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# Scott Pilgrim vs. the Times

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## **Scott Pilgrim Vs. The Times**

*Scott Pilgrim is the best book ever. It is the chronicle of our times. With Kung Fu, so, yeah: perfect.*

—Joss Whedon (Vol. 6 back cover)

Brendan Gillett's Precious Little Thesis  
Pomona College English Department, 2014



## The Story So Far

*Scott Pilgrim's Precious Little Life* was released in 2004. In 2010, the sixth and final book was released, along with a movie and a video game both based in the same world, with the same characters, telling similar stories. It was, as the sixth volume so aptly proclaimed, *Scott Pilgrim's Finest Hour*. By this time, the works had developed a large and active fan community that continues to extend the reach of the works and expand as new fans find one of *Scott Pilgrim's* numerous iterations. With so many things happening at the same time—the concurrent creation of the books, movie, and video game, the presence of all three as independent yet linked objects, ongoing fan conversations—it can be difficult to make any definite claims about the work of *Scott Pilgrim* and its fans.

This project will be one of assessing the whole by way of the parts. Each section deals with a different barometer of a given work's relationship to the times surrounding its production. The four chosen here—media and literacy, feelings, pilgrimages, and responses—are far from the only useful metrics used to assess works. These measurements are also not unique to *this* particular set of works; one could just as easily plug, for example, *The Canterbury Tales* into this framework and discover things about the times of that production. These four lenses are, hopefully, particularly revealing in regards to the relationship between *Scott Pilgrim* and *these* times.

The times are ongoing. Often, analysis focuses on the *moment* of production. The production arc of *Scott Pilgrim*, in various forms, began long before the first book and is still continuing through the moment of this essay's production. The publication timeline alone spans six years, in particular six years at the beginning of the twenty-first century,

the bulk of the 'Naughties.<sup>1</sup> These six years are in some ways collapsed into the span of one within the narrative, with the rapid changes in technology and social systems happening at great speed from the first to the final pages ([radiomaru.tumblr.com/page/21](http://radiomaru.tumblr.com/page/21)). As such, *Scott Pilgrim* works as a zeitgeist, making it possible to read broad, relatively slow and unobvious changes that took a decade in real time in a clear, condensed form. These are works about what filters through into the consciousness of the characters and their creators, far exceeding specifics—what artists audiences are attracted to, which brand of phone they have—in favor of the general—how people are engaging with art, where they are doing it—resulting in a narrative that encapsulates the times, not just the moments.

Dividing the times into discrete, yet related, elements allows for measured analysis and contemplation. In the same way that specific aspects of the different works will be isolated and considered as working within a broader picture, so too will these four different analyses of *Scott Pilgrim* add up to a broader conception of the times. These chapters are hopefully written in such a way that they can be read in any order and individually, though they will make more sense, show a broader picture, when read together. As arranged here, the foci of the chapters move from the formal to the fan level, spanning the distance from artistic works to physical work.

Ultimately, the concern is one of reconciliation to the times, for characters, creators, and fans. Each era comes with its own set of changes, innovations, challenges, and movements, all of which those growing up in and shaping that era must grapple with. There is never a singular answer for how best to live through a particular period of

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<sup>1</sup> So named because there is no decade marker, e.g. the 80s, the 90s, etc. Rather, these years are "naught 4, naught 5," etc.

history, and indeed it is this range of strategies that leads to new times, each with their own unique set of features. Cultural artifacts, like the various works associated with *Scott Pilgrim*, often reflect back particular ways in which people worked through their times, and these methods further influences those of the next era, as the moments of cultural production and reception are often divided by a number of years. That is, a work is often a distillation of its times, and then that work is reinterpreted and influences the times following when it starts to circulate. *Scott Pilgrim* characters and the fans who love them show at least one way of coping with the prospect of coming of age in the early 2000s, whatever that means.

# Contents, Basically

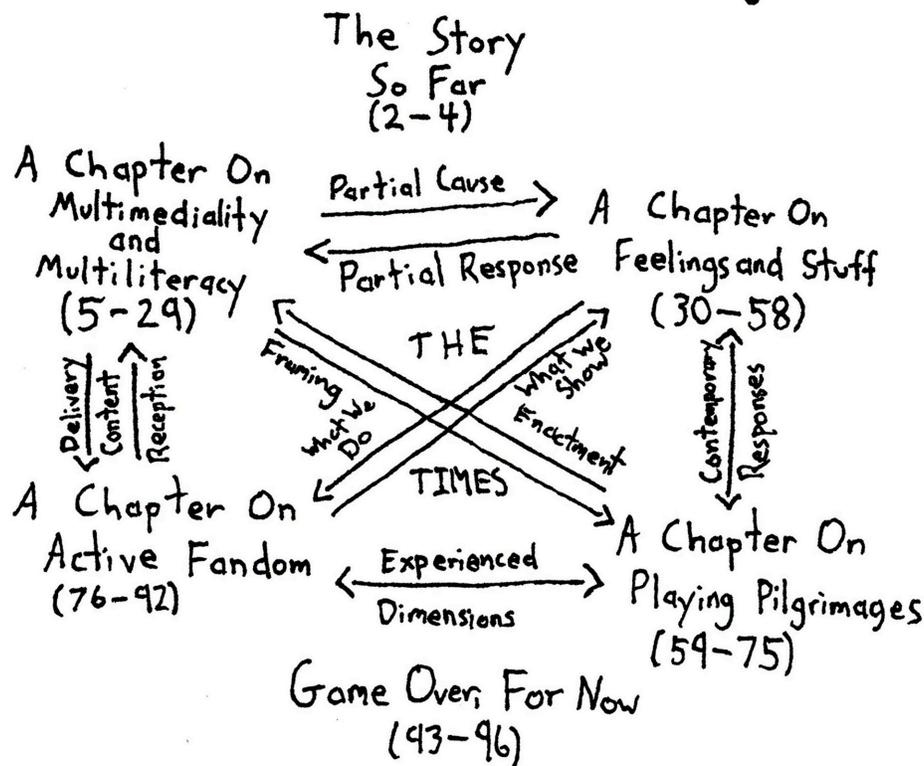


Fig. 0.1: A general overview of the chapters and some indication of their relations to each other.

## A Chapter On Multimediality and Multiliteracy

Creators make works. These works then go out and onward, moving in new directions, passing into the hands of other creators and taking new turns. As works spread out, they undergo a process of *collaborative creatorship*, wherein things are made piece-by-piece, new works building on older works and each associated creator leaving their mark on the conversation without any taking a full sense of authority. This allows audiences to decide the best ways to interact with the created works, perhaps joining the conversation with their own creations.

Audiences engage with works. By reading, watching, playing, and participating, audiences take up the conventions of a given artistic medium in order to best interpret and understand the content. By agreeing to engage a work on its terms, an audience member comes to learn those terms, developing medium-specific literacy. The ongoing proliferation of media and content requires audiences to continue honing their particular literacies, borrowing and blending to move from media form to media form. The more ways an audience has to engage with works, the more possibilities open up to them.

### Trans- and Intermediality



Fig. 1.1: Scott McCloud explains the relationship of medium and content (6)

Artistic media place certain parameters on content to suit their forms, placing certain limitations on and creating certain affordances for the work, as simply explained by McCloud's brilliant image of the liquid in a pitcher (Fig 1.1). McCloud stops there, emptying the formal pitcher of its contents in order to examine the form. These contents, however, are free to flow into other media and take on those forms.<sup>2</sup> These forms are, on a basic level, nothing more than "delivery technologies," ways of dispersing and representing content to audiences (Jenkins 13). Each breakthrough in content transmission, from the first printed paper to sophisticated video game consoles, opens new possibilities for audiences and creators. These delivery technologies, then, give rise to the development of media. A media form, says Gitelman, is "a set of associated 'protocols' or social and cultural practices that have grown up around that technology" (Jenkins 13-14), or those technologies depending on how many ways certain types of content come to be delivered. Thus, media forms refers both to the technology and the practices, the materials and the matter. As delivery technologies continue to develop and die off, so too do new media forms come into existence, sometimes outlasting the specific delivery technologies.

Audiences, then, are expected to keep up as specific content goes from media form to media form. Adapting existing content to other media has become an increasingly common practice. Books become movies, movies become video games, video games become books, classic plays become comics, and soundtracks accompany everything. This is the age of transmediality, where elements of narrative threads can stitch together seemingly disparate media (Kukkonen 34). A transmedial narrative is one that is told

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<sup>2</sup> McCloud hints at this later on that same page, showing various empty pitchers labeled "Written Word," "Music," "Video," "Theatre," "Visual Art," and "Film." (McCloud 6). These are by no means the only media out there, yet they are six of the most prevalent.

using various media forms, either approximating the narrative using different media protocols and technologies or using different media to tell different parts of the same narrative. This "remediation" is equal parts a change in delivery technology and changes to mechanics and techniques of communication (Bolter and Grusin qtd. in Wark 32). Thus, the nature of the work and the audiences' experiences of the content changes with each new form.

The multiple iterations of *Scott Pilgrim* are a prime example of transmedial narrative, wherein an organized story is told multiple times in different media. Each iteration has elements—characters, settings, plot events, themes—in common and in new combinations, often altering the nature of and relation between these elements. There are no rules about how closely these different versions should match. Rather, the specific medium often dictates the end result more than the content, as each medium demands a specific treatment. Frequently, and certainly with *Scott Pilgrim*, there is a recognizable narrative driving each version of a given work, and that helps the audience to make the jump from one to the other by giving them anchor points drawn from works they have previously experienced.

Often, works are completed in one medium and then moved into others. Each new reinterpretation and remediation is understood to be of a different, often lesser, quality than the previous ones. Whichever is considered the original work is thought to be the most important while the others are derivative. There is an urge to keep each medium separate and to rank them, to demonstrate that one understands each but prefers the "right" one. This has led to the rise of phrases like, "The book was better than the

movie."<sup>3</sup> Inherent in this is the idea that the book was fundamentally *different* than the movie, and in fact the book and the movie can and should be classified and divided by those terms. Similarly, audiences are ostensibly divided to accompany each work: readers are different from viewers are different from players, at least at the moment they are interacting with a given work. This ontological approach to media and audience classification is no longer important because of the distinctions between forms it creates; instead, it may now be more important to look at the *influences* and *elements* of *each work across different media*. That is to say, understanding each form of media on its own allows us to understand media that draw on different forms. Furthermore, understanding how media work together can lead to an understanding of how audiences move fluidly from form to form.

Scott Pilgrim and his group of friends have moved through numerous mediums. Shortly after Vol. 1 came out, Bryan Lee O'Malley entered into talks about adapting *Scott Pilgrim* for the screen, both silver and digital (Eric Nakamura 26). While working on the books, O'Malley was also consulting on both the movie script and the video game, meaning that Scott Pilgrim was born into a transmedial world in the truest sense of the term; rather than starting in the comics and migrating to a movie and then a game, the three iterations of that universe were taking shape together while remaining distinct to some degree. This degree of distinction is worth considering; each version of *Scott Pilgrim* offers something different to the audience and focuses on a different aspect of the story. Here, they will be considered as individual items with distinct, mediated histories

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<sup>3</sup> This line actually appears in the *Scott Pilgrim Vs. The World* movie, calling attention to the transmediality.

and conventions as well as a multi-part unit, a network of information that today's audience can navigate skillfully and effectively.

To look at the transmedial nature of the *Scott Pilgrim* narrative, we must look at the mediums: comics, movies, and video games. It should be noted that these three types of media are not necessarily the only three forms that influence each iteration of *Scott Pilgrim*; there may be techniques borrowed from painting and the fine arts, the soundtrack to the movie or game may be interpretations in their own right, or the inclusion of chord diagrams may merit examination as written music.<sup>4</sup> However, the comics volumes, movie, and video game are the three main iterations of *Scott Pilgrim's* world. The following definitions of each media will by no means be exhaustive, but should serve to ground this discussion in workable specifics.

### **Comics? Graphic Novels? Manga??**

Comics are, in short, a bunch of pictures and words arranged in a deliberate order. As *Scott Pilgrim* first appeared in the form of comics, that same form makes for a good starting place. The origin and appearance of the form of comics itself is often debated, but, as McCloud says, "let **others** wrestle with **that** one" (15). The question is not one of *how* comics came to be, but rather *what* it has come to be. The question of what provides enough ground for debate. A basic definition, again from McCloud, is: "Juxtaposed pictorial and other images in deliberate sequence, intended to convey information and/or to produce an aesthetic response in the viewer" (9).<sup>5</sup> This definition is broadly applicable, and indeed a large range of objects fits inside the "comics" category.

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<sup>4</sup> Music makes many important appearances throughout each version.

<sup>5</sup> McCloud also explains that "comics" is plural, yet used as a singular, a convention that will be followed in this essay.

The fact that there are multiple terms for all different types of comics speaks to the growing volume of comics works. This is an expanding territory in the contemporary media landscape. A wealth of more "sophisticated" and "complex" works is appearing on bookshelves right next to the traditional superhero works which most consider to be the extent of comics. This expansion brings with it a reading style unique to comics. Unlike a purely text-based work, or even a work with some illustrations, comics demand that the reader process verbal and visual information simultaneously. This can take some getting used to, as comics contains certain conventions that are not always readily apparent. Layouts vary with each page, and a reader must constantly figure out both how to navigate from moment to moment while also deciphering the symbolic aspect of the



*Fig. 1.2: Here, O'Malley represents motion both in a single panel and using closure across the gutters. It is up to the reader to make sense of the passage of time and the relationship between each representation of the same body (Vol. 2 122)*

pictures and the relationship between them and the words. The sequence of images in a comics work is most often organized into panels separated by "gutters." The gutters themselves allow space for readers to create a sense of "closure" and a relationship between the different panels, be it the passage of time, a thematic connection, a change in location, or whatever else helps the reader understand the sequence (McCloud 67).

Comics also represent physical motion, internal emotions, sound, and other non-visual details using coded symbols and conventions

(Fig. 1.2). Motion is a difficult thing to convey in a static image, and artists continue to experiment with motion lines, multiple images of the moving object, or splitting the motion into multiple panels (McCloud 112). Emotions and affective states remain more difficult to convey. McCloud shows how visual aspects such as line type (124), facial expressions (131), and backgrounds and compositions (132) can convey tone in comics. Comics has to make things visible and legible to the reader using both words and images, and the vocabulary of comics has grown increasingly large and sophisticated.<sup>6</sup>

As comics have spread across continents, distinct styles and variations have arisen. Japan has developed a particularly strong comics tradition, often referred to as *manga*. Following WWII, American comics were imported to Japan, and *manga* artists took the new techniques and ran with them in new directions (Gravett 28). This at once led to diversification of form and content while also allowing certain things to cohere. Eventually, *manga* would become synonymous with the ways in which Japanese comics artists used their medium to convey information; *manga* developed what Cohn describes as a "visual language (VL)" that is unique to Japan (187). Works using the *manga* VL would reverse the journey of American comics years earlier, influencing Western artists, and now *manga* is available and influencing artists all over the world.

*Scott Pilgrim* is intimately tied up with *manga*. Bryan Lee O'Malley has talked at length about his past as a *manga* fan (radiomaru.tumblr.com 63), which has played out in his works and their reception.<sup>7</sup> Not only do the books make use of common *manga*

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<sup>6</sup> A term that has come into vogue, possibly in response to the growing number and increasing critical legitimacy of comics works, is "graphic novel." Coined by Will Eisner, a graphic novel refers to a long, narrative-driven comics work, and there is no difference between "comic books" and "graphic novels" other than length.

<sup>7</sup> For more on fans and O'Malley's relationship to them, see the Online Matter in the Chapter On Active Fandom (77)

conventions like subjective motion—portraying the moving object as static while the background flies by (McCloud 114)—but they anticipate readers' perceptions of these works as *manga* volumes. Roughly the same shape and printed on similar paper to *manga* collected volumes, *Scott Pilgrim* books share more than internal formal similarities with *manga*. Vol. 4 contains a page, just inside the right cover, telling readers to stop and go to the other side of the book, along with a diagram of how to read it (Vol. 4 214).<sup>8</sup> This ostensibly comes at the end of the book, and thus cannot be directed at first time comics readers who would likely start from the left side, which is the beginning of the book in a society that reads left to right, as *Scott Pilgrim's* English-speaking audience must. The Stop page, then, is a commentary on and instructions for *manga* readers. *Manga*, like Japanese, is read right to left, and many translated volumes have an instructional page by the left cover, the opposite of what appears in Vol. 4. Whether the page in Vol. 4 is meant to be instructional or merely a joke that plays on the relationship of *Scott Pilgrim* and *manga* is unclear. Regardless, it reinforces the connection between these two forms, suggesting that there is a transnational formal conversation occurring in addition to the transmedial movements.

Borrowing from many different comics traditions, *Scott Pilgrim* creates a visual language almost entirely its own, one that fits the content and intended audience. This visual language accomplishes many tasks, but asks the readers to participate in the process of closure, creating coherence and narrative progression. The sequencing of images allows for comics writers to show the passage of time visually, comics becomes a *medium of the moment*. That is to say, each page is made of a collection of moments, often segmented into panels (McCloud 99). The reader needs to do some work to

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<sup>8</sup> It also says "Stop" in French; this is a Canadian work, after all.

understand the portrayal of temporality, but in time—and with reading—it happens with ease. When *Scott Pilgrim* made the transition to movies, those moments began to move.

## **Movies**

Movies are, in short, a bunch of pictures and sounds projected in a deliberate, time-based sequence. Originally based on the technology/form of film, and often that same word—film—is used to describe any motion picture work. Here, "movie" will be used more broadly to reflect the changes in both technology and form. Recording has become largely digital, and movies may now span several episodes, several hours, or even several seconds. The common thread, however, is that these things *move*. Movie time is not necessarily real time as, like comics, there can be large jumps, or "cuts," which simply omit big chunks of time. However, the overall experience of a film unfolds in what is understood as real time. It is much easier to connect the images together into a continuous thread while watching a movie than with comics because motion is replicated, at least it appears that way. The viewer participates in the maintenance of the illusion, as with comics, and this participation occasionally affords the opportunity for the viewer to be interpellated into the structure. Kaja Silverman describes this process as "suture," wherein the viewer allows their subjectivity to be taken up and into the perspective of the camera and the movie (205). The viewer is willing to hold the jumps and cuts of the film together because the viewer is an active participant rather than a passive receiver (Silverman 219), though it is still often easier to create moment-to-moment closure in movies than with comics. Movies have an almost unique ability to directly engage multiple senses rather than activating them through formal tricks, as printed matter must.

One of the key differences between movies and comics is that movies can make use of aurality. This adds another layer of sensory experience that is unavailable to comics. While comics has developed ways to represent sound—speech bubbles, floating onomatopoeia, even certain shapes (McCloud 27)—it can never match the experience of actual sound. This does not mean that movies are more advanced or able to communicate more, but rather the possibilities are different in each. One of the more clever aspects of the *Scott Pilgrim* movie is that it uses sound while representing them visually. This direct borrowing of a comics convention does two key things. First, it reinscribes the connection between the two iterations, even positioning the comics as the original source material. It makes the movie a *comics movie*, a term often reserved for movies featuring superheroes who first appeared in the comics. Here, though, it refers to a work based on something that began with comics and quickly branched out. Second, the visual representation of comics-style words in a movie demonstrates one of the ways media have started to influence each other and transgress their own boundaries.

