Tweeting the Author: Tao Lin's Performance of Authorial Identity on Twitter

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Abstract: This article takes a closer look at how the American author Tao Lin uses Twitter to perform his authorial identity. Twitter serves as a primary platform for Lin to shape and reshape the public images of him as an author. Lin's Twitter presence operates as 140-character bursts of authorial self-presentation. The tweets he chooses to post combined with his views on Twitter as a presentational platform show that Lin is conscious of his identity performance, especially online. With this knowledge, he uses the language of Twitter to enact his authorial identity and influence the representations that circulate in the literary world, but he fell short because of the dominant role print media play in images of authorship. To counteract this and gain cultural legitimacy for his online identity in the literary world, Lin resorts to remediating his Twitter profiles into a fetishized print book. Lin's coquettish relationship with Twitter shows his audience that the platform is more than a place to generate attention for oneself; it is a site for the continual reshaping of identity on a mass scale.

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By now, Twitter as a digital platform for the dissemination of information is ubiquitous in mainstream culture. Citizens to celebrities to political leaders use it to place their subjective insight into the stream of voices on topics as wide ranging as from shoes to U.S./North Korea tensions. Even though the platform has established a new communicative channel for society, Twitter has also shifted how we think about identity and its social

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performance. According to Alice Marwick and danah boyd, "Self-presentation on Twitter takes place through ongoing 'tweets' and conversations with others rather than static profiles" (116). Unlike Facebook, Twitter is a microblog, a place for users to generate content by expressing themselves and engaging with a wide array of voices, and for Marwick and boyd, this makes Twitter problematic because it "collapse[s] multiple contexts and bring[s] together commonly distinct audiences" instead of refined groupings like other social media (115). This makes Twitter a ripe site for the enactment of shifting online identities.

The performance of identity on this digital platform can be broken down into fluid components that represent the inability to fix identities in social spaces and the shifting nature of identity made prominent by many Postmodern critics. For Stuart Hall, identity stems from "the narrativization of the self," which incorporates socio-cultural discourses (4). Hall posits that identity is "the point of *suture*, between on the one hand the discourses and practices which attempt to 'interpellate,' speak to us to us or hail us into place as the social subjects of particular discourses, and on the other hand, the processes which produce subjectivities, which construct us as subjects which can be 'spoken'" (5-6). The ways in which identity is constructed across other socio-cultural spaces is adopted into digital platforms such as Twitter. Theresa M. Senft claims that one of the functions of identity online is "framed by what people do while on the Internet" (347). She believes that how we act online makes identity a way of "performing, writing" ourselves (348). For all of us who participate on social media, we use the platforms to present ourselves to audiences ranging from our family and close friends to the unknown masses in public discussions, and this creates a performative aspect to how we communicate on Twitter and similar sites. Christopher Moore, Kim Barbour, and Katja Lee contend that "[t]he mediatised identities of online persona are formed by the accumulation of paratexts over time" (4). As we build our profiles through likes, retweets, videos, and other digital objects, our identities emerge. To build online identities, we must "use the language of media to express" ourselves, according to Marwick (358). All participants are limited by the hardcoding and business model of Twitter as a platform. The platform regulates how we interact with it and audiences, causing us to create our identities out of all of the elements we subjectively choose to post and attach to ourselves. The performance of identity on Twitter entails the use of primarily textual cues, instead of the visual ones we use in face-to-face communication. Twitter's limitations place us in a constant form of self-presentation, and this cycle produces new ways to conceive of established notions of identity.

The platform's ability to shape public representations has been embraced by writers to extend their authorial identities beyond the medium of print. As younger writers gain prominence in the literary world, digital media become central components for performing their authorial identities. These writers use social media, blogs, and other online platforms to communicate with their readers and to establish themselves. They realize that

maintaining an online presence is as necessary as publishing in print nowadays. Many older writers, like Jonathan Franzen, view digital media as a lesser form of culture (Franzen, *The Kraus Project* 12; Franzen, "What's Wrong"). This is not the case for many who began their careers during the twenty-first-century. These authors are digitally born because they often do not travel the traditional path of print publication first. In a sense their authorship is a convergence of performances from all media, but especially new media. These authors believe contemporary literature is not solely print-based. To digitally born authors, engaging with the literary world across all media is necessary to become recognized. This phenomenon occasions new conceptions of authors and authorship in the digital age.

