

The Fishtank Treatise

Part I

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank all *Fishtank* fans who give the show far more discussion and analysis than it's worth. Picking apart an online reality TV show known exclusively for its chaos isn't for everyone, but the extensive analytical discourse about the show by those niche and dedicated parts of the community was a huge inspiration for me in getting this work off the ground.

While the ideas in this work are unique, there were a great number of times where late night discussion on */tv/*, and especially in the Kiwifarms *Fishtank* thread, gave me the mental stimulus I needed to write just one more chapter.

And a special thank you to the crew running the show; without them there would be nothing to analyze.

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Introduction

The original intent of this work was to take the commonly discussed topic of *Fishtank's* cyclical nature and understand why the show's quality would fluctuate over a given season. *Fishtank* is an extremely volatile show, rising to heights of great entertainment only to drop into an abyss of directionless boredom soon after. It seems that *Fishtank's* only constant is to lead the audience on, to make them believe that things have improved, only to have a sudden shift in quality leaving them disappointed.

I started writing about this topic around the latter half of Season Two, a grim time in the show's history marked by a lack of direction and an absence of creativity in those running it. It was the first time when the high expectations of a season had been met, even surpassed in some regard, only for the good will that had been built up to be destroyed by poor decision-making.

At that point, I was fully submerged in what many *Fishtank* fans should be intimately familiar with, the grip of sunk cost. I couldn't stop watching the inexplicable train wreck in front of me. A season of such promise had deteriorated right in front of our eyes, but it happened so suddenly it was difficult to comprehend. How could this happen? So, perhaps as a way to find meaning in the suffering, to justify the inability to walk away, *The Fishtank Treatise* was born.

The original intent has not been lost, and I believe the treatise gives a rudimentary, though admittedly theoretical, justification for why *Fishtank* captivates us the way it does despite its extreme fluctuations in quality. However, throughout writing, increasingly complex ideas began to present themselves. Every attempt to fulfill my original intent was met with a dozen more questions needing to be answered.

To even begin writing about the topic at hand, I realized I had to start at the fundamentals. Why exactly do people watch the show in the first place?

If you were to ask a fan why they watch *Fishtank*, their opinion would boil down to wanting to be entertained. In the *Fishtank* fanbase, entertainment is framed around content. Terms such as 'content' and 'nontent' have become commonplace within the *Fishtank* lexicon. These concepts are treated as self-evident parts of the *Fishtank* viewing experience. So then, most viewers tune in to watch content.

Of course, there is the problem of defining these terms. There has been no universally accepted definition for what content or nontent represent. Whatever original ideas these terms captured have been lost to colloquial use. The words have evolved to represent good and bad respectively, which differs depending on the viewer. If you like what you're seeing, it's content. If you despise whatever is unfolding on screen, it's nontent.

The variability of these terms makes them difficult to identify and next to useless for any kind of objective analysis. Because each individual differs in what they find entertaining, one viewer's perception of content is not the same as another's. These largely subjective interpretations lack the fixed reference point needed for meaningful analysis. No timeframe of the show can be considered "bad" or "good" if every viewer's subjective taste is equally justifiable.

For an analysis to take place, we need to find a definition that can correct for this idea while also being immune to these inherent entertainment biases. The *Fishtank* community never works in agreed upon absolutes. It's a fanbase full of generalized assumptions, and without objective definitions, any analysis would fall into the same trap.

Without a grounded definition of content, what is and what isn't entertaining, no conclusive argument can be made for a season's high or low point. Even if large portions of the fanbase feel a particular season at a particular point was lacking in content, a contrarian could very well come along and chalk these feelings up to entertainment differences. And under the subjective definitions, they'd be right.

The viability of this work therefore hinges on how it defines *Fishtank's* most elementary building block—content. The definition I will eventually propose isn't meant to be an absolute truth, rather it is an analytical tool, a constraint designed to maintain coherence throughout all parts of the broader treatise. Without it, every idea explored quickly devolves into the chaos of subjective taste. Disagreeing with the eventual definition is fair, but I should note that doing so breaks the internal logic of the analysis that will follow. While an opinion piece at its core, this work operates within a consistent analytical framework. Rejecting this framework destroys the analysis's coherence.

Part I concerns itself with defining content and the methods of content identification. In future parts, we will begin to branch outward towards the exploration of broader *Fishtank* structures, each concept building upon the last. The existence of content implies the existence of a source of origin. While content can originate from many different in-house individuals, the broader treatise, Part I included, focuses primarily on contestants. Throughout the treatise, contestants will be referred to as their in-universe label, *Fish*.

The wider *Fishtank* audience tends to refer to the crew running the show as a singular entity called *Production*. Staying in line with previously accepted *Fishtank* terminology that doesn't break the framework, the individuals that make up this crew will be called Production as a whole.

In future parts, after exploring the intrinsic relationship between content and Fish, we will again zoom out to explore the broader structure, viewing all Fish as a monolith and how this collective status determines the volatility and overall quality of any given season. In the final parts of the treatise, we will pivot into season deep-dives, where we will analyze Seasons 1-3 using my content theory as a baseline.

The simplified structure of the treatise can be summarized as follows:

Content analysis → Content in relation to Fish → Fish in relation to each other → Fish in relation to a season's perceived quality → Analysis of Seasons 1-3

The initial release of Part I covers only the content analysis portion of this structure. Future parts will build upon the foundations established here. Part I is micro-oriented, focusing primarily on individual pieces of content, a stark contrast to the season-wide analysis we will eventually engage with. Content analysis still encapsulates a large amount of concepts, so don't let the simplified progression above fool you.

Needless to say, the original intention of this work has grown far more complex than I intended, and it is for this reason that I advise against skipping around. Because theoretical discussion surrounding *Fishtank* is ungoverned, there exists no widely accepted terminology I can refer to whenever a new concept is brought up. Therefore, the nature of this work necessitates the invention of new terms and definitions to provide a clear understanding of whatever topic is at hand. I use these terms and rely on these definitions so often that skipping over their introductions will leave the reader feeling lost.

I would suggest at least some familiarity with *Fishtank* before delving into this work. While Part I focuses more on theory than actual in-season events, it's important to at least understand the structure of *Fishtank* and how content is perceived before diving in. Preferably one should be familiar with at least one of the three seasons. Future parts will put greater emphasis on Seasons Two and Three specifically. While not a requirement, knowing at least a little bit about prominent Fish such as Jon, Letty, Cole, Alex, Burt, and others from each season will enhance the reading experience.

I should also emphasize that the theoretical framework being explored is solely limited to mainline seasons. *Fishtank* offshoots such as *Blood Games*, *Bitchtank*, *Streamstars*, and the like—while sharing some similarities with the main series—have a number of underlying differences that make the direct application of this framework unreliable. The same can be said about offseason shenanigans. If it's not a mainline season (1, 2, 3, etc) it holds no relevancy in the context of the treatise.

With the formalities and warnings out of the way, we can finally start our analysis.

Content is the lifeblood of the show, from which everything else flows. In order to build our theory then, it makes sense to start at defining this foundational element.

Part I: Foundations of Content Theory

"Kiwi's have the strangest discussion around fish tank, it's like they live in an alternate reality where fishtank season one is Decalogue tier kino." —Anon, /tv/, 12/23/2023

What is Content?

Every *Fishtank* discussion eventually circles back to one word: content. Large amounts of content can keep viewers entertained, engaged, spending money, and glued to their screen waiting for the next development to take place. A lack of content leads to dead air and stagnating viewership. Content can be called the lifeblood of *Fishtank* because, like an organism without a properly functioning circulation, the show begins to break down in its absence.

In the *Fishtank* fanbase, 'content' is a term that is used ad nauseam, yet has no universal definition outside of, "what is entertaining." The *Fishtank* fandom is made up of a very diverse selection of individuals, making this definition inherently flawed for broader analysis. Some groups of viewers will find specific actions of a Fish entertaining, while another group might find those same actions incredibly boring or unwatchable. Entertainment is variable, but to even begin our analysis we need a stable definition.

For this definition to hold any analytical weight, we must immediately reject the idea that content is simply what one personally finds entertaining, or, "the presence of entertainment value to some individual." Without this rejection, absurdities begin to appear. A viewer who finds entertainment in watching their favorite contestant sleep in a room for hours without contributing anything to the show could say this action—or lack of action—is content. Content would be relative and effectively useless as an analytical tool.

To avoid confusion, we must evaluate any given action based on the general viewership being able to recognize the action as entertaining to others. Under our framework, personal enjoyment is irrelevant; recognizing why others might be entertained is what matters. Therefore, content must possess what I call *universally recognizable entertainment value* (UREV). We can define this quality as the ability for a viewer to see why a specific action is entertaining to others, regardless of whether they personally find it entertaining.

This mindset is absolutely crucial when defining what content is. A person may not like a Fish being loud and annoying others, but they can recognize why someone would find that specific action entertaining. An action such as this potentially creates tension between the contestants, keeping viewers engaged in the process. Similarly, you may cringe at the sight of two Fish engaging in a brawl, but that does not mean it lacks universally recognizable entertainment value.

Admittedly, UREV is not easily definable in the traditional sense. It's not a variable that can be quantitatively measured. We can describe UREV as a known unknown, something that is intuited rather than quantified. Its exact boundaries remain necessarily fuzzy, and the concept serves as a flexible distinction between actions that generate recognizable entertainment value and those that don't.

Fear not, the vague nature of UREV is not the sole methodology used to determine what is and what isn't content. Rather, UREV functions as the unexplainable fabric of the *Fishtank* universe. The fundamental axiom upon which all content rests. It is the simplest form of content essence, not precisely definable, but still felt and fully present.

I am aware some could argue there is UREV in all actions, no matter how mundane. Within *Fishtank's* context, however, this stretches the concept beyond usefulness. *Fishtank* is reality TV, a genre viewers engage with for human interaction, drama, tension, unfolding plotlines, and conflict. Active Fish are favored; inactive ones become jokes or non-entities.

The average viewer can recognize that the action of a Fish starting conflicts has UREV, while a Fish sleeping all day does not. Both actions almost surely have entertainment value to some individual, but the general viewership only recognizes the entertainment value of one. Because *Fishtank* is marketed as a radical form of reality television, we must assume the general audience expects these genre conventions, and recognizes them as having entertainment value.

When viewed under this perspective, the presence of UREV becomes far easier to identify, even with the philosophical backdrop. A Fish staying in their room all day watching paint dry is a violation of reality TV principles, and by extension, viewer expectations. While certain viewers might find such a scenario entertaining, the broader masses of viewership pay it no mind. They aren't tuning in, popcorn in hand, to watch a Fish sleep. They tune in for spectacle, interpersonal dynamics, and evolving narratives. UREV is the recognition that an action provides entertainment value within these expectations, regardless of personal taste.

Actions, Effort, and the EFC Test

Every season of *Fishtank* is made up of millions of actions. An action in the context of our Fish-centric framework is anything a Fish does at any point in a season's runtime, though Production and Freeloaders are also capable of carrying out actions. Needless to say, there's a lot to categorize when it comes to this topic. There are so many different occurrences of actions that it would be a monumental, perhaps impossible task, to keep track of them all.

Fortunately, for both my sanity and the reader's, the majority of actions that take place within a season's runtime can be disregarded or flat-out ignored in our framework. Because we are interested in content analysis, most actions become background noise to the real meat and potatoes we're trying to analyze.

Because everything a Fish does is considered an action, content itself is derived from the actions of each Fish. The most crucial piece of information to memorize is this:

All pieces of content are actions, but not all actions are content.

The task at hand then is separating the background noise from what we're actually interested in. How can we distinguish non-content actions from those that are synonymous with it?

This question gnawed at me for a great deal of time before I developed the *Effort-Filled Content test* (EFC test). The word 'effort' here isn't used to evoke imagery of how the content came to be. There have been multiple Fish who create content as easily as you or I breathe, needing no effort to do so. Rather, 'effort-filled' denotes actions that rise above the baseline of mundane activity, a descriptor of actions that register as significant rather than mere noise. Or, more simply, an action is described as effort-filled when it passes the EFC test.

The terms 'effort-filled action' and 'content' are effectively interchangeable. Once an action passes the EFC test and is established as effort-filled, it is fully identifiable as content. They are one and the same. It is non-negotiable, in the context of this work, an action **MUST** pass the EFC test in order to be considered content.

There are three filters that an action must pass before it becomes content:

1. **Non-Basic Action:** The action must be non-basic.
2. **UREV Present:** The action must possess identifiable UREV.
3. **Uncommon Occurrence:** The action must avoid becoming functionally basic through repetition.

Each filter warrants a closer examination.

Basic Actions

A basic action can be defined as any action that is both extremely common and inherent to the human condition. In the context of *Fishtank*, basic actions make up the vast majority of all actions performed on the show. They appear in such excess that the majority of the viewing audience spends next to no brain energy on consciously registering their existence. Examples include breathing, drinking, eating, sleeping, sitting, walking, and blinking.

When we refer to basic actions, we are holding on to an assumption of normality. Certain actions that appear basic can in fact elevate themselves past this filter with a unique addition. For example, when I mentioned the act of eating as a basic action I was simply referring to eating in its base form—the consumption of sustenance without any inherent UREV.

However, the act of eating can theoretically become non-basic if done in a unique manner. Think a Fish stuffing their face in a disgusting display of gluttony, or consuming a particularly abnormal meal. The addition of a unique attribute such as these elevates the action above background noise to something the viewer consciously registers.

