Ending To This Week's "Game Of Thrones," *Buzzfeed*, accessed March 21, 2017, https://www.buzzfeed.com/andyneuenschwander/people-are-not-ok-with-the-ending-of-this-weeks-game-of-thro?utm_term=.ptdr42O9X0#.saZk72dOj5). Popsugar's was a citation of a caption by one Etsy seller: "*Yeah, it might be too soon for these types of depressing jokes, but we have to cope somehow, right?*" (Popsugar). As a further example, other reportages that suggested that Hodor-related humour functioned as an attempt to "mourn" ("These Hodor Door Stops Have Us Sobbing," *The Creators Project*, accessed March 21, 2017, https://creators.vice.com/en_us/article/hodor-door-stop) or to "complete the grieving process" ("'Game Of Thrones' Fans Found The Most Hilarious Way To Honor Hodor," *Elite Daily*, accessed March 21, 2017, http://elitedaily.com/entertainment/game-of-thrones-hodor-door-stoppers/1504031/). Other articles spoke, among other things, of "alleviating the pain" ("13 fans who were completely destroyed by THAT Hodor reveal on Game Of Thrones ," *Metro*, accessed March 21, 2017, http://metro.co.uk/2016/05/23/13-fans-who-were-completely-destroyed-by-that-hodor-reveal-on-game-of-thrones-5899418/) and "dealing [...] with the saddest moment on Game of Thrones yet" ("Hodor doorstops have officially taken over the internet," *Hello Giggles*, accessed March 21, 2017, http://hellogiggles.com/hodor-doostoppers-officially-taken-internet-world/).

[42] Alexander Etkind, *Cultural Memory in the Present: Warped Mourning: Stories of the Undead in the Land of the Unburied* (Redwood City, US: Stanford University Press, 2013), 21.

[43] Doka, "Disenfranchised grief," 37.

[44] Doka, "Disenfranchised grief," 37.

[45] Harju, "Socially Shared Mourning," 125; Cornel Sandvoss, *Fans: the Mirror of Consumption* (Oxford: Polity Press, 2005).

[46] Doka, "Disenfranchised grief"; Erika Doss, "Spontaneous Memorials and Contemporary Modes of Mourning in America," *Material Religion: The Journal of Object, Art and Belief* 2 (2006), 294–318; Jack Santino, "Performance Commemoratives, the Personal, and the Public: Spontaneous Shrines, Emergent Ritual, and the Field of Folklore (AFS Presidential Plenary Address, 2003), *Journal of American Folklore* 117 (2004), 363–372.

[47] Doka, "Disenfranchised grief"; Doss, "Spontaneous Memorials," 294–318; Santino, "Performance

Commemoratives," 363–372.
[48] Jenkins, *Textual Poachers*, 10.
[49] See: Andsager, "Altaered sites," 18; Sandvoss, *Fans*; Harju "Socially Shared Mourning"; Rebecca Williams, *Post-Object Fandom: Television, Identity and Self-Narrative* (New York and London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015).
[50] Matt Hills, "Proper distance in the ethical positioning of scholar-fandoms: Between academics' and fans' moral economies?,") in *Fan Culture: Theory/Practice,* ed. Katherine Larsen and Lynn Zubernis (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2012), 28–31.
[51] Racheline Maltese, "Fan communities and the Mourning of Fictional Characters," (paper presented at "Desiring the Text, Touching the Past: towards an Erotics of Representation", Bristol University, 10 July, 2010) quoted in Hills "Proper distance," 29.
[52] Veijo Hietala, *Media ja suuret tunteet: Johdatusta 2000–luvun uusromantiikkaan* (Helsinki: BTJ Kustannus, 2007).
[53] Jenkins, *Textual Poachers*, 10, 15.
[54] See: Maurice Bloch and Jonathan Parry, ed., *Death and the Regeneration of Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982; Sigmund Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia," in *Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud Vol. XIV*, trans. James Strachey and Anna Freud (London: The Hogarth Press, 1953); Arnold van Gennep. *The Rites of Passage* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1965); Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1969).
[55] Doka, "Disenfranchised grief," 38.
[56] See: Doss, "Spontaneous Memorials," 301–306.
[57] See: Stanley Brandes, "Sugar, Colonialism, and Death: On the Origins of Mexico's Day of the Dead," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 39 (1997), 270–299; Stanley Brandes, "Is There a Mexican View of Death?," *Ethos* 31(2003), 127–144.
[58] Etkind, *Cultural Memory in the Present*, 1–4.
[59] Andsager, "Altaered sites," 17–18; Douglas Crimp "Mourning and Militancy," *October* 51 (1989), 9; Doka, "Disenfranchised Grief," 37.
[60] Antu Sorainen, "Orlandon Perintö,"*AntroBlogi*, June 28, 2016, accessed January 16, 2017, http://www.antroblogi.fi/2016/06/orlandon-perinto/.
[61] Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1965).
[62] Sorainen, "Orlandon Perintö".
[63] See: Jenkins, *Textual Poachers*, 16–24: Sandvoss, Fans, 11–43.
[64] Jenkins, *Textual Poachers*, 18.
[65] Doss, "Spontaneous Memorials," 298.
[66] Doss, "Spontaneous Memorials," 298; Santino, "Performance Commemoratives," 369.
[67] Although the juxtaposition with Harambe is made complicated in the sensitive questions of racialized violence, its position as an animal and a symbol also evoke questions of the disenfranchisement of its mourning.
[68] Terry Eagleton, "Bakhtin, Schopenhauer, Kundera," in *Bakhtin and Cultural Theory*, ed. Ken Hirschkop and David Shepherd (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1989), 229–240.
[69] Doka, "Disenfranchised grief," 38.
[70] Brandes, "Is There a Mexican View of Death?," 138.
[71] Doss, "Spontaneous Memorials,"298; Santino, "Performance Commemoratives," 369.
[72] "Too Soon?," *HUH*., "Game Of Thrones Inspired Door Holder Featuring…Well, You Know Who," *Nerdist*, accessed March 28, 2017, http://nerdist.com/game-of-thrones-inspired-door-holder-featuring-well-you-know-who/; "The growing market of Hodor door stoppers," *The Daily Dot*, accessed March 28,