Tao Lin serves as a striking example of the digitally born author. He has published three novels, a novella, a short story collection, two poetry collections, a print collection of tweets, eBooks in several genres (poetry, short stories, epistolary), and numerous articles in print and digital media since appearing on the literary scene in 2006. Besides this prolific output, Lin first garnered attention through his online presences, particularly his blog. *Reader of Depressing Books* allowed him to cultivate an audience and construct an authorial identity even before publishing his first poetry collection, *you are a little bit happier than i am* (Action Books, 2006).

At the same time, he developed a reputation as a controversial figure. The issue did not stem from his art so much as from his self-promotion, both online and in-person. His shenanigans, such as plastering the *Gawker* offices with Britney Spears bumper stickers and spamming publications' emails, trolled the literary establishment (Carlson; Hall, "Author Attacks;" Lawson; Baron). His art took a backseat to his attention-seeking persona, but he believed that this, combined with his heavy use of digital media, made him different. Lin saw the Internet as a place to publish his works, to perform his authorial identity, and to generate attention. This provided him with another means of presentation along with the traditional methods. Even though he used the Internet to create buzz, Lin realized that for a writer cultural capital was still bestowed primarily through print. This led him to publish his major works through this traditional medium. Post print publishing, he maintained a strong online presence but also limited his antics, preferring to use the Internet for more professional forms of authorial performance.

Even though he has pulled back the antics that were associated with his authorial identity, Tao Lin continues to use Twitter consistently as a form of authorial identity performance and self-promotion. For many, Lin's traditional literary works and his Twitter are synonymous. Emily Witt states that Lin's Twitter page and novels "complement one another" and that both are "equally" pleasing." Witt's pleasure from reading not only Lin's print works but also his Twitter posts shows Lin's abilities as a writer are not specifically tied to the medium of print or long-form online presences. He uses Twitter "as a medium for deeper reflection," according to Andrea Longini, which "allows him to chronicle over time, in short bursts, his hunger: for occasional carbs, for organic food, for a highly curated

selection of media, and, mostly [sic] importantly to parse out and make sense of his life." Lin's Twitter presence operates as 140-character bursts of authorial self-presentation. The tweets he chooses to post combined with his views on Twitter as a presentational platform show that Lin is conscious of his identity performance, especially online. With this knowledge, he uses the language of Twitter to enact his authorial identity and influence the representations that circulate in the literary world, but he fell short because of the dominant role print media play in images of authorship. To counteract this and gain cultural legitimacy for his Twitter identity in the literary world, Lin resorts to remediating his online profiles into a fetishized print book. Through this, Lin shows that even though an author creates and enacts a strong digital presence, print still validates authorial identities.

Lin modus operandi involves significant Twitter usage, and he believes the medium offers artistic challenges. Early in his career, Lin declared that his Internet presences functioned collectively as "a work of art" (Lin qtd. in Nonko). The association with his digital presences with art reveals an interesting facet of Lin as an author. Instead of seeing Twitter and similar platforms as less worthy of literary endeavors or lower forms of art, Lin points out that these forms of creation are not only beneficial to the emerging author, but also an integral part in *his* artistic process. Answering a question on his Tumblr about why he had not deleted his Twitter, Lin stated, "I don't think I'm going to delete mine. I do think I'm going to continue to feel the urge periodically, to varying degrees, for the rest of my life" (Lin, *Tao Lin*, 32).[1] Twitter becomes, for Lin, a medium for literary art and authorial expression. Twitter affects how Lin thinks as a writer (Friedlander). The site allows him to construct a consistent persona and narrative, and through this process, Lin wants to make his audience "feel like they've read a novel or something, instead of someone just talking without editing" (Lin qtd. in Nonko). His attempts at "keeping a consistent Twitter-prose style" allows him to provide his audience with ways to engage with his art and his persona (Lin qtd. in Levack). The persona Lin creates and plays on Twitter becomes an obsessive documentation of an emerging author's daily life.