Similarly, the act of sleeping becomes non-basic the moment a Fish starts to snore. The act of standing becomes non-basic if a Fish decides to stand on their head. The addition of a unique attribute to the basic action circumvents the original definition of, "...any action that is both extremely common and inherent to the human condition," placing it outside the range of what can be considered basic.

Once an action clears this first filter, it is referred to as being non-basic. While not as numerous, there still exists a great deal of non-basic actions that lack the UREV necessary to be considered content. The action of humming isn't inherent to the human condition, nor is it considered to be "extremely common," on the same level as, say, eating or breathing. But at the same time there's something about this non-basic action that separates it from, say, the similarly non-basic action of a fist fight. A perceptible difference can be felt.

The difference between these two examples stems from their hold on UREV. Above all things, a piece of content must be universally recognizable as potentially entertaining to other *Fishtank* viewers. This recognition forms the basis of the second filter.

Non-Basic Actions and Universally Recognizable Entertainment Value

UREV is defined as the quality that allows viewers to recognize why an action would be entertaining to others, regardless of whether they personally find it entertaining. A viewer might personally find a piece of content boring, cringe, uncomfortable to watch, or infuriating, but that same viewer should be able to recognize in the content an underlying essence that draws engagement through entertainment.

Because it involves the fundamental axiom that is UREV, the importance of this filter cannot be overstated. As I mentioned in the previous section, it is relatively easy to raise a basic action to the status of non-basic with the help of a distinctly unique add-on. The first filter is not hard to clear. This second filter exists to weed out non-basic actions that, within the *Fishtank* context, lack universally recognizable entertainment value.

Within *Fishtank's* context, we must distinguish between individual entertainment biases and UREV. While some viewers might find mundane non-basic tasks riveting when performed by their favorite Fish, these actions lack UREV on a show-wide scale. *Fishtank*, as a form of alternative reality TV, sets a certain entertainment norm. The viewer comes in expecting conflict, drama, human interaction, eye-catching spectacles, and challenges soaked in the unique environment *Fishtank* provides. Passive observation of routine tasks, while prevalent, entirely lacks UREV because it directly contradicts these expectations.

To demonstrate how UREV is necessary as a second filter, let's look at an example. A Fish moving clothes, considered in isolation, is technically non-basic. The action is neither extremely common nor inherent to the human condition. Yet one would have a hard time explaining why this action could be considered entertaining to *Fishtank's* wider audience. Where is its UREV?

Broadly speaking, most viewers aren't tuning in with the preconceived desire of hoping to watch a Fish move clothes. This action passes the first filter, yet fails the second as it does not have UREV. Because of this failure, it should be disregarded as content.

In later sections, you will come to find that not all content is alike. Certain effort-filled actions require context to reveal their UREV. That is to say, UREV is not always plainly evident in an action, sometimes we require information of the surrounding context to see it.

We can demonstrate this claim through an alternative clothes-moving example. We already know that a Fish moving clothes from their room in isolation lacks UREV. However, what happens if we add some context? Assume now that this Fish has a rival, and this rival ascribes a great deal of emotional value to their clothes. The Fish was actually moving their rival's clothes with the intention of "getting back" at them, sowing the seeds for conflict in the future. Now that we're familiar with the context, UREV is derived from the anticipation of what is to come.

One might have to look at the context surrounding a non-basic action before determining if it passes the second filter. On that same note, we must also recognize that sometimes even the context of an action isn't enough to justify it as having UREV.

Let's go back to the clothes-moving example. Consider the new context: The Fish is now moving their own personal clothing in order to get them cleaned. This scenario involves information that is not abundantly clear at first glance, just like the former. A viewer that is out of the loop simply sees a Fish moving clothes without knowing the purpose behind the action. This action, while non-basic, has no UREV even when full context is provided.

To give another example of how context can change the perception of UREV, imagine a Fish has a habit of talking about the weather to other contestants. In isolation this action lacks UREV. The Fish is talking—a notably non-basic act—but the topic of conversation proves to be incredibly mundane. But if the weather-obsessed Fish is unknowingly annoying other contestants with their meteorology babble, suddenly UREV emerges. The context of an underlying tension quietly brewing in the background as a result of this Fish droning on and on allows us to process the situation differently. The emphasis is no longer on the boring topic, but the potential conflict the topic brings forth.

Awareness has nothing to do with a non-basic action's potential to hold UREV. Whether a Fish acts with intent to annoy others or does so unknowingly, the core recognition does not sway. We, the audience, are aware of what's taking place, and can feel the weight of UREV's presence.

Out of all filters, the second is the one to look towards when quickly determining what is and what isn't content. All of the filters are important, but filter one and, as you will soon see, filter three act as refinements of what UREV should already identify. Being the cornerstone of all content, it is an extremely useful tool if one wants to speed through the filtering process. A basic action will never have UREV, which means an action that passes the second filter is guaranteed to pass the first.

While UREV can serve as a useful quick indicator, I would still encourage the reader to familiarize themselves with the order of filters given before building up the confidence to apply them out of order. It's important to master the fundamentals to prevent mistakes in content analysis later on.

Non-Basic Actions and Repetition

With both of the previous filters cleared, there remains one final requirement before an action qualifies as content. This filter addresses repetition: how the repeated occurrence of non-basic actions can prevent them from achieving, or in some cases strip them of, content status.

We need to be a little careful to not tread on previously covered ground. In the first filter, we already discussed commonality and repetition to some degree. Basic actions are by definition extremely common and repeatable. However, it's important to note that the first filter puts great emphasis on both the extreme commonality of the action and its inherentness to the human condition. Basic actions are common among all Fish. Every contestant eats, sleeps, and breathes.

However, the first filter does not take into account any quirks or habits that are unique to a Fish as an individual but still repeated in excess. Certain actions might be non-basic on paper—lacking an inherentness to the human condition—but specific individuals can turn these so-called non-basic actions into extremely common occurrences in their own right.

So while the action itself is technically non-basic on a global scale, it is repeated so often that it becomes *functionally basic*. The term 'functionally basic' is used to describe actions that surpass the first filter but become so common through repetition that they have no UREV.

When a Fish repeats a specific non-basic action in excess, it becomes, in the eyes of the average viewer, a basic action. The same way a person living next to a waterfall filters out its distinct noise, the typical *Fishtank* viewer stops registering functionally-basic actions just as they pay no mind to when a Fish walks, eats, or breathes.

We can demonstrate this with another simple example. When the audience is first exposed to a Fish with a speech impediment, they might be quick to determine this Fish as comparatively more content-rich because of their odd way of speaking. Simply put, the Fish sounds funny/odd/different so, like a person visiting a waterfall and being exposed to its sound, the action grabs our attention.

But as time passes, we the viewers grow accustomed to the Fish's vocal mannerisms. Assuming the Fish is especially talkative, the audience could grow used to their impediment in a matter of hours. By then we've spent enough time by the waterfall to stop registering its sound. This Fish's action of speech, while initially being enhanced by the unique addition of the speech impediment, has now become functionally basic, an occurrence so common we don't register it anymore despite its non-basic status.

With this third filter, repetition is measured against a season's objective timeline. A brand new viewer might tune in halfway through the season, be enamored with the speech impediment due to lack of exposure, and falsely assume that the Fish is creating content through speech. We appeal to how a consistent viewer digests the action on display. The addition of a new viewer doesn't suddenly remove past repetitions of the action, the same way closing your eyes doesn't erase the reality of the world around you.

This filter is unique in that it doesn't decide the fate of actions that have yet to become content—it also holds power over actions that have *already* been determined to be content. This filter and its unique relationship to content will be a prominent fixture throughout the entire treatise. While we have mostly been focusing on the fundamental attributes of content rather than content itself, we can for the first time shift our focus from content's abstract properties to content as concrete instances.

The Law of Diminishing Content Returns

Even an action that has passed the EFC test and is now considered content can have its status revoked if repeated too often. I want to emphasize that this does not retroactively remove content status from past instances. Content from the past remains content, even if the same action becomes functionally basic in the future.

It's best not to view things in absolutes. An effort-filled action being repeated over and over again doesn't immediately discount it from being content. Rather, it's more of a subtle progression towards functionally-basic status. Each subsequent repetition has a negative effect on perception of the effort-filled action's UREV. The action is no longer as broadly entertaining as it once was because the audience has in some way grown accustomed to it.

This phenomenon will be referred to as the *Law of Diminishing Content Returns*—the idea that repetition erodes the universal recognizability of an effort-filled action's entertainment value, eventually rendering it functionally basic.

The Law of Diminishing Content Returns will be a topic we return to time and time again, as it has a variety of unique relationships with how content forms, how it is perceived, how it is identified, and the overall quality of the show from season to season. It is one of *Fishtank's* most impactful governing principles.

In future parts, the topic of diminishing content returns will ramp up in complexity, but for now we will just focus on its most basic attributes, laying the groundwork for what is to come.

Pieces of content are not all on the same footing. Some content is, quite frankly, better than others. The Law of Diminishing Content Returns has a different effect on distinguished pieces of content depending on the content's quality. Content exists on a spectrum. More potent forms of content can withstand more repetitions before becoming functionally basic compared to mundane alternatives.

Despite this, all content, no matter its potency, is affected by this law in one form or another. Depending on the content or degree of repetition it might not be as noticeable, but the effect still remains.

We can view the UREV of every effort-filled action on a standard 0 to 1 scale, with 1 representing a universally perceptible amount of UREV and 0 representing no UREV at all. I should note that the use of this scale is as a tool to make the concept I've laid out more comprehensible. This 0-to-1 scale is only unique to this section, not a framework we'll use going forward. It serves only to visualize the concept of UREV decay through repetition.

This scale represents the Law of Diminishing Content Returns in its most basic form, and consequently makes a few assumptions to preserve its simplistic explanatory value. Until stated otherwise we will assume that the UREV of all content declines at the same rate, pauses between repetitions are non-existent, and that content is perfectly replicable in that it has absolutely no discernable differences.

Most radically we will be assuming UREV is a quantifiable substance rather than something that is perceptibly felt. As established earlier, this is actually impossible given UREV's abstract nature and fuzzy boundaries. This artificial precision is purely for teaching purposes, allowing us to visualize content decay and revival before returning to the messier reality where UREV remains felt but not quantified. In later parts, as we branch out to more complex topics, I will introduce more quantifiable measures of content quality, but for now UREV remains the closest thing we have to such an instrument, however imprecise.

Let's say we have an effort-filled action with a UREV of 1. The value of 1 represents maximum confidence that the broader audience recognizes the action's entertainment value. If the action is repeated enough, that number begins to decrease, representing a decline in universal recognizability as a result of repetitive use.

As the action is repeated, the original UREV value of 1 sets off on a downward trajectory toward 0. At 0.7, repetition has habituated a portion of the audience; this portion no longer recognizes the action's entertainment value. At 0.3, extreme repetition means only the most tolerant viewers still register it as potentially entertaining to others. Eventually the action has been repeated so much that the UREV falls completely to 0, at which point no viewer recognizes why the action would be entertaining to others.

The audience, being exposed to the same effort-filled action on screen over and over again, adjusts to what they're seeing. UREV's perceptible impact is felt less and less until one cannot discern it from any other basic action—it is now functionally basic. Once this status is achieved, the action is no longer considered content on subsequent repetitions.

This example shows diminishing content returns in its simplest form: the fizzling out of universal recognizability of entertainment value that once was. But this decay isn't irreversible.

Once we add certain variables into the equation of diminishment, we can alter the pace of decline or even revive a functionally-basic action back to content status. The most noticeable way such an outcome can be achieved is through the usage of a unique addition to the action being performed. We refer to this addition as a *unique flair*.

The same way the usage of seasoning can open up an entirely new palate of what was once a bland meal, a unique flair alters how we view a repeated piece of content. These flairs function as a defense mechanism against the downward trajectory posed by the Law of Diminishing Content Returns. The use of a flair doesn't eliminate the existence of the law, the weight of diminishing content returns still exists, rather it works to rebalance the scales in UREV's favor. Ideally, the audience is revitalized as they are visually consuming something that is, at least in part, new to their palate.

Of course, like most things content-related, the quality of these flairs will vary. Sometimes the additions are great enough to cancel out the negative effects of the Law of Diminishing Content Returns, bringing the UREV back to its base value of 1. Other times the Law of Diminishing Content Returns is greater than the positive effect of the unique flair(s), but the flair still pushes back. In which case we'd get a number between 0 and 1. And in few cases the unique flair can be so unnoteworthy that it has no effect whatsoever.

Keeping our assumptions constant, we will examine how the potency of a flair can change the impact of diminishing content returns. We will use a perfectly replicable fistfight between two Fish as an example. Given enough repetition, the UREV of this content will eventually reach 0.

To perfectly reverse the effect of diminishing content returns from 0 to 1, a radical unique flair or unique flairs would have to be introduced to completely change how the audience views the next fight. For a perfect reverse to take place, the original action would be unrecognizable to its perfectly replicable form but with the same essence of a fight intact. To demonstrate this with an extreme example, Production could give the Fish swords, let loose a lion in the house, hire a professional fight announcer, and have the Fish fight to the death with the victor being awarded a cash prize of five hundred million dollars.

This example is in no way realistic, but the extreme stakes, gladiatorial tone, and change in pace is great enough to distinguish itself from the original fistfight while maintaining its core essence. The audience would be mortified, yet fully re-engaged to what was once a functionally-basic action.