Movies are still bound to the screen. Despite the acts of closure and suture on the part of the audience and their active projection of self into the action, movies still run their course as they were set out to do. The audience does not influence what happens on the screen in real time, but rather interprets and assigns meaning. They



Fig. 1.3: *Scott Pilgrim Vs. The World* makes use of comics conventions and visuals

are not given pace control, as is always the case when pages must be turned, for example. The audience is also not given input into the characters' actions. When *Scott Pilgrim* transitions from comics or a movie into a video game, audiences got the chance to play.

## **Video Games and Game Systems**

*Computer games are a key part of the shared culture from which one can begin the process—as laborious as it is playful—of creating a reflective and critical approach to the time.*

—McKenzie Wark (Acknowledgments)

Video games are...a lot of things. Part cinematic events, part playable games, part code, part player experience, and part reality, video games are a form of media that has quickly staked out a large territory on the contemporary media landscape. Perhaps this is because video games did not evolve out of existing media so much as they created a space into which parts of the existing forms could flow. The question, again, is one of *what* video games have become. In this case, as it is still a relatively new medium at the time of writing, it may also be productive to ask what video games *can and will become*.

The simplest way to think about video games is as just that: projected spaces of play. The video aspect refers to the presentation on some sort of monitor using a simulation of motion similar to that seen in movies. The games aspect is much more complicated. A game, in short, is a play space, an "interlude" from everyday life wherein the players willfully subject themselves to a particular set of rules that apply only within the bounds of that space (Huizinga 9). They are a place to explore, to challenge, to learn, to play. As the technology has grown more sophisticated, video games have evolved from nearly-abstract, two dimensional games to the three-dimensional, fully explorable game spaces with complex narrative arcs.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> The dimensionality of games is no longer limited to the space of the screen. Nintendo's 3DS, which at the time of writing is the coolest, hottest new handheld game thing (Vol. 6 11) creates the illusion of depth without the use of 3D glasses.

The *Scott Pilgrim Vs. The World* video game is centered around the action. There are nods to the comics as speech bubbles, for example, appear above the characters' heads. There are also cinematic cut scenes which play out like mini-movies, with the audience just watching. Again, the narrative is largely the same, though there is no dialogue, making the game all about what the characters *do*. This, in turn, is a result of what the players do. Video games differ from other media in that they demand input. Of course, comics must be read and film must be viewed, but the content will remain there regardless of who is present. Video games are animated by the inputs of the player(s). This input is frequently tactile and highly physical: pressing buttons, twiddling joysticks, tilting the controller, pointing to things on the screen (Juul 160). Without these actions, the game remains inanimate code waiting for a player.



*Fig. 1.4: Games require physical inputs and make use of leveling (Scott Pilgrim Vs. The World: The Game)*

The actions of the player map onto the in-game events with varying degrees of abstraction. Sometimes a player swinging their arm causes the on-screen character—the avatar—to swing their own arm. Other times, pressing the button marked "A" makes the avatar perform the same action, though the function of each button and action changes

from game to game. Regardless of how closely related the physical and projected actions are, the player still understands one thing: what the player does matters. The avatar is, largely, under the direct control of the player, and thus acts as a sort of surrogate for that player within the digital gamespace. As the player gains skills and items, so too does the player. Yet the player also remains outside of the space, watching and reading and taking in the events on the screen. This shifting proximity to the narrative world is key for understanding how to take in video games, and has largely lead to a new type of immersion in other media as audiences rethink their role in the work. *Scott Pilgrim* works differently in each of these three media forms, as each production team took up those aspects that were best suited to their particular media.

### **So What Does It Look Like?**

While they were created partly in parallel, the different versions of *Scott Pilgrim* required different presentations of common elements. Certain moments make clear the difference between the media. For example, Lucas Lee explodes after grinding down the rail at Casa Loma. This event is, for all intents and purposes, the same across *Scott Pilgrim's* three primary media. However, there are notable differences in both Lucas's motivation for grinding in the first place and the aftermath of his explosion that highlight the differences between the media forms.

In both the book and the movie, Scott convinces Lucas to show him "a cool trick" (Vol. 2 121). Lucas's refusal is met with passive implications about his inadequacy as a skater. So, of course, Lucas has to do "a thingy" down the rail, which leads to his explosion. This explosion saves Scott from having to fight this obviously more powerful foe, giving Scott a default win. In the book, this is simply passed off as "the worst fight

ever" (Vol. 2 127). In both the movie and the game, however, Lucas's deadly antic follows a rather lengthy fight. The reasons for this change are numerous. In both cases, the moving adaptation lends itself to spectacle; why not show a sweet fight in a live-action movie or a video game? In addition, the shorter narratives of the movie and video game rely on patterns, and thus every Evil Ex must have a fight. The books have time to wander, to explore different ways of dealing with the work carried out with the Evil Exes in ways other than physically fighting them.

In the game, the player must also fight Lucas Lee. The player only has the ability to control the character's physical fighting, leaving the diplomacy present in the book and movie unavailable. As such, the current character must defeat Lucas Lee in combat rather than with wits. In addition, the game is multiplayer and allows players to choose between for different characters. This change takes the necessity of defeating the Evil Exes out of Scott's hands and places it squarely in those of the player, privileging the played experience over the storyline or which character is on the screen. This is also apparent in the moment of Lee's explosion; the rail in the game goes down maybe 8 steps (as opposed to the 200 of the book and movie), and thus Lee spends less time grinding; it is more of an acknowledgement than a key moment. Scott offers no incentive to perform the grind in the first place, and Lee jumps on the rail seemingly for no reason other than that this is the way he is ordained to die. The rail serves as an almost anticlimactic coda to the played fight, a gesture to the other iterations rather than an integral part of the game.

In all three cases, Lucas Lee leaves items in his wake. As is usual for all the Evil Exes, he bursts into a small shower of coins, which Scott can collect. In addition, an

unlike other Evil Exes, Lucas also leaves a distinctly video game-derived item. In the book, its an "ITEM" box containing a "Mithril Skateboard" that promises the user upgraded abilities in various skill areas. Unfortunately, Scott did not choose the skateboard proficiency in grade five, so the skateboard simply vanishes (Vol. 2 127). Here, we see a clear nod to common video game mechanics; Scott suggests some set of proficiencies that he chose and can upgrade through experience and new items, with those items serving other proficiencies remaining inaccessible to him. This is an unusual move in a comics work, as the formal system does not necessitate the same types of limitations that game codes do. Game protagonists "develop" linearly and discretely, and developers often limit the number of dimensions each character has. In a comics work, the character can undergo any number of changes with varying degrees and subtlety. Here, O'Malley plays with which medium he is really working in, suggesting that there are structures and logics organizing the world Scott inhabits that come from other mediums and experiences.

In the movie and the game, however, the items are different. In the movie, a simple "2000" floats up from the former site of Lucas's body. In the game, the ITEM box still reveals the skateboard, but it disappears after a moment without explanation. Oddly enough, it is in the game that this gamic convention is the most hollow. Scott does not and cannot engage with the item, and, like Lucas's explosion after the rail, it seems more of a reference to the original work than it does a necessary or fitting part of the experience. A moment that was cut from games and pasted into comics is here retranslated for the game, and the transmedial movement does not entirely work in this direction. There is a tension between the transmedial and narrative aspects.

Certain moments, events, features, and conventions do not make sense in all media. Since the works are all distinct yet working on a common narrative, there are moments when it becomes clear that the creators were beholden, for one reason or another, to the other versions. When Lucas Lee jumps on his skateboard in the video game, he does so seemingly without reason. Unlike the comics and movie, which show somewhat lengthy scenes of Scott playing on Lee's hubris to convince him to do a "cool trick" on the rails (Vol. 2 116). The video game does not have a system for diplomacy and reasoning with other characters, so that process is rendered unplayable. In the interest of condensing the story to short cut scenes, the game simply relies on prior knowledge of the one or both of the other versions. This suggests that, as the iteration that began latest in the process, the game had the most existing material to draw on. Also, it is either aware of its status as a "secondary" experience that merely supports the other two or the game is not as concerned with fitting everything to the form. Rather, the game is about the play, and thus doesn't need to focus on the story. Either way, it points to the ways in which the audience is likely expected to be able to move across media to gain familiarity with the narrative in each form.

### **We Need to Do Them Now and Together**

The concurrent creation of each *Scott Pilgrim* narration speaks to the assumption that many works will go transmedial. *Scott Pilgrim's* various creators anticipated the adaptations, and the creations of the three main iterations overlapped with one another rather than happening in a discrete chronological sequence. Perhaps this contributed to the ways in which each one influenced the others in regards to the content. However, there is also an important set of formal influences to consider. As *Scott Pilgrim* started

from a position of transmediality, there was also an assumption that the audience would be able to interpret each media. If they could interpret each separately, then it would also be possible for the audience to decipher the conventions of multiple forms of media *within a single work*. Thus, in addition to being a transmedial narrative, the different *Scott Pilgrims* are *intermedial* works.

If transmediality is about content–narration, characters, settings, etc.–crossing medial boundaries, then intermediality is about form and convention. This idea of intermediality is what makes legible certain moments throughout each version of *Scott Pilgrim*. For example, the player's avatar has a certain number of extra "lives" in the video game. This is a standard video game convention, wherein a small icon of the character's face represents the chance to try again should the avatar "die." However, "lives" in the video game sense also appear in the Vol. 5 and the movie. In the movie, after defeating the Katayanagi Twins, a small icon representing Scott's face appears, and he grabs it. Later, Gideon stabs Scott, who, realistically, dies. However, the life icon reappears, and he is resurrected or "reset" to right before the battle. He gets a chance to start over, something that is not typically a formal feature of comics or movies.<sup>10</sup> However, *Scott Pilgrim*, both the character and the narrative, understand and frame life as a video game in many ways, this being one of them, and thus the life icon appears without comment.<sup>11</sup> The intermedial nature of each work requires an audience who can, in addition to the transmedial hopping described above, read each media type at the same

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<sup>10</sup> For a different analysis of this same feature, see the Chapter On Playing Pilgrimages (59).

<sup>11</sup> Similarly, meters reminiscent of video game health meters appear above Scott measuring things like thirst, cash, and pee (Vol. 4 31). This is another video game convention appearing without explanation in the other two media, an intermedial moment. Somewhat ironically, the video game itself has no meters, only numbers representing health.

time and in the same work, comfortable with multiple delivery systems and multiple media systems.

Reading for multiple media at the same time is a skill born of interacting with each media form individually. By following a transmedial narrative across medial divides, audiences also develop *simultaneous multiliteracy*. Simultaneous because they must contend with multiple forms at any given time—extra lives in comics, panels in movies, cinematic scenes in games, etc.—and multiliterate because each formal convention brings with it a particular form of perceiving, or reading, that is mediated by the form itself. When a reader turns the page of *Scott Pilgrim* and sees the pee meter, or some experience points, or a big "K.O.," the reader will presumably be able to simply read those moments for what they are—references to the mechanics of video games—and continue to move through the narrative. There will be audience members, however, who cannot read through the conspicuously intermedial moments. Rather, it is more accurate to say that those moments of intermedial convention borrowing are conspicuous for those who are not versed in each media on its own.

### **Yeah, Like, So What, Man?**

**GR: It was kind of abstract, but readers get it. It's kind of like the language of our generation. Michael Cera's piss level bar was funny.**

BLO: Yeah, it's just kind of like the way you think when you play too many videogames.

-Eric Nakamura and Bryan Lee O'Malley  
(Nakamura 25)

Simultaneous multiliteracy allows audiences to experience a narrative from multiple angles. As a narrative and/or its characters, worlds, and events move from media to media, there are small changes, as seen above. With respect to *Scott Pilgrim*, the three media emphasize different aspects. The comics works allow for complex plot lines, detailed character development, and long stretches of affective blankness. Meanwhile, the

movie compresses and cuts, focusing on the intermedial framing of and by the characters—and by association the audience—and the spectacle. The video game focuses in on the fighting, greatly extending the amount of physical combat and making those events the building blocks of the story, held together by the pre-mixed concrete narrative. If an audience can read across these media and also read each form in the others, then they will be able to get a more complete experience of the narrative.

Trans- and intermediality have become common conditions of narrative presentation. If one can experience each different iteration, then there is room for comparison and decision. A multiliterate audience can ask *why* each version came into being, and *what* it does to inform them of the narrative. If each version emphasizes different things, then each must provide a different experience for the audience. This is not to say that one *must* read across media and enter each one with a developed multiliterate apparatus in order to get the complete picture; rarely do creators relegate specific, necessary information to different media and make audiences track down all of the parts.<sup>12</sup> Rather, with *Scott Pilgrim*, one gets to approach the narrative from multiple angles, each one affording its own insight. Whether splitting the narrative into different media or using different media to further open a narrative, this method of "synergistic storytelling" is a logical outgrowth of trans- and intermedial movements (Askwith qtd. in Jenkins 106). The component parts of the story take on new meanings in each medial light.

Take, for example, the use of fighting in *Scott Pilgrim*. Fighting is certainly a central component to each iteration, yet the functions it serves in each is slightly

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<sup>12</sup> There are a number of notable exceptions. For example, *The Matrix* creators spread the full narrative across films, comics, and video games, each telling a different part of the large story (Jenkins 103).

different. This may be partly due to the formal constraints imposed by the different media, or perhaps a nod to what works best in each media form. Regardless, fighting carries out a different narrative function each time. Starting, again, with the comics, fighting is seen as a mode of interpersonal conflict resolution. Scott must fight the Evil Exes, but other characters attempt to engage in physical altercations as a way of working out their problems. The Chau family is particularly active in this realm, as Knives challenges Ramona (Vol. 2 137) and Mr. Chau challenges Scott (Vol. 4 155). This fighting seems to be the only mode of conflict resolution available to the characters. Thus, it can be understood as an externalization of their internal/verbal conflicts. This is how Scott understands things, a term that is easy for him, and also the audience, to understand.

In the movie, fighting functions in much the same way, though with an added emphasis on the spectacle. As the fights now move, they become much more exciting on a visceral level. The moments, formerly fragmented by the comics panels, now flow together continuously, or at least it seems that way. However, the movie also cuts out a number of important fights. Thus, it becomes the way that *Scott* understands his conflicts and resolves them, not the universal mode that it was in the comics. Here, the fights provide turning points in the story, visible markers of each stage in the progression toward fighting Gideon. The fights are more contained, and the characters in more stark opposition to each other. In the comics, the characters chat during the fights. Scott and Matthew Patel discuss Ramona, Knives and Ramona talk about Scott, Wallace and Ramona make small talk with Envy while watching Scott and Todd fight. Again, the comics focuses on character development and the complex web of relationships between

them, so it makes sense that the fights perform transactional work rather than pure conflict resolution. The fights are woven into the comics narrative whereas they merely punctuate and accentuate the movie.

Fights carry the video game. Foregoing the balanced integration of fights into narrative of the comics and reversing the story-punctuated-by-fights style of the movie, the video game requires players to fight through various stages in order to see short, scripted cinematic moments. These story blocks, or "cut scenes," give the fights narrative coherence. The mechanics of the game are similar to any side-scrolling fighter. Characters walk left to right through the stage, encounter enemies, punch, kick, and block their way to victory while using objects and the environment. At the end of each stage there is a boss, followed by a cut scene explaining what just happened and setting up the next stage. This is a tried and true formula, and a number of different narratives have been fitted to this formal skeleton.



*Fig. 1.5: Scott Pilgrim Vs. The World and The Simpsons Arcade Game. Similar mechanics, different narratives, worlds, and framing*

It is possible that games of this sort could be done with *no* coherent narrative and still work. The focus is on the fighting and progressing, the accumulation of experience, learning new skills, and figuring out the best ways to beat the bad guys. However, the narrative helps the player navigate the experience. It explains the choice of avatars—Scott,

Ramona, Kim, Stephen Stills—and the location—Toronto—as well as the power-ups and tangential characters. Each of the bosses is, as in the other versions, one of Ramona's Evil Exes, yet here the encounters (and everything leading up to them) are more discrete, further divided into stages connected by a base map. The game takes up elements from the other works and remediates them, playing with what they mean. The video game arguably departs from the narrative in service of the played experience of fighting. The fights are extended, characters who were previously noncombatants (or simply didn't exist) enter the fray, and the player measures achievements and success by the number of enemies knocked out. The leveling up is explicitly marked, and the progress through the game is explicitly tracked.

### **Level Up to a Life**

Just as narrative-as-framing-structure has flowed from media to media, so too are media-specific structures moving beyond their bounds. A narrative is one way to organize and recapitulate experiences, used for everything from understanding life experiences to making sense of seemingly disconnected video game levels. Narrative is still one of the most prevalent organizing methods in the realms of film and comics. Both the *Scott Pilgrim* books and movie use narrative to connect the scenes and characters while still focusing on different aspects. The video game, and many video games, is informed by the narrative, but largely organized by *progress and achievements*. Games are about completing tasks and reaching new levels. They are about gaining experience points and acquiring items. They encourage problem solving and critical thinking, interacting with your environment and exploring the affordances of the ruled space (Portnow *et al*). And, if you play them enough, they can help organize your life.

Scott Pilgrim plays his life. Throughout both the books and the movie, there are constant references to video games, as discussed above. The audience can understand them, they add a distinct flare, and they make sense in today's media landscape. The presence of these intermedial interlopers is revealed by and centered around Scott. This is evident in the way he talks about things like "job systems," that is to say games, yet there are formal indicators as well.<sup>13</sup> Throughout each version of his story, Scott gains experience points for things such as beating an Evil Ex, getting rehired, or professing his love to Ramona.<sup>14</sup> This sudden yet unremarkable interjection of gamic framing can be read two very different ways. On the one hand, it may be an intermedial moment imposed from beyond the page/screen to help the reader organize Scott's life. Or, and more likely,



Fig. 1.6: Whatever Scott earns some EXP. getting rehired (Vol. 4 149)

it may be the way that Scott himself organizes his experience; that is, Scott organizes his experiences by quantifying them with points and dividing them into levels. This, like the fighting, is an instance of externalizing the internal, of access to Scott's particular lens. Were the stories organized around Ramona, for instance, the fights and experience points and other such aspects may not even factor into it. Scott Pilgrim is a fantastic view of life as seen by a gamer.

In *Gamer Theory*, Wark poses a series of questions:

<sup>13</sup> See Scott Pilgrim Gets a Job! in the Chapter On Feelings and Stuff (52).

<sup>14</sup> The video game allows other characters to earn points as well, mostly for fighting (*Scott Pilgrim Vs. The World: The Game*)

Ever get the feeling you're playing some vast and useless game whose goal you don't know and whose rules you can't remember?...Ever get the vague dread that you have no choice but to play the game, you can't win it, can't know the score, or who keeps it? Ever suspect that you don't even know who your real opponent might be?...Welcome to the gamespace. It's everywhere, this atopian arena, this speculation sport (001).