For Marwick, online identity, particularly on Twitter, is dependent upon *all* aspects of the platform: "every piece of digital information a person provides, from typing speed to nickname and email address, can and is used to make inferences about them" (355). Lin's early tweets showed him participating in the typical form of social media writing, that of documenting, but instead of mere comments, Lin's tweets reveal a desire to chronicle the mundanity of contemporary life. On August 28, 2008 at 12:58 A.M., he tweeted, "today i ate watermelon around 4 p.m., iced coffee around 5 p.m., 1 qt of coconut water with spirulina around 9 p.m., watermelon around 1 a.m." Lin's food consumption tweet does not seem to reveal much about him beyond the simple fact that he does not eat much during a day.

[1]Another reference toward Twitter's importance in Lin's authorial identity is his strategic linking to his Twitter on all his social media. The link is a constant breadcrumb navigation tool on every page of Lin's Tumblr. In About or Info sections on Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, Vimeo, and SoundCloud, @tao_lin is prominently displayed so his followers can access this platform.

However, if this tweet is read as a glimpse at Lin performing authorial identity, then it becomes clearer that his reporting serves as paratextual evidence about his life. According to Dhiraj Murthy, "[l]ike all social media, Twitter has everything to do with self-presentation," and this means even "'banal' social media posts serve as an important vehicle of self-affirmation" (1062). Murthy contends that these types of tweets seek to draw the audience's attention toward the writer as "exist[ing]" in the world (1062). The tweet does not profess some grand authorial statement directly, but it points toward Lin's idea of a healthy existence. The tweet serves as a marker of how Lin operates as a person and how he presents himself as a representative of the contemporary desire to record all facets of one's life.

During an interview with *The Believer*, Shelia Heti asked Lin whether there existed "a persona or a fictional Tao Lin" within his Twitter presences, since his tweets "seem to come from a consistent universe." He responded by representing himself ambiguously: "To me, at this point, I think I've found that I don't want to think about whether anything is fictional, nonfictional, a persona, not a persona, authentic, not authentic, true, not true" (qtd. in Heti). Lin is unclear because he does not elaborate on how he came to believe this, but this statement showcases Lin's conscious efforts to obscure his authorial identity by performing it eccentrically in public, which stems from his early career antics such as bombarding *Gawker* with emails or intentionally weird and awkward interviews. The performance of online identity, according to Moore, Barbour, and Lee, becomes an assemblage between multiple social actors that ultimately works in the in-between of the real and the unreal:

> To present a publicly mediated persona, we must perform our identity, our profession, our gender, and effectuate our tastes, interests, and networks of connection, through activities like commenting on posts, liking other's contributions or framing a selfie. This performative identity does not make claims about the 'real,' or a self that is somehow less produced or implemented, or more complete in some underlying way. The public performance of the self is neither entirely 'real' nor entirely 'fictional.' The accomplishment of performativity means that a persona connects together and meshes all the various characteristics that are staged and presented in the everyday and intended to interact with others. (4)

Lin's claim to not "think" about the real or unreal features of his persona mirror how the performative aspects of identity function. The way he uses Twitter as a performance platform allows him to open up his authorial identity beyond just that of a certain type of writer.