When a flair only partially counters diminishing returns the action will have some recognizability to the original form, but with certain alterations linked to an increase in audience engagement. This change could be accomplished by having the Fish fight blindfolded and on one leg, LARP as a boxing caricature, or promising a hefty (but not unrealistic) cash prize to raise the fighting stakes. These unique flairs aren't groundbreaking in what they add to the fight, but they shake things up for the audience's viewing pleasure.

A unique flair with no effect on diminishing returns could be any superficial change that fails in counteracting the effects of repetition. If nothing was altered other than the use of a new rug in the room the Fish are fighting in, the audience's recognition of the action's entertainment value does not perceptibly change. It's the same perfectly replicable fight they've seen time and time again, only now the rug is light blue instead of navy.

Now that we understand what the Law of Diminishing Content Returns is and how flairs can counteract it, let's see how things complicate when we remove some of the previously established assumptions.

Assumptions Removed

While the simplified model in the previous section illustrates the core principle of repetition's effect on content, content decay and analysis in the context of a real season involves the removal of our previous assumptions. The simplified model is all we need for Part I, but it's still important to demonstrate how things become complicated once we move beyond theoretical boundaries.

Perfectly replicable content does not exist in real seasons. Every piece of content that comes into being will have some kind of difference, even if it's technically repeated. *Fishtank*, despite having a reputation of unpredictability, is still bound to the laws of nature. The concept of a perfectly replicable piece of content only exists in the realm of theoretical content analysis, and will not be used in practice moving forward.

Similarly, the idea that all content declines at the same rate is, to put it bluntly, incorrect. The removal of our perfectly replicable assumption is an acceptance that not all content is the same. As a result we must acknowledge that, like how one piece of content qualitatively distinguishes itself from another, a piece of content's rate of decay is not constant.

The diminishing returns of a fistfight will not be the same as a forced date between Fish. The diminishing returns of a repeated controversial conversation will not be the same as watching the Fish play hide and seek multiple times over. While the mechanisms behind the differences in quality and decay rates of content will be explored in Part II, we must recognize that not all content decays at a constant rate. This is essential for the analysis ahead.

To preview what Part II will explore in depth, we can generally associate the extremity of the action with its resistance to diminishing content returns. Extreme content is linked to higher entertainment value and acts as a potent drug that influences the degree of a viewer's engagement with the show. The greater the extremity, the stronger the safeguard against diminishing returns upon repeat.

As a reminder, even extreme actions are not completely exempt from the Law of Diminishing Content Returns. Rather, it has a built in resistance to it. The audience can grow accustomed to a Fish talking with a speech impediment in a matter of hours, while a Fish's physically destructive behavior towards others would take far longer before becoming functionally basic.

Unfortunately, this does not mean we've unlocked the secret to perfectly optimal content generation. The paradox with this phenomenon is that the more extreme or potent an action, the less likely it is to be repeated. This rarity isn't always built on the fear of negative consequences incurred from performing the action. Certain Fish lack what we would call the "natural inhibitions of a sane individual." It's equally likely that the energy or time investment it takes for potent content to come into fruition acts as a natural filter to its existence. The act of striking up an interesting conversation is fairly easy and takes little time, but planning and successfully pulling off an extensive gaslighting campaign is psychologically exhausting and takes days or even weeks of consistent investment.

Beyond potency and replication differences, time also plays a tangible real-world role regarding diminishing content returns. The longer one goes without experiencing a certain piece of content, the more their adaptation to said content dwindles. A longer pause between repeats means, upon return, the action is far more likely to subvert the viewer's expectations and seem fresh, regaining its universal recognizability in the process.

For example, the audience might grow bored of seeing many boxing matches between Fish in short succession. But if boxing then ceased only to be re-introduced thirty days later, the audience would be far more receptive to the return to form. While technically a repeat, this return generates far more engagement than if boxing had continued on a day-to-day basis. The entertainment value of the action becomes universally recognizable once more thanks to the pause.

I've said enough regarding the basics of the Law of Diminishing Content Returns at this time. We've covered everything relevant to Part I and then some. Given its prevalence and the important role it plays within content generation, this is by no means the end of our exploration of the concept. We will expound upon it in greater detail once we build up the proper content identification skills.

Before diving headfirst into the sorting of content as a fully established and conceptualized item, there is one more law worth mentioning. This law, while not quite as intrinsically linked to the diagnosis of content as the previous, still remains a pivotal aspect of content analysis. Consider it a kind of secret "fourth filter" of the EFC test, fully capable of preventing an action from achieving content status under the right circumstances. We refer to this law as the *First Day Rule*.

The First Day Rule

The start of a new *Fishtank* season is as exciting as it is informative. New Fish, new setting, and new hope of content to come. Unfortunately, exposure to mainline *Fishtank*, especially after the relatively long waiting period in between seasons, can muddle our ability to effectively analyze content.

The *Fishtank* offseason, that is the time between mainline releases, typically plays upon the mystery of the season that is to come. Whether done intentionally or unintentionally, the lack of information given to the fanbase goes a long way in driving up current anticipation and future engagement by putting the fanbase's hype into a pressure cooker. From a marketing perspective, this is a great thing. The excitement is palpable, but the intensity of this excitement interferes with how one analyzes actions in the earliest moments of a new season.

Those in charge of the show seem very particular about giving any details about the new Fish, their personalities, their identities, or any character traits that might otherwise prep the audience for what social intermingling they are about to see on screen. Assuming no major leaks have taken place, the uninformed exposure to a new cast and the fervor that is to follow will inevitably result in biases when analyzing the earliest of their actions.

Furthermore, the near-complete cessation of content between *Fishtank* seasons can dull the viewer's sense of content determination. In a way we unwillingly, but necessarily, experience content withdrawal during the offseason. Enough time has elapsed without a mainline season that we're itching to get our fix on screen. Withdrawal symptoms might briefly be satiated with the occasional offshoot, but they never leave us fully satisfied.

Our tolerance needs to once again be rebuilt in order to set our viewing expectations back to baseline. Because of this weak tolerance and intense craving for content, actions we would usually deem as having failed the EFC test can seem riveting. Not because of the quality on display, but because of the mere notion that *Fishtank* and the anticipation of future entertainment it brings is once again in action.

The first day of any season is undoubtedly going to be a messy affair both emotionally and practically. More likely than not, technical issues involving cameras and audio are still being worked out. This substandard visual and audio performance interrupts how we see the flow of content, assuming there is any with how awkwardly the Fish are introduced.

Fish are introduced sporadically throughout the day and have yet to get fully acclimated to the new environment. Sometimes it takes well into the night before all Fish have arrived. While a season usually has at least one or two Fish extroverted enough to break the ice, it's still not enough to overshadow the uncomfortable nature of early social interaction and the long bouts of awkward silence that follow.

Even assuming timely introductions, the Fish have yet to establish themselves as defined figures to the audience. Not enough time has passed to distinguish behavior that hints at content generation potential from the quirks or habits the Fish individually display. The intoxicating mixture of new-season excitement and getting acquainted with the new contestants makes it seem like every action by default is unique and holding UREV. Our view is distorted.

Many viewers, myself included, can mistake the excitement of new-season potential for content quality during the awkward early phase of a season still finding its footing. A Fish exploring their

new environment a little too eagerly is enough to throw viewers into a laughing fit. Two Fish of the opposite sex just sitting near each other evokes imagery of potential romance, sending the audience into a frenzy. These feelings are exacerbated under *Fishtank's* ideal viewing conditions—with a community. The community aspect, while fully enjoyable, only serves to fuel the flames of illusory content sightings.

Because Day 1 usually unfolds in a chaotic manner and because of the emotional weight behind it, I propose, for simplicity's sake, that no actions on the first day should be considered effort-filled. Day 1 produces no content.

This day should be all about acclimation. The Fish, Production, and the audience are either falling back into the rhythm of *Fishtank* or settling into it for the first time. The chaos only serves as a barrier towards genuine content analysis and is far more trouble than it's worth when trying to work around it. Rather than trying to write out some complex scheme to correct for tech troubles, Fish intro spacing, reacclimation bias, and a lack of grounding we can simply take the easy way out and say *Fishtank* truly starts on Day 2.

Day 1 is important, but effectively useless for concrete analysis. And in the grand scheme of a 42-day season, the discounting of one day, especially Day 1, isn't going to radically alter the final analysis.

Summary Before Moving Forward

To recap: content does not have to be entertaining to all viewers in order to be considered content. At its most basic level, an action must pass the EFC test to be given the content label. The most important cornerstone of the EFC test, and all content for that matter, is UREV. A viewer may like a Fish's personality or their specific quirks, but unless the action a Fish is performing passes the EFC test, it cannot be considered content.

Therefore, the path from action to content we have laid out goes as follows:

1. An action is performed by a Fish.
2. This action is put through the EFC test and the First Day Rule.
3. If the action clears the filters present in step two, it is labeled as content.

Now that we finally have a way to distinguish between unnoteworthy actions and the effort-filled actions that make up the most elemental parts of the content ecosystem, we can start to expand. Our analysis can now shift to effort-filled actions specifically. We know these actions are content, but content surely isn't a monolith upon closer examination. Rather, we can view the specific attributes of a piece of content to give it a distinguished identity. Three main criteria exist, of which a piece of content can be sorted into one or more depending on the prerequisites they meet. This brings us to our next stage in content analysis:

4. A newly formed piece of content is sorted into one or more of three different criteria, giving it a concrete identity.

The Three Criteria

Up to this point, there have been quite a few hints that content is variable. All content is defined by an action's ability to pass the EFC test and related conditions, but once content status is achieved, the effort-filled action can break off into a multitude of different forms.

While the expectations of content stay grounded in the reality TV format *Fishtank* provides, there still exists diversification in what is expected. Some Fish excel in isolation, creating content visible only to the eyes of the viewer. Other Fish thrive in social situations, where their extroversion or lack of social awareness makes for a specific kind of content generation.

At the individual level, one piece of content isn't necessarily 'superior' to another, even if fundamentally different in essence. That said, the existence of multiple criteria implies a piece of content can have broader appeal if it hits multiple at once, giving us a potential method of determining content quality in the future. Recognizing that fundamental differences exist in how content takes shape, and that these differences affect how a season unfolds, this work posits that all content can be sorted into one or more of three different criteria:

1. The effort-filled action is recognized as having UREV by *Fishtank* viewers, even with the context of the situation removed.
2. The effort-filled action provides other in-house individuals with an opportunity to respond.
3. The effort-filled action contributes to a major plotline.

As we did with the filters of the EFC test, each criterion of content will be given its own in depth section breaking down its distinguishable features. The complexity of these sections, while digestible, is pronounced when compared to the filters that came before. Instead of focusing on the unified trunk that all content shares, we will now set a course along separate branches, each requiring its own terms and methods of understanding.

Looking at the definitions, we can see the usage of both old (UREV, effort-filled) and new (opportunity to respond, major plotline) terms. Do not let this confuse you. Any word crucial to the understanding of a criterion will be defined in depth within the criterion's own section.

With the preliminaries out of the way, we can now dive into the first and perhaps simplest form of effort-filled action—criterion one content.

Criterion One Content

The effort-filled action is recognized as having UREV by Fishtank viewers, even with the context of the situation removed.

What is Criterion One Content?

Criterion one content is any effort-filled action that maintains UREV even with the context of the action removed. The UREV the action holds can stand on its own merit without a circumstantial

explanation. In short, UREV is fulfilled by being tied directly to the action as spectacle, rather than the context relating to the action being performed.

Because UREV makes the assumption of viewership familiarity with *Fishtank*, the UREV does not have to hold for individuals not familiar with the show, hence the use of '*Fishtank* viewers' in its defining principles. The requirement that UREV persists without context applies only to average *Fishtank* viewers, though there have been cases where certain clips of criterion one content have broken this engagement barrier into the broader public.

The lack of context-dependent enjoyment means criterion one content is highly clippable, which leads me to giving it the oh-so-creative moniker of clippable content. Some notable examples throughout *Fishtank* with no particular preference include schizo rambling, drunkenly singing, attempted (and possibly fulfilled) sexual intercourse, saying ridiculous things no normal person would say, damaging the house in an unexpected way, slipping, falling down stairs, using slurs, projectile vomiting, crying uncontrollably, having mental breakdowns, getting into fights, telling a funny joke, performing impressive talents, being high on narcotics, and much more.

Notice that all of these actions, in some way or another, derive UREV from being a spectacle. The action itself fulfills the UREV standard. Even without context, the entertainment value of these actions is easily recognized. That doesn't mean the entertainment value can't be improved with context. It could very well be that UREV is derived from other context-dependent sources. But for criterion one, the defining characteristic is that UREV remains when context is removed.

Because of how *Fishtank* operates, the analysis of criterion one content (and all content for that matter) requires a separation of morality from entertainment. In the actions listed, quite a few can be deemed morally shaky, some being outright condemnable. Finding entertainment value in somebody's mental breakdown isn't exactly the typical person's reaction. But *Fishtank's* special branding of its genre sets the viewer up for that expectation. Hence the emphasis of UREV existing only for the primed *Fishtank* viewer.

Certain morally dubious actions, whether we like it or not, are ideal engagement material for the fanbase. A good amount of criterion one content falls within morally dubious territory (controversy is spectacle), but we cannot let that discount its validity as content. Moral judgement should not be confused with content analysis.

