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”A Conspiracy of Lost Content” - The Case of ”Q” and QAnon

Abstract: Starting in November 2017, the anonymous poster ”Q” filled its followers with messages regarding American politics. The QAnons – the movement formed around the messages from Q – were fierce online discussants occupying almost every possible social media platform. Although, this online presence would not last as platform after platform banned the QAnons. The author uses a theory and method in which the Q-posts are described as part of a digital ecosystem and tries to answer questions regarding if it is possible to preserve the content of a deplatformed movement thus exploring the limits of digital preservation of interlinked content created by a community.

Keywords: deplatforming, digital humanities, digital preservation, interlinked content, kickbanning, social media, QAnon,

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Introduction

”The uh human species...Homo sap... (laughter) is perhaps two million years old... prehistorians keep pushing our birthdate further back... perhaps an abortion would be the uh simplest solution... (laughter) but the incidence of clearly recognizable artifacts dates back only fifty to a hundred thousand years. In that modest span gentlemen, we have come from stone axes and spears to intercontinental missiles with nuclear warheads... the same principle as the spear but rather more efficacious... (laughter). Is it not feasible that other cultures may have traveled the same road and disappeared without a trace? Nor can we rule out the possibility that artifacts were deliberately destroyed. The river people of New Guinea fashions masks for their festival which are burned once the festival is consummated. And what would a historian make of pseudo artifacts of modern art? Who is that artist who does a barrelful of nuts and bolts? He went on to burnt kitchen chairs ... oh yes ... Armand ... How could our future scholar know that this artifact commemorates the sale of a name. It's an Armand and worth so much just as the coppers of Kwakiutl potlatches were valued according to the transfers they had accreted.”

William S. Burroughs, *The Place of Dead Roads*

From November 2017 to December 2020 the mystical anonymous poster "Q" filled their followers with messages regarding American politics. Q acted like the person behind the handle was someone who had insight into both the intelligence community and important political circles. Q posted on different image boards and as the number of followers grew different web pages were created where canonical Q-posts (usually called "drops" or Q-drops") were preserved, numbered, tagged, and interlinked. The QAnons – the movement formed around the messages from Q – were fierce discussants on the Internet occupying almost every possible social media platform. QAnon is a baseless movement combined with a syncretic conspiracy theory presenting an all-you-can-eat-buffet of recycled conspiracies; lizard men, a blood-drinking paedophile elite, underground tunnels where secret people live etcetera. Baseless because it does not have a hierarchical organization, consisting mostly of isolated individuals in front of internet-connected screens (Bloom & Moskalenko 2021). Syncretic

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because it recycles a collection of different earlier conspiracy theories and incorporates them into a compilation of QAnon-approved narratives. These different conspiracy theories dwell within the movement and is why it sometimes is described as a “Big Tent Conspiracy Theory” (Roose 2021). It is a tent under which lots of different world views can mix and find common ground – a form of “Meta Conspiracy Theory” (Bloom & Moskalenko 2021, p. 33). There is also an idea in media and on internet forums that QAnon is not an ordinary conspiracy theory, that it is an internet-based role-playing game gone wrong. A way of sorts to hack reality and create a substratum where a virtual reality can grow, where it is possible to perform an advanced role play. If this is the case, the movement itself may not be aware of this, the QAnons being a sort of non-player personalities (NPCs) tricked into performing in a certain way. Behaving like an internet-based flash mob with instructions, yet with no insight into the background of their acting (Financial Times 2020). Nevertheless, this has not been proven other than on a mere speculative level and will not have any impact on the work performed in this article.

It is often claimed that the QAnon movement reached its peak when the QAnons spearheaded the attack against the Capitol on the 6th of January 2021. During the autumn of 2020 almost all big social media platforms started to purge QAnons, kickbanning them and thus removing their accounts and their created content (BBC 2022). After the purge the movement now lives on in a crippled way – in the open on smaller platforms like GAB and Bitchute – and in a more covert way among those followers whose digital presence survived the purge and still holds accounts on mainstream social media platforms. Instant messaging applications like Telegram have also become a haven for QAnons, especially using the application’s possibility to create chat groups.