The art of his performance lies in creating a believable existence as an author: "Writing an extremely long book for the sole purpose of playfully exerting your existence

on those who will feel obligated to read all of it" (@tao_lin, 21 Feb. 2015, 2:24 PM). Lin accomplishes two things with this tweet: 1. He gives the reader a reference point to identify his authorship. 2. He maintains ambiguity because the reader does not know if this should be interpreted as a literary work or a joke. If we take Lin's Twitter presence as an ever-growing literary text, then the meaning of this tweet may become clearer. Twitter could be the "book" Lin is referring to here, and his continual reshaping of his "existence" becomes a game between him and his followers. Murthy argues that "[t]hough it is easy to view tweets merely as a crude mode of communication, doing so misses the impact tweets have on one's *Bildung*" (1063). Lin is no exception to this claim. His tweets progress from strange to insightful. He uses the platform to generate a real time *Bildungsroman*, or even *Künstlerroman*, of his life as an author. Succinct tweets about his editing practices habitually appear as he works on writing projects. Adding to this, Lin immerses us in the contemporary distractions in author's lives: "was editing 'shoplifting from american apparel' then felt myself looking with serious facial expression at wikipedia page for 'ramen'" (@tao_lin, 9 Feb. 2009, 3:00 PM). This tweet reveals Lin's fixation on the digital as not only a place of immense potential for the author, but also a means to endless pitfalls when creating art. The image of Lin produced from this tweet is relatable. He is at once the author diligently working, and at the same time, the roving Internet surfer. The duality becomes something Lin finds value in and incorporates into his Twitter presences.

Lin's performance of authorial identity is split into multiple identities, not only within his main Twitter account, @tao_lin, but between other accounts as well. He has maintained as many as seven Twitter accounts over the course of his career. These have ranged from his primary and longest running one, @tao_lin, to one based solely around his parents, @tao_linparents.[2] These multiple Twitter accounts provide Lin with the chance to experiment with his performance. In a post on @tao_lin, he tweeted that one of the ways he approached multiple Twitter accounts was through considering them heteronyms, along the lines of Fernando Pessoa's *The Book of Disquiet* ("Notes"). For Lin, Pessoa provided a glimpse at the way literature can be created through identity performance in *The Book of Disquiet*, and accomplishing this feat led Lin to consider how Pessoa would have used a platform like Twitter. Through this lens, Lin constructed his numerous accounts, although the names of them were slight modifications of his primary account name. He described this approach more fully in an interview with *Electric Lit* while promoting the publication of *Selected Tweets*, ironically published in print:

[22] Lin deactivated some of his accounts—@tao_linunedited, @tao_lin2, @tao_lin8, and @tao_lin33. However, Lin collected some of the tweets from these accounts in *Selected Tweets* (Short Flight/Long Drive Books, 2015). On deleting the account @tao_lin33, Lin tweeted on @tao_lin3, "i deleted @tao_lin33 a few days ago because i felt like i had more twitter accounts than i currently had at the time…" (7:23 PM, September 9, 2013). @tao_lin3 is still active. unlike @tao_lin, @tao_lin3 has been used recently in a similar way to Lin's Facebook, with posting related to articles he has read on various topics.

> I think the earliest second account I made was @tao_lin2, which I made because I wanted to be a different person on Twitter with a different account. The profile info was something like 'Not better. Not worse. Not the same. Just different.' I made @tao_lin unedited at some point because I wanted to tweet tweets I wouldn't edit—tweets I wouldn't, before tweeting it, consider whether to tweet it or not, or if I could explain the feeling or thought or whatever more accurately or concisely, or not. (Lin qtd. in Escoria)

Lin uses social media to manipulate the presentation of his identity as not only an author but also as a person. The profile description he gives for @tao_lin2 displays how he considers this other account to function as a representation of his authorship. Lin is skeptical of boundaries and of the limitations that a fixed identity would have upon him as an author, and since his authorial identity operates as performance art, he, naturally, pushes back on the idea that it can be restricted. Twitter allows him to play with the presentation of his identity across multiple accounts. This mirrors a consistent theme in the critical analyses of online identity. Moore, Barbour, and Lee assert, "The acts of performing the self online are so diverse that an individual may pick and choose the aspects of the role that best suits their intended performance […], but this performance is a balancing act" (5). For them, online identity serves to establish "sincere and authentic" representations through a careful negotiation of "the personal and intimate to the public and professional" (5). Lin's tweets reveal his clear understanding of how he wants to be perceived on Twitter and the value he finds in the platform for the promotion of his authorial identity. Twitter provides Lin a way to maintain prevailing images, while at the same time breaking down those representations to validate his authorship.