In past sections I implied that effort-filled actions need not have UREV without context in order to be considered content. I maintain this notion, with one further consideration. If the effort-filled action is ever to be distinguished as criterion one specifically, it must meet an additional requirement and maintain UREV regardless of environmental context.

The central principle of criterion one content is that UREV stems from the action itself, not from surrounding circumstances, relationships, or narrative context. A fight is entertaining because it's a fight. A mental breakdown holds UREV because it's a mental breakdown. No additional

information is needed to recognize the entertainment value, even if information could enhance it. UREV of criterion one content is intrinsic to the action itself.

Logically, if the UREV is truly based on the inherent spectacle of the action rather than its context, the UREV should hold even with context introduced. This claim is mostly true, but there is one exception where context can annihilate the action's UREV.

While not always the case, criterion one content can be highly replicable. Content with a low bar of entry like the use of slurs, peculiar tics, or the aforementioned schizo ramblings can be repeated ad nauseam if a Fish lacks the inhibitions to hold back. All of these actions hold UREV with context removed and can absolutely be considered criterion one content, but we must keep in mind the Law of Diminishing Content Returns. If repetitious in the extreme, these actions will eventually become functionally basic, losing the UREV they once had.

Criterion one content is especially prone to falling victim to this law. We must therefore consider the history of an action (how many times it's been performed) when determining whether it still maintains context-independent UREV. No doubt there is some irony here, as we use contextual information of past repetition to assess whether the action itself remains entertaining without context.

This is why it's important that criterion one UREV holds both with and without context. You'll notice criterion one's definition says, "...even with the context of the situation removed." The use of 'even with' here implies UREV must also exist when context is present, including the action's history of repetition. If we only verified UREV without context, we would miss actions that have become functionally basic through the Law of Diminishing Content Returns, resulting in misapplication of the content label.

Additionally, one must understand that not every clipped action, even those that gain mass popularity, is necessarily criterion one content. There have been scenarios where Fish gather a notable amount of fans who become obsessed with their every action, regardless of UREV presence. These viewers find a niche enjoyment in even the most basic of their Fish's actions. The EFC test, specifically the first filter and second filter, ensures the consistent ability to sort these clips from those that meet the criterion one standards.

In relation to popular clips, we must also take into account the role of fan edits and memes. While by no means a common occurrence, there have been cases where the mundanity of a Fish is embraced as a kind of anti-content, viewed as entertaining because of the blatant subversion of *Fishtank* expectations. Clips of non-content actions can be edited or shared in such a way as to elicit a positive reaction from viewers similar to the impact of UREV, but this resemblance is only superficial.

The recognizable entertainment value created through fan edits and memes comes from fan creativity rather than the action's own spectacle. A Fish's mundane actions cannot be carried to

content status by way of fan support. Therefore, we must not confuse UREV created through fan talents with UREV intrinsic to the Fish's original action.

While the analysis of criterion one content is made relatively simple because of its inherent UREV in the absence of context, the next two criteria necessitate context-based UREV as a prerequisite for proper classification. The distinction of criterion one content is based upon this pronounced variance. Context-based content has a set of intricacies and outside variables not present under the criterion one umbrella. With that being said, we will now move into criterion two content.

Criterion Two Content

The effort-filled action provides other in-house individuals with an opportunity to respond.

What is a Catalyst?

At its core, a catalyst on *Fishtank* is any action performed by any in-house individual that provides other in-house individuals with a valid opportunity to respond. Because of how our framework is oriented, we primarily focus on catalysts created by Fish in particular, though other in-house individuals (e.g. Production, Freeloaders, etc) also have the capability to create them.

By definition, catalysts are actions that set others up to give a reaction, even if the catalyst-providing Fish didn't intend to provoke a reaction. One of the most common forms a catalyst takes is through verbal expression, such as a Fish talking to another in-house individual, allowing them to respond in some way.

But catalysts are not limited to just verbal expression. There also exists a diverse subsection of physical catalysts, actions that utilize a combination of human force and physical contact to provide a response opportunity. Each type of catalyst, verbal and physical, will be given their own in-depth sections.

Because of how *Fishtank* is set up, the concept of a 'valid opportunity to respond' opens up a philosophical can of worms. Specifically, Production, while being an in-house individual, acts as a semi-omniscient figure due to their access to cameras, fan-made clips of past events, and recaps of actions that have already come to pass. Because of their semi-omniscient role in the *Fishtank* universe, one might assume any action is made into a catalyst simply because Production almost certainly has the opportunity to respond to it, if not now then in the future.

I want to assure the reader these considerations have been taken into account. The tension Production's presence puts on this framework will eventually be addressed. But for now, our main focus is laying out the fundamentals of criterion two content so that one can identify it, to better understand its unique role within the greater content ecosystem. For the time being, we will treat Production's universal presence as a non-factor.

A distinguishing feature of criterion two content is that its foundational action must allow for people *within the house* to respond in some way, whether that be a fellow Fish, member of Production, a Freeloader, a visiting fan, or members of the general public brought in on short notice. In our framework, Fish-created catalysts are our primary focus, but the potential responder to these catalysts only has to be an in-house individual. A catalyst that never provides a valid opportunity to respond is not a catalyst, it remains an action in isolation, discounting it from ever becoming criterion two content.

There also exist catalysts where the opportunity to respond isn't limited to the immediate present, but something that can be discovered in the future. While this isn't true for quick-fading actions like those stemming from speech, certain physical catalysts can leave footprints behind, giving an opportunity to respond to anyone who eventually encounters them. How quickly a valid opportunity to respond fades is a central subject of criterion two content analysis. This concept falls under the domain of *natural means*, and it will also be discussed in detail when it becomes unignorable.

Because an action's identity as a catalyst is contingent on it providing a valid opportunity to respond, and because the provision of such opportunities isn't always limited to the present, these actions will be referred to as 'potential catalysts' since their status as a catalyst is not yet determined. These actions have yet to provide a valid opportunity to respond, but the possibility of an in-house individual naturally encountering them (and therefore being given a valid response opportunity) still exists. They cannot be discounted as a catalyst just yet, but they also have yet to meet the conditions necessary to be labeled as one. This terminology will be especially useful during examples where an action's identity as a catalyst is still being explored.

Additionally, because we limit valued responses to in-house individuals, interactions with fans through TTS are off the table in terms of fulfilling the opportunity to respond condition. Similarly, non-human entities like animals do not count as individuals capable of conscious response, making them disqualified from fulfilling this condition. Finally, humans incapable of giving a response, such as dead people or those in a vegetative state, by their very nature, cannot engage with any sort of catalyst. They too are unable to fulfill the valid opportunity to respond requirement.

Since they don't require intent, catalysts technically encapsulate all actions, including those not deemed effort-filled, so long as they provide a valid opportunity for another in-house individual to respond. Every catalyst is built upon an action. A transitive property of this structure is that, in the same way basic actions exponentially outnumber effort-filled actions, catalysts built upon basic actions outnumber those that aren't.

Catalysts that exist without passing the EFC test are known as *basic catalysts*, and they cannot become content. A simple greeting, like one Fish going up to another and saying, "hello," with no greater meaning is a catalyst. It sets the other Fish up to respond with an action of their own. However, we can recognize that saying, "hello" lacks any form of UREV and therefore as an action fails the EFC test.

Because they are built on actions, basic catalysts are no different from any other action that fails the EFC test. In this manner, basic catalysts are so common that the brain overlooks them as notable, instead categorizing them as background noise. But in the same way that basic actions can become non-basic with the addition of some kind of unique flair, basic catalysts have equal potential of being raised to the level of an effort-filled catalyst when a unique flair is added.

While the potential exploration of basic catalysts as a phenomenon is no doubt rich in depth of subject matter, the specific brand of catalysts relevant to content generation are those built upon effort-filled actions.

An *effort-filled catalyst* is any catalyst built upon an effort-filled action. These are the catalysts we can label as criterion two content. However, the UREV of criterion two content is based on different premises. With an effort-filled catalyst, the action's UREV is dependent on a relational variable. Criterion two content is not created until the effort-filled action provides a verified opportunity to respond to somebody else. This relational context and the viewer's eager anticipation of a potential response to follow is where part of the UREV is derived.

With criterion one content, the spectacle of the action itself fulfills the UREV condition. With criterion two content, the UREV of the action is at least partly related to the expectation of response, whether it be *immediate* or *anticipatory*. Viewers recognize the potential for UREV when someone crosses a boundary or creates tension, but this recognition goes unrealized unless somebody else is there to potentially respond to it. The UREV exists in a latent form where we sense that something entertaining could happen, but it isn't fully realized until the opportunity to respond materializes.

So then, if an effort-filled action is performed in isolation (without witnesses), while it may hold UREV, this UREV exists independently of any relational context. While this action might qualify under another criterion, its existence in isolation means it failed to provide any opportunity to respond. Because the UREV being recognized is unrelated to an expectation of potential response, the action cannot be criterion two content.

For effort-filled catalysts with witnesses present at creation, UREV is typically immediate. That is to say, the audience recognizes a present opportunity to respond, and UREV is realized instantly from an expectation of response in that moment. In future sections, you will find that this immediate form of UREV realization is the standard case for verbal catalysts and a specific type of physical catalysts noted as ephemeral, though some exceptions do exist.

But not all opportunities to respond are immediate. Sometimes UREV can be anticipatory, dependent on a future discovery in order to be realized. In these cases, the opportunity to respond lies in a dormant state with the expectation of response until both are brought into effect. The action's identity as a catalyst is undetermined for the time being, but once uncovered, the opportunity to respond is in full play, and the anticipatory UREV is realized.

For anticipatory UREV, think of it this way: the action creates the conditions for UREV, but the opportunity for others to respond defines the action as a catalyst and allows UREV to be fully realized in that context. Until that moment, the action hovers in a pre-content state where it is recognizable as potentially effort-filled, but not yet content. While the concept of anticipatory UREV is less relevant to verbal catalysts, it will be central to the physical catalyst section.

To be counted as criterion two content then, all catalysts, both physical and verbal, must fulfill the following conditions:

1. The action the catalyst is built upon passes the EFC test (with UREV at least partly derived from expectation of response).
2. The effort-filled catalyst gives an in-house individual the opportunity to respond.
3. The opportunity to respond exists through natural means.

These conditions will be central to our analysis. Even though variations in how the conditions are met exist depending on the catalyst created, the core validity of these three rules will remain intact as we move from section to section. The term 'natural means' has everything to do with the validity of an opportunity to respond, and while the term hasn't been fully fleshed out yet, we'll explore what it means and why it matters as we move along. Just keep the term in the back of your mind for now, and know that it serves an important purpose.

To start, a catalyst's identity as criterion two content does not hinge on the response—or lack thereof—it provokes. Only a valid opportunity to respond is required for criterion two content to be made.

Criterion Two Content and Lack of Response

Criterion two content concerns the catalyst itself, not the response it generates. The response is a separate action attributed to the responder, not the catalyst's creator, and is therefore irrelevant. As long as the original effort-filled catalyst provides an opportunity for some in-house individual to respond (through natural means), it can be considered criterion two content.

One would be hard pressed to invalidate the content generated by a contestant punching someone in the face if the person being punched has no reaction whatsoever. While an extreme example, this scenario demonstrates the absurdity of interpreting content generation based on the subjective reaction of an individual. The catalyst was created. It passed the EFC test. It gave the other Fish a valid opportunity to respond. The other Fish refused to do so. Even still, the original catalyst has immediate UREV. Its classification as criterion two content is built upon its relational context—the interaction between a Fish and another individual.

The same logic applies when responses are insignificant. If Fish 1 provides an effort-filled catalyst for Fish 2, and Fish 2 responds in a simplistic manner, then we cannot invalidate Fish 1's criterion two content generation.

Catalysts are viewed independently of responses and vice-versa. The catalyst creator is not credited with the responder's reaction, only their own catalyst. The original catalyst is viewed as an isolated instance rather than claiming ownership over reactions that stem from it. If Fish 1 provides a fairly standard effort-filled catalyst, and Fish 2 responds with one of the greatest pieces of content ever witnessed on the show, Fish 1 isn't suddenly credited for Fish 2's content. Both Fish have created content as separate individuals; therefore each receives full recognition for their own contributions.

Every catalyst can be sorted into one of two categories: verbal and physical. While they share core properties, there exist fundamental differences between the two, features that change how we evaluate them as criterion two content. Because these catalyst types function differently, this division is an ingrained feature of criterion two content analysis, and both types therefore warrant equal attention.

The Criterion Two Content Split

How long a valid opportunity to respond lasts depends on the type of catalyst. The chance of an in-house individual witnessing a potential verbal catalyst, thus being given a valid opportunity to respond, is limited to the immediate timeframe in which the potential verbal catalyst is created. A potential verbal catalyst does not reverberate throughout the house hours after it comes into being. If Fish 1 creates a potential verbal catalyst and nobody is around to witness it, the chance of creating a valid opportunity to respond by way of this specific action is extinguished. Here, relational UREV is dependent on an immediate response opportunity, so if no such opportunity exists then criterion two content cannot be generated.

Certain potential physical catalysts leave behind evidence of their existence after they are created. Rather than being destined for annihilation if no opportunity to respond is immediately present, these potential catalysts can leave a lasting impact on the environment around them, leaving the door open for a valid opportunity to respond at some point in the future. This difference alone justifies treating verbal and physical catalysts as distinct items.

For now, we will start our analysis with verbal criterion two content, as the verbal catalyst's tendency to fade makes it an easier concept to understand.