Scott would likely respond to each of these questions with an enthusiastic "YES!!" On the one hand, he is often seen, in each iteration, playing actual video games, once that he can understand because the goals and boundaries are clear. At the same time, Scott's life is played as a game, which he seems rather confused about at times. What is clear, however, is that his gaming has informed his life. As Wark goes on to explain, "So this is the world as it appears to the gamer: a matrix of endlessly varying games—a gamespace—all reducible to the same principles, all producing the same kind of subject who belongs to this gamespace in the same way, as a gamer to a game" (015). Scott is never quite sure which game he is playing, or what he is supposed to do, but he still tries to play as much as he tries to understand the experiences.

*Scott Pilgrim* is an example of structure through play and games. Rather than organize his life into discrete game spaces, Scott is constantly in one big game space. Everything that in other works might be understood as a separate narrative thread—fighting Evil Exes, getting a job, winning Ramona's heart, keeping up with friends, having a band—is here organized as another mini-game that is *not* distinct from the larger game. Whether or not these games are all oriented toward a common endpoint is unclear and unimportant; Scott measures progress without destination. He is young, affectively apathetic, and trusting that things will work if he keeps playing the game(s) of his life. His friends fit into the game, each bringing his or her own skills (and items, and personality, and appearance).

**GR: There are a lot of video game connections in Scott Pilgrim. Had you seen that in comics before?**

*BLO: Not in the same way. It was just stuff that was in my head. I feel like everything you experience when you're young—you know, 9,10,11, or 12—sticks with you forever, and I was playing way too much Nintendo at that time.*

-Eric Nakamura and Bryan Lee O'malley  
(Nakamura 25)

## A Chapter On Feelings And Stuff

*Is there anything to do other than feel?*

– Rei Terada (13-14)

### **Friendship and Courage and Whatever!**

After drifting through Vol. 1, the central thrust of Scott and Ramona's narrative enters, rather dramatically. Matthew Patel busts through the ceiling, shattering both that structural element and the apparent safety and mundanity of Scott's precious little life.<sup>15</sup> Upon turning the page, however, the reader encounters a seemingly new Scott. Instructing the other members of Sex Bob-Omb to "get off the stage" (Vol. 1 119), lines drawing visual focus to his body, Scott instantly readies himself for a fight, landing a massive block-reversal-kick combo on his new foe. Wallace, ever helpful, informs him that "It's that one guy!" (Vol. 1 124), a nonspecific statement that still manages to convey the necessary information to Scott, who isn't too sure what's happening anyway. It's only after a further 64-hit combo that Scott even bothers to ask who he's fighting (Vol. 1 126-127). The revelation of Matthew Patel's status as Ramona's first Evil Ex-Boyfriend effects another change in Scott. His angry eyebrows lift up, his fighting grows less intense, and he seems more interested in stories about Ramona's past than defeating a guy who just punched through the roof to fight him. So they chat.

Soon, however, the fight ratchets back up. Matthew uses his "mystical powers" (Vol. 1 155) to create some "demon hipster chicks" (Vol. 1 127). Another page turn again reveals Scott instantly jumping into action. This time, however, he is not alone. Stacey, Wallace, Stephen Stills, Young Neil, Knives, and Kim all fall into formation, working together to shield themselves from Patel's fireballs. Matthew may think he's awesome,

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<sup>15</sup> Why yes, that is the title of Vol. 1.

but as Scott says, "You gotta have friendship and courage and whatever!" (Vol. 1 135-6). Though, like Wallace's warning, this statement is decidedly vague, it is an almost unexpected sentiment coming from a guy who can barely even commit to breakfast.<sup>16</sup> There is, however, a concrete example of the ways in which this group of people will commit to backing each other up without question, there to show their friendship, or courage, or whatever. Scott leaps from the ranks, seemingly propelled by the pointing fingers of his friends, to punch Matthew so hard that he earns a K.O., and Matthew turns into \$2.10.<sup>17</sup>

"Sweet! Coins!" (Vol. 1 140) is all Scott says, followed by a lamentation that this isn't even enough for the subway home. He and then Ramona then abruptly run off "...before everyone gets really mad at [him]..." (Vol. 1 157). The fight, during which Scott displays not only superhuman abilities but an investment in a goal—when he wasn't asking for gossip on Ramona—and strong connections to his group of friends, ends as abruptly as it started, and Scott is more concerned about how much money he found than with what really happened. The sudden focus on shiny objects suggests that Scott wants to downplay the fight, either in order to seem like it was no big deal or because he truly didn't think much of it. That is to say, the whole thing is taken in stride, physics-bending aeriels, sudden strong feelings, and transubstantiation included.

Scott never seems to make decisions at first. In this case, the fight finds Scott, and he passes up his chance to opt out by failing to read Patel's previous missives (Vol. 1 99). In the next few pages, however, Ramona explains the situation: Defeat her seven Evil Ex-Boyfriends in order to date her. Scott thinks for one panel, turns to her, and says, "Well, I

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<sup>16</sup> Vol. 1, pg. 103, in which Scott accepts the bacon that Wallace offers because it's there rather than feeling an actual desire to eat it.

<sup>17</sup> In Canadian money, obviously.

guess I'm okay with that" (Vol. 1 144). Here, he makes a choice, one that will involve at least six more fights. Scott wants something—to date Ramona—and he's willing to do something—fight six Evil Ex-Boyfriends—to achieve that goal. Ramona appreciates this, smiling as a little heart appears above her head (Vol. 1 145). Even if he still prefaces his declaration with "well, I guess" and is merely "okay" with it rather than being aggressively and entirely in favor, Scott is still professing a willingness to do something. He will fight, physically, for someone important to him.

### **Scott Pilgrim and the Infinite Feeling**

The following volumes each end with similar boss battles. These battles seem to occupy the central position in the narrative, as they are ostensibly symptoms of the largest obstacle in the path of the titular character who is presumably the protagonist. However, a lot can happen in six volumes, and a lot does happen. The multivolume narrative allows for the development of subplots, pursuit of tangents, and general space to breathe during the books. While there are many highly and tightly stylized elements of the *Scott Pilgrim* world, Bryan Lee O'Malley is not afraid to let the plot roam with the characters. This desultory wandering is one of the most prominent features of the works, which helps give them their particular feel.

Feelings can be roughly separated into types, though those types change depending on whose taxonomy it is. Here, the two most important feeling types are *emotions* and *affects*. Following Sianne Ngai's *Ugly Feelings*, emotion and affect will be divided along lines of action. Emotions are sudden and strong, often described as amplified states of feeling; rage, fear, euphoria, sorrow, grief, and love are all potential emotions. They are tied to immediate and specific situations and actions (Ngai 26). These

personal feelings give the subject a sense of relation to events and external forces and help shape conceptions of the appropriate response. As Terada argues, "emotions are often portrayed as expressions of a subject imposed upon the subject, as when someone is seized by remorse or surprised by joy" (5). These seemingly external modes of feeling dictate how one reacts to, say, the appearance of a potential romantic interest or a new foe. For Scott, Ramona is an emotional inspiration, the apparent origin of his excited emotions, which in turn drive his actions, including fighting Matthew Patel. However, the reader is largely left without obvious signs for decoding and translating Scott's general feelings, and strong actions and definite emotional states are few and far between. Instead, it is his affective state that is more prominent.

Affects play the long game. In contrast to emotions, affects are often tied to ideas of inaction (Ngai 26) and are thus more difficult to discern; anxiety, jealousy, melancholy, dreariness, pleasantness, and vagueness are all persistent yet often backgrounded affective states. These are not inspired by specific occurrences, and thus they "are less than ideally suited for setting and realizing clearly defined goals" (Ngai 26). Indeed, it is possible to experience an affective state without knowing exactly what that state is (Ngai 27). The narrative drifting mentioned above is the result of Scott's dominant affective state, which is a vague form of apathy. This manifests itself in his ostensible lack of goals, ambivalent language, uncertainty, and general outlook. Scott does not seem to know what he is feeling, leading to a certain type of illegibility. In a narrative work, this illegibility is present both for the characters and the readers, as both must attempt to decipher the affective states of all characters and, at times, of the work itself. Here, then, is the realm of *expression*.

Expression functions on multiple levels. Speaking on the personal level, that is to say thinking in relation to the emotions of subjects, Terada outlines "the relatively uncontroversial observation that expression is the dominant trope of thought about emotion. The ideology of emotion diagrams emotion as something lifted from a depth to a surface" (11). By this theory, the "affective quality" of the emotional subject is revealed directly, though there is perhaps a conflation between feeling subject and feelings in and of themselves as expression is considered to be an almost-unmediated revelation of internal states (Terada 12). In this view, emotional and affective expressiveness are folded into the same category, or rather affect is subsumed under emotion. *Scott Pilgrim's* group of friends displays an alternate schema of feelings, wherein emotional highs punctuate standing affective states.

Speaking on the (con)textual level, that is to say thinking in relation to the affective quality of texts, there are a number of things to be said about affective expression. As the characters express their feelings, there is both an accrual of tonal information that informs the overall works and expression by the works themselves. While the "*expressive hypothesis*" Terada outlines (11) generally refers to subjects, it is also productive to apply it to works, in this case to *Scott Pilgrim*. Take, for instance, the idea that "the container and the contained are not yet differentiated within expression" (Terada 12). When the text is considered as an emotional and affective container, it becomes possible to begin organizing along generic lines. As Liu argues,

We remember that once the great public genres and style of affective experience—for example, tragedy, comedy, the beautiful, the sublime, and so on—corresponded with modes of feeling that, however much zeroed out at crucial moments in *apatheia* (serene passionlessness, as in the aftermath of tragic purgation) were painted in broad emotional gestures (Liu 237).

Liu's genres based on "emotional gestures" rely on the external, the incitement of specific feeling, regardless of the apparent levels of emotion displayed. These works are remembered and understood through the moments, the deaths, the jokes, the striking visuals, the expansive, and that which is outside the norm. *Scott Pilgrim* is painted in broad affective gestures, and the "style of affective experience" is at odds with those given by Liu, as it is not so definite. *Scott Pilgrim* falls into a public category of vague apathy, as mentioned above. This, and other affective genres, are remembered for the base states, the standing feelings, rather than the sudden interruptions. This genre is not about overt revelation but rather subtle uncoverings of things already felt and thus, on some level, understood. We must consider, then, how these works uncover these felt understandings.

### **Comics, Man**

Let us begin at the level of form, interrogating the ways in which we figure out the feel of *Scott Pilgrim* through the artistic gestures and techniques. As this discussion could expand in scope very easily, I will try to limit it to the affective aspect of comics, specifically *these* comics.<sup>18</sup> This requires thinking of comics as a medium of expression, a type of work that is carried out largely by the material, artistic, and textual aspects of the comics. The books' small size and medium-quality paper are reminiscent of bound *manga* volumes, little more than semi-permanent collections of ephemeral material (Gravett 96) that are to be read quickly and without deep consideration. The reader is arguably primed to expect certain levels of feeling by "paratexts," those aspects of the text that surround the content (Genette qtd. in Frow 106). In this case, the paratextual

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<sup>18</sup> For a more in-depth formal analysis/discussion of comics, see Comics, Man in the Chapter on Multimediality and Multiliteracy (34).

framing calls to mind related forms, potentially locating *Scott Pilgrim* among other artifacts the reader may have encountered.<sup>19</sup> The covers are bright and feature character portraits, giving a hint of the art within. Here, then, we can consider the characters as visual aesthetic objects in relation to the whole works. Terada notes that the face and voice have been described as "maximally efficient" sites of emotional/affective expression (12). In the case of a comics work, the faces are but one part of the style of the work. Comics arguably approach maximal efficiency through a combination of visual and textual information that echoes the combination of visual and verbal information received from the pages.

The art in *Scott Pilgrim* is fairly simple: black on white, bold brush strokes, grey fades, background textures, dramatically differing page layouts.<sup>20</sup> Character designs are likewise rather simple, faces and features pushed toward the abstract; lines for noses, rounded edges, plenty of blank space, and large eyes make up the basic face for all characters. In some cases, their hair plays a bigger part in differentiating them than the other features, suggesting strong facial similarities. However, these faces are deceptively expressive. The large eyes work in tandem with the other prominent feature, the mouths, to create a range of expressions. Looking only on the covers, it is possible to see determination (Vol. 1), uncertainty (Vol. 2), angst (Vol. 3), enthusiasm and doubt (Vol. 4), assertive defiance (Vol. 5), and determination (Vol. 6). Three things are notable about this sequence. First, these are interpretations, and thus there is no certainty that this is what is being expressed. However, the fact that such diverse range of expressions can be

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<sup>19</sup> For another take on the *manga* connection, see Comics, Man in the Chapter On Multimediality and Multileteracy (34).

<sup>20</sup> There is a colorized version of the works that began publication in 2012, 8 years after the original publication began. Colors can provide additional expressive cues, though this essay will stick with the black and white versions.

read from these simple and similar faces suggests the expressive potential of said faces. Second, the first and last both express determination, yet they are different expressions of that same emotional state. Finally, it is possible to see a hint of the movement toward an even more simplified art style across the works.



Fig. 2.2: The covers of Vol. 1 and 6, and a page 94 Vol. 4 as expressions of determination and confusion, respectively.

The move toward aesthetic simplification inherently changes the expression of feeling. Faces get rounder, proportions change, Scott's hair becomes more of a solid, angular piece, and everything takes on more of an iconic, "cartoon" look. In this context, "icon" refers not to a culturally established and recognizable item, but rather an image that works symbolically as a representation of some other person, thing, or idea (McCloud 27). As *Scott Pilgrim* is already a simplified representation of recognizably real things—a group of friends living in Toronto—the less "realistic" the pictures become, the more instantly accessible they are to the reader because they tend towards representing archetypes of things rather than specific things. The reader is allowed to fill in the specifics outlined by Bryan Lee O'Malley's brushstrokes. The art works to set the

feel of the piece, and the *Scott Pilgrim* universe is suited to a style less based in reality.<sup>21</sup>

As with all comics works, the message of the art is reinforced or complicated via the text on the page.

The textual information of *Scott Pilgrim* is carefully doled

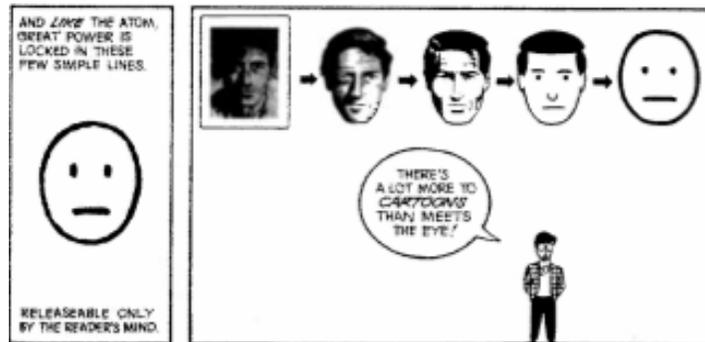


Fig. 2.3: McCloud demonstrates the progression from realistic to iconic and suggests the simple has great potential (45)

out. Mostly character dialogue and onomatopoeia, the words on the pages of *Scott Pilgrim* are part that world overall.<sup>22</sup> They are not there to convey information that can be expressed visually. Rather, the words are there to fill out the environment and help articulate what the characters are displaying through their faces, actions, and stances. Despite the relative sparseness of the words, they do serve key functions when it comes to tone setting, especially through the characters' speech.

### **I Feel Like We Should Talk About it Or Whatever**

*(...An absurd remedy, everyone would surely agree, to add to each sentence some little phrase of uncertainty, as if anything that came out of language could make language tremble.)*

– Roland Barthes (48)

Throughout the works, the characters of the *Scott Pilgrim* universe share their general disposition—part affective, part emotional, part general outlook/life philosophy—by way of distinct speech patterns and verbal habits. There is a proliferation of words and

<sup>21</sup> It is also possible that this is simply the result of Bryan Lee O'Malley refining his style and figuring it out as he goes. However, it should not be considered coincidental that the process of refinement pushed the art in the direction of the iconic.

<sup>22</sup> The status of represented sound in comics could be debated, as the characters would "hear" the sounds while the reader sees them. However, onomatopoeia are used to represent the sounds of the world itself, and thus will be considered diegetic because both character and reader are aware of these sounds, though in different ways.

phrases that act as tags, codas, and general tone-setting mechanisms. These words and phrases are ostensibly empty in and of themselves; "I guess," "I dunno," "um..." "kind of..." "or something," and the ubiquitous "whatever" all lend the characters' words a sense of uncertainty. Most of these work simply; by casting doubt on the assuredness of the details in a given sentence, speakers at once abdicate responsibility for what they are saying while also presenting a lax, slightly to severely disinterested front.

Scott and Ramona are both experts at qualifying what they say, suffusing their speech with so many tags that it is almost amazing they manage to communicate at all.<sup>23</sup> Their first real interaction, when Ramona comes to deliver Scott's CDs, is an exemplary instance of these techniques. Upon opening the door, Scott is greeted with a simple, "Um...Scott Pilgrim?" (Vol. 1 74). This is, however, split between two panels, so the first word that Ramona says is an isolated "Um." They spend most of the next two-and-a-half pages trying to come to an understanding of subspace highways, but Scott can't seem to get it, so they move on (Vol. 1 74-26). Almost every other sentence is a question, or at least ends with a question mark, suggesting the same air of uncertainty created by the verbal tags. Once they establish some details, things flow a bit more smoothly. Scott asks Ramona if she's American, and she asks if she's "coming off as rude, or something like that?" (Vol. 1 76). Here, we see both a question and a vague ending. Scott, however, tops this combination on the next page. When Ramona mentions leaving, Scott launches into a jumbled mass of words, ellipses, dashes, and question marks attempting to explain to her that "there are... reasons... for you to hang out with me?" (Vol. 1 77). Ramona's response sums up most of these characters: "You're all over the place" (Vol. 1 77). Scott, in turn, points out what is truly important when he says, "But I'm so sincere!"

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<sup>23</sup> Maybe this is why it takes them six books to actually get it together, as individuals and a couple.



Fig. 2.3: *Scott Pilgrim, sincerely not together* (Vol. 1 73)

This sincerity is perhaps what allows these vague, seemingly directionless conversations to function. These characters often exhibit "...the highly specific feeling of feeling uncertain *about* what one is feeling" (Ngai 17) and they express this through their speech. However, they know that they are feeling something, and they know that they still exhibit personal qualities—such as sincerity—that serve as reasons for the other characters to keep hanging out with them. Through hanging out, which often consists largely of talking, characters start collecting their thoughts, transitioning from being all over the place to a state of greater certainty, one in which they know what they are feeling. Throughout this conversation, Scott does have a goal: to hang out with Ramona Flowers. When she finally agrees, he responds enthusiastically and definitively, with a "Yes!! Certainly!! Ramona Flowers!! Awesome!" (Vol. 1 78). Here, it is still not clear that he knows exactly what he is feeling, but it is certainly awesome. He then drops back into the less declarative mode, starting his next sentence with "So yeah..." (Vol. 1 78), one of the aforementioned verbal tags without a sentiment to modify.