Lin admits he is self-consciousness over his appearance on Twitter. This links his use of the platform to the same feelings that many traditional writers have over their representations in print. According to Lin, altering his writing style on Twitter made him self-conscious, and this shift in textual appearance disrupted the consistency he maintained (Heti). Although he admits to not worrying about a consistent textual performance, @tao_lin displays his authorial identity consistently by promoting his career. Currently, Lin's Twitter features a pinned tweet stating that his next books will be published by Vintage (@tao_lin, "Vintage is publishing…"). The tweet becomes a promotional tool allowing him to keep his audience aware of his work, while at the same time implying his and the work's importance through their association with a mainstream publisher. Similar to how he seems validated by Vintage in other publications, Lin's choice to highlight it at the top of his Twitter page reveals that print publication still holds a prominent place in his authorial performance.

Much of the recent Twitter activity has focused on his editing process for his upcoming book. On July 25, 2017, Lin tweeted: "Beyond Existentialism is now titled Trip: Psychedelics, Alienation, and Change & will be out in probably May 2018." Numerous times over the past two years, he mentioned this nonfiction book, and throughout the process, he

tweeted screen shots of his editing and of his bibliography. His tweets about the development of this book place value on Twitter as a platform for literary promotion and also authorial identity performance. Sharing updates on his work becomes a way for Lin to keep his audience informed. This sharing also illuminates his authorial identity by granting them a closer look at his writing process. He tweeted on May 17, 2016, "My editing process includes staring at the screen thinking 'fuck…' then tweeting this and going back to other screen to keep trying." It could be argued Lin is being coy by casting himself in a non-authorial manner, and that this is proof of his tactlessness and ability to annoy.

However, in tweeting this, he revealed to his followers that he is a dedicated professional. Benjamin Lytal claimed, "Mr. Lin made rigor seem like laziness," and that Lin "spent 140 hours revising *Taipei* after the book was in galleys." This glimpse into Lin's editing process for *Taipei* and his tweet foreground the ambition that is obscured by his eccentric performances. Lin asserted that his drive to be represented as a serious author was something that was an auxiliary to his Twitter presence:

> But yeah, I'm not ambitious. Ambition's just a side effect. Of wanting to … oh my god. Like if a lot of people know about me when I tweet something, the reaction will be bigger. Which is exciting to me. In part because like, everyone will see that one tweet is doing something. And if someone sees someone's doing something, and it's affecting one person, or it's affecting a thousand people, that person will feel more excited if it's affecting a thousand people. (Lin qtd. in Levack)

His desire to share his work and let his audience in on his writing process becomes a way to perform authorship in real-time. Instead of the isolation of print, Twitter allows Lin to perform directly alongside his audience's reactions. According to White, "Lin is positive about sharing writing on social media," and she contended that his view of the platform ran counter to popular connotations about how Twitter was mainly a site for "sharing links." As Witt claimed, "'Tao Lin,' the collected textual output of the Tao Lin I follow on the Web, was one of my favorite 'books' before I had even read *Shoplifting From American Apparel*, *Richard Yates*, or any of Lin's other works." Statements like this reveal his approach to using Twitter extend his authorial performance beyond the traditional channels of the literary world. By adapting and performing his authorship to these new media, Lin maintains a connection to his audience through maintaining his brand.