Previous research

QAnon has of course been investigated by others, although its brief history makes the list of publications short in comparison to other fringe movements. Mia Bloom and Sophia Moskalenko, a professor of communications and a researcher in psychology, published what to my knowledge was the first academic book dedicated to QAnon, *Pastels and*

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Pedophiles – Inside the Mind of QAnon in 2021. Besides describing the movement and its history, they focus on the psychological processes behind the followers and the consequences for families when a member becomes entangled in conspiracist belief (Bloom & Moskalenko 2021). If we search through research articles regarding QAnon some disciplines stand out; psychology, and other disciplines within the behavioural sciences, informatics, and computer science. Within the behavioural sciences, there is a will to explain why the movement has appeared and who joined it. This can be done by using Jungian analytical psychology as in Jim Kline's article *Eat My Flesh, Drink My Blood Archetypal Elements in the QAnon Conspiracy* or using theories regarding political aggression as in Michael A. Jensen and Sheehan Kane's *QAnon-inspired violence in the United States: an empirical assessment of a misunderstood threat* (Kline 2021, Jensen 2021). Another perspective from the social sciences that has been investigated is the social classes within the QAnon-movement, in Isaac Kamola's article *QAnon and the Digital Lumpenproletariat* (Kamola 2020).

In Informatics and Computer Science examples worth noting are Hanly et al *No Calm in The Storm: Investigating QAnon Website Relationships* in which relationships between different QAnon websites are investigated through a web crawling-technique in which a program follows links in QAnon-content from different message boards to social media sites and onward. This research gives us the possibility to understand the ecosystem in which QAnon resides (Hanly et al 2021). There are also several interesting works in the interdisciplinary field that sometimes is named Digital Humanities. Peter L. Forberg's article *From the Fringe to the Fore: An Algorithmic Ethnography of the Far-Right Conspiracy Theory Group QAnon* is one of those that investigates QAnon from an interdisciplinary perspective in which both ethnography and analysis of algorithmic techniques are used. In this case with a focus on how the QAnons use search algorithms to boost the spread of the movement on the web (Forberg 2021). Another example from this field is Paul Bleakley's article *Panic, pizza and mainstreaming the alt-right: A social media analysis of Pizzagate and the rise of the QAnon conspiracy* in which he investigates how the QAnon-movement used the Pizzagate-hashtag to boost their relevance on the net, and how the use of debunked conspiracy theories doesn't seem to hinder a movement from growing (Bleakely 2021). QAnon, being a

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contemporary political movement connected to different political incidents, has of course gained a lot of attention from journalists. At least one example needs to be mentioned here. Journalists connected to the independent international research collective Bellingcat have written about the plasticity of QAnon and how the "big tent" conspiracists seem to have an advantage through the possibility of pacing back and forth between different views and opinions, having an ideological kernel that doesn't need to apply to the unwritten rules of political movements (Tian 2021). So far there are, to my knowledge, no research directed towards the preservation of the content left behind by the movement and this is where this article fits into the puzzle of QAnon-related research.