These verbal tags are taken up by the work itself to act as tonal indicators. Immediately after Scott says it, the phrase "So Yeah" looms large on the next page, where we see Ramona waiting in a park for Scott to come hang out with her (Vol. 1 78).

These phrases appear throughout all six volumes and are intended to function exclusively for the reader; the characters are unaware of the words floating above their heads, as the words are not actually occupying the same space despite being on the same page. This is a twist on the classic "Meanwhile, back at the ranch"-type phrases used to set the scene in countless comics works. Appropriately, these are consistent with the speech patterns of the characters, and thus even the partially externalized narration participates in the same sense of uncertainty that the characters display all over the place. Thus, these tags become part of the official tone of the works themselves.

Despite their apparent lack of meaning and the fact that they usually accompany and modify meaningful language, the verbal tags are often used as stand-alone items. When talking to Knives, Scott responds to her admission of not dating many guys with a simple "Yeah, so whatever man!" (Vol. 1 29). He is letting her know that it doesn't matter without using language that is specific to the conversation, or that really conveys anything specific at all. This is, however, perfectly fine with Knives, and pretty much with the rest of the characters in the works. Oftentimes, they don't even bother with full sentences; when talking about his poor memory, Ramona responds to Scott's admission of not remembering if he graduated with an emphatic, "Whatever!!" (Vol. 2 165). Here, Ramona's interjection suggests a strong opinion, yet that opinion is ambivalence. It is no coincidence that the word used perhaps the most of any other is inherently ambivalent; the characters are often expressing little more than ambivalence, or appearing to. What matters is not that they know how they feel or are able to articulate it so much as it is the act of articulating *something*, and these vague phrases are better than nothing.

## Many Friends Who Don't Hate Each Other

The characters express their emotional states and affective qualities on a number of levels and serve as more than formal features of the text. First, there are the individual characters, with Scott seemingly privileged as the primary emotional tone setter. However, attempts to articulate his emotional/affective state are frustrated by his own inability or unwillingness to do the same. Thus, readers are left asking the same question Ngai asks about *Bartleby the Scrivener*: "What, if anything, is this inexpressive character feeling?" (1). In the case of *Scott Pilgrim*, this is a good question up to a point. Sure, readers want to know something about what he is feeling, but it may be more appropriate to feel it rather than name it. In that sense, the reader is invited to *feel along with* the character and thus arrive at a vicariously experiential understanding rather than an interpretively verbalized one. Affect resists language, and *Scott Pilgrim's* characters are content–contentment itself possibly functioning as an affective state—to let themselves and audiences dwell, ruminating over feelings without trying to pin them down and talk about them. The works themselves feature inroads and points of contact but not full maps. Readers, then, must explore and chart territories for themselves.

In addition to the protagonist himself, Knives Chau provides an entry point, in some senses even a stand-in for the audience, into this text via the expression of feelings and acquisition of knowledge. In considering matters of affect, Knives's trajectory from naïve and



Fig. 2.4: Knives Chau, adorably behind the curve but already undergoing a transformation (Vol. 2 97)

excitable high schooler (Vol. 1 25) to jaded scenester (Vol. 6 234) follows the potential path of the reader. Regardless of what the reader brings to these works or how they feel at the outset, they will learn how to match the affective registers of these characters and these works by experiencing them alongside this excitable character. Just like Knives, it doesn't matter how recently one found out about good music—or good comics, or good movies, or good video games, or cool people—so much as it is the finding out and subsequent uptake/participation that matter. Knives is the outsider who enters the world of Scott and his friends, moving from a position of ignorance to a state of belonging, and she is constantly discussing and demonstrating how she feels about it.

Another point of feeling is the friend group as a unit. Events and actions and affects are almost always spread between multiple characters who, at times, act as an ensemble protagonist. Friends provide support. They help each other out. They maintain their connections to each other through exchanges, kindnesses, mercies, and just hanging out. There is an ease here, one which again resists, to a degree, too much analysis. The intro pages to each volume lay out the group dynamics at that point, providing enough to understand what is going on without over-thinking something that, again, is felt.

The basic social unit of the *Scott Pilgrim* universe is the group. This may seem a rather vague and informal term, yet it is apt because the group itself is a vague and informal formation that mirrors the vague and unformed sense of apathy of its members. The group is conspicuously tied to the idea of youth culture, as it perhaps perceived as a social formation suited almost exclusively to young people, those without "real" responsibilities and complex, more fixed social organizations. The group, then, is loose, more of a *social affective state* than a clearly defined entity. Groups maintain themselves

through the individual efforts of members to navigate their relationships to other members, the group itself, and formations and apparatuses beyond the group.

Scott Pilgrim's group consists of a few core members: Wallace Wells, Kim Pine, Stephen Stills, Young Neil, Stacey Pilgrim, Knives Chau, and, of course, Ramona Flowers.<sup>24</sup> These are the friends that Scott can count on, and they, in turn, can usually count on Scott, and each other. They are also the people Scott has been hanging out with the most. Which aspect is more important, reliability or familiarity, is debatable, though it is likely a combination of both. The group provides a touchstone for each member as they exist in and interact with a broader world. It also helps them organize their feelings. Affective states are dissipated over the group while also being determined by the group.

There is a cycle of feelings, and it is often less important *which individual* the feelings emanate from, and the focus is rather *how they effect the whole group*. It is no coincidence that one of the main organizing factors of this group is the fact that three of them are members of the band Sex Bob-Omb, who begin their shows by proclaiming approximately how they are going to make the audience feel. The larger friend group, without shouting it out, also indicates how the audience should feel in response to these



Fig. 2.5: Sex Bob-Omb register their qualified intent to make the audience "get sad and stuff!!!" (Vol. 4 126)

<sup>24</sup> Core membership is debatable and shifting, as will be discussed. However, these are the members who appear most consistently.

works.

When two groups come into contact, the affective interplay is complicated. In Vol. 3, Sex Bob-Omb and The Clash at Demonhead, a band featuring Scott's own Evil Ex, hold a backstage meeting. This is a confusion of friends, as former bandmates and lovers sit across from each other, sizing up the new relations and figuring out how to interact with each other. There is an affective stalemate at first, portrayed through nearly two pages with a total of seven words exchanged, and a giant "Silence" dominating one panel (Vol. 3 10-11). Aside from a small outburst by Knives (Vol. 3 13), the scene remains rather stagnant until a fight breaks out between Scott and Todd. However, the dominant mode is one of actual uncertainty, as both groups try to assess the motives of the other and how they should feel about it. They do not know what they can expect from each other, which is poignant in this instance because many of those present were members of former groups together. Thus, they expected and relied on a certain type of interaction with each other that has been replaced with a new network.

### **Some Stuff About the New Networked Economy and Friendly Networks**

The network Scott and his friends are caught up in may be based on economic relations and transactions. In *The New Spirit of Capitalism*, Boltanski and Chiapello outline what can best be described as an "extrovert economy."<sup>25</sup> In this conception of the contemporary capitalist world, the "great man" is he who can circulate freely, connecting people and resources and leveraging any and all socio-economic currency to facilitate successful projects (Boltanski and Chiapello104). Meanwhile, "little people" are left behind, victims of their own lack of proactive go-getterism and connections (Boltanski and Chiapello108). This is the economy of the individual, wherein connections are made

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<sup>25</sup> Joseph Long, in conversation.

and maintained only insofar as they are useful for some greater economic end. There is a constant, expansive forward drive, as both the economy as a whole and the great individuals who comprise the system charge breathlessly onward to the next project, the next idea, the next set of people.

The pervasiveness of this system makes it difficult for individuals to effectively resist. However, there are a number of ways that one could elect to remain separate from the network of networks that Boltanski and Chiapello describe. Some choose to cling to the previous spirit of capitalism, maintaining their positions within larger corporate structures that provide safety and security at the cost of mobility even as those positions disappear. Others simply put in a mediocre performance in the web of networks, playing the flies to the great traversing spiders. It is necessary for people to take both of these paths for the network to thrive, as the economy would collapse if everyone were the team leader every time, and thus even little people play an essential role. In addition to these various levels of participation in the new networked economy, there is also at least one potential form of alternative (non)participation: the group network.

The group is how the characters of *Scott Pilgrim* organize many of their economic actions. The salient feature here is that the group is composed of a small number of individuals who maintain their connections regardless of value and often act together. Groups are often made up of young people who are perceived as being outside of the economy, neither moving ahead nor back or, for that matter, really moving much of anywhere; in other words, ostensible motion is vague, if present at all. They are seen as static, mired in their half-baked ideas and lack of useful connections. Somewhat paradoxically, the group members are seen as selfish layabouts who look out only for

themselves. Yet this is a vision perpetuated by the very individuals whose unbridled individualism drives the new economy; if one is not performing conspicuous circulation in a global context, they one must not be increasing the overall value of, well, anything. And, in the new economy, value, whether it be personal, national, or corporate, is of utmost importance. The vague affective state of the *Scott Pilgrim* group allows them to resist the drive to splinter into a number of networked, yet not truly connected, individuals. This resistance is in some senses surface-level, as there is little hope of truly escaping or confounding economic structures. However, this enacted resistance is meaningful in that the characters feel like they know what they are doing and this youthful idealism is enough to sustain them even as their situation grows more precarious.

In a series of networks based on intense personal promotion, a group acting like it just doesn't care comes to be a radical resistance strategy, or something like it. The line between affect and actual disinterest is blurry at best, and so it is always unclear if the groups are actively electing to operate outside of networks that they understand in great detail or if they just feel like doing their own thing a little bit. What is constant is the lack of engagement with those networks on the networks' terms. Groups are more inclined towards pursuing projects with friends than pursuing that which may turn out to be the most lucrative or lead to future connections. They may focus on one thing for an inordinate amount of time—such as recording an album—despite a range of "better" options. Members may come and go, yet the group ethos is always intact and willing to assist each other in various ways.



Fig. 2.6: Kim relies on her group of friends, including a guy with a car, to help her move (Vol. 4 21-22)

Groups often help each other perform labor-intensive tasks. There are three "big" residence changes throughout the Scott Pilgrim series. "Big" in the sense that Scott sees changing residences as "...kinda blowing [his] mind and stuff" (Vol. 4 22). In contrast to Scott's view, the other characters, such as Kim, see them as "completely ordinary" (Vol. 4 22). Furthermore, these characters have little more than a few boxes, enough for maybe one carload, two at the most. And therein lies the first occasion for calling on the informal services of friends and acquaintances: getting a car. Enter Jason Kim, a minor character who first appears because he "uh...[owns] the car" (Vol. 4 22). This comes to be one Jason's defining characteristics, partially because it is so unusual in this group. "I know a guy with a *car*?" (Vol. 4 46) Scott later remarks, forgetting once again that he met Jason for like the fifth time when they helped Kim move (Fig. 2.6). Jason is little more than a strategic connection, or at least he is in Scott's social schema, and as Scott is the title character the worldview is perhaps slightly slanted in his direction. Readers see what he sees, and what he sees is a guy with a car, called in to help a best friend move.

Once the car and help of its owner/driver have been secured, characters find the second occasion to rely on friends: carrying boxes. Despite the small number of things

that Kim apparently owns, she still calls on friends to do the manual labor of moving. This is a volunteer effort (Vol. 4 21), and here the benefit of having friend is (mostly) dependable free labor. These moments also bring new people into contact and work to expand the group. When Stephen Stills walks past Joseph's room, he notices a recording studio and asks Joseph if he can record Sex Bob-Omb's album. Joseph agrees, if only because he thinks Stephen Stills is attractive (Vol. 4 24). Here, again, is a scenario of informal exchange; Joseph will provide his skills and equipment, things for which he could likely charge money, in return for the chance to spend time with Stephen Stills. Joseph and Jason are both pulled into the group through the auspices of friendly exchange and take on different roles in relation to the core group.

Jason and Joseph both become romantically involved with members of Sex Bob-Omb, with different results. Just as Jason showed up for an afternoon to lend his car and time, he is little more than a brief fling for Kim. By the middle of the following volume, Ramona asks Kim about "that guy you were seeing" (Vol. 5 72). Scott remained entirely unaware that the relationship had ever progressed beyond Jason-as-car-owner (Vol. 5 72), and it turns out that it was already over anyway. Jason briefly had a chance to join the group, but instead he slept with Kim's roommate and "now he's out of the picture" (Vol. 5 73).<sup>26</sup> Joseph, meanwhile, hangs around, ostensibly because recording an album takes longer than an afternoon and thus he needs to stay around to continually provide his services. However, he also begins a relationship with Stephen Stills, which Scott also doesn't learn about until long after it starts (Vol. 6 229-230). Turns out Stephen also found Joseph attractive, and thus an afternoon of volunteer moving turned into a free

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<sup>26</sup> This is a particularly relevant phrase in a graphic medium, as nondiegetic events are literally *not pictured* or drawn on the page. Thus, Jason Kim is relegated to words, leaving him with only half the possible presence of a comics character.

recording turned into a romance. Relationships are volatile, ephemeral, and mutable, shifting from type to type with relative frequency and ease in response to group and individual events in a way that echoes Boltanski and Chiapello's schema. What's different here is that these friends will often help each other out with very little recognizable return incentive, and certainly without a thought to financial gain.

Just as it opened with a group move, Volume 4 closes with the friends again carrying someone's belongings to a new residence. This time, Scott is moving. The whole event takes less than two pages to narrate, which makes sense given that Scott only has one box and two garbage bags full of stuff, plus a poster (Vol. 4 195). Stephen Stills thinks that's "kind of pathetic, man" and Kim can't believe that Scott "had the audacity to call [them] over for *this*" move (Vol. 4 195). Despite their protests, however, the friends are there, willing to help Scott with even this small task. It is unclear if Jason Kim is involved this time, as he remains out of the picture. What matters is that Scott has a solid group of friend who he can rely on for any type of help, big or small.

In the subsequent volume, Scott needs to lean a little harder on his friends when Ramona decides that she needs some alone time in the apartment. Luckily, Scott can rely on "one of [his] many friends who don't hate [him]" (Vol. 5 60). His friends glare, indicating that they may hate him a bit more than he thinks. However, they still take him in. Not only that, they seem to enjoy it. Scott and Kim's dinner at the Thai restaurant is one of the few panels in which Kim smiles (Vol. 5 69). Here, it is even possible that Scott is paying for dinner<sup>27</sup> and thus giving Kim a form of material compensation—food—in return for use of her space. However, this is not what is important here. Rather, it is the companionship, the way in which two friends can enjoy each other's company and

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<sup>27</sup> Because he has a *job*! See following page.

couches when they need to, and the ways in which that can make them happy, or something like it.

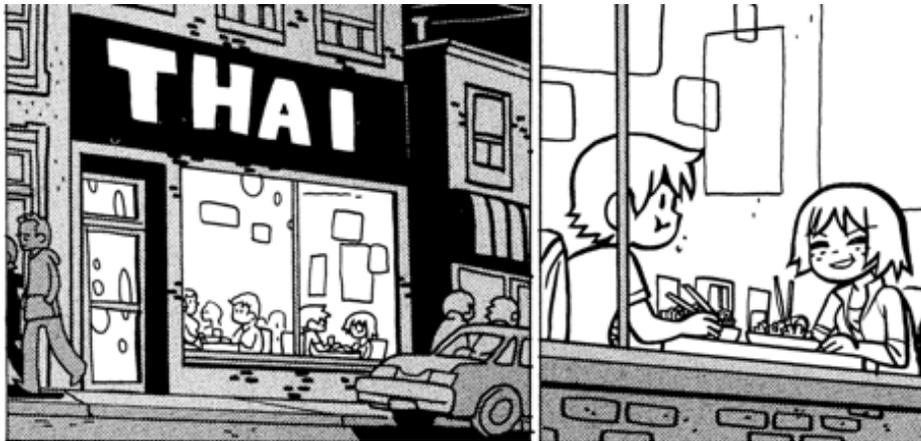


Fig. 2.7: Two friends enjoy dinner together while one also lends her couch as a sleeping space (Vol. 5 69)

Now, while they may resemble the new networked economy, the informal group network of *Scott Pilgrim* is not merely an outgrowth of this economy. Groups exist *in relation to* and are *augmented by* this economy, which is in turn effected by the presence of these group and their members. Ngai, continuing on the work of Paolo Virno, contends that there is no distance between those exhibiting "sentiments of disenchantment" with an prevailing economic system and the system itself, as these same sentiments "are now perversely integrated, from the factory to the office, into contemporary capitalist production itself" (4). The characters of *Scott Pilgrim*, then, may simply be revealing "how capitalism's classic affects of disaffection (and thus of potential social conflict and political antagonism) are neatly reabsorbed by the wage system and reconfigured into professional ideals" (Ngai 4). The group participates in similar forms of networking and economic exchange, and it is ostensibly only their blasé attitude—an attitude which, again, is arguably presented rather than truly felt—that marks them as "alternative," and thus they are still participants. However, the fact that they rely primarily on social capital rather

than financial capital serves to set this group apart from Boltanski and Chiapello's networked economy in substantial ways. Members of the group still leverage connections in the form of their relations, yet the aims are different. Thus they are engaged in *imitation* rather than pure *participation*. When the characters actually engage directly with the economy, they blend their group affective mentality while also working jobs that are decidedly not about networking.

### **Scott Pilgrim Gets a Job!**

Volume 4 is appropriately titled *Scott Pilgrim Gets It Together*. Sure, it's more than halfway through the series, but it's great to see Scott showing some initiative and, to borrow the phrase, getting it together.<sup>28</sup> This goes beyond moving in with Ramona and continuing to fight Evil Exes; there are numerous ways in which he goes about organizing his life, one of which is getting a job. Until this point, he's relied on "an understanding" with Wallace (Vol. 3 71), but by the end of Volume 3 it is increasingly evident that Scott is taking on a number of difficult tasks, and finding a recognizable job—something with hours, a specific location, regular paychecks, a title, etc.—is one of them.

As expected, Scott doesn't exactly go out and take workforce by storm. In fact, it occurs to him slowly that he should have a job. "Do you...uh... have a job?" He asks his friend Lisa, explaining, "I keep getting asked that question, so..." (Vol. 4 35). He breaks out in a nervous sweat when Lisa mentions that she is "just bumming around" (Vol. 4 35), and the same could be said of him. Through sheer repetition of the question and discussion on the topic, Scott Pilgrim gets that he needs to get a job.

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<sup>28</sup> For more on what getting it together means for Scott's broader goals, see the Chapter on Playing Pilgrimages (59).

A few pages later, Scott's friends get a bit more direct about finding a job. As she cruises through yet another dream, Ramona berates him for always being asleep while she's working. "I'm sick of this too!" she says, "I want—" but that thought is cut off by the ringing phone. This moment kicks off Chapter 21, aptly titled "Getting it Together" (Vol. 4 53). On the following page, Scott answers the phone to find that Wallace is calling from *his* job. Wallace's snide remark about how Scott is "obviously...very busy" sparks something in Scott's mind, leading him to ask Wallace, "hey...uh, are there any, uh, jobs at your job?" Upon further questioning, Scott backs out, saying that his friend is looking for a job. He is also unable to name where Wallace works (Vol. 4 54). This moment suggests that Scott still has a rudimentary understanding of "jobs." Indeed, Wallace's job is signified by the headset he wears and the cubicles in the background and thus neither Scott nor the reader is not given much detail other than standard workplace (Vol. 4 54).<sup>29</sup> However, the important thing is that Wallace *has* a job, and Scott continues to slowly move towards the opinion that he should have one too.