Yet this brand is off-putting for many who encounter Lin online. As attention grew around him with the publication of *Richard Yates* in 2010, many focused-on Lin as an innovator of digital promotion more than writing techniques. Daniel B. Roberts, in *Salon*, stated, "What fame Lin has already achieved is a testament to his ability to master viral and unconventional publicity techniques." In categorizing Lin's writing, Roberts captured the essence behind his online presence: "… Lin's writing, despite its shortcomings, has perfectly

captured the aimless malaise of the Internet generation. It's no wonder, then, that he has successfully used the Web to manage his career and push his name onto computer screens everywhere". Although he allots Lin some respect for his literary talent, Roberts believed Lin revealed how the Internet had become a tool for self-promotion and expression in literary culture, and this aspect "made him a Web phenomenon" instead of a literary phenomenon. According to Lin, Internet fame was not something he intentionally wanted, but it provided him with "a constant source of interesting shit to look at whenever…[he] want[ed] to look at it" (Lin qtd. in Levack). He claimed, "if I'm ever bored, all I have to do is go to a computer and Google myself and see endless entertaining shit, that I am able to influence by just typing something into Twitter" (Lin qtd. in Levack). He is conscious of his ability to interact with his audience and his critics by participating in online discussions. The knowledge that much of this discussion exists without his permission provides him a semblance of joy, which he seems to find comforting because at least he is receiving attention.

This attention has been, nonetheless, primarily negative, with much of it serving to cast him as an outlier in the literary world. Cole Stryker claimed, in *Rhizome*, "Bloggers, eager to demonstrate that they are in on the joke, describe Lin as the first author to really figure out how to harness the viral potential of the web, while his detractors see him as just another boring publicity hound whose actual work doesn't stand up to scrutiny from those who are able to look past his trollish antics." Stryker's piece took its title, "Go to Bed Tao Lin," from a meme circulating on *4chan*. Members of the site created it because, as Stryker stated, "they claim he [Tao Lin] uses the board to plug his work, which flies in the face of the site's culture of pure anonymity," and he added that the members "also hate…[Lin] because he's an NYC hipster artfag." This policing of online discussions participates in the ways authorship has often been viewed in America. Many participants view Lin's self-promotion as "trollgaze." According to Stryker, *The Village Voice*'s music critic Maura Johnston defined "trollgaze" as "being outrageously obnoxious and/or odd in order to develop an inscrutable public persona, which ostensibly will lead to increased exposure courtesy of head-scratching and/or facepalming journalists and subsequently, fame and/or fortune." Lin's digital antics fit within this definition. Perhaps, the most fitting part of Stryker's use of the term and its application to Lin was that trollgaze intentionally blurred "your public-facing image, your actual self, and (last and probably least) your art—and where the three meet and diverge." This aptly applied to Lin's use of online media because his presences seem constructed to gain any type of attention rather than promote serious art.

Lin's conscious performance of authorship problematized many of his attempts to cast himself as a serious figure in the literary world. He stated, "Yeah, writers are always talking about wanting to be original. But it seems like they're stuck into certain things outside of their writing" (Lin qtd. in Levack). The concept of originality is slippery, but Lin attempts to create some signature component of his authorship. His online authorial

performances subvert the traditional images of authorship by consciously manipulating his media presences. Zach Sokol called Lin "one of the most bizarre—and maybe even sui generis—authors working at the moment." This remark presented both sides of Lin's authorial identity again—the weird/strange and the original genius. As he performed his authorial identity, he pushed against established traditions of authorship, making believers in those definitions uncomfortable. Stryker extended the notion of Lin being disruptive: his "persona is ultimately a reaction against the hyper-self-aware blogosphere and its ironic distance," and that "[t]o be publicly awkward is to reject social norms is to 'not give a shit' is to be vulnerable is to be authentic: that ever-elusive ideal of the age." Stryker was correct in describing Lin in this way because his authorial identity incorporated an attitude of rejecting authority in favor of more underground, restricted cultural recognition.