Verbal Criterion Two Content

Verbal criterion two content is any effort-filled action that primarily utilizes verbal expression, the emulation of verbal expression, vocal sounds, or language as its driving force, while also providing an opportunity to respond for another in-house individual (through natural means).

Most verbal catalysts are ephemeral. That is to say, they require direct witnessing to give rise to a response. Despite the name, not all verbal catalysts require the use of vocalization. While actions done in the presence of others like screaming, talking, or simple utterances are obviously verbal by nature, there also exists non-vocal expressions that are both short-lasting

and communicative. Examples include hand signals, expressive body language, deliberate gestures, and facial expressions.

Even though these are generally considered physical expressions in everyday life, our framework treats them as verbal because they share the defining characteristics: they are ephemeral and require an immediate witness to provide an opportunity to respond.

A verbal catalyst must meet the following conditions in order to be considered criterion two content:

1. The action the verbal catalyst is built upon passes the EFC test (with UREV at least partly derived from expectation of response).
2. The effort-filled verbal catalyst gives an in-house individual the opportunity to respond.
3. The opportunity to respond exists through natural means.

Keeping things simple, we will be focusing on conditions one and two to start. The third condition, while a fundamental attribute of all criterion two content, brings into play some complicated questions. Natural means explores the temporal dimension of response opportunities and whether potential catalysts can properly generate a valid opportunity to respond long after the action itself has faded from existence.

For now, our examples will all have built-in immediate response opportunities; the time between catalyst creation and opportunity to respond is zero. In the presence of a proper witness then, UREV is immediate rather than anticipatory. The witness views the catalyst as soon as it comes into being, making their response opportunity completely valid.

Earlier, I established that the opportunity to respond created by a potential verbal catalyst is temporally limited. The potential catalyst itself fades quickly, but if a witness is present at creation, the opportunity to respond exists in that moment. The fading refers to what happens after that initial moment if no one is present. While potential verbal catalysts typically fade immediately, there is a special exception: certain verbal catalysts can provide valid opportunities to respond well into the future. This involves anticipatory UREV and natural means, which will be analyzed in a dedicated subsection.

In the case of presence but no witnessing—for example, an in-house individual being on the receiving end of a potential verbal catalyst but incapable of hearing it—they never had the opportunity to respond and criterion two content was not generated. By definition, the effort-filled action cannot be considered a catalyst, as it failed to provide an opportunity to respond.

I will provide several examples to address possible points of confusion when trying to understand what is and what isn't verbal criterion two content. We will assume those on the receiving end of the verbal catalysts clearly witness the catalyst's existence. Additionally, we will presume that the catalysts in our examples neither violate the First Day Rule nor the Law of Diminishing Content Returns.

So what does verbal criterion two content really look like? As an easy example, let's say we have two Fish named Sam and Goran. On Day 3 of Season X, Goran comes up to Sam and starts talking to him about his dream of producing a reality TV show. In this instance, Goran has created a verbal catalyst that has passed the EFC test. The topic of conversation elevates the action to non-basic, and our assumption of no diminishing returns holds steady. Notably, UREV is realized immediately because Sam is present and has the opportunity to respond to this unique topic.

Whether Sam responds or not remains irrelevant, because the original action on Goran's part meets the listed conditions of verbal criterion two content. Goran has made criterion two content by being the originator of an effort-filled verbal catalyst while giving his fellow contestant the opportunity to respond in whatever way Sam deems fit.

Let's try to complicate things a bit. The new situation is as follows: Goran, while in a room with a group of other Fish, starts ranting to a TTS message sent to him by an audience member. This specific message was criticizing him for the potential monetary consequences of investing 60% of a show's budget into whippets. This annoys the other Fish, but they refuse to voice their grievances. They instead opt to sit on the couch and do nothing. Despite its origin being influenced by TTS, Goran's catalyst still qualifies as criterion two content because:

1. A catalyst that passes the EFC test is established by Goran going on a tangent about whippets.
2. Other in-house individuals (in this case Fish) are present and are therefore given the opportunity to respond to the effort-filled catalyst. Their presence ensures at least part of the UREV is relational.
3. The visible confirmation of their presence is proof of natural means existing (more on this later).

This example demonstrates the non-importance of cause and intent behind a catalyst. Even though Goran's catalyst was sparked by audience commentary, it is no less his. Similarly, even though Goran is not directing his catalyst towards the other Fish, and the Fish are only hearing his words as passive spectators, they still have the full capability of interjecting and giving a response. The opportunity to respond exists regardless of whether the catalyst is directly addressed to them. Although no Fish chooses to respond, criterion two content has still been made.

Let's briefly revisit the EFC test for a moment, as it's easy to confuse the noise surrounding criterion two content with the content itself. Specifically, we must remember that even when a basic catalyst provokes an extreme response, the basic catalyst itself remains nontent (not content). We must distinguish between basic and non-basic actions a catalyst might be built upon. We will presume Goran interacts with Sam in a way similar to that of our first example. Goran is the catalyst creator, and Sam is the responder.

In this example, Goran says “hello” to Sam. For no deeper reason, this annoys Sam to a great degree, resulting in Sam fiercely voicing his displeasure. Sam then throws Goran through a wall. Although Goran’s action resulted in Sam responding with a set of effort-filled actions all on his own, the catalyst that set Sam off was basic in nature. The foundational action Goran’s verbal catalyst was built upon fails to pass the EFC test. In this instance, Goran did not create criterion two content.

But what about Sam’s response? Recall that, in the presence of Goran, Sam voiced his displeasure (an effort-filled catalyst with clear opportunity for Goran to respond) and performed the very subtle action of throwing Goran through a nearby wall (physical catalyst with clear opportunity for Goran to respond). Because Sam provided two effort-filled catalysts, both giving Goran a valid opportunity to respond, Sam has created criterion two content.

Goran’s catalyst wasn’t effort-filled, but the response Sam gave to Goran’s basic catalyst was. As established earlier, catalysts are viewed independently of responses. Even though Goran’s basic catalyst set off this chain of content from Sam, that does not mean Goran’s basic catalyst at the start of this reaction chain is itself content. We cannot get our lines crossed. The analyzed actions are assigned to the Fish who created them, and each Fish is awarded the full value of their action.

Examples like these pop up thousands of times in every *Fishtank* season. Because certain Fish lack inhibitions, the ability to perceive social cues, or just have mental illnesses, it’s not uncommon to see these Fish make content in reaction to even the most basic of catalysts. Fish A might act completely uninterested when interacting with Fish B, seeing it as going through the motions of mundane social courtesy. But Fish B might fail to recognize this disinterest, responding disproportionately with energetic off-the-wall content.

These examples provide us with brief glimpses into future parts where we will be grouping the Fish based on their relationship with content generation. Getting back on track, our examples so far have involved Fish-on-Fish interactions. A Fish creates a catalyst, and other Fish have a valid opportunity to respond. But recall, effort-filled catalysts only require that *some* in-house individual(s) have the valid opportunity to respond. This means that Freeloaders and Production can fulfill the opportunity to respond condition.

Most in-house individuals are limited by a set of *Fishtank* rules when it comes to viewing past events. Fish, most Freeloaders, and usually special guests, once in the house, are bound to standard knowledge; they have no access to devices or up-to-date information that would otherwise enhance their current perception of the show and the social dynamics therein. This is done to keep the personalities and actions of Fish feeling genuine while leaving them vulnerable for future gaslighting.

When it comes to in-house individuals with standard knowledge in relation to potential verbal catalysts, if none of these individuals witness the potential catalyst’s inception, then the opportunity to respond to that specific action disappears for them entirely. Perhaps the action

can be repeated word-for-word at some point in the future, but for the action created in that *specific* instance, its potential for catalyzing a response opportunity, and therefore becoming criterion two content, has been extinguished.

With individuals under the umbrella of standard *Fishtank* knowledge, potential verbal catalysts function as normal. If they witnessed it directly, a valid opportunity to respond existed and the catalyst has been fulfilled. If not, no such opportunity was presented, and the potential catalyst is just an action in isolation. However, those who work above the umbrella of standard knowledge throw a wrench into the machine.

Production has no limitation on what actions they can see, hear, or otherwise witness. The ephemeral nature of a potential verbal catalyst is made completely irrelevant if an in-house individual, like Production, has the ability to access earlier timeframes to witness it. Because of their unfettered access to cameras, clips, updates, and the up-to-date discussions that take place in fan circles, Production effectively always has the opportunity to respond, even if it's not immediate.

This poses a problem. If Production always has the opportunity to respond, then, by definition, all effort-filled actions become criterion two content. The opportunity to respond condition is always fulfilled. To avoid a kind of content inflation where the category of criterion two content becomes meaningless, we must find a method of criterion two content analysis that accounts for Production's near omniscience.

Verbal Criterion Two Content With Production as a Responder

Unlike the in-house individuals who are limited by what they initially see and hear in the present moment, the scope of Production's knowledge of potential catalysts, past and present, is by default superior to others in the house. We must therefore adjust our framework for criterion two content analysis when Production is in the picture.

Let's assume Fish 1 has a preference for isolation. They are typically seen on their own, far out of the witnessing range of other contestants. Fish 1 also has a habit of talking to themselves. Because of Production's access to the cameras and past information, they always have the opportunity to respond to anything Fish 1 says. Let's also say that Fish 1, in this exact moment, is experiencing a brief disconnect from reality, ranting about their own conspiracies surrounding the show. No doubt, this action passes the EFC test, therefore meeting the first requirement of being an effort-filled catalyst.

The flaw one would typically point out here is that Fish 1's effort-filled action, being out of the hearing range of most in-house individuals, seemingly fails to give anyone the opportunity to respond. This would make it an action in isolation rather than a catalyst, discounting it from becoming criterion two content. However, Production, having unlimited access to cameras and outsider knowledge, still has the opportunity to respond to whatever Fish 1 is saying. Does their presence not fulfill the opportunity to respond requirement necessary for Fish 1's action to be criterion two content?

Fish 1 has created a potential verbal catalyst, and has provided an in-house individual (Production) with the opportunity to respond. All the boxes seem to be checked. The problem with this perspective is it results in an overinflation of content generation. If we are to assume Production has a valid opportunity to respond to all effort-filled actions, no matter how niche, then we must consequently assume every effort-filled action that comes into being is, in some way, criterion two content. This fact makes it useless as an analytical tool.

Additionally, we would be assuming that Production is a kind of all-seeing eye—always in the know of what is going on, regardless of the location or spontaneity of the effort-filled action. In reality, we have no idea what cameras Production is viewing, whether or not they understand what's going on, if they're up to date on recent happenings, or even if they're watching at all. We would therefore have to make completely blind guesses as to whether or not Production truly has the opportunity to respond. It's ultimately left to chance to decide.

We can never know if Production has the opportunity to respond unless they do, in fact, respond. This leads to even more confusion, since a verbal catalyst usually doesn't require an actual response from an individual in order to be considered criterion two content, only the opportunity of one. So then, if a Fish provides an effort-filled action on their own, and Production never responds, what reasoning does one realistically attribute to the lack of response?

Did Production have the opportunity to respond but simply elect not to? If so, the action is a catalyst and criterion two content. Or did Production simply never witness the action to begin with, and by extension never have the opportunity to respond? In this latter scenario, the action is not a catalyst and criterion two content has not been made. Both guesses are equally reasonable. We end up with an inconclusive result.

More fundamentally, a potential verbal catalyst with no witness fades out from existence at an astoundingly fast rate. Once it fades, no Fish can naturally come across it and have an opportunity to respond in the present, because the action itself is limited to the past. However, if we were to leave Production's opportunity to respond up for interpretation, we would be infringing upon this subconsciously accepted temporal limit. It would seem that the lack of ability others have to respond doesn't matter, so long as Production has access to past clips.

Who's to say that Production isn't simply taking their time to respond? If a Fish creates an effort-filled action on Day 2 with nobody around to respond, only to have Production respond to this same action on Day 42, under this lax interpretation the Fish has produced criterion two content. The action has long since been dead and buried, and like Dr. Frankenstein, Production has come along and interfered with the cessation of life.

Time has now become an unignorable feature in verbal catalyst analysis. Because we cannot confirm Production had any opportunity to respond, the natural life-cycle of verbal catalysts, once intuitive, is potentially thrown off balance. Before introducing Production, verbal catalysts with witnesses all had a built-in response opportunity. Zero time passed between creation and

an in-house individual's choice to respond. If nobody was present, no opportunity existed, and no content was made. But now with Production's semi-omniscience, they could witness and respond to said action at any future point in the season, creating a temporal gap.

Accounting for these differences, the original rules as to what qualifies as verbal criterion two content begin to shift slightly. In the context of Production being the sole receiver of an opportunity to respond, the potential verbal catalyst does not count as criterion two content generation unless two conditions are met:

1. Production is the intended receiver of an effort-filled potential verbal catalyst (invocation).
2. Production responds to or acknowledges this potential verbal catalyst, providing verifiable proof they had the opportunity to respond.

This differs slightly from our non-Production guidelines as to what constitutes verbal criterion two content. Before introducing Production's presence, time was not a major factor. This made criterion two content simple: the action the catalyst was built upon passed the EFC test, and at least one in-house individual had the valid opportunity to respond. UREV would be relational. That's all we were concerned with. Those who failed to witness the catalyst's creation simply never had the opportunity to respond. These guidelines remain true, but only for in-house individuals who do not have verifiable access to Production-level knowledge.