Fig. 2.8: The thick, filled gutter puts a visible divide between the layabout and the employed (Vol. 4 54)

Scott continues to develop this opinion when he sees Stacey at the Second Cup, her place of employment. She gives him a free drink, presumably in exchange for his

<sup>29</sup> Wallace looks very worn down while he is at work - the lines under his eyes and lack of a smile suggest a workplace persona who is under the influence of business rather than Scott's ebullient roommate.

being her brother, and he asks if they're hiring (Vol. 4 57). "Hiring" is in its own sub-bubble, separated from the rest of the thought, almost as if he would have trailed off but just managed to remember the final word of the question, which is, of course, the crucial one. Stacey is taken aback by Scott's question, and in fact has to ask for clarification twice. Scott seems ambivalent himself, responding with one of his vague statements that ends in a question mark. When Stacey asks, "Do you *want* to work here?" Scott's level of desire to do anything is implicitly called into question. Stacey still sees him as his Volume 1 self, unable to make decisions or take action. Scott takes a long "Slurrrp" of his free drink to think about it, then simply says, "I have to go" and leaves (Vol. 4 57). Scott's second attempt to get a job saw him actually identify a possible location and make a solid inquiry, which is a major improvement over his questions about the number of jobs at Wallace's job. He backs out halfway through even the preliminary process, but the job search continues on the next page.

As with the informal labor exchange, Scott continues to turn to friends to find a job. After his first two attempts, Scott turns to Kim Pine.<sup>30</sup> He is about to ask her for a job, but realizes "how stupid that would be" because, once again, he is totally unprepared, as Kim is all too happy to point out (though she does applaud his "maturity") (Vol. 4 59). This time, he doesn't even make it to the question, though this is presumably because he realizes he is woefully unqualified for a job at the video store. Luckily, as discussed above, Scott's group of friends is large enough that there are other options. Kim takes Scott to Stephen Stills's workplace. On the way, Scott asks if he can get a job at "the...uh...bank?" Kim informs him that Stephen works in a restaurant, but the bank was a

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<sup>30</sup> This parallels the order in which he turns to friends –Wallace, Kim, Stephen Stills – for lodging in the next volume (and also features an appearance by Stacey).

"nice try" (Vol. 4 59). Again, Scott's understanding of jobs and the workplace is tenuous at best, and he seems largely oblivious to what his friends do for work.

Stephen Stills explains that they "actually do have a dishwashing position open," and Scott could "work [his] way up" (Vol. 4 60). Scott thinks this sounds like a video game, "kind of a 'job system'" (Vol. 4 60) which presumably entails levels and skills and persistence in pursuit of a goal.<sup>31</sup> Stephen Stills is unimpressed, and even walks away, and it takes a slap in the face and (mildly) encouraging words from Kim for Scott to realize that he's "not as clueless an idiot" as he seems (Vol. 4 60). Before Scott can make up his mind on how clueless he is, Stephen Stills returns with a very serious set of questions, asking if Scott is "going to work?" (Vol. 4 61). Here, a challenge has been presented, specifically a challenge to participate publically and formally in the economy, and Scott has to pause to think about it.

Scott decides that he can do it. In fact, he can "do *anything!!*" if he is given "a chance" (Vol. 4 61). This is a bold statement, accompanied by a clenched fist showing determination. Here, Scott's apathetic affect is broken by sudden excitement, and emotion prompted by Kim's anger Stephen Stills's assertiveness. This subset of the larger group engages in a goal-oriented display of emotions which propels Scott to a new level. Yet Scott's excitement does not sustain the other characters in the scene, and Stephen Stills leans on the counter and asks if Scott can have the job (Vol. 4 61). There is a moment while the day manager thinks, and Stephen Stills and Kim remain nonplussed while Scott looks on in eager anticipation. And, with a simple "Whatever," Scott get's a job at Stephen Still's job! Scott is super excited about this, striking a victory pose while Kim remarks "that seemed...easy" (Vol. 4 62). She and Stephen Stills are at once surprised that

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<sup>31</sup> For more on leveled systems as framing devices, see the Chapter On Playing Pilgrimages (59).

Scott did anything, yet they also understand how getting a job works. Scott, however, can't stop talking about it even onto the next page (Vol. 4 63). Relying on the emotional cues of his friends, and his own emotions, allowed Scott to achieve something.

The exchange that leads to this job is characteristic of the series as a whole; a mix of friendship and courage, as well as some well-placed ultimatums (or whatever), land Scott a job. Additionally, "+500 EXP." appears next to Scott right after he gets the job.

Video game conventions are another integral part of the series and here they come into play in relation to jobs. Scott's understanding of a "job system" turns out to be correct in this instance, as his logic is the logic of this world. Just by getting a job, Scott has already leveled up to



*Fig. 2.9: Our hero lands a job, and while his excitement is the central focus of the panel, his friends are still there supporting him in their way (Vol. 4 62)*

"dishwasher" and economic participant. He is still participating on his own terms, or rather the terms of a video game. Those around him are also participating on their own terms; hiring friends of employees, acting ambivalent to new hires, referring each other informally to openings, and the profession of relative ease all suggest a mode of participation that seeks to distance the participants from the systems in more than superficial ways. Scott and his friends are still participating in the systems around them, but they have demonstrated their methods of reconciling their personal ideals and styles to that system.

## **Yeah, So Whatever Man!**

The affective states of the characters, as well as their relationships to various other structures, give a sense of something much larger. If emotions are, as Ngai suggests, "unusually knotted or condensed 'interpretations of predicaments'—that is, signs that not only render visible different registers of problem (formal, ideological, sociohistorical) but conjoin these problems in a distinctive manner" (3), then Scott Pilgrim and his group of friends are swinging wildly between problems. However, they seem to maintain a relatively even facade in the face of each distinct issue. It is possible, then, that affective states are unusually dispersed "interpretations of predicaments" which both reveal and obnubilate different "registers of problem" while also complicating the notion of relation to these same registers.

The problems registered in *Scott Pilgrim* are those faced by a set of twenty-somethings living in a Canadian, and perhaps more broadly North American, metropolis. The majority of the characters have graduated from university, with a few others currently attending or soon to depart. They are working or looking for work, making rent or finding a place to live, perhaps pursuing a dream or just figuring out where to go next. They are navigating networks of friends, family, contacts, and romantic interests constantly and simultaneously. They are asking themselves both *what to do* and *how to be*. The search for these answers necessitates numerous modes of interaction, and the characters of *Scott Pilgrim* have, overall, adopted an affective state they feel is appropriate, or at least seems easy.

The group in *Scott Pilgrim* function almost as emotional icons. Their vague apathetic affective state is, in some ways, the feelings equivalent of the non-realistic art

used to represent it. These characters are abstractions, both visually and conceptually, and thus the reader is, as stated above, invited to feel along with them rather than feeling for them. These works are not interested in expressing the specific or directly answering the questions they pose through the characters words, actions, and the resultant situations. There is no endpoint presented for the question of how to be, but rather the presentation of a few stages in a *being system* that, like the job system, entails proficiencies to master and tasks to achieve in order to level up and be someone new, maybe even someone better.

Beneath the basic questions mentioned above, the characters of *Scott Pilgrim* are also asking *about what to care*. The vague apathetic front of these characters suggests a lack of investment in almost anything. However, the characters do demonstrate strong attachments to each other, to certain pursuits, and to ideals. Much of the work of figuring oneself out is, in this instance, a matter of deciding what to invest their emotions in. To pursue these investments requires a betrayal of the carefully crafted air of vagueness that these characters so often display. This is not to suggest that their affective state is entirely created and not felt; rather, it cannot persist under all circumstances, and must occasionally be punctuated by sudden bursts of emotion when something appears to change the situation. Ultimately, *Scott Pilgrim* is not about *not caring*, but rather *caring when it counts*. And when it counts, these characters can do anything; they just need to be given a chance.



Fig. 2.10: Perhaps the summative phrase for the affective state present here (Vol. 1 75)

## A Chapter On Playing Pilgrimages

*Every pilgrim reaches the end of his journey.*

-Roxy Richter (*Scott Pilgrim Vs. The World*)

Or does he? A pilgrimage may be oriented toward its end, yet it is almost always about the journey. Scott's journey takes numerous twists and turns. There are almost always two or three potential storylines, or quests, that Scott is working through simultaneously. As is expected from such a hapless hero, Scott does not always breeze through things with ease, nor does he always know *how* to do things. That is what allows him to learn.

### **Let's Do It Again**

Scott does not always do things right the first time. He does, however, try again. This is a logic derived from video games. Video games foster mastery of skills and exploration of space, and they do it through repetition. The Extra Credits team posits the concept of "depth" to refer to the presentation of different skills and opportunity for players to master numerous mechanics and choose when to use them. As players progress, they get the chance to learn, to combine previous skills with new situations in order to find their own way through the game (Portnow *et al*). Often times, the biggest rewards are those the player must work hardest for, which is to say they require the player to think, to plan, and to work with what they know in new situations. Skills are vital, but knowing how to use those skills is possibly more important. Knowledge and skills gained through repetition and mastery, through trying again no matter how many times it takes, are only worth acquiring if the player also learns how and when to use them in pursuit of larger goals.

Teaching players which skills to master and the mechanics and rules of a given game system comprises the bulk of many games. Whether they are explicitly divided into discreet levels that get progressively harder—games like *Pac Man*, *Donkey Kong*, *Super Mario*, or even *Scott Pilgrim Vs. The World*—or presented as various challenges and bosses—games like *Shadow of the Colossus*, all of the *Zelda* Games, or the *Scott Pilgrim* books and movie—connected by a continuous narrative, games want the player to do things again and again until they've learned. Mechanics are introduced, honed, and then utilized in stages, whether or not the player recognizes the divisions between the stages. Eventually, the player is seemingly able to intuit the solution to a presented puzzle because they have used the skills so many times that they have become second nature.

As players repeat and master, they gain skills and climb the ranks. After defeating Lucas Lee in the book, Scott earns a Mithril Skateboard, and laments not choosing the skateboard proficiency in grade five (Vol. 2 127).<sup>32</sup> Later, after a sword bursts forth from his chest to represent earning the power of love, Scott responds "Now I'm glad I picked that longsword proficiency in grade five!" (Vol. 5 182). Aside from being a great callback to an earlier volume, this remark alerts the reader to the presence of some sort of skill/level system in the books. Scott hones a few skills throughout his journey. Unlike the longsword proficiency, however, most skills are not defined outright, but rather understood. Formal elements such as the presence of "Exp." indicate moments of growth directly to the reader, yet they often go unmentioned by the characters themselves.

These proficiencies, named or not, are useful insofar as they assist the character with some sort of quest or storyline. *Scott Pilgrim* is facing numerous storylines, or

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<sup>32</sup> For another look at the function of the Mithril Skateboard, see *So What Does It Look Like?* in the Chapter on *Multimediality and Multiliteracy* (19).

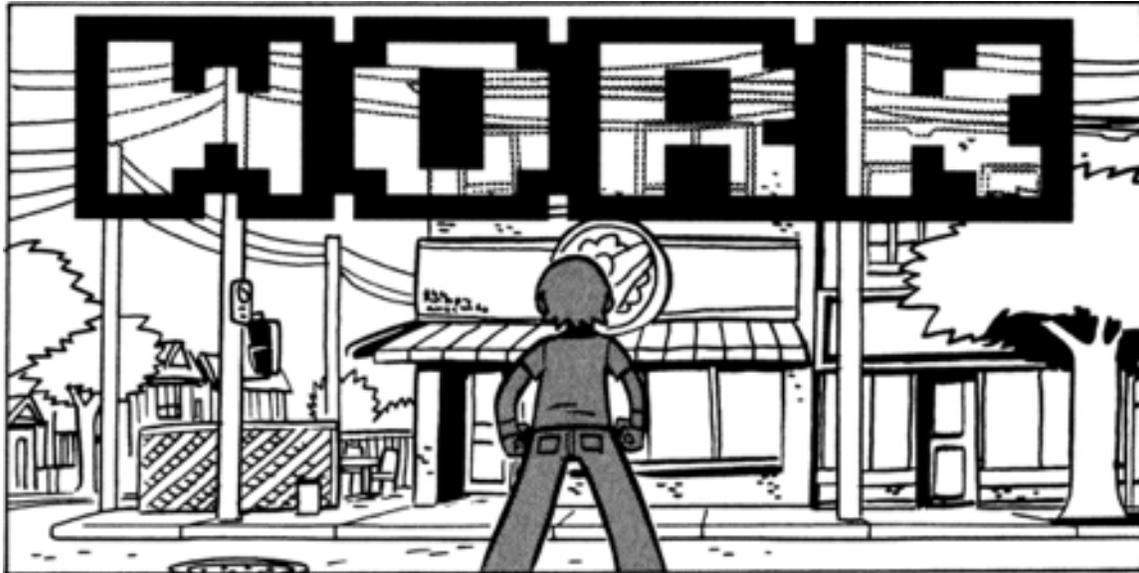
games: defeating the evil exes, participating in the job system, figuring out where to live, playing in a band, navigating friendships, and numerous other side quests. Overall, he is "getting it together," a loose phrase that encompasses all of his various tasks. He is working on becoming a better version of himself, arguably in response to Ramona. Once she shows up, he starts making numerous changes in his life, embarking on the aforementioned quests. Scott and Ramona's relationship itself is perhaps the most journey-like, level-based, gamified aspect of Scott's life. Whether or not Ramona sees it this way is beside the point. This is Scott's framing device, an apparatus that organizes his experience. The other quests are subsumed by the quest to continue dating Ramona, and that same quest inspires him to get it together and work on his skills.

One of the more external proficiencies, that is, something Scott must develop skills to navigate surrounding circumstances, relates to his job, or "job system" (Vol. 4 60).<sup>33</sup> Scott manages, somehow, to get a job, a feat that is rewarded with 500 Exp. (Vol. 4 62). He has made it to the base level of this particular job system, and will need to work his way up. This work is set off by a six panel sequence focusing on Scott's determined face as he stands before the restaurant, followed by the work "WORK" in huge, pixelated letters (Fig 3.1). This word is, presumably, only visible to the reader yet it does speak to Scott's perception of the situation; the blocky font recalls classic fighting games which delivered simple commands—"FIGHT!," "Finish Him!," etc.—to players in much the same way. Scott is shown as willing and able, ready to face this challenge. "One million hours later," he leaves, rather drained (Vol. 4 88). He is working his way through the ranks, completing small, seemingly meaningless tasks that are not even worth showing in the

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<sup>33</sup> To see how Scott feels about his participation in this job system, see Scott Pilgrim Gets a Job! in the Chapter On Feelings and Stuff (52).

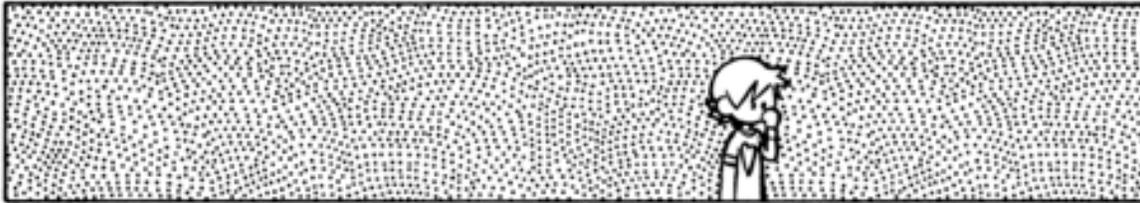
narrative. Basically, he is level grinding, doing something simple repeatedly in order to hone proficiencies and level up.



*Fig. 3.1: Preparing for one million hours of work (Vol. 4 88)*

The most important moment in Scott's job game comes when he loses his job and needs to win it back. At the point when everything seems at its worst—he and Ramona are fighting, he has no job, and he is still stymied in his attempts to defeat Roxy Richter—Lisa observes that Scott is "really in love with [Ramona]" (Vol. 4 146). Scott initially sighs and just flops back on the couch, still unable to get up and face things. A moment passes, shown by a giant, floating ellipsis (Vol. 4 146), and in that moment Scott must decide: quit or continue? He jumps up, and with an emphatic yet rather unoriginal "Lisa...I have to go now," he makes his decision (Vol. 4 146). He begins running "To Ramona," yet loses momentum, thinks for a minute, and suddenly runs "(the opposite direction)" (Vol. 4 147) which brings him to the restaurant he worked at (Vol. 4 147). There, with huge eyes and floating stars, Scott asks for his job back. He is given his job, despite still wearing the same shirt he was in the day before when he lost the job, because they haven't hired a replacement (Vol. 4 148-149). Despite not changing his clothes, he has

inevitably changed in some way in that he takes ownership of his participation, asking for his own job rather than letting friends ask like last time. He is rewarded with 1000 EXP., twice the number for getting the job in the first place, and happily resumes working (Vol. 4 149). What matters here is that Scott *did* something, entirely for himself.



*Fig. 3.2: Scott takes a moment to figure out what to do next (Vol. 4 147)*

In addition to getting his job back, essentially selecting "continue" on the job system kill screen, he managed to prioritize, realizing that he needed to get himself together in a few ways before he could restart his relationship with Ramona. The quest for a job is a tangential feature of that relationship, at least in Scott's view. Scott knows there is a connection, and that he shouldn't face Ramona until he has successfully been rehired. Unfortunately, he stayed at Lisa's the previous night, as Ramona said she needed space. Hearing that Scott stayed with Lisa makes Ramona anxious and uncertain, although on the next page it is revealed that she has Roxy staying over (Vol. 4 163), which causes Scott to collapse in the street (Vol. 4 167). When he looks up, he sees a dark, shadowy version of himself. Realizing that he needs Ramona, and that he can't give up and give in to this shadow self, Scott charges through and heads back to Ramona's yard (Vol. 4 170). He has decided to go back, to try again.

This chapter is, fittingly, entitled "Still Getting It Together" (Vol. 4 169). The fact that it is the final chapter in a volume titled "Scott Pilgrim Gets It Together" suggests the difficulty involved in getting it together. This is not something that can be accomplished quickly, or even that one knows to have occurred right up until it happens. And just when

it seems that things have come together—such as when Scott gets his job back—a new event—like Roxy walking down Ramona's stairs—will reveal that, actually, things are much less together than previously thought. It is in these moments of uncertainty that choices must be made, something Scott Pilgrim has taken a long time to learn.