If we want to preserve a digital source, it will require regular tending. If it is to be preserved over a longer period we have to control our possibilities to read and interpret the material even though the technological environment has changed (Smith Rumsey 2016, p. 148f). If not tended, several problems can be discovered by a later retriever of the source; the delivery technology (the tape, the server) could have malfunctioned or the file format is not readable anymore (Jenkins 2006, p. 13). Or it could be gone, forgotten or misplaced. When we are dealing with sources being curated by a controversial movement we need to ensure that the sources, a website, a forum, presence on social media etcetera, do not disappear suddenly. This could happen if the internet service provider decides to remove the webpage due to its content, if the owner forgets to pay the bill for website hosting, or if a social media platform decides to ban certain expressions in text or in memes – and for many other reasons. We can very fast be faced with a situation where certain sources suddenly are removed. *MySpace*, the once popular social media platform, lost 12 years of user-uploaded music in 2019 when files ended up corrupted after server migration (Hayes 2019). There are even examples of internet services that focused on preserving digital material that has gone bankrupt leading to users losing their material. Like the Swedish life-logging service *Narrative-Memento* (Frigo 2017, p. 18). If we want to preserve a source, especially if we don't control it ourselves as curators or creators, we need to perform some preventive work regarding that source to keep it from being lost in the future. I have performed some work regarding QAnon related to preservation, but when doing this preservative work I have

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also seen the limits of the possibilities to preserve internet content. What I claim that those limits are will be clear to the reader further on in this article.

Preservation of cultural heritage

In January 2021 I started to preserve all Q-drops by downloading them in raw text format and saving them as individual files. The content was also saved in picture format, through a screenshot of each post from one of the sites that preserve the canonized drops. It is a very interesting material, full of dog-whistling, echo-chamber-like links to supporters on different social media platforms, and memes whose messages are very internal to the movement. Downloading the posts as text created the possibility to use different text processing tools to investigate the corpus. It also created an insight into what happens with preserved internet content when links suddenly are broken and the movement surrounding the content is banned. This insight transformed into the main questions that will lead the discussions in this text: 1) How do we preserve (and can we preserve?) the content of a deplatformed movement? and 2) What are the limits of digital preservation of interlinked content created by a community?

The title of the article suggests that the Q-posts are part of a cultural heritage. Cultural heritage is “the sites, things, and practices a society regards as old, important, and worthy of conservation” (Brumann 2015). In general, cultural heritage organizations consider digital objects as worthy of conservation, although there is an insight that the problems of conserving digital objects have not been fully understood yet (Cameron & Kenderdine 2010). Interlinked content is one of the problems of conserving digital objects. The reader might have encountered the “Wayback Machine” of the Internet Archives (Internet Archives 2023). This is a site that provides the service of archiving any website on a specific date and gives the user a possibility to surf a website as it was on a specific date – if someone has made a copy of it. If you enter the “Wayback machine” you will notice one of the problems with preservation of interlinked content. Most of the links on the websites are dead and linked content as advertising are empty boxes. If we consider the World Wide Web as an actual web of content linking to other content this does not resemble what the user experienced when visiting

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the websites before they were preserved in the archive. What we have left is a dysfunctional copy of the website. Without the majority of its web-like characteristics.

It might be time to wrap up the introduction and the description of previous QAnon-research and continue with a description of the outline of what is going to take place below. After this introduction, the theoretical concepts used in the study will be explained. This is followed by a description of the methods used. After theory and method, we are fit to investigate some problems with preserving the deplatformed QAnon movement and its maimed remnants. Finally, some conclusive remarks and possible further research will be presented.

Theoretical concepts; Ecosystem, Authenticity and Provenance

There are at least three theoretical concepts that are suitable when investigating and analyzing the remnants of Q and QAnon from an archival science perspective. First what we could call an “Ecosystem”, related to the interlinked qualities of the content. The other two are the concepts of “Provenance” and “Authenticity” that are connected to, among others, the discipline of Archival Science, and are used to describe qualities of archival content. The two concepts are interdependent on each other, we cannot assess authenticity without a perception of the provenance and we cannot build a perception of the provenance without assessing authenticity. The idea of a digital ecosystem can be argued, if it is described as I will describe it below, to be connected to both provenance and authenticity. I will start by describing the three concepts separately, but there are, as the reader will notice, several overlaps between them.