When dealing with Production, the requirements of verification change. The action still must pass the EFC test and have relational UREV, but we now require specific intent (Production being an invoked target of the catalyst), and a verifiable response from Production. If before no invocation or response was needed, why the change?

For in-house individuals with standard knowledge, we can verify opportunity to respond very easily. They either witnessed the action when it formed, or they didn't. UREV stemming from the expectation of response was immediately present in the moment. But Production is not bound to standard knowledge, as they have the means to view past events with ease. Without Production physically being present at catalyst creation, we cannot verify a response opportunity ever existed unless they visibly confirm it. The act of confirmation is itself a response.

Rather than being a substantive rule change, this response requirement is an evidentiary standard to combat the unknowability problem. The requirement for a valid opportunity to respond remains constant, but we need Production's acknowledgement or response as evidence the opportunity existed. Until a verifiable response is given, we will presume no criterion two content involving Production as the responder has been created. The action will remain in a potential-catalyst state.

A response doesn't just have to be a direct interaction with the Fish who created the catalyst. Any verifiable acknowledgment of the catalyst, in the presence of others or privately expressed to the audience, will do.

The intent behind the verbal catalyst also becomes an important half of the equation. With only our verification standard, Production, by simply giving a response to every effort-filled action they witness, can still create mass criterion two inflation. The problem of every effort-filled action being criterion two, while weakened with help of verification, still persists.

The persistence of the problem has a lot to do with ease of acknowledgement. Response verification isn't limited to live reactions performed on camera. It would also constitute low-effort responses like a Production member sending a TTS message in response to a Fish's action, even without the Fish knowing Production sent it. This is a simple acknowledgment that proves response opportunity, but still highly replicable given Production's infinite access to TTS and their documented use of both real and fake accounts to send hundreds of messages throughout a given season.

Additionally, Production's constant but invisible presence creates a fundamental issue with the UREV of the potential verbal catalyst. Typically with effort-filled verbal catalysts, UREV is immediate. As soon as the catalyst is created a valid opportunity to respond is there. The audience registers UREV because the expectation of response is built into the relational context of the action.

Not so with Production as the sole responder. Because the opportunity to respond to vocal actions fades so quickly, viewers fail to register any UREV derived from expectation of response. UREV cannot be immediate because nobody is around to witness the action. And because potential verbal catalysts leave no trace, viewers don't anticipate a future response opportunity either. In the eyes of the viewer, this is purely an action done in isolation.

In short, even if the action holds UREV, no part of that UREV is relational. There is no expectation of response. We fully categorize this action as being outside the catalyst + response cycle. For that reason, the action cannot be labeled criterion two content.

When not present on screen, Production is effectively relegated to background infrastructure in the eyes of the viewer. Our attention is naturally drawn to the Fish, not the invisible crew behind the camera. Because of this, Production's potential response is never factored into how we perceive isolated actions by default. The viewer isn't going to think, "oh, Production might respond to this isolated action created by this Fish," because that logic would have to apply to literally every action done in isolation.

Even if Production technically has the opportunity to respond to an action, that doesn't mean the response opportunity turns the action into a catalyst. It could be that their opportunity to respond is invalid. If an action is registered as completely isolated by the audience, no form of relational UREV exists in the first place. If Production responds to this action, there's no relational UREV being realized. Yes, they technically have the opportunity to respond, but it's not a valid one.

To ensure we register a potential catalyst as having relational UREV to begin with, we use invocation as a filter. If a Fish invokes Production directly, the expectation of their response is

catapulted to the front of the viewer's mind. The very nature of the callout sets us up to anticipate a response from Production. In this way, anticipatory UREV exists, and has the potential to be realized. Production's response opportunity, if it exists, will be valid.

These verification methods (invocation and verification of response) work in tandem with each other. Invocation makes the response opportunity valid, and verification ensures the response opportunity exists. Both are used specifically in situations where Production is invisible. That is to say, we look to both intent and response only when Production members were not physically present to witness the action directly.

Therefore, verbal criterion two content involving an invisible Production must meet these standards:

1. The potential verbal catalyst invokes the invisible Production. (Giving them the valid opportunity to respond).
2. The action the potential verbal catalyst is built upon must pass the EFC test (anticipatory UREV from response expectation).
3. Production must provide a response or acknowledgment to prove opportunity to respond existed.

If no future response or acknowledgement takes place by the end of a season, we automatically default to the assumption that Production never had the opportunity to respond, and no criterion two content was generated.

However, these Production-specific conditions change when Production is physically present (visible) at the creation of the potential verbal catalyst. An example would be one of the show's hosts being in the presence of a Fish suffering a mental breakdown.

In such cases, we no longer need the verification of an opportunity to respond. We can see with our own eyes that a Production member is in range and has witnessed an effort-filled potential catalyst come into being. Their presence makes the action into a catalyst. The opportunity to respond is confirmed right then and there, so no actual response is required.

We still must keep the requirement of invocation intact. Assuming the Production member is the only one who witnesses this action, they must be an intended receiver of it for criterion two content to be generated—the Fish must be invoking them directly. This is done to ensure the opportunity to respond remains valid, as without invocation, no relational UREV involving them is created, and therefore no valid opportunity exists.

If the requirement of intent were not the case, Production would effectively be eavesdropping if they choose not to respond. But how is this a problem? If Fish 1 was talking to themselves in private (potential verbal catalyst), and Fish 2 was eavesdropping outside the door (opportunity to respond), so long as the verbal catalyst provided by Fish 1 was effort-filled, it would count as

criterion two content generation, no intent required. Fish 1 wasn't invoking Fish 2, yet Fish 2's presence combined with Fish 1's effort-filled ramblings resulted in criterion two content.

Why then, if we switch Fish 2 out with a Production member, is intent required now? Fish 1 still provides a potential verbal catalyst, and Production's presence is direct evidence of an opportunity to respond. Why is no criterion two content generated?

The explanation lies within how Production is inherently viewed. *Fishtank* is a show grounded in reality TV expectations, the first and foremost of which is contestant interaction. While some members of Production do get involved for directing purposes, these members are designed to be socially non-existent despite physical presence. Their responsibilities are limited to things like watching the show unfold and occasionally inserting themselves or providing the means to encourage more Fish-to-Fish interaction. Even the most 'involved' members of Production are meant to be tools used to derive more content from the Fish.

Production, and whatever quirky hijinks they get up to, is not the focus of the show. A Production member might do something entertaining, funny, engaging, or unexpected. But this work is not interested in whatever content Production has created. Nobody talks about whether Sam, Jet, Ben, or Chris are great content makers. Their value is measured in relation to the Fish—how effective they are at nourishing each Fish's content-making abilities.

Production is relegated to the background by both viewer and contestant alike, only acknowledged in terms of their success as a tool or their position as a central authority beyond interpersonal dynamics. Exceptions do exist where Production has forcefully inserted themselves, undercutting the behind-the-scenes role they're meant to fulfill within the *Fishtank* machine. But this is a violation of what is expected of them: Provide challenges, record entertaining moments, and make sure the show stays on course with the occasional nudge.

In many cases, Production members are physically present but socially invisible by design. A Fish talking near a cameraman isn't creating a valid opportunity to respond for them as the cameraman is background infrastructure meant to be blocked out and ignored. No relational UREV exists since the expected role of the cameraman is passive observer rather than direct participant. UREV cannot be tied to an expectation of response when no such expectation exists. If not the case, then Production's functional presence would once again be inflating the status of all nearby Fish actions.

Once invoked, the expectation of Production passivity shifts to one of action. Relational UREV now exists since the audience consciously notes the Production member as having an active role to play socially. When they are visibly present, UREV is immediate rather than anticipatory. This is because Production's presence confirms an immediate opportunity to respond rather than one that might happen in the future.

The solution then is straightforward. Unless the Fish choose to bring Production into their social game by invoking them directly, Production cannot properly fulfill the valid opportunity to

respond condition. Only the deliberate invocation of Production counts, that way Production's functional presence won't result in the overestimation of criterion two content.

For Production's visible presence, verification works as follows:

1. The verbal catalyst invokes the visible Production member(s) (giving them a valid opportunity to respond).
2. The action the verbal catalyst is built upon must pass the EFC test (immediate UREV from response expectation).
3. Production's presence proves opportunity to respond exists.

Timing of Production's Response

Finally, it's important to address the timing of Production's response to a verbal catalyst. Assuming an effort-filled verbal catalyst meets the standard of direct invocation, the duration of time between the creation of the verbal catalyst and Production's acknowledgment/response does not matter.

At first, ignoring the time gap might seem a little strange, especially given my earlier argument that Production risks infringing upon the inherent life expectancy of verbal catalysts when responding to potential verbal catalysts not invoking them. But there is an explanation.

The nature of a potential verbal catalyst is immediate decay without the presence of at least one other in-house individual to witness it. No presence means no existing opportunity to respond, no existing opportunity to respond means no criterion two content. Production, I posited, could not artificially inflate just any potential verbal catalyst's life expectancy from the mere suggestion that they might have witnessed it through the live feed.

I stand by this statement. The unseen potential of Production responding to a potential verbal catalyst, let alone one not intended for them, is a violation of the nature of criterion two content. It is a Frankenstein scenario. However, the essence of the potential verbal catalyst is altered when Production is invoked. In either case—whether Production is within range as the primary recipient, or huddled away behind a camera witnessing the potential catalyst later—invocation gives the potential verbal catalyst protection from immediate annihilation. We will explore why time doesn't matter in both scenarios.

When Production is already within witnessing range of an effort-filled catalyst that invokes them, the logic is straightforward. In such a scenario no direct response is required for criterion two content generation. Production's physical presence has already verified their opportunity to respond, and invocation makes it valid. So whether Production replies in seconds or waits forty days, the Fish's invocation combined with Production's visible presence confirms criterion two content has been generated.

But what about the far more bewildering scenario of Production being invisible during invocation? Invocation makes any Production response opportunity valid, but we have yet to

confirm if an opportunity exists. In this case, we can only rely on some form of Production response/acknowledgement to the potential catalyst in order to prove the opportunity to respond exists. The identity of this action is up in the air until we receive confirmation.

Two possibilities can unfold from this set up. Either Production acknowledges the potential verbal catalyst within the season's runtime, allowing anticipatory UREV to be realized and criterion two content to be made, or they don't. In the latter outcome, no criterion two content has been generated. The season reached its conclusion before any opportunity to respond was confirmed and the UREV could be realized, meaning multiple conditions for criterion two content went unfulfilled.

Example: If Fish 1 starts ranting to the camera about how terrible Production is on Day 5 (invocation + potential effort-filled verbal catalyst) and Production acknowledges it on Day 35 (proof of opportunity to respond, realization of anticipatory UREV), it is still considered criterion two content generation by Fish 1 despite the time elapsed between the catalyst's creation and Production's confirmed acknowledgement.

Overlooking time ensures consistency and maintains a strong theoretical foundation for our framework. We cannot set a deadline by which Production must acknowledge the potential catalyst directed at them, as doing so would be completely subjective. At what point do we declare anticipatory UREV can no longer be realized? After a few minutes? Hours? Days? If we set the cut-off line at say, ten days, why does the potential verbal catalyst become content if Production acknowledges it after 9 days 23 hours and 59 minutes, but not 10 days on the dot? Does the difference of seconds really hold that much weight? Is the initial presence of anticipatory UREV stemming from the Fish's invocation somehow invalidated because Production failed to respond fast enough?

To avoid endless philosophical debate about the temporal nature of potential verbal catalysts invoking Production, it's easier to just look towards the indisputable borders of a season and put the cut-off there. The cams go down, and the offseason begins. An opportunity to respond can no longer be demonstrated since the season as a whole has concluded. What's done is done, since the season ceases any and all content output after its finale.

But Production's special status raises the question: If Production can't fulfill the opportunity to respond condition for verbal catalysts not invoking them, could they perhaps "resurrect" the action as a potential verbal catalyst through their semi-omniscient abilities, raising the possibility of it being enshrined as an actual catalyst?

For example, Production witnesses Fish 1 talking badly about Fish 2 through use of the cameras. Fish 2, and every other in-house individual with standard knowledge, was out of witnessing range. Production, while technically a witness of this potential catalyst, was never invoked by it. In this instance, the potential catalyst, failing to create a valid opportunity to respond, dies immediately after it is created. However, could Production use their exclusive access to footage and information as a means to resurrect it? If Production decides to tell Fish 2

about Fish 1's private rant, or perhaps decides to show them a clip of it, would it count as criterion two content generation by Fish 1?

In doing this, Production would be unnaturally extending the potential catalyst's lifespan. Fish 2, or any standard in-house individual exposed to the action post-mortem, never would have had an opportunity to respond without the assistance of Production's semi-omniscience. Like a trickster god, Production has violated the natural order of their own universe in hopes of stirring up content long past its expiration date.

This flagrant violation of nature leads us into our next section—Natural Means.

Verbal Catalysts and Natural Means

Natural means is the ability for an in-house individual to validly fulfill the opportunity to respond through naturally available methods based on their default knowledge and access. For in-house individuals with standard knowledge (e.g. Fish), methods are limited to physical presence and sensory range. Production's methods stretch beyond what's considered standard, including things such as viewing cameras, clip review, and access to online spaces dedicated to community discussion.