Making a choice is hard; following through is harder. When Scott returns to Ramona's, Mr. Chau jumps out of the house in pursuit of Scott (Vol. 4 171). Scott attempts to pit him against Roxy Richter, essentially passing two opponents off to each other to avoid fighting either (Vol. 4 172-173). Not one to mince words, Roxy yells, **"YOU'RE JUST A PUUUSSSSY!"** as Mr. Chau knocks her off the balcony (Vol. 4 176). What follows is one of the most important moments in Scott's story. Still hiding in the shadows, there is suddenly a glint in Scott's eye and he confidently strides into the light, where he clutches Ramona, tells her that he loves her, and he knows they "can make this relationship work" (Vol. 4 177-179).<sup>34</sup> This earns him 9999 EXP., the most he has received so far, and a sword—which bursts from his chest—representing "The Power of Love" (Vol. 4 179-181). Also, more quietly and without the concrete indicators that mark so many of Scott's major moments, Ramona also has a small change of heart. Her quiet "Oh, Scott..." (Vol. 4 179) in response to his bold actions is an acknowledgement that he has earned something—love? respect? a chance?—from her, and she is also making decisions about the relationship.

By the end of Vol. 4, Scott has it together. In his case, this nebulous phrase means that he has defeated another Evil Ex—Roxy—gained the respect of Mr. Chau, earned the

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<sup>34</sup> Each of these moments and actions is accompanied by a floating word: "glint," "stride," and "clutch" (vol. 4, 177). These serve to emphasize each action and highlight the intentionality behind each step.

Power of Love (which came with a great sword), moved in with Ramona (Vol. 4 195),<sup>35</sup> maintained his ties with friends (Vol. 4 200-201), gotten his job back, exchanged professions of love with Ramona, and even remembered his birthday (Vol. 4 203). This is the most resolution Scott's had at the end of any volume, as things move from the uncertain endings of Vols. 1 and 2 to the relative stability at the end of Vol. 3 to the seemingly perfect moment at the end of Vol. 4. The only hint that of challenges to come are the words "Next: Twins!" at the bottom of the final page, but Scott already learned about them on page 191 and doesn't seem too worried. For the time being, everything is right with the world, and Scott and Ramona are content.



*Fig. 3.3: Scott Pilgrim has it together, and he and Ramona savor the moment (Vol. 4 206)*

### **Getting it Back Together**

Of course, immediately after the end of Vol. 4, Scott's life is again thrown out of balance. The appearance of the Twins (Vol. 5 11) and Knives divulging to Ramona that Scott cheated on them (Vol. 5 54) signal a shift, which is to say that Scott definitely no longer has it together. By page 61, he's staying with different friends and maybe out of favor with Ramona.<sup>36</sup> After a party, a fight with a robot, and a bottle of Tequila, Scott is allowed back to Ramona's place and things seem to be turning around, until Ramona

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<sup>35</sup> For a discussion of how Scott feels regarding this move see *Some Stuff About the New Networked Economy and Friendly Networks in the Chapter on Feelings and Stuff* (45).

<sup>36</sup> He forgot his keys, and Ramona said he couldn't come back in if he did that, and that she needed some "me time" (Vol. 4 60).

brings up cheating. Scott is confused, unsure if Ramona is breaking up with him, and unsure what he should feel. This low affective state interrupted by a message from Kim saying she needs to be rescued from the Twins (Vol. 5 113). During the fight, Kim helps Scott regain certainty and motivation about the relationship with Ramona, and he races home, back on track.

When he arrives, however, Ramona disappears into the glow emanating from her head (Vol. 5 139-143). The following chapter, "World of Ruin," (Vol. 5 149), opens with Scott waking up next to Stephen Stills, seeing his shadow self in the mirror, and walking to work under a large, pixelated "GAME OVER" (Vol. 5 150-152). His friends are no help, Kim leaves town (Vol. 5 165), and Scott is left out in the cold waiting for Ramona's cat to come back.<sup>37</sup> Completing the "Game Over" convention, the word "CONTINUE?"



Fig. 3.4: Scott reaches a possible end to his journey (Vol. 5 167)

is written at the bottom of the panel (Fig. 3.4). Scott has the option to end this particular game/storyline/quest. It gave him such purpose, and throughout Volume 5, he clings to the idea that things will be better if he just beats the Twins and Gideon (110) and the idea that loving each other at that moment is enough to make things work between he and Ramona (138). He had a goal, and an understandable set of tasks to complete in order to achieve that goal, and

<sup>37</sup> He escaped when Scott opened the door and then locked his keys inside (Vol. 5 146-147).

suddenly it disappeared in a flash of light from his possibly-ex-girlfriend's head.

Scott must turn to his support network. The page after the "Continue?" moment, and "some time later" (Vol. 5 169), Scott is living in a new apartment paid for by his parents (Vol. 5 170). He's still unsure about Gideon and Ramona, but at least he has decided to go on. The game asked him to insert more credits, and he borrowed some from his parents, but he is still in the game. It takes him about 85 pages of Volume 6, during which he goes to visit Kim up north for a "Wilderness Sabbatical" (Vol. 6 57). There, Scott's shadow self charges out of the woods and is revealed to be "The Negascott," or rather an inverted version of Scott (Vol. 6 73).<sup>38</sup> Scott engages the Negascott in a fight, thinking again that if he kills his immediate opponent, he can move on, in this case forgetting about Ramona and never facing facts about who he is and what he's done (Vol. 6 75-77). Kim provides the essential advice for this fight, telling Scott, "...if you keep forgetting your mistakes, you'll just keep making them again" (Vol. 6 76). Suddenly, Scott has three pages of memories about Ramona (Vol. 6 81-83), which causes the Negascott to stop attacking and then enter into Scott's body (Vol. 6 84-85). Scott has reincorporated his dark reflection, which in



Fig. 3.5: Scott Pilgrim might have it mostly together (Vol. 6 88)

<sup>38</sup> This is possibly a reference to enemies such as Dark Link, a boss from *The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time*. Dark Link has the same outline as Link, the protagonist/avatar, yet is entirely grey and black. He copies every move that the player makes with Link, suggesting that he is the evil reflection of Link, but also somehow connected to and a part of Link (*The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time*)

this case seems to be his past, his mistakes, and his memories. "I remember everything" (Vol. 6 85) he says. He boards a bus to Toronto, looking ahead to the future with purpose (Fig. 3.5) and declaring himself back in the game. It wasn't easy, but Scott has started to get it back together.

During the very long fight with Gideon, which lasts most of Vol. 6, Scott Pilgrim loses his life. This is yet another variation on the intermedial game over-continue motif that has come up throughout the series.<sup>39</sup> This time, it most closely reflects the classic arcade video games, wherein "lives," often referred to as "1-Ups," were represented by some icon and showed how many times a player could attempt the game before needing more quarters. Luckily, Scott got a 1-Up in Volume 3, a fact that his mom points out to Stacey when Scott suddenly comes back to life after being stabbed through the heart (Vol. 6 140).<sup>40</sup> This means he gets to try again. He knows everything he knew up to the point of his death, including where he went wrong.

### **"I Feel Like I learned Something"**

Scott has come all this way for a reason. He's won battles, found inner strengths, gotten a job, gotten that job back, and, seemingly, worked things out with Ramona. The only thing left for him to figure out is *why* he did all of this. In the movie, when he briefly dies, Scott sinks to his knees and says, in his characteristic noncommittal way, "I feel like I learned something." Scott becomes so invested in recognizable goals and objectives and defined results that he forgets that life is often more complicated than that, and he struggles to figure out what it is that he learned. Unable to point to new fighting

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<sup>39</sup> For a fuller discussion of intermedial features, see the Chapter on Multimediality and Multiliteracy (5).

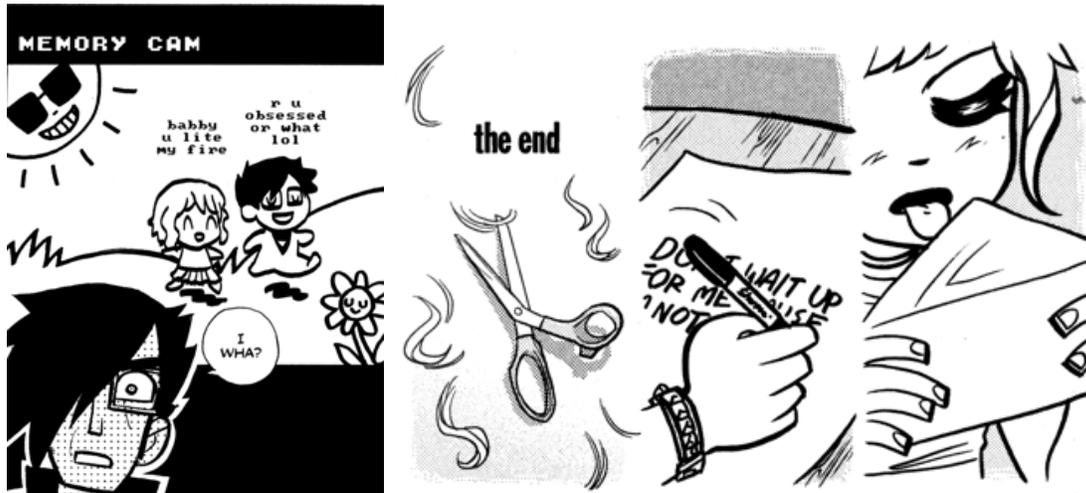
<sup>40</sup> This is one of many instances during which characters make explicit references to volume numbers, suggesting some awareness that they are in a series of books. It also reminds the reader what they are doing, which is to say reading a series of books. This high level of formal awareness is a result of the deeply intermedial nature of the works (see previous note).

techniques or factual information, often the takeaways from a game, Scott must work to figure out what he learned.

Two pivotal moments in Vol. 6 suggest that it is not so much about learning something as it is about remembering and understanding some things. As mentioned above, Scott defeats, in a sense, the Negascott by suddenly remembering everything he was trying to forget. There is a revelation somewhere in those memories of Ramona. However, as it was a revelation drawn from previous experiences, it was more a recapitulation of what he already knew, a recasting of information in a new light. He stops short of saying that he understands, because he doesn't fully understand yet. He has a sense of where he must go and what he must do: he needs to go back to Toronto and make it personal (Fig. 3.5). He'll work out the details later.

During the fight with Gideon, Scott does understand. Over the course of the fight, the characters ongoing discussions take numerous twists and turns, delving deeply and directly into each of their psyches, Scott's when he dies and Ramona's when Scott physically climbs into her bag. These discussions and explorations are metaphorically played out through the physical fight, yet the labor is mental and emotional. All three main fighters—Scott, Ramona, and Gideon—have flashbacks, all to different effect. Gideon is clearly not interested in his past, and in fact hardly remembers his relationship with Ramona (Fig. 3.6). Ramona, meanwhile, recalls the beginning and the end of that relationship (Fig. 3.6), which parallel similar moments with Scott differing in that she came back for herself and Scott this time (Vol. 6 136). Her mind returns to the memory of disappearing into the glow (Vol. 6 161) right after she is stabbed while attempting the same thing (Vol. 6 154). It doesn't work out this time, and perhaps remembering is her

way of understanding that it was never a solution to begin with, though she does not come right out and say that. She realizes, however, that she needs to try again, and try something different.



*Fig. 3.6: Gideon and Ramona clearly have different memories regarding their relationship (Vol. 6 151 and 160)*

Scott does explicitly say that his memories have helped him to understand (Vol. 6 195). Similar to Gideon and Ramona, Scott's memories focus on relationships, specifically the different endings he and his previous girlfriends have faced. The four-memory sequence is bracketed by two memories in which Scott was left, and in both he looks shocked, eyes wide and pupils tiny (Fig. 3.7). The difference, as with Ramona, is that he wants things to continue the second time, and he is willing to take steps to achieve that desire. He has never truly been able to move on from any of his relationships: Kim and Knives are his close friends throughout the series, Envy keeps reappearing, and he still wants to try with Ramona. The incorporation of the Negascott, and therefore of all of his memories, was always going to happen, and once he stopped fighting, he not only remembered, he understood.



Fig. 3.7: Scott Pilgrim is surprised at the ending of two different relationships (Vol. 6 191-192)

Scott's sudden understanding is the turning point of the fight, symbolized by a new sword and t-shirt and a caption proclaiming, "Scott Earned the Power of Understanding!" (Vol. 6 197). It is with this sword, and the qualities it represents, that Scott and Ramona (who is now brandishing the Power of Love (190), having earned it back from Gideon, who stole it (119)) are able to finally defeat Gideon near the end of Vol. 6. This is ostensibly what they have been working towards the whole time. Everything Scott has done has been folded into this quest to defeat Gideon, which is supposed to make everything better. Ramona is ready to be done, and Scott tells her that might be the case (Vol. 6 210). They have won their game, defeated the final boss and received the rewards. They have defeated the great man who thrives on being in charge of projects.<sup>41</sup> They have fought to the heart of their own feelings, as represented by an external person. And, most of all, they have persevered even in the face of defeat.

And then the book continues.

### **"So...We Try Again."**

The end is never the end. Gideon explodes on page 208 of Vol. 6. The narrative finally wraps up on page 247. A few things need to happen before they even leave the

<sup>41</sup> For a discussion of the term "great man" and projects see Some Stuff About the New Networked Economy and Friendly Networks in the Chapter about Feelings and Stuff (45).

club: Envy hugs Scott, who achieves closure (Vol. 6 211-212), Envy finishes her concert (Vol. 6 213), Ramona tells everyone where she was (Vol. 6 220), and, most importantly, Scott and Ramona need to talk. They both understood something over the course of the series, perhaps many things, and they need some time to process those things through conversation and work out which predicaments their knots of feelings represent. Ramona says that she has spent her life always changing, never wanting to be "stuck," embracing the idea that "things never *were* the same" (Vol. 6 222-223). Scott carefully posits the idea that, maybe, they could "get *unstuck*" and "maybe [they] just need to hold on" (Vol. 6 224-225). Despite hiding behind "I dunno..." and "maybe," Scott is onto something, something he understands now, as shown by he and Ramona physically holding hands. They are holding on, maybe to each other, maybe to more. It is not going to be easy, but Scott reassures Ramona that "It just takes practice," and Ramona silently smiles back (Vol. 6 226). They are probably ready to give it a try.

Before that, however, they still have an epilogue of sorts. Introduced via a stark page containing a large "SO ANYWAY" (Vol. 6 227), this final section quickly wraps up the storylines for some of the most important members of Scott and Ramona's friend group, in particular the other members of Sex Bob-Omb.<sup>42</sup> Scott has advanced to prep cook, still working alongside Stephen Stills. He still hasn't mastered everything, such as flipping beans, but he's working his way up in that job system (Vol. 6 228). Stephen Stills, meanwhile, is revealed to be dating Joseph, which he told everyone else "back in volume 5," but Scott "seemed busy," so Stephen Stills "didn't mention it" (Vol. 6 230). This is followed with a performance by Shatterband, Scott and Kim's new band (Vol. 6 232). Unfortunately, their only two potential fans, Knives and Neil, "have developed

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<sup>42</sup> Notably absent are Wallace Wells and Stacey Pilgrim.

taste," leaving Shatterband to play for the cat (Vol. 6 234). Then, a tearful and slightly confusing goodbye with Knives (Fig 3.8). There is not a sense of closure on any of these relationships and narratives.

Stephen Stills invites Scott to grab a drink with him and Joseph. Kim and Scott are going to keep practicing. Scott tells Knives to call him when she's in town. Everyone's place is established, and life moves on.

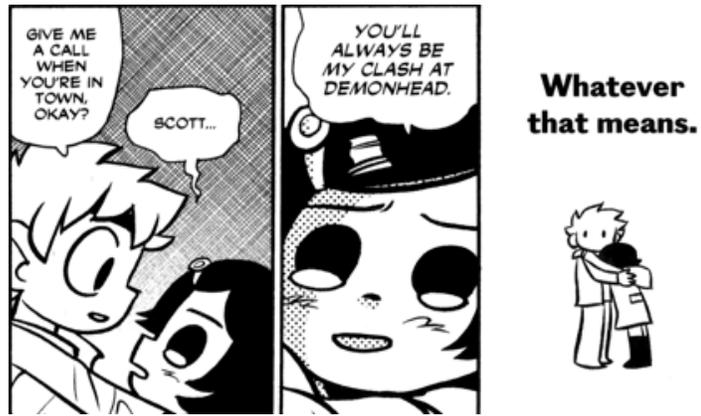


Fig. 3.8: Knives offers Scott a farewell sentiment (Vol. 6 235)

In the final pages of the narrative, Scott and Ramona meet in a park. Echoing the "So Yeah." that introduced their first date, a large, simple, "SO." introduces this familiar scene of Scott walking up the steps to find Ramona (Vol. 6 236). This time it isn't snowing, yet their status is still slightly ambiguous. They talk around it in their usual vague terms, repeating the word "so" three times before Scott says, "...we try again" (Vol. 6 238). As in the elevator, Ramona simply smiles and holds out her hand. With a final glance, they enter a door to subspace, and over the course of eight pages fall through darkness into a brilliant light (Vol. 6 240-247). They have come a long way, and it seems that their journey is finally over. They do not have any clear destination, and no goals except to try again, together.

Scott Pilgrim experiences gameric depth, yet life is never the same as a game. He has chances to try things again, to reuse mechanics and facts he learned earlier, but he

never gets to fully reset. Ramona's observation that things "never *were* the same" applies both to their relationship and Scott's pattern of trying, failing, and trying again. While it may resemble a game, there is never a chance to try the exact same things again. Losing his job does not set him back to the point where he messed up, he doesn't jump back to the moment Ramona left when he wants to try again with the relationship, and even using his extra life just starts him where he was. While there is one save point in Volume 3, which theoretically would allow Scott to respawn at that exact place, at that exact moment in time if things went south, he fails to access it in time (9). Life does not come with save points, and thus the game metaphor necessarily breaks down.

Scott's extra lives work differently across media types. In the video game, dying will simply respawn the character right where they are, until they run out of lives and must start the level again. Characters reach checkpoints, and restarting a level resets everything to exactly what it was. It is possible to replay the same challenges infinitely until one has mastered the mechanics. In video games, lives are used to measure the number of attempts the player has, a leftover from the era of coin-operated machines wherein characters could buy more lives.<sup>43</sup> In the movie, the extra life serves as a combination life and save point, and Scott jumps back to the point at which he earned the life. There is a jump in chronology, as he traverses time in the space of a cut. In the comics, Scott comes back to life exactly where he was, at the same time. Scott's death and resurrection during the fight with Gideon looks unique, yet it is a similar moment to those at which he asks for his job back or he and Ramona decide to try again. Some

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<sup>43</sup> Perhaps this is why the Evil Exes turn into coins when Scott defeats them. O'Malley has claimed that "They respawn in their homes, having learned their lesson. CANON." ([radiomaru.tumblr.com/page/47](http://radiomaru.tumblr.com/page/47)) His assertion that this is "canon" suggests that, while this alteration was made after the finished books, it can be considered part of the world, as outlined in Fan Matters in the Chapter On Active Fandom (83).

action in his past—defeating Todd, showing up to work on time, demonstrating his potential as a boyfriend—allows him a second chance. During the fight, the stakes were life and death, which is why the second chance must be represented as a video game-style life, but Scott also earns implicit lives at his job and in his relationship. He has learned something, and while he can't undo what came before or attempt to alter previous plans of action, he can try again and move forward. At the end of the books, both he and Ramona are ready to try again, try better, and try together.