Lin's Twitter presences and his creation of an online "brand" serves to place him into a standard usage of the platform. According to Marwick and boyd, "The strategic use of Twitter to maintain followers, or to create and market a 'personal brand,' is part of a larger social phenomenon of using social media instrumentally for self-conscious commodification" (119). Lin has no issue with creating and marketing a personal brand, as evidenced in his essay "How to Give a Reading on Mushrooms" where he discusses maintaining his "brand" while high at a reading/book signing. Lin's Twitter presences become ways to sustain this image of his association with drug culture as well as making him a public figure who knows the power of branding in contemporary society. Collapsing his authorial identity with his drug use, Lin tweeted on his @tao_lin3 account, "Writing my Guggenheim proposal for my next book (for what I'd work on w the money) &, stoned currently, it actually seems fascinating (fwiw)." Besides for this, Lin keeps his Twitter presences consistent. @tao_lin and @tao_lin3 overlap; both contain similar tweets with only slight modifications. Lin discusses how he views literary prestige and cultural legitimacy by tweeting about how he intends to focus his work to his "future biographer" (@tao_lin, "going…;" @tao_lin3, "I'm officially…"). The concern for literary prestige reveals that Lin is conscious of how authors are legitimized, and his expression of this on Twitter further complicates his relationship to traditional literary culture. However, by keeping his online presences consistent, Lin can cultivate an audience across multiple identities, which allows him to gain wider recognition.

During his movement into a more recognized position in the literary world, Lin's use of Twitter needed to be justified. One way of validating his Twitter presences as legitimate authorial identities came through collecting and publishing his tweets. However, Lin presents a new perspective on the medium and the ways authors can use it to express literary sentiment. Many critics would interpret Lin's tweet as a lower form of writing that does not demand critical attention, but the tweet provides closer insight into how Lin approaches Twitter as a literary performance.

Lin frames *Selected Tweets* through a similar lens. This framing attempts to legitimize the medium through remediation into print. Lin describes to Escoria how he interprets the collection:

> 1. Fragmented linear narrative. I think of the book as a kind of fragmented, mostly or all chronological narrative with many different sections, like the novel *Why Did I Ever* by Mary Robison or *K: A Biography of Kafka* by Ronald Hayman. I think of it as an extreme, slightly alien variation on this type of book. Like in a biography, the dates are recorded, and like in some biographies, the dates act as a suggested structure—years, months, and sometimes days in Selected Tweets—for the book.
>
> 2. Short story collection. I like to think of each Twitter account in the book as a short story, and each of the "extras" also as short stories. So, for my side of the book, a short story collection of eight stories; for Mira's side of the book, five stories. (Or maybe seven stories and a novella and five stories and a novella.)
>
> 3. Poetry book. I like to think of *Selected Tweets* as a poetry collection. There's a certain kind of poetry where each line is a low-level non sequitur to the next line, and I think of this book as a variation on that to some degree. So, I see it as a poetry book as it is now, and I could also see myself removing the dates and editing the book into a poetry collection. But I like it better as it is: Single, at times dense, chronological lines of narrative, description, thoughts, and feelings in a variety of tones and featuring a certain range of content, arranged into sections by month, year, and Twitter account, in a manner that works, to me, both as fiction and as a document of reality that people can reference as nonfiction. (qtd. in Escoria)

The description provides the audience a closer view of the thought behind Lin's decisions when collecting and arranging tweets. Setting the collection in the frame of short story and poetry collections, Lin highlights the connective elements between the tweets. His description of the book as a "[f]ragmented linear narrative" gives the collection a postmodern, experimental quality that makes the book more of an art object than a popular, mainstream narrative. Lin's categorization provides an approach to interpreting the collection as a whole as well as the individual presentations of his Twitter identities.