In the previous section, we were exploring some situations related to this concept. If Production uses their semi-omniscience to respond to a potential catalyst not invoking them, their response opportunity was never valid to begin with—there's nothing to fulfill. No relational UREV exists, no expectation of response is present, and as a result no natural means is found. Therefore criterion two content cannot be generated. Production's access to special knowledge is irrelevant if there's no potential catalyst to respond to.

Natural means can be violated when semi-omniscient entities (like Production) artificially provide information to individuals with standard knowledge that would otherwise be inaccessible or implausible to discover, such as showing a Fish clips of actions they couldn't have witnessed.

Natural means is a fundamental prerequisite for all criterion two content, on equal footing with the existence of an opportunity to respond, relational UREV, and effort-filled catalysts. If an in-house individual is given an opportunity to respond to an effort-filled action without natural means, criterion two content cannot be generated with them as a responder.

In previous sections, we explored how a potential verbal catalyst, in relation to in-house individuals with standard knowledge, fades if nobody is able to witness it. When an invisible Production is invoked, their natural means are extended beyond the immediate moment of creation for that potential catalyst. While the opportunity to respond becomes impossible for someone with standard knowledge, Production has default access to the potential catalyst through recordings. When invoked, their natural means in relation to that specific potential catalyst persists until the season's end.

Because of their special knowledge, Production has, at times, interfered with the natural flow of criterion two content. This shouldn't come as a surprise to the *Fishtank* community. It's no secret that Production receives mountains of criticism for incessant intervention that has, in many cases, undercut the generation of content.

While we already know that Production cannot have a valid opportunity to respond unless invoked, this section asks the question, "Can Production manufacture a valid opportunity to respond by showing a potential verbal catalyst to someone who couldn't naturally witness it?"

For simplicity, this section will only use Production in examples as the interfering party, but be aware they aren't necessarily the only semi-omniscient entity capable of violating natural means. Freeloaders with special knowledge, Production members disguised as Fish, and even the audience themselves are capable of unnaturally enhancing the default knowledge of Fish.

Catalysts invoking Production are irrelevant for this section. When Production shares an effort-filled catalyst that invoked them with another in-house individual (even if that individual never witnessed it and has standard knowledge), this 'passing of the torch' acts as a form of response. The original catalyst invoked Production, and Production (through showing another Fish) has unwittingly proven they had the opportunity to respond.

The original action becomes criterion two content because it involved invocation + proof of opportunity to respond from Production. Whatever natural means violation might occur with the other Fish is largely irrelevant since criterion two content has already been made. Natural means violations become analytically relevant only when Production attempts to reintroduce a potential catalyst not invoking them—one that has already faded from existence—to in-house individuals with standard knowledge.

Having established Production-specific exceptions in relation to the topic at hand, we can now examine natural means in practice. While natural means has its role to play regarding both types of catalysts (physical and verbal), for now we'll only be examining natural means specifically in the context of verbal catalysts (potential or otherwise). Physical catalysts and their relationship with natural means will be addressed in their own section.

About the example in the previous section: If Fish 1 is insulting Fish 2 out of range of any in-house individual, but Production witnesses it over the cameras, we disregard Fish 1's action as being criterion two content. No opportunity to respond, and no direct Production invocation means the potential catalyst is dead as soon as the sound waves carrying it fade. A valid opportunity to respond for any standard-knowledge individual becomes impossible. They never heard it, and the expectation is they're never going to hear it.

While Fish 1 could repeat themselves some point in the future, they would be creating an entirely new instance of potential catalyst different from the original. The potential catalyst in its original form, context, and essence is dead.

Recall the original action never invoked Production, meaning that Production's opportunity to respond is entirely meaningless. They have no control in determining the action's status. Even still, Production, being an incidental witness to this action, has the unique ability to inform less knowledgeable in-house individuals about it. The thought is that perhaps by reintroducing the dead potential catalyst in its original state to others, a valid opportunity to respond would be created. Fish 1's potential catalyst would supposedly become criterion two content post-mortem.

This thought is misguided and incorrect.

In this instance, natural means acts as a crucial mechanism for us to distinguish between criterion two content generated by Fish 1 and criterion two content generated by Production through reintroducing Fish 1's words. If Production "resurrects" the potential catalyst, even if it results in a response from Fish 2, Fish 1 has in no sense created criterion two content.

Fish 2 would never have been made aware of this potential catalyst without the semi-omniscient powers of Production in play. The potential catalyst faded out of existence long before it ever reached Fish 2, making Fish 2's opportunity to respond entirely disconnected from the initial action's essence and invalid. This means Fish 1 has not created criterion two content.

This sounds complex, but it becomes more comprehensible if we break it down.

Fish 1 created an action in isolation. Nobody besides Production witnessed it. Production was never invoked, therefore any response from them cannot result in criterion two content generation. The UREV of Fish 1's action, if it even exists, is completely unrelated to an expected response opportunity. The audience, knowing the action was created in isolation, have no such expectation.

Production now shows the action to Fish 2 (through clips, word of mouth, or other semi-omniscient mediums). Fish 1's potential catalyst is already dead. Fish 2 no longer has a valid opportunity to respond to Fish 1's potential catalyst in its living form; rather, their response opportunity is only related to the information Production is providing them. Fish 2's default state of knowledge has been infringed upon, resulting in a natural means violation regarding Fish 1's dead potential catalyst.

Consequently, Production has created a verbal catalyst by *showing* Fish 2 the previous action Fish 1 created. Production has used the corpse of Fish 1's potential catalyst as a starting point for their own effort-filled action. Any UREV related to an expectation of response is solely derived from how Fish 2 might react to the information Production gives them, not from Fish 2 witnessing Fish 1's original action.

Fish 2 isn't responding to Fish 1's words, they're responding to Production's act of showing them something. The catalyst creator is determined by who provides the valid opportunity to respond, not by where the material being conveyed originally came from. Production created the opportunity; Fish 1's dead catalyst did not. Even though the words come from Fish 1, the

catalyst comes from Production. Therefore, this is criterion two content generation by Production. Any valid opportunity Fish 2 has to respond stems from Production's action of providing this material, not Fish 1's initial action.

We must emphasize a point here. The origin of the material is irrelevant to attribution. What matters is who created the valid opportunity to respond to that material. Fish 1's action created none; Production's act of showing Fish 2 created all of it.

There's nothing inherently wrong with Production's action from a broader content-making perspective. Fish 2 may go on to generate some quality content thanks to Production's meddling, meaning a net positive of content has been achieved. But this content directly stems from Production's catalyst (relaying the material), not from Fish 1's original action. Rather than being a critique of Production's approach, this example only serves to demonstrate how dead potential catalysts fail to qualify as criterion two content.

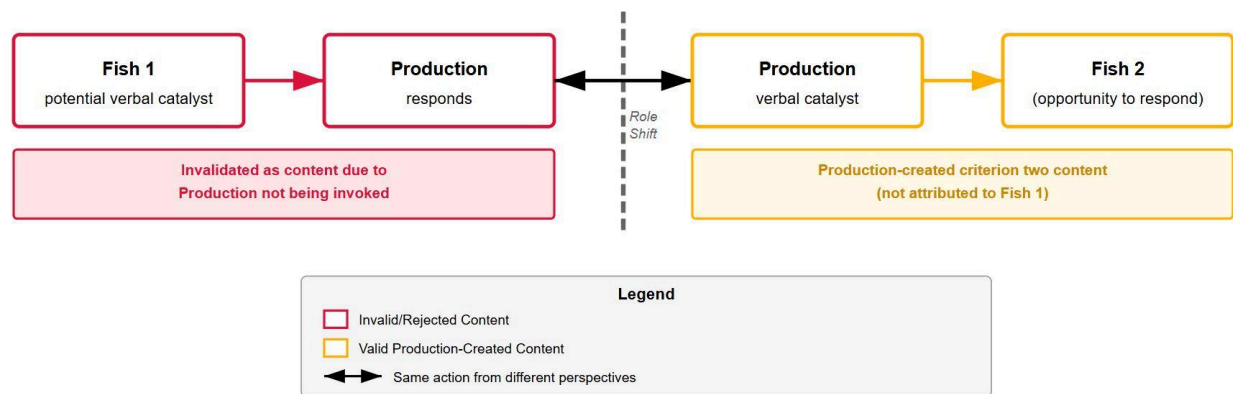
Catalysts and responses are still attributed to who created them, even when Production is involved. We are not disqualifying any action Fish 2 does in response to Production's catalyst as their own content. If Fish 2 takes the info given to them and punches Fish 1 as a consequence, this act of violence was done in response to Production's catalyst, but it's still fully attributed to Fish 2.

We can also look at it through the lens of previously discussed theories. Remember earlier how we determined if Production responds to a potential verbal catalyst not directed at them, it does not count as criterion two content? Production is doing just that in this example. Fish 1 created a potential verbal catalyst that did not invoke Production, and Production is responding to that potential verbal catalyst anyway by telling Fish 2 about it. No UREV has been realized here, as an expectation of response never existed. Therefore, Fish 1 has not created criterion two content.

While criterion two content has technically been made by Production, it exists outside our analytical scope. Under the current framework, our interest isn't in Production's content generation. We couldn't care less. The *Fishtank* viewer is only interested in how much content a Fish creates.

The following diagram illustrates this chain of events and where criterion two content lies:

Natural Means Violation - Production Intervention in Verbal Catalyst Chain



(Zoom for clearer detail)

A few things to consider in this diagram. The left side of the role shift line, labeled in red, represents an interaction that yields no criterion two content. As we already know, Production was never invoked by Fish 1's potential catalyst, and nobody else witnessed it. No relational UREV exists, and there is no expectation of response. Whether Production responds or not does not matter, as the lack of invocation disregards their response opportunity as being meaningful to content status.

The black arrow that crosses over the role shift barrier connects the same action from different perspectives, hence its double head. Production's invalid response to Fish 1's potential catalyst (in red) is the verbal catalyst of telling Fish 2 (in yellow). Production fulfills the role of an invalid responder and a catalyst creator depending on the view.

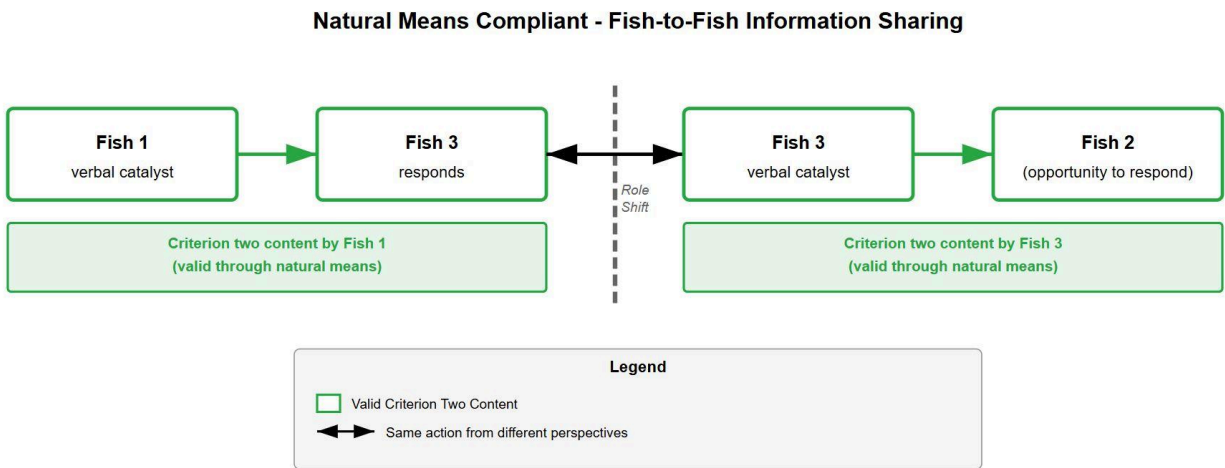
Arrows pointing exclusively to the right link two separate in-house individuals together, connecting an action to a response opportunity. Not all opportunities to respond are valid under the criterion two framework, however. While Production's opportunity to respond to Fish 1's action does technically exist, the arrow connecting Fish 1's action with Production's response is still labeled in red. This is of course because Production was never invoked, and consequently their response opportunity to Fish one is invalidated as a fulfiller of criterion two content.

Note how there is no arrow connecting Fish 1's potential verbal catalyst with Fish 2's opportunity to respond. This is because Fish 2 is given the opportunity to respond to Production's verbal catalyst—which just so happens to be about Fish 1's trash talk—not the original potential catalyst created by Fish 1. Fish 2 might go out of their way to create content as a result of Production providing them information, but this would be a response to the catalyst Production has made.

This doesn't mean Production can't coax a Fish to witness a potential verbal catalyst before it can fade, though this would require some foresight to account for how fast a potential verbal

catalyst dissipates after creation. For example, if Production were to tell Fish 2 to go eavesdrop on Fish 1 before Fish 1 started their trash talk, Fish 2 would be there to witness the verbal catalyst in the methods naturally available to them. The crucial difference is that the catalyst has yet to be created when Production positions Fish 2; natural means is preserved because Fish 2 witnesses it first hand. They would now be able to hear the catalyst and have the opportunity to respond without it being an impossibility, resulting in Fish 1 creating criterion two content.