*Fig. 3.9: Scott and Ramona fall into subspace together, the end of the pilgrimage (Vol. 6 245)*

## A Chapter On Active Fandom

### Back Matter

Scott and Ramona's narrative reaches a temporary pause at the end of each volume, but it is not the end of the books. Turning the page of each reveals the back matter. These are the "bonus sections" (Vol. 3 186), the special features of the books. Each is a collection of odds and ends that Bryan Lee O'Malley includes at the ends of the six volumes of Scott Pilgrim. These range from author biographies to explanations of the process to fan-made comics and art. They provide readers with something extra, which is to say material that is in excess of what is strictly needed for the story to be told. These extra things are at once outside the canonical narrative but still within the pages of the books. This makes their status flexible, and the included materials are sometimes self-reflexive in regards to their own place in the Scott Pilgrim canon and world.

The back matter of every volume is different. After the narrative hits the "To Be Continued" point in Volume 1 (165), i.e. wraps up until the next volume, there is the first instance of extra content. In this case, the amount is modest, just a teaser for Volume 2 and a page about Bryan Lee O'Malley, featuring a drawing of the author by another artist (166-167).<sup>44</sup> This is the first inclusion of another creator's work directly into the bound space of a Scott Pilgrim book. Volume 2 is similar, with the addition of a depiction of old photos of Scott and Envy (200). These are small gestures toward a larger community, yet they speak volumes about what is to come in the back of other books and on the Internet.

By the end of Volume 3, a single drawing by another artist has expanded to contributions from six different creators (186-193). These include the original models for

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<sup>44</sup> The guest artist is "Corey S. Lewis The Rey."

the Vegan Police, two character posters, two guest comics, and, of course, a portrait of the author. Each is accompanied by the creator's name, and many also feature a short biography with links to the creators' sites or the titles of their other works. Their

connections to O'Malley and Scott Pilgrim are explained vaguely at best. In one case, O'Malley writes, "I have known him since the first day I went on the internet or something" (Vol. 3 188). The inclusion of links (that can't be clicked) and mentions of the Internet suggest a continuity between the digital and the printed, hinting that there are further discoveries waiting online. Volume 4 covers the same ground, Volume 5 has a breakdown of O'Malley's creative process, and Volume 6 is almost devoid of back matter. However, audiences can make the jump to various places on the Internet in order to find more bonus features and guest creations and get involved in the conversation.



author's portrait by Vera Bragop  
**ABOUT THE AUTHOR** Bryan Lee O'Malley (born 21 February 1979) is a Canadian cartoonist and occasional musician. He lives in the wilderness with Hope Larson ([www.hopelarson.com](http://www.hopelarson.com)) and three cats, and has an extremely great website at [www.radiomaru.com](http://www.radiomaru.com).

### this is kind of like a blog

I got re-obsessed with manga while I was working on this book. Here's some stuff that I can remember reading, in no particular order, that I more or less recommend: **BERSERK** (Kentaro Miura), **GANTZ** (Hiroya Oku), **DEATH NOTE** (Tsugumi Ohba & Takeshi Obata), **AZUMANGA DAIOH** (Koyohko Azuma), **LIVING GAMES** (Mochizu Hoshizato). There's a lot of good stuff out there if you can get past the fanboy/fangirling... Some people have been asking about the music I listen to while working on Scott Pilgrim. For each book, I tend to make one mix CD of songs that capture the right mood. I don't have much space here, so I'll just list a few major songs.

- PLUMTREE** - "Scott Pilgrim" - this is the song that inspired the book in general. By a great Canadian indie guitar band from the 90s. Plumtree rocks forever!
- JOEL PLASKETT** - "When I Have My Vision" - "Written All Over Me", etc. - he's a guy whose music has had a huge influence on me and Scott Pilgrim. He was also in a great 90s band called Thrush Hermit whose defining album "Clayton Park" is an overlooked classic.
- THE FLYING BURRITO BROS.** - "La Ramasa", etc. - this legendary band fronted by Gram Parsons in the early 70s is the soundtrack to Scott's mind.
- BEACHWOOD SPARKS** - "By Your Side" - a sweetly cosmic countrified cover of a Sade song. It's the ultimate Scott Pilgrim love song. I secretly love the original, too.
- THE REPLACEMENTS** - "Left of the Dial", "Can't Hardly Wait", etc. - they wrote amazing songs. I always think of them as Ramona's favorite band. They're one of mine.
- UNCLE TUPELD** - "Gristlestone" - the original uk-country band. I equate them with the character Stephen Stills.
- WEE YOUNG** - "Borrowed Base" - and every other Hall Young song. Scott also "borrowed" a tune from the Rolling Stones in this book, in case you missed it...
- SPOON** - "Waiting For The Kid To Come Out" - gets me moving every time. This is an old 90s-side but it screams Scott Pilgrim to me. "Ricker" and "Sambalade".
- OLD 97's** - "Let The Good Times Roll", etc. - they're a bouncy pop-country punk something band from Texas and they've given this comic a lot of juice over the years.
- TOM PETTY** - "American Girl" - this song plays over the credits of every episode of Scott Pilgrim in my mind. Check out that guitar in the mix! **CLASSIC ROCK!**

Fig. 4.1: The final page of Vol. 3, featuring a portrait by another artist, an author bio, and a statement linking this page to the Internet (Vol. 3 194)

## Online Matter

*My fans seem really nice, which is unusual. There aren't a lot of cocky assholes coming up to me during conventions and stuff. Last night a whole bunch of people came up to me at this party and wanted to shake my hand. That's cool. For the most part, I'm really introverted.*

-Bryan Lee O'Malley

Bryan Lee O'Malley is known for his active participation in conversations around Scott Pilgrim. His twitter (@radiomaru) has 88.1K followers and an impressive 44.1K tweets.<sup>45</sup> His tumblr has over 60 pages of content, ranging from drawings from his current projects to reblogged pictures of his favorite cosplay. Bryan Lee O'Malley is a fan of his fans. This has helped to create a cult of personality around the man himself as well as his works. However, most fan interaction is mediated through one or two layers of technology and conventions,<sup>46</sup> meaning fans interact with a version of Bryan Lee O'Malley, one that is as much a created, controlled artifact as any of his other characters.

Bryan Lee O'Malley's public persona merges with the characters of his story worlds. That is to say, sometimes he does. Or parts of his persona. The epigraph above, taken from a 2010 interview with Eric Nakamura in the magazine *Giant Robot*, presents one version of O'Malley. He claims to be introverted, says he likes his fans, and, notably, seems rather nonplussed about everything. There are echoes of Scott's borderline apathetic speech, or perhaps Scott is echoing O'Malley. Either way, there is *consistency* between story and creator, reassuring readers of the interview that this man is of a piece with the world he created.<sup>47</sup> The interview is full of phrases like "I guess," "or whatever," and the ever-present "and stuff." He gives straight answers for the most part, but remains slightly evasive, reflecting on major facets of the work, the experience of collaborating on a movie and a game, and the interactions with fans with simple phrases such as "I feel like it's okay" (Nakamura 28). This Bryan Lee O'Malley is not too worried about it.

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<sup>45</sup> As of May, 2014.

<sup>46</sup> Both customs and actual comics conventions

<sup>47</sup> For more on speech patterns and affect, see I Feel Like We Should Talk About It Or Whatever in the Chapter On Feelings and Stuff (38).

@Radiomaru is an entirely different matter. Quick, sardonic, bordering on flippant, yet full of public love and admiration for his fans, O'Malley's twitter persona is quite different in outward tone. His twitter posts run the gamut from silly little things like "shits froze" (@radiomaru March 30 2014) to more cryptic messages such as "all cartoonists are abnegation" (@radiomaru April 1 2014) to actual information regarding upcoming events and releases. He also, of course, occasionally retweets other users' tweets, in particular those related to his works. This is a conversational medium, and while Radiomaru seems to be speaking mostly with himself, he is aware of his place on a larger, multiuser platform.

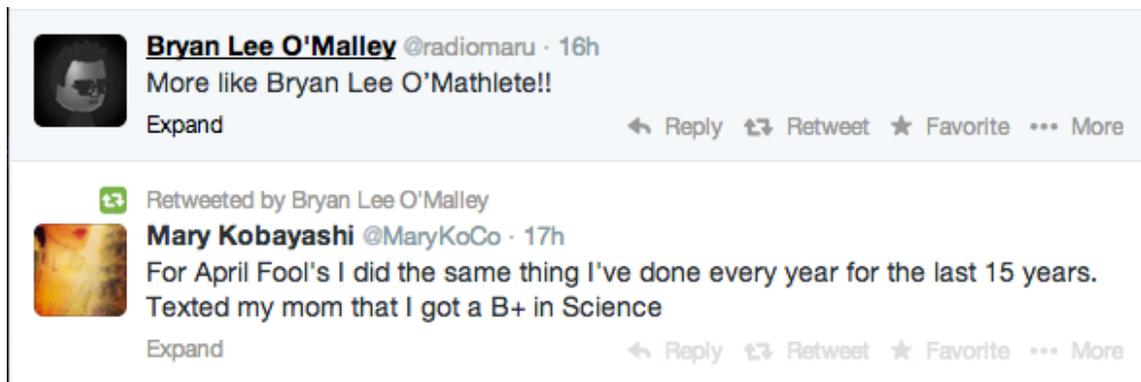


Fig. 4.2: A small sample of Bryan Lee O'Malley's twitter feed. (@Radiomaru ongoing)

Bryan Lee O'Malley finds a happy medium between the formality of his interview self and the zaniness of his twitter self on his tumblr, radiomaru.com. Much of the tumblr is devoted to reblogging fan creations and cosplays, to which O'Malley often adds encouraging notes. In addition, he provides exciting "extras," such as pages from upcoming works or glimpses into his process (including photos of his desk). Basically, his tumblr is like the back matter of the books in an ever-growing, interactive format. Perhaps the slow contraction of the back matter was influenced by the possibility of starting the blog, a realization that there was plenty of room for all of this stuff online.

The other main component of the tumblr is Q&A, wherein fans ask questions and O'Malley answers them. He speaks, for the most part, openly about how he works, what he is working on, questions about the story world, etc. He admits to being initially "confused & annoyed by fans" because people he'd never met taking an interest in him was a foreign concept. However, responding to a fan's question about his attitude toward fans, O'Malley summed it up thusly: "On one level, you are all strangers to me, but on another level, we are closely intertwined. It can be confusing" ([radiomaru.tumblr.com/page/41](http://radiomaru.tumblr.com/page/41)). He has come to accept, and even embrace, the interest of almost complete strangers, seeing himself as part of their community, not above it.

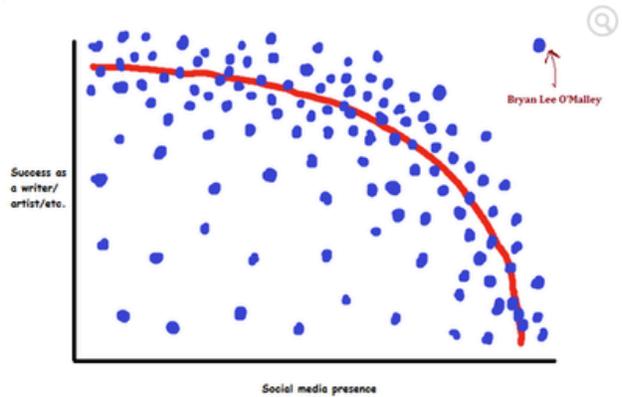
O'Malley's interaction with fans has its roots in his own days of fandom. A self-professed "internerd," O'Malley used to be part of a collective of anime-style artists whose primary delivery technology was, of course, the Internet ([radiomaru.tumblr.com/page/66](http://radiomaru.tumblr.com/page/66)). He grew up as a fan, participating in mediated creative endeavors and conversations with those around him, both geographically and online. Despite his initial confusion, he must recognize something of himself in these new internerds who turn to his works for inspiration. It is difficult to say when an artist crosses over the threshold from fan to creator, and the Internet has allowed for an almost infinite gradation of positions. An artist might, for example, have thousands of notes and reblogs on tumblr but no work in publication. Established artists may try to promote newer artists to no avail, or to great success. Artists who had major book deals may slowly drop back down the ranks of Internerds, reaching almost complete obscurity again, yet keeping some loyal fans through their online presence. As tumblr user Ubercream illustrates (Fig. 4.2), it is often detrimental for a creator to become too

involved in fan communities. Perhaps fans like the illusion of distance, or perhaps the more they see of someone the less they like them, and the mystique goes away. Bryan Lee O'Malley has managed the rare feat of being an active creator and an active fan, recirculating his work and the works of others and moving the conversation in new directions.

Fans love to ask: How did you do it? While there is pleasure in interacting with someone who has

"made it" and is thus different than the average fan out there, there is also the appealing fantasy that it could happen to anyone. Question after question comes in asking about O'Malley's process, how to "break in" to the industry, or who to talk to. All of these are met with the same response: work. His message is stern, yet positive. With characteristically noncommittal words, O'Malley responds, "I don't feel like I was all that hard-working or diligent but I was at least kinda hard working and kinda diligent, and maybe that's all it takes. That and believing in yourself" to a fan saying he can't commit to one particular artistic discipline ([radiomaru.tumblr.com/page/51](http://radiomaru.tumblr.com/page/51)).

Scott himself shows this attitude throughout the narrative; he is not the best at his job, or the band, or with his friends, or with Ramona, but he was "kinda" diligent,



ubercream:

Something I've noticed.

lol

Source: *ubercream*

October 7, 2013 / 752 notes

tumblr meta bryan lee o'malley

Share

Fig. 4.3 An astute graph, with added commentary by Bryan Lee O'Malley ([radiomaru.tumblr.com/page/3](http://radiomaru.tumblr.com/page/3))

enough, at least, to fight for the things he wanted. Again, this creates consistency between worlds, imagined and lived. It also shows one way in which fans can level up, and that is by working. Just as Scott needed to do more than simply frame his job as a playable "job system" to get any real work done, fans cannot simply expect that having a fun, working outlook will enable them to complete the necessary labor. The system they are in, the game they are playing, is nebulous at best, as so many of life's games are. But with some measure of diligence, anyone can get somewhere. And sometimes, the best place to start is with the works of others.

"is that ok? Does that help? i'm some shy, shlubby, boring, canadian, comic book person, do you expect me to be really cool headed and judgmental about this whole thing? i'm not. it was all crazy and great and my head was spinning the whole time."

–Bryan Lee O'Malley  
([radiomaru.tumblr.com/page/64](http://radiomaru.tumblr.com/page/64))

### **Fan Matters**

Just as the last pages of each volume do not mark the end of the book, Scott and Ramona's slow fade at the end of Vol. 6 does not mark the end of their narrative. On the one hand, the "official" ending of the narrative is ambiguous and open. They might just be taking subspace to a restaurant for a date, or heading home at the end of a long day. They still have work to do, still need to try again, and they are ready to embark on that part of the journey. That, however, is not shown at the end of the narrative. On the other hand, they pass right out of the books themselves and into new mediated homes and the hands of the fans.

Scott Pilgrim has developed a cult following. Henry Jenkins, drawing on Umberto Eco, posits that works become cult artifacts if they are presented as worlds that are both complete and dense with information. This, he argues, allows readers to quote lines or make reference to various aspects of the world as if they were real. In addition, there is

the opportunity to engage deeply and learn a large array of facts about the world, which can be called upon for a different effect, such as showing mastery, knowledge, and commitment (Jenkins 99). Cult artifacts, then, are those that let fans develop attachments and "construct their own fantasies" with the material (Jenkins 100). These resources are often drawn from other sources, and half of the pleasure of cult followings comes from tracking the movement of elements and ideas from one work to another. There is at once a sense of nostalgia and *déjà vu*, along with a desire to continue the movement of these same elements (Jenkins 100). One of the key results is that cult artifacts are "made to be quoted" (Jenkins 100). In addition to direct quotation, cult artifacts are made to be played with.

Enter the fans. Whether they come to the world of Scott Pilgrim through the books, movie, or game is unimportant.<sup>48</sup> Rather, it is what they do with that world. Jenkins contrasts the implicitly passive consumer with the "active fan" (12). Fans, he argues, are becoming an increasingly important facet of cultural production, superseding their previous function of reception. While it is certainly possible that fans have always been creating "secondary" cultural artifacts, the introduction of the Internet has provided a delivery technology for these artifacts, connecting fans with each other to participate in production based around an existing world that ultimately extends and complicates that world.

Fans make things. These things bring the world into new medial realms; jewelry, shirts, prints, paintings, pins, earrings, bags, wigs, digital comics, and more can all be found on the Internet, made by fans, featuring some part of the Scott Pilgrim world. There is a drive to create, to take what has been made and explore fantasy scenarios, just

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<sup>48</sup> I myself first encountered the movie, then went over to the books and games via a friend.

as Eco argues. There is also a drive to share, much of the satisfaction coming from the connections to other fans. The Internet and conventions are places for these fan creators to share their work, constructing artifacts that can be considered an intrinsic part of the original world. This, then, we might call the "fanon," as it comprises a body of work that is inherently fan-based and more-or-less canonical. If it is not canonical, then the fans simply create their own canon; this is the realm of fan fiction, cosplay, fantasy art, computer backgrounds, crafts, and whatever else the fans can think of.

These fan-made works then circulate, as fans participate in mediated exchanges and conversations. As Jenkins points out, "this circulation of media content—across different media systems, competing media economies, and national borders—depends heavily on consumers' active participation" (3). However, as they get more actively involved in the circulation and begin to create their own media, these "consumers" also become *creators* who in turn consume what others have created. Authorship, in the sense of generation and content control, is exploded across the numerous platforms available online and at conventions. This leaves the fan with a huge number of works to choose from when deciding how they experience the narrative and its world, leading to highly personalized experiences (Jenkins 3-4). Fans can also choose what sorts of contributions they want to make and what they hope to gain or give.

Many fans are satisfied with commentary and curation. These are fans who may, perhaps, start a tumblr with which they collect their favorite artifacts and re-present them with minimal notes, if any. Their primary action is the decision whether or not to include a given work in their public collection. They may also purchase things from other fans, or directly from the publishers/media houses themselves. Their role is not generative of new

content, though this does not make it a superfluous part of the active process of fan communities. Without numerous fans to recirculate artifacts, the efforts of those who do make things would be in vain, limited to their immediate circles. Now, an amateur artist may garner attention through sheer numbers of reblogs, which can have notable impacts on that artist's career and allow them to continue pursuing art. These fans are the *curators*, those whose skill and passion are devoted to putting existing things together and creating new juxtapositions and collections.

Some fans gain satisfaction from creating their own works to put out there. This includes everything from simple fan drawings to animated gifs to cosplay and videos. These are things that were not there before, which the curators can then reblog and add notes to. These are the content creators, the ones who show us what Ramona's outfit might look like on a real person, for example, or draw short comics centered around their favorite minor characters. They do it for the love, taking up their role as cult followers because it is impossible to resist the allure of the resources presented by the "canon" material. Depending on the work, the fan creations can play a major role in further "official" works. In return, these fans ask for nothing more than more works and shared interest. The system of exchange is based on excitement, and the work serves to connect them to other fans. These are the *hobbyists*, those whose talents are used purely for the enjoyment of contributing to and participating in economies of enthusiasm.