ECOSYSTEM

In this text parts of the Internet will be described as environments with certain traits; an ecosystem. An Ecosystem is a system containing a community of animals, humans, or other living organisms (usually called an ecology) and a physical environment in which this community lives, a rotting log, a social media forum (Townsend et al 2008). What makes the Internet an

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ecosystem is the connections between different nodes within the system and the possibility, under the right circumstances, for one node to affect another. This is because of a network structure in which nodes are “connected through a disordered pattern of many different interactions.” (Caldarelli & Catanzaro 2012). The network structure is evident on both the technical level of the Internet and on the social level. On the technical level, the TCP/IP protocol connects servers and clients in a network. Within the web servers the social interaction, the social networks, has its foundation. It provides interfaces for the users to interact and databases in which these interactions are stored. The Internet consists of, to use Christian Fuchs’s words: “a technological system and a social subsystem that both have a network structure” (Fuchs 2017, p. 41).

It could be easy to claim that the technical level is the starting point of the World Wide Web as a network, but even before the technical foundations were created, and before our present social global connections, there were ideas of local interlinking of information and of possibilities to collaborate in the development of information resources. Vannevar Bush wrote his paradigmatic essay “As We May Think” in 1945 using his experience of the need for fast information research during World War 2 to imagine a machine with infinite information storage. More important though – Bush discussed the possibility of “trailblazing”, the act of creating codes that would link two entities of information to each other. And this is before zeroes and ones in any practical way entered the information storage scene (Bush 1945). Ted Nelson was the researcher who during the 1960s designed a large part of the idea of linking information between different text (Barnett 2015, p. 61). However, links as many of us are used to today, with some sort of highlighting et cetera, were introduced in 1984 by one of Nelson’s disciples (Schneiderman 2015, p. 7).

Technically, when we are linking something on a web-based platform, a simple line of code orders the computer to make one part of the screen, often a piece of text, become clickable and when clicked, move the viewer to another document. In HTML this is done by a href-tag, but on most social media platforms there is no need for the user to know what happens behind the scene. Socially there are more components. A user decides that a piece of information should refer to another piece of information thus motivating the creation of a link between the two documents that

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contain the two different entities of information. Often a user can do this without any need for knowledge about the technique behind, copying and pasting a link. The social internet today has the same role as our vocal cords – we can use them without really knowing how they work or even without knowledge regarding if they even exist or not. The interfaces we use hide the technical aspects. Link upon links can then be created by myriads of users with different purposes, from referring to proof in an argument to recommending a text, video, etcetera that another user should see. One of the more prominent internal jokes of the Internet culture is the so-called “Rick-rolling”, tricking someone into clicking on a link that leads to a video of Rick Astley’s 1987 hit “Never Gonna Give You Up” (Brown 2022). Together the links and the users create an ecosystem that feeds on both technical and social premises. A link can break both for technical reasons – a moved webpage, a crashed server, and for social reasons, a removed post, or a banned webpage. In QAnon’s case, there is a history of links being broken because the content linked is often seen as controversial outside the movement. QAnon is a movement that has been banned from different platforms and this kind of broken linkage can be connected to the social part of the description of a network.

AUTHENTICITY AND PROVENANCE

Provenance is, as mentioned earlier, a concept found in, among others, the discipline of Archival Science. It describes the context in which a unit of information is created. Which organization that has created it and, during which time and so forth. It is an important organizing principle in Archival Science and generally the key organizing principle in most archives, globally, since the 19th century (Douglas 2017, p. 26). Provenance can also be used as a foundation for the next principle I will describe; Authenticity. A concept that provides us both with a context and a creator of a specific unit of information.