To provide a contrasting example, let's imagine a situation in which an in-house individual without semi-omniscient ability overhears Fish 1 trash talking and relays the information to Fish 2. Instead of Production, we will introduce Fish 3 as the relayer of info:



(Zoom for clearer detail)

What changed? In this case, Fish 1 created an effort-filled verbal catalyst, and this catalyst gave an in-house individual (Fish 3) the immediate opportunity to respond. Since Fish 3 witnessed the catalyst directly, part of the UREV relates to the expectation of how Fish 3 might respond. Additionally, Fish 3 is able to respond using the methods naturally available to him, showing that natural means is intact. When it comes to Fish 1 generating criterion two content, what Fish 3 chooses to do with this information doesn't matter. He could choose to tell Fish 2, he could keep the information to himself, he could choose to blackmail Fish 1, or he could even tell any in-house individual what he heard.

Whatever option he chooses, Fish 3 has a valid opportunity to respond to Fish 1's effort-filled catalyst, therefore Fish 1 has created criterion two content. This instance of content generation is displayed on the left side of the role shift line, with the valid opportunity to respond being represented by the green rightward pointing arrow connecting Fish 1's action to Fish 3's response.

In the scenario we've conjured up, Fish 3 acts as both a valid fulfiller of response opportunity and a transmitter of information. They respond to Fish 1's catalyst by telling Fish 2 what has occurred. Again, a double-headed arrow reflects the dual nature of Fish 3's action. It is both a

response and a catalyst depending on its position in the chain, being one and the same action but fulfilling two different roles.

If Fish 3 were to tell Fish 2 about Fish 1's trash talking as shown in the diagram, Fish 3 would be the one providing a verbal catalyst for Fish 2. Fish 2 still isn't fulfilling the 'opportunity to respond' condition of Fish 1's initial catalyst. That function goes to Fish 3. Instead, we have an entirely separate instance of criterion two content, one where Fish 3 provides a verbal catalyst for Fish 2 using Fish 1's initial catalyst as a starting point.

Crucially, two separate pieces of criterion two content have been made here. One where Fish 1 provides a catalyst where Fish 3 responds, and one where Fish 3 provides a catalyst where Fish 2 has the opportunity to respond. Both scenarios involve immediate UREV stemming from response expectations. Fish 1 and Fish 3 both generate criterion two content, whereas in the first example, only Production did. The absence of Production in this second example gives way to a greater content output.

Verbal Natural Means Reference Guide

To consolidate what we've covered up to this point, here is a reference guide for scenarios involving potential verbal catalysts.

Green: Fish-made criterion two content and natural means intact

Yellow: No Fish-made criterion two content but natural means present

Red: No Fish-made criterion two content and no natural means intact

- An effort-filled verbal catalyst is created with other Fish present.
 - Natural means exists, as each Fish has an immediate and valid opportunity to respond. Criterion two content is generated
- A potential effort-filled verbal catalyst is created with no in-house individual present and does not invoke Production.
 - No natural means exists. There is no plausible way for any in-house individual to have a valid opportunity to respond. No expectation of response exists. No relational UREV is present. No natural means exists. No criterion two content is generated.
- A potential effort-filled verbal catalyst is created without the presence of an in-house individual. It directly invokes Production. Production responds.
 - Natural means exists. Invocation ensures any opportunity to respond Production holds will be valid. The catalyst being directed at them allows them to naturally give an acknowledgement at any point in the season's runtime. Their response verifies an opportunity to respond existed. Criterion two content is generated.
- A potential effort-filled verbal catalyst is created without the presence of an in-house individual. It directly invokes Production. Production does not respond.
 - Natural means exists. Invocation has taken place. This means Production, having access to recordings, has the ability to validly fulfill the

opportunity to respond. However, no criterion two content is generated because Production never proves the opportunity existed through response or acknowledgment.

- An effort-filled verbal catalyst is created invoking Production with other Fish present. Production never responds.
 - Natural means exists. While Production never responds, other Fish witness the action. This fulfills the requirement of a valid opportunity to respond. Criterion two content is generated.
- An effort-filled verbal catalyst is created invoking Production with other Fish present. Production responds
 - Natural means exists. Both the Fish within range and Production (through invocation + verification) demonstrate valid opportunities to respond. Criterion two content is generated by the Fish creating the catalyst.
- Fish 1 creates a potential effort-filled verbal catalyst with no in-house individual present, and it does not invoke Production. Fish 2 is informed of this action through TTS by an audience member.
 - No natural means exists in relation to Fish 1's action. Fish 2's opportunity to respond to Fish 1's action is invalid. However, they do have a valid response opportunity when it comes to the audience-provided catalyst.
- A Fish creates an effort-filled verbal catalyst invoking Production with a member of Production in their presence.
 - Natural means exists. The Production member has been invoked and has a visible opportunity to respond because of their proximity to the Fish. Criterion two content is generated.
- A potential effort-filled verbal catalyst is created by Fish 1 with no in-house individual present. It does not invoke Production. Production decides to show a clip of Fish 1's action to Fish 2.
 - No natural means exists for Fish 1's potential catalyst. Fish 2 could not have discovered the original potential catalyst naturally as it had already faded from existence. Production's act of showing the clip is a new catalyst, and one that Fish 2 has the natural means to respond to. Production has created criterion two content; Fish 1 has not.

Recap of Verbal Criterion Two Content

- In order for an action to be considered verbal criterion two content, the action must be verbal, have UREV at least partly related to response expectations, pass the EFC test, and provide at least one other in-house individual with the opportunity to respond through natural means.
- Potential verbal catalysts are fleeting, since without another's presence the valid response opportunity fades as soon as they are created. Barring certain exceptions involving Production, the moment a potential verbal catalyst fully dissolves no in-house individual has natural means in relation to it.
- With the exception of Production, in-house individuals do not need to be invoked in order for their opportunity to respond to be valid.

- With the exception of potential verbal catalysts done in isolation invoking Production, a response isn't necessary for a verbal catalyst to count as criterion two content. So long as an opportunity to respond exists, the content label is still viable.
- Verbal criterion two content can be created with nobody immediately present, but this can only be done by the following conditions: The action must be effort-filled, it must invoke Production (creates anticipatory UREV), and Production must verify they had the opportunity to respond (realization of anticipatory UREV).
 - Production's response acts as a confirmation of the opportunity to respond. Until given, we will assume no criterion two content has been made.
 - Unless a member of Production is a visible witness of the potential verbal catalyst during its creation, we cannot assume they have the opportunity to respond.
 - If a Fish performs an action in isolation without invoking Production, and Production responds anyway, no valid response opportunity exists. No anticipatory UREV exists to be realized. No criterion two content has been generated.
- Potential verbal catalysts that have died cannot truly be resurrected. While in-house individuals who hold semi-omniscience have the ability to interact with a potential catalyst post-mortem, at best doing so creates a new catalyst rather than reviving the original.
 - The act of trying to resurrect a dead potential catalyst is itself a potential catalyst attributed to whatever semi-omniscient individual attempted to reintroduce it.
 - Any response or opportunity to respond, therefore, is in direct relation to the Production/TTS-created catalyst, not the dead one.
 - The creator of the dead potential catalyst receives no criterion two credit, regardless of what happens.
 - While this can be argued to be criterion two content attributed to the semi-omniscient individual, it is irrelevant. The focus of our content analysis strictly concerns the content of Fish, not the content of Production or similar entities.

Physical Criterion Two Content

Physical criterion two content is any effort-filled catalyst where human force produces physical contact, thereby providing a valid opportunity to respond for another in-house individual. While sharing the core structure of its verbal counterpart (effort-filled catalyst + UREV expectations + valid opportunity to respond), physical catalysts differ in key ways we'll soon explore.

Not all physical actions are physical catalysts, even those that promote an opportunity to respond. The requirement of human force plus contact acts as a filter to distinguish true physical catalysts from typical physical actions. Hand gestures, facial expressions, and any number of body movements designed to communicate are "physical" in the sense that human force is used to move features of the body. However, such actions lack any form of physical contact and are effectively verbal by proxy.

Physical contact without human force also does not create a physical catalyst. A Fish sitting down only to have another accidentally bump into them hasn't suddenly created a physical catalyst. The sitting Fish may have made contact with somebody, but this contact wasn't dictated by their own human force. To say the sitting Fish has created a physical catalyst would be like crediting a silent Fish for a verbal catalyst just because someone spoke to them.

Human force is inseparable from a physical catalyst's essence. If a light fixture happens to fall on a Fish's head, physical contact has been made, but no human force caused this contact. So while the Fish may respond to this unfortunate event, the action was an act of God not ascribable to any in-house individual.

The concepts of human force and physical contact are admittedly quite broad, and they sometimes aren't even related to each other. This is why we need a causal link between the two before a potential physical catalyst can even be created. Human force can be something as mundane as walking, while physical contact is an everpresent phenomenon in the day-to-day lives of Fish, demonstrated by the mere acts of sitting on a couch or standing on the floor. The foundation of a physical catalyst isn't just any combination of random human force with the addition of unrelated physical contact with something. Rather, the human force must produce the physical contact; they are to be causally linked.

The act of walking (force) and standing on the floor (contact) appear linked, but the contact exists regardless of the walking. In this scenario, walking and contact (with the floor) are coincidentally linked. A person could stand, walk, lay down, or sit, contact with the floor exists across all of these states. The force itself doesn't produce the contact. On the other hand, punching somebody in the face requires the use of a specific type of force to inflict a desired outcome of contact. Remove the punch, and the contact with the face is also removed.

As with potential verbal catalysts, not all potential physical catalysts are content. Even after a causal link and opportunity to respond is established, the EFC test still remains in effect, and UREV still needs to be relational. Considered, in isolation, a mutual handshake between Fish. While action in essence possesses a valid response opportunity, human force, and contact, it has no UREV connected to an expectation of response.

Some simple but notable examples of physical catalysts include hugging, kissing, punching, kicking, pushing, grabbing, and sexual intimacy. The listed examples are recognized as having an immediate valid opportunity to respond present at their creation. At least a part of their UREV is relational.

We shouldn't be all too unfamiliar with this concept, as verbal catalysts usually have an immediate valid opportunity to respond upon their formation as well. Certain physical catalysts also have this expectation for instantaneous response built in. Their UREV is dependent on the witnesses surrounding them at creation rather than future expectations.

If Fish 1 punches Fish 2, Fish 2 is put in direct, unavoidable contact with the physical catalyst. They have the opportunity to respond as soon as they register what is happening. The audience expects an immediate reaction to this effort-filled catalyst, which is where a portion of the UREV is derived. Non-violent physical catalysts can also share this immediacy. If Fish 1 kisses Fish 2, the opportunity to respond is similarly immediate, and the audience is primed for an instantaneous response.

While verbal and physical catalysts share numerous similarities, we have yet to acknowledge one of their biggest differences: a potential physical catalyst can have a lasting impact on the real world environment that continues well past its initial creation. This leftover evidence leaves the possibility for a future opportunity to respond on the table, even for in-house individuals with basic knowledge.

Potential verbal catalysts don't fossilize, as these potential catalysts exist in an unfelt, invisible medium. You cannot determine the past vocalizations of others simply by walking into the room they once spoke. There's no apparent change to the environment where the potential catalyst remains visible. The natural means others have with a potential verbal catalyst is, as we've established, extremely fragile, and this is exactly why. No witness means the potential catalyst is just an action in isolation, cursed to irrelevancy by its temporal dimensions.

But physical catalysts can surpass this limitation. Certain physical catalysts that come into being leave footprints of their creation through the impact they've left on the environment around them, not as tightly bound to the temporal dimension. A Fish kicking a hole in the wall initiates a potential physical catalyst, and while the absence of a witness would restrict its immediate status as criterion two content, the action has left its mark on the world. So long as the hole exists, others have the natural means to respond to it. And once it is discovered, an opportunity to respond presents itself like a dormant bud that blooms after winter.

In these scenarios, the UREV being derived is anticipatory rather than immediate. Since nobody witnessed the potential physical catalyst at its creation, but the valid opportunity to respond is dormant rather than extinguished, a Fish could very well encounter it in the future. The action's status as a catalyst and criterion two content remains up in the air until discovery takes place, or the season reaches its end.

This is where those aforementioned similarities begin to break down. We must once again talk about natural means and how the validity of an opportunity to respond to verbal and physical catalysts varies as time passes.

Natural Means and Physical Catalysts

In order for a verbal action to be counted as criterion two content, an in-house individual will typically have to be within its immediate vicinity in order to have a valid opportunity to respond. There are some (Production-involved) exceptions to this, but assuming the Fish creates a potential verbal catalyst without invoking Production, and nobody is around to have the valid opportunity to respond, the potential verbal catalyst will fade immediately. Any future opportunity

to respond is invalid, as potential verbal catalysts do not linger past the immediate time frame they are created.

The same cannot be said about physical catalysts. Some potential physical catalysts can linger after they are created. Moving a box from a room leaves evidence through newfound absence, an object once with a verifiable location is no longer present. While not all physical catalysts leave visible traces, some do. And it is these trace-leaving physical catalysts that necessitate a special distinction.

We can distinguish between two types of physical catalysts: ephemeral physical catalysts (like punches or kisses, where UREV is immediate if effort-filled) and persistent physical catalysts (those leaving discoverable evidence maintaining natural means over time, with anticipatory UREV when effort-filled). Ephemeral physical catalysts are physical in essence but behave exactly like verbal catalysts in terms of natural means and UREV. So as to not beat a dead horse, the majority of our analysis on physical catalysts will focus on the persistent type. We will briefly touch upon the ephemeral towards the end as a refresher.

I should note that while we separate physical catalysts into 'ephemeral' and 'persistent' for clarity