Hannakdraws.tumblr



*Fig 4.4: Hobbyist interpretations of Ramona Flowers by tumblr users hannakdraws, livanilustrado, -gumballs-, and naylemonstre reblogged by radiomaru*

Some fans satisfy the demands of others by monetizing their efforts and contributions. These are the types of fans that make profiles on Etsy rather than tumblr, or set up artist tables at conventions rather than walking around shopping. These fans often produce physical goods to sell. Here, then, circulation is tied up with economic exchanges and fans need to consume on multiple levels: artistic, conversational, economic, etc. Fans are always hungry for more, and are often happy to invest money as well as time. The creators of purchasable items, then, have talents to share and want some form of monetary compensation for the materials and time used for the projects other than reblogged posts and likes. In some cases, this allows them to become full-time creators, accepting the importance and place of income in an artist's life. Arguably, these producers are capitalizing on things that are not "theirs," since they use symbols and characters created by others in order to make money. However, these are still labors of love. Many of these fans produce very high-quality items, and there are many things one can find from individuals and small sellers that are not available through the more "official" channels. This is an extension of the active fandom activities into the commercial realm, not a type of fan exchange conditioned by commercialism. In other

words, the fandom comes first in the majority of cases. These are the *craftspeople*, those whose relationships to other fans are still close while being additionally conditioned by economies of material and monetary exchange.

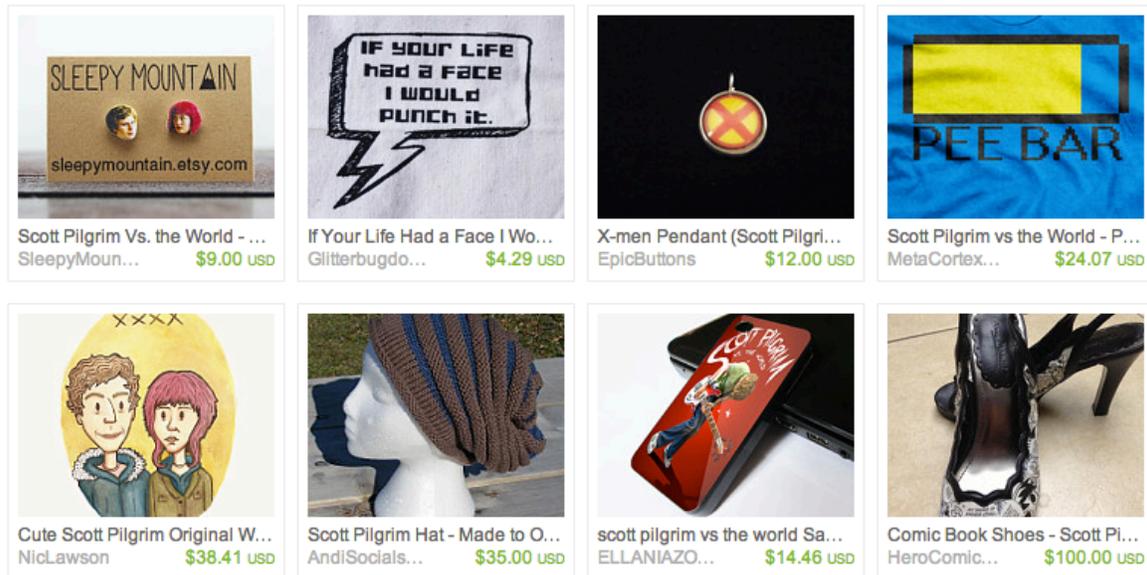
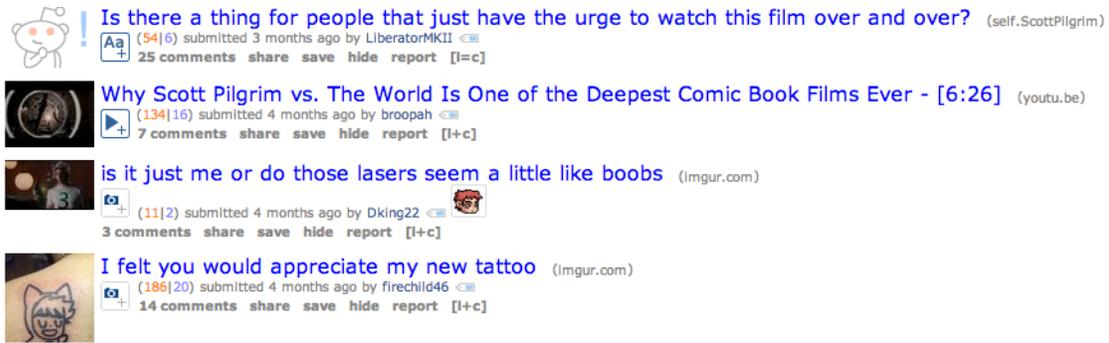


Fig. 4.5: A small selections of the 200+ custom-made Scott Pilgrim items on Etsy ([https://www.etsy.com/search?q=Scott%20Pilgrim&ship\\_to=US](https://www.etsy.com/search?q=Scott%20Pilgrim&ship_to=US))

Many fans are unsatisfied with the amount of knowledge related to a given work/world. They want to catalogue and organize every possible bit of information presented in the original works while also taking into account that which fans have created. These are the fans who flock to message boards and subreddits in order to discuss what they know, compare notes, and come up with new ideas or possible explanations for events in and features of the story world. They will argue endlessly about what is canon—supported by the texts—and make decisions or ask the creators. Their project is encyclopedic, devoted to the collection and organization of knowledge rather than the production and curation of secondary artifacts. These are the *theorists* and *archivists*, continually striving to flesh out the story world and find the limits of official knowledge in order to make sense of both official and fan created knowledge.



*Fig. 4.6: A small sampling of the discussions happening between all types of fans on reddit.com/r/scottpilgrim*

Scott Pilgrim's cult following has all types of fans, each of whom has their own angle. It is possible to be a fan of the books yet not participate in forums or make drawings, or see the movie as the best story and the comics as a rough draft. Fans are allowed to participate to the extent that makes them comfortable. The presence of other fans brings assurance that if someone acts, others will likely respond. Thus, fandom has a communal allure, one based on sharing rather than sitting alone with one's love and knowledge and creations. In many cases, and particularly when it comes to Scott Pilgrim, the fans get chances to interact directly with the creators themselves, blurring the line between the end of the canon and the beginning of the fanon.

Ultimately, what seems important here is not who is participating or what they are doing, but rather the fact that such action is happening. On some level, these fans are working out ways to reconcile their love of a set of works with their participation in surrounding cultural practices, both social and economic. In the case of fandom, the participation feels voluntary rather than compulsory, even when paying high prices to attend conventions and see big, corporate names. Fans have a good sense of what is right for them, and often resist co-optation in meaningful ways, much as Scott and his friends find ways of participating on their terms. Fans revel in their fringe status, gathering online and in person wearing elaborate costumes to discuss seemingly trivial minutiae of

worlds that don't "really" exist, but that is not what matters. What matters is the *process*. Artifacts generate responses, as they have for years, but now those responses, the process of secondary and tertiary culture generation, are made more visible and widely available. It is practically impossible to hold onto aspects of a work and dictate what can or cannot be made with or in response to a work. Certain creators have truly embraced this, even joining in with their fans to push the conversation further and explore new territory by adding to the bodies of criticism on their own works.

### **Keep Going**

Once set in motion, a narrative will keep going as long as there are interested fans. Whether curating, honing their hobby skills, crafting, theorizing, or archiving, fans are always actively creating and circulating. Each community will take up its source material in a different way, or rather a myriad of different ways. The diversity of uptakes, that is to say what a given audience member does in response to a work (Freadman 39), is what makes the fan community what it is, as each individual brings his or her own talents to bear on the material. Fans create new juxtapositions of existing content, generate new content, learn from and with each other, and generally make something of the many resources they are given. This in turn allows them to consume each other's, and thus their own, work, in a cycle of circulation and generation that never needs to end. There is visible vitality in the story universes and surrounding discourses.

*Scott Pilgrim* has one of the most active fan communities, and a particularly active creator. While it is truly a trans- and intermedial work, it did first appear in the form of comics, which may have contributed to the fan culture. Comic cons and message boards have been conspicuous events for years. People gather to trade, showcase, discuss,

and generally geek out about their favorite comics works. This is due in part to the accessibility of comics. They combine words and images, and take nothing more than a pen and paper to create. Fans have more to work with for original stories and cosplay than prose, and they are simpler than films or recorded music or video games. As O'Malley explained, "comics are just better than other media..." ([radiomaru.tumblr.com/page/65](http://radiomaru.tumblr.com/page/65)), and comics fans are some of the most active fans out there. However, distinctions between types of fans are breaking down. *Scott Pilgrim* fans are also able to go far beyond comics to engage in a way that is as transmedial as the original articles.

*Scott Pilgrim's* fan community is not only literate in multiple media, but also productive within those same media. It is relatively simple to produce comics, but the fans that *Scott Pilgrim* attracts bring with them a whole range of productive talents and time. Moreover, they are engaging with works that invite trans- and intermedial fandom; it makes sense to create content that takes up the concerns of the base works, including the formal concerns. Fans play with the intermediality of the works, producing cross-stitch versions of the pee bar and animated gifs of drawings. They corporealize the character designs through cosplay and then digitally add to photos of themselves, continuing to blur the lines between media types. Fans have medial freedom, and they take advantage of it.



*Fig. 4.7 Photo by tumblr user rexonarquiza, reblogged by radiomaru, who added that he met this group at a convention*

Fans also take up the tonal concerns of the original works. Dressing up as a character, for example, puts that fan into the story world in some ways. Many of the items posted to the Internet are accompanied with the consistent affective front that Scott and his friends present throughout the works, and O'Malley presents in many interviews. There is a nonchalance about this process of further creation and engagement that belies the work it takes to create these new artifacts and the excitement that comes along with them. Fans are allowed to show pride and investment, but they receive more reblogs if they seem to take it in stride. The works speak for themselves, testaments to everything the fans are willing to do. Commentary by creators is sometimes uncalled for, and if it does exist it can only go so far since the author becomes just another interpreter once the work is circulating. Rather, these fans spend their energy on pushing things forward regardless of where the creator intended it to go. Many contemporary creators don't seem to mind, because they understand the times and conventions.

Fans will take up and extend the narrative concerns of the works as well. Combining their medial talents and tonal personas, fans will often work things out through their creations. They might explore an underdeveloped character like Lisa Miller (a fan favorite) or speculate on the workings of Wallace and Mobile's relationship. Whatever they do, they enter into and carry on the tradition of narrative labor initiated by the original works. At times, fans will bring their own distinct narrative problems to the existing storyworld, creating some unique storylines and approaches that did not exist before. By cross-pollinating and furthering the exiting material, fans stake their place in the canon, and thus gimmicky portmanteaus fall away to reveal the truly collaborative work of creating, cataloguing, and critiquing a story world.

Whatever their function, fans are important. Scott Pilgrim's fanbase has blended seamlessly with the Scott Pilgrim works themselves, continuing the Internerd processes and cultures that gave birth to these works in the first place. Coming from a place of networked, mediated fandom himself, Bryan Lee O'Malley understands his fans and is able to engage with them on their terms. He may not always give direct answers, yet he is constantly responding and reacting and, above all, listening to his fans. Scott and Ramona fade out on the last pages of Volume 6, yet they show up immediately and simultaneously in multiple new locations with many devoted fans to help them find their way.

## Game Over, For Now



*Fig. 5.1: Knives Chau, moments away from meeting Scott Pilgrim (Vol. 1 8)*

O'Malley has admitted to being oblivious to most of the early 2000's pop culture and being "stuck in like 1987-1995" ([Radiomaru.tumblr.com/page/14](http://Radiomaru.tumblr.com/page/14), 12). As such, it may seem odd to claim that his work encapsulates a time that he describes as "a complete blur" ([Radiomaru.tumblr.com/page/14](http://Radiomaru.tumblr.com/page/14)). However, knowing about the specifics of pop culture is less important than knowing about the larger features of the times. In other words, there is a difference between being "hip"—knowing what is in at that moment—and "cool"—knowing how people and culture are in that time. Those who came of age in times past are often the ones shaping current culture. Their take is, in some sense, one degree removed from the most active participants. It comes across in small ways, like the fact that Scott doesn't have a cell phone or show much facility with navigating the Internet (Vol. 1 64). Scott is, in some ways, out of the loop, creating his own framing and organizing devices for the world that, for example, the kids surfing the Net on handheld devices in Volume 6 don't need to because everything is there for them (156). He may have missed particular moments, but that does not mean he has been left behind.

Scott is living in an age of digitized information yet refusing to engage with it on its terms, suggesting there are multiple ways of appropriately navigating this mediated

landscape. Bryan Lee O'Malley may be better aware of what is happening with his fans and with other cultural productions now that he has become so active online, but he was perhaps better able to comment on the ways people engaged with everything around them while he was "kinda shut in [his] room and literally living in the wilderness for a few years" ([Radiomaru.tumblr.com/page/14](http://Radiomaru.tumblr.com/page/14)). The degree of remove allowed for commentary and portraiture rather than stories from the same perspective.

The portrait produced is, obviously, complicated. The trans- and intermedial nature of these works require and create audiences capable of and almost expecting to jump from form to form, mediating their access to a message through any means available as they exercise their multiliteracy. There is an explosion of information, which translates to an onslaught of stimuli and a need to read simultaneously in multiple modalities. The overall response to this overwhelming deluge of media and delivery technologies carrying widely varied content is a feeling of unfocused acceptance. The contemporary affective state is often described as apathetic at best, and the characters of *Scott Pilgrim* are prime examples. This vague sense of engagement goes far beyond media, encompassing everything from jobs to friendships to romantic relationships. There is an attempt to make sense of the world, yet most stop short of articulating it. A sense of things is substituted for outright understanding. Thus, when people fall short, when one fails at a given task because understanding is thin at best, it is necessary to try again. Continuing to engage with surrounding structures is the challenge, one that is particularly pertinent for twenty somethings living in these times and who, like Scott and his friends, are leaving the security of school and casting about for what to do next.

We, the fans, demonstrate what comes after those final pages or the end of the credits. Our creations and crafts and conventions show how works can be taken up and extended in new directions and in excess of the originals. The endless circulation sets up content loops, creators and fans swapping and influencing each other via technologically-constructed networks and at the physical spaces of meet ups and cons. Beyond this, however, the fans continue to engage with the world around them. We work, we play, we create, we form relationships of our own, and we continue trying to get it together. This larger life work is less obvious in our cosplay pictures and theories, our analyses and fiction which all seem to belong to worlds apart from the one we inhabit. However, we are drawn to these works not solely because we like the look or the soundtrack. We identify because, thematically, we feel something that we can take back to the outside world. The Internet is full of posts explaining connections to the texts, personal insights that help users understand their place in society, provided some insight into the way they wanted to live. Whether we want to see our jobs as job systems, be gay "such a badass" like Wallace ([radiomaru.tumblr.com/page/19](http://radiomaru.tumblr.com/page/19)), or try again when things don't work out, *Scott Pilgrim* can help provide a model for reconciliation with and making sense of structures of the times that often make no sense in and of themselves. Fans learn to apply frameworks, and we're quite good at it, since those frameworks formed around a portrait of us. Ultimately, *Scott Pilgrim* reminds us that, if we keep working at it instead of worrying, things will turn out okay.



*Fig. 5.2: Scott Pilgrim offering his summative piece of advice (Vol. 1 9).*

**Continue?**

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- Scott Pilgrim Vs. The World: The Game* Ubisoft, 2010. Video Game.
- Terada, Rei *Feeling in Theory: Emotion After the "Death of the Subject"* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001. Print.

## BONUS SECTION

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### Some Music that Got Me Through

Scott Pilgrim Soundtracks - Various,  
 Anamanguchi  
 Before the Last Song At Wounded Hill - Seki  
 Another Dance Mix (~-~-)~ - night ham  
 Obsidian - Baths  
 Various Albums - Anamanaguchi  
 Coming Home (Lifelike Remix) - Visitor

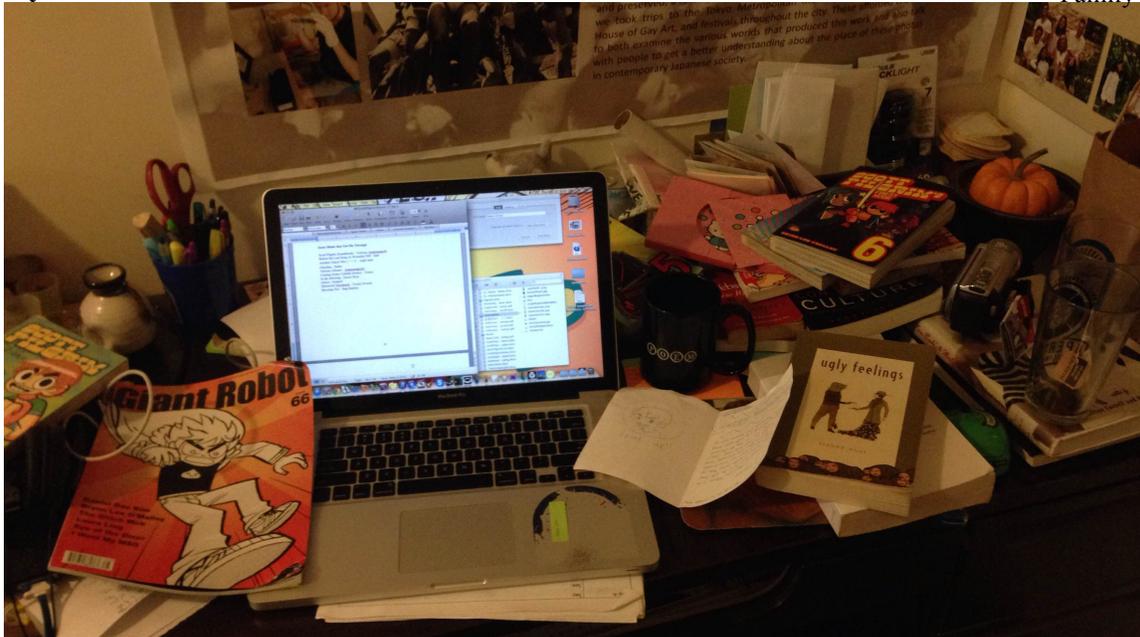
*In the Morning* - Junior Boys  
 Antics - Interpol  
 Samorost2 Sountrack - Tomas Dvorak  
*Shooting Star* - Bag Raiders

Fan-made  
 Scott Pilgrim  
 Background

Tea!

Picture of  
 Family

### My Desk



Souvenir  
 from Japan

Vol. 4

Pile of Books

Glasses

Mouse  
 (hiding)

Magazine

Computer w/ thesis open

Hand-made birthday  
 card w/ drawing of Scott

## About the Author/Curator/Theorist/Fan



*Fig. 6.1: Lauren Moon (not the author) as Ramona Flowers and huge fanboy Brendan Gillett in obviously handmade Scott Pilgrim cosplay. Find him on various parts of the Internet @scrumpledina.*