In the discipline of information security, authenticity is a criteria connected to proper attribution; the ability to prove that a certain unit of information is created by a certain organizational entity (Andress 2015, p. 8). In the discipline of Archival Science this definition of the concept is commonly criticized as being too simple. Authenticity cannot be argued to be an intrinsic character of an

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information entity, authenticity is created through different circumstances surrounding the entity. This is an experience that Archival Science has inherited from the medieval discipline of Diplomatics, a discipline focusing on evaluating legal documents, often legal document related to ownership. At the end of the nineteen-eighties, Archival Science scholar Luciana Duranti used concepts from Diplomatics to analyze digital content (Duranti 1989, p. 12). This led to an ongoing debate in Archival Science. Often there are two divisions of authenticity used in Diplomatics: legal and historical authenticity. Legal being if the information (often, in the pre-digital era some kind of paper document) has been ruled legitimate or false by a court of law, historical, if there is evidence of fidelity towards the entity of information: if people generally have believed it as authentic (Mak 2012, p. 4ff). I will later on present my definition of authenticity in relation to the Q-drops, leaning more towards the concept of historical authenticity.

Methodology

Two methods need to be explained here. First, the method which is connected to the work in this article. The desired result is to describe the ecosystem of QAnon and the processes within that ecosystem in a way that makes the reader understand where the information exist in this ecosystem and thus what we need to preserve to have a possibility to understand the movement in retrospect. I will do this in two parts, first describing the ecosystem and the processes within it, then describing the breakdown and what it did to the material. The next method is connected to the qualities of the preserved material, the Q-posts. What in this material we can preserve and how the material can be assessed using the two concepts of provenance and authenticity. The first method is thematic and descriptive. Describing the QAnon movement with the premise that it is an ecosystem and that our understanding of the movement's processes will give us a clearer view of how it works. Describing the breakdown of the movement will supply us with the premise that the deplatforming broke certain processes within this ecosystem. The second method uses the concepts of provenance and authenticity to perform an analysis of the QAnon movement with a focus on the Q-drops. Using these concepts, we will have a clearer view of

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the qualities of the preserved drops and how they can, and cannot, be used in research in the future.

Posts interlinked within posts interlinked; an ecology

If we study the canonized Q-drops it is possible to create a timeline of Qs career. Q first published 4953 drops starting on the 28th of October 2017 and later became quiet on the 8th of December 2020. The silence lasted until 2022, when Q published a number of drops slightly different than during the earlier period. These later drops are less connected to contemporary politics than those from the earlier period and more esoteric in comparison with earlier posts (OperationQ 2023). During the first period, ending in 2020, Q and its followers eventually started to develop a pattern. I call this pattern the Q-process. It starts when Q posts a drop on one of the image boards used as a “dead drop”, mainly 4Chan and 8Chan (later called 8Kun). “Dead drop” is a term used in espionage describing a secret place where a spy can drop information that later can be picked up by another spy (without a need for the two persons to meet each other). The followers identify the post as a Q-drop mainly by the use of a specific user ID, but also through style, content etcetera. They pick it up and start to analyze it. The part of the process that started after Q publishes a drop has been described with the expression “Breadcrumbs and Bakers”. The idea behind this description is that Q leaves “breadcrumbs”, clues regarding what happens behind the scenes in politics. These breadcrumbs are picked up by “bakers” who put them into the context of the conspiracy theories included in QAnon’s big tent (Bloom & Moskalenko 2021, p. 9). The bakers are people that are invested in QAnon and have a platform (a podcast, a Youtube-channel et cetera) where they have an audience. The bakers create bread that the QAnons, the affiliates of this conspiracy theory, consume. Bread could be described as processed and contextualized information. Information that descends from the Q-drops. Even if this is a rather uninformed way of describing the work process of a real bakery, it is the way this group describes their process of information gathering and distribution (Schwartz 2018). Each part of the process, the drop, the canonization, and the

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analysis are nodes in a network containing links, assumptions, references and so forth.

Take these broken links; the breakdown

QAnon eventually got purged from all major social media platforms, beginning with *Reddit* as early as 2018 and continuing with *Facebook*, *Twitter*, and *Youtube* during the fall of 2020 (Bloom & Moskalenko 2021, p. 45). Purge in this case means practically that their subreddits were deleted, their groups were deleted, and certain users that spread QAnon-related material had their accounts deleted. This meant not just that the ecosystem that Q and the QAnons had created was destroyed, however it also meant that vast amounts of content were gone. One of the distinctive traits of the collapse of a network is that it is very hard to get an overview of the results of the collapse. Especially to conquer this overview before the actual collapse happens (Caldarelli & Catanzaro 2012, p. 42). So, when the QAnon movement was virtually destroyed on most prominent social media platforms, it was not only the movement that was destroyed. A lot of information regarding the movement fell with it – who the affiliates were, what they had posted on the platforms, and how they were connected.