2017, https://www.dailydot.com/parsec/hodor-door-stoppers/; “This invention is both depressing and brilliant, and some die-hard 'Game of Thrones' fan needs to make it ASAP,” *The Business Insider*, accessed March 28, 2017, http://www.businessinsider.com/hodor-door-2016-5?r=US&IR=T&IR=T

[73] “*It is the artifact that the mourners gather as it is the memorial that comes to carry meaning(s)*,"Harju, “Socially Shared Mourning,” 140.

[74] Martha Pike, “In Memory of: Artifacts Relating to Mourning in Nineteenth century America,” *American Culture* 3 (1980), quoted in Andsager, “Altaered sites,”17.

[75] See: Andsager, “Altaered sites”; Haverinen *Memoria Virtualis*.

[76] Andsager, “Altaered sites,” 17-18; Haverinen, *Memoria Virtualis*, 29.

[77] Doss, “Spontaneous Memorials”; Santino, “Performance Commemoratives”.

[78] Andsager, “Altaered sites,”; Margaret Gibson, “Melancholy objects,” *Mortality* 9 (2004), 285–299, accessed March 28, 2017, doi: 10.1080/1357627042331329812; Haverinen, *Memoria Virtualis*.

[79] “Patrull,” *Ikea*, accessed March 28, 2017, http://www.ikea.com/us/en/catalog/products/10098949/

[80] “Everyone Is Trolling ‘Game Of Thrones’ Fans With Hodor Door Stoppers,” *Uproxx*, accessed March 28, 2017, http://uproxx.com/tv/hodor-doorstop-hold-the-door-game-of-thrones/

[81] “Internet's uninspired Hodor jokes,” *The Verge.*

[82] Santino, “Performance Commemoratives,” 370.

[83] Roger Scruton, “Kitsch and the Modern Predicament”, *City Journal,* Winter 1999, http://www.city-journal.org/html/kitsch-and-modern-predicament-11726.html.

[84] Tomás Kulka, *Taide ja kitsch* (Helsinki: Kustannus Oy Taifuuni, 1997).

[85] Scruton, “Kitsch and the Modern Predicament”.

[86] “Everyone Is Trolling,” *Uproxx*.

[87] “The Game of Thrones Graveyard”, *Slate*, accessed March 27 2017, http://www.slate.com/articles/arts/television/2014/04/game_of_thrones_deaths_mourn_dead_characters_at_their_virtual_graveyard.html.

[88] Doka, “Disenfranchised grief,” 37–39.

[89] Scruton, “Kitsch and the Modern Predicament”.

[90] Scruton, “Kitsch and the Modern Predicament”.

[91] Susanne Ylönen, *Tappeleva rapuhirviö: Kauhun estetiikka lastenkulttuurissa*, (Jyväskylä: University of Jyväskylä, 2016): 81–91.

[92] Carolyn Korsmeyer, *Savoring Disgust: The Foul and the Fair in Aesthetics*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011): 130–135.

[93] Doss, “Spontaneous Memorials,” 298.

[94] Etkind, *Cultural Memory in the Present*, 21–22.

[95] Abercrombie & Longhurst, *Audiences*; Andsager, “Altaered sites,”; Maltese, “The Mourning of Fictional Characters,” quoted in Hills “Proper distance,” 29.

[96] Helena Sederholm, “‘Camp’, lainausmerkkien taidetta,” in *Kulttikirja. Tutkimuksia nykyajan kultti-ilmiöistä*, ed, Urpo Kovala and Tuija Saresma (Helsinki : Suomalaisen Kirjallisuuden Seura, 2003): 166.

[97] Lee C. Harrington, “The ars moriendi of US serial television: Towards a good textual death,” *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 16 (2012): 590.

[98] “Hold the door: now Game of Thrones fans are making Hodor doorstops,” *The Telegraph*, accessed March 28, 2017, http://www.telegraph.co.uk/tv/2016/05/25/hold-the-door-now-game-of-thrones-fans-are-making-hodor-doorstop/