In this way, *Selected Tweets* and Lin's Twitter presences are fetishized, and this facet of the book further legitimizes Lin's Twitter authorial performances. Escoria fetishizes the physical book at the opening of her interview: "The book is a beautiful object—leather-

bound, illustrated, and with two 'bonus' stories per author."[3] In more detail, Longini romanticizes the book's publishing practice:

> Tao Lin and Mira Gonzalez have introduced a new genre to the literary canon in *Selected Tweets*, their collection of Twitter output published in a tête-bêche volume for paperback consumption. The curious binding practice—where a book features two separate covers and must be flipped over halfway through—dates back to at least [the] 19th century, yet it is not the only characteristic of the double-billed volume that harkens back decades. Longini describes the book as a continuation of art practices, something to be desired not only for its content but also for its appearance. Adding this focus to the book and its contents makes Lin a desirable commodity.

Taking it further, Escoria fetishizes Twitter as a medium to perform one's identity, and she views Lin's use of the medium as a way to enact his identity across multiple communicative channels. She claims, "As a collection, it leaves one with questions about the performance aspect of Twitter, the performative act of tweeting. Each account reveals more, but there are still gaps, things not included, things left out" (Escoria). For Escoria, Twitter provides Lin opportunities to perform multiple identities, while at the same time merging them into one consistent presentation through the publication of *Selected Tweets*. The print serves as a binding medium for the disparate Twitter profiles, making them cohere through traditional literary practices.

Twitter provides Lin an avenue to perform his authorship that has only been accessible briefly in the scope of literary culture. Although Lin attempts to present Twitter and tweeting as a new form of literature, it is unclear why he feels the need to publish a physical book. One can only assume that the collection of these twitter accounts serves as another layer in the validation process of the medium and his authorship. Print is the traditional marker for authorship and literature to this day, and Lin has experiential insight into how literary culture still maintains the marks of authorship and literature via print media. The combination of Romantic publishing practices, making the book an art object itself, and textual presentation of tweets as poetry seeks to strip away the entrenched cultural connotations around what is considered literature in contemporary culture, but Lin's choice to publish a physical book shows that even though he experiments with new media, he is beholden to the pull of print to gain legitimacy as an author.

Twitter becomes a platform for Tao Lin to perform his authorial identity and affect the images of him circulating within literary culture. Following Stuart Hall, the ways Lin

[3] See also, Brad Listi, "Tao Lin & Mira Gonzalez," *OtherPPl* podcast, 1:17:53, July 19, 2015. In the text before the audio portion of the podcast, Listi describes how *Selected Tweets* is "published in a little black bible-like volume." See also, Michael Silverblatt, "Mira Gonzalez and Tao Lin: *Selected Tweets*," *Bookworm*, KCRW, August 13, 2015. Silverblatt discusses how the book is "beautifully published."

uses Twitter allows him "to take up" a "position" and craft "representations" that serve to give some impression of stability (6). What emerges from Lin's Twitter is an image of an author in constant self-revelation and refinement. Marwick states, "Identity is flexible and changeable, and people are highly skilled in varying their self-presentation appropriately" (356). Tao Lin knows this and uses Twitter to act out different threads of his authorial identity and progress his visibility in the literary world. Nevertheless, Lin's Twitter presences are not validated by the literary establishment, and he is often seen as "a world-class perpetrator of gimmickry" instead of a serious literary author (Anderson). The publication of *Selected Tweets* remediated Lin's Twitter identities into the medium of choice for the literary world. With this, he gave cultural capital to his digital existence, making the efforts to present himself as an author online a part of his textual output. However, Lin still feels the pull of solely digital performance, and his recent tweets reveal the ways the platform has become an essential component of his authorial identity. On June 13, 2018, Lin tweeted, "Working on tweeting less & reading less tweets & doing less things on Twitter & doing other things more." Not being the first time Lin has expressed this desire, the tweet becomes yet another attempt to distance himself from a platform that allowed him to position himself within the literary world. Lin's constant promotion of his new book *Trip: Psychedelics, Alienation, and Change* (Vintage, 2018) and his non sequiturs abound, making his presence even stronger. Lin's coquettish relationship with Twitter shows his audience that the platform is more than a place to generate attention for oneself; it is a site for the continual reshaping of identity on a mass scale.

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