Practically what happened is that nodes disappeared. Suddenly links were broken and accounts were non-existent. The World Wide Web is a lazy discourse with a tradition of linking information rather than retyping it. When a post is removed, the content is lost. Deplatforming is a common practice in contemporary society regarding groups that spread false or hateful messages. In this context, when the existence of a movement and the movement's communication are almost identical the deplatforming will also affect the sources needed to investigate the movement.

As mentioned at the beginning of this article, in early 2021 I saved all Q-drops in txt-format creating the possibility to use text-analysis tools such as GREP and AWK to analyze the content. These tools make it possible to find specific words, link-types etcetera searching all individual text-files simultaneously. This work has resulted in three poster presentations, one regarding the existence of direct

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references to established conspiracy theories in the Q-drops, a scope which does not have any larger impact on the analysis performed in this article (Friberg von Sydow 2021). Poster presentation 2 describes an empirical investigation of linked content in the Q-drops using Twitter links as an example. In the 4953 Q-drops, there are 1509 links to tweets. Often used by Q as the beginning of an argument or as examples and references. Of these tweets, 43% belong to suspended accounts and cannot be retrieved today. Added to this 3.8% of the tweets are deleted (by Twitter or the tweeter) and 3% are retweets from suspended accounts – making around half of the tweets linked in the Q-drops unavailable today (Friberg von Sydow 2022). The third poster presents a similar work as in poster 2, but uses Youtube.com as the empirical example. The result is similar – a great portion of the linked content is missing today, although only a few years has passed (Friberg von Sydow 2023). In general most of the dead links are due to suspended accounts making the broken network, and the loss of content and context, a result of the purge against the QAnon movement on Twitter and other mainstream social media providers.

Is it possible to preserve this? And what are we preserving?

Even without the purge the content of these kind of movements are very hard to preserve. There is also an important question that need to be discussed: what should actually be included when preserving the digital remnants of a network-based movement? To answer this we need to analyze the Q-drops using the two concepts that are vital to preserve the qualities of a collection of information; authenticity and provenance. Regarding provenance, there are not any credible knowledge regarding the actual source of the Q-drops. This is one of the main ingredients in the concept of Q – that the poster is anonymous. We have to build provenance on other arguments, and lean more towards the audience and their view of how to define a Q-drop. There are some uncanonized early Q-drops that are not included on collection-sites as “OperationQ” (Bellingcat 2021). There are also investigations analyzing the language style used in the Q-drops that point towards that they are the

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product of more than one writer (Aliapoulios et al 2021). Despite that, the Q-drops are still a collection of information entities that a group of followers put their trust in. If we want to understand the Q-drops and their use it seems realistic to ignore these problems of provenance and authenticity, and build arguments that are rooted in the belief of the movement; the QAnons. The content of the Q-drops is, outside the QAnon-movement, generally argued to be false – the first Q-drop – as an example – claims that Hillary Clinton is going to be arrested soon (posted in October 2017). This is known to be false, so it would be problematic to try to build arguments regarding authenticity using the content of the drops themselves. I have constructed a model describing different categories of authenticity that is possible to use to analyze Q-drops. “Authenticity through content” is generally not usable on the Q-drops. They are believed in by the QAnons, and this is the important aspect. It is much more plausible to argue towards an “Authenticity through the faith of followers”, the follower’s faith in the drops being what makes them stand out from other posts on 4Chan and other image boards, that the QAnons will ignore. It is also possible to claim relevance through another possible categories of authenticity. A “Process-based authenticity” – claiming that authenticity is created through a process of Q posting a drop on a platform, the QAnons claiming it as a true Q-drop thus including it in the Canon of Q-drops. This category would also focus on canonization itself, ignoring the process that appears before the actual inclusion among the canonized drops. Using these categories it is possible to argue that the Q-drops are authentic and it is also possible to argue that there are traces of provenance that knit them together as a collection. Being a part of QAnon is to have access to a (belief-dependent) information classification system, that can be used to analyze content related to such diverse phenomenon as World politics or gossip regarding Hollywood stars. The Q-drops are a part of this classification system. The classification system of the QAnons is not in essence, different to other classification systems. A classification system, to use the words of the library- and information scientists Geoffrey C. Bowker and Susan Leigh Star is “a spatial, temporal or spatio-temporal segmentation of the world” (Bowkers & Leigh Star 2000, p. 10). The spatio-temporal segmentation, in the case of QAnon, is the internet-content, the nodes that make up the network – the ecology.

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Can we preserve an ecology? No - a net breaks if we start to remove the central nodes. It rips if we start to remove nodes on the edges. We have to sew it together again if it is impossible to recreate the node that we have lost. If we want to preserve the totality of the drops – including links – we have to perform an appraisal of the material and choose what to preserve and not to preserve. Linked content can change over time, which makes nothing but a slice of the total ecology possible to preserve. We have to choose what we preserve and when we preserve it. Make a collection of relevant material. Using a preservation model, as OAIS, the Open Archival Information System, we have tools to describe such a collection, describing what has been preserved and when it was preserved (DLM 2017). More important – We would need to describe what is missing – where the net is broken and ripped. In the corpus-analysis described above, where broken links were identified those rips and breaks are shown. Such a collection can then be used by future researchers, who through the descriptions of its premises will be aware of the qualities of its content.

When creating such a collection some kind of active preservation during the period of time when the movement is active, would be preferred in order to not lose large amounts of information due to purges et cetera. This is not an easy method though, it requires timing, starting the preservation in an early phase of the movement's existence. It requires great knowledge of in which platforms the movement is active and how to monitor these platforms and preserve the content posted. In many ways an active preservation under these circumstances requires multiple skills both the skills of a researcher in the field of online political movements in order to identify which content that is useful for future research, and skills of digital preservation in order to preserve the content properly. There are several risks involved in using such a method if the goal is to create preserved digital content that can be used by future researchers. Two risks worth mentioning are 1) identifying the right material, which always will be a task involving some speculations and 2) preserving the material in such way that links and other connections within the material is intelligible for future researchers.

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Conclusive remarks

The quote from William S. Burroughs late novel *The Place of Dead Roads* found at the beginning of this article describes the confusion that the future observer of ancient artefacts can be taken with. A broken link in digital research material should affect the future observer in a similar way. A piece of the puzzle is missing and the distant observer, probably with less knowledge of the context than a contemporary observer, will have great problems understanding the material. Deplatforming is a very efficient tactic in the wars of the information society. It disarms the combatant, making them voiceless in a war that mostly is performed through discussions and disruptions. However, it also threatens to destroys the scarce sources of future research in political movements – especially if these movements are seen as controversial in their contemporary setting. The loss of information that is a consequence of deplatforming can also affect the possibility of proving what a movement really stood for. It might remove hate speech – yet it also removes the proof that the hate speech occurred in the first place. Deplatforming as a method to stop online movements who spread hatred or false information, can seem uncontroversial, but those recommending it should reflect on its consequences: Before tearing down the enemy fortress of content, reflect on the content's possible future use. As evidence of both possible crimes and as a cultural artefact. Don't let earlier cultures travel down the road and disappear without a trace. It's a Tweet and valued through how many times it was retweeted - just as the coppers of Kwakiutl potlatches were valued according to the transfers they had accreted. We should preserve the knowledge of its value for the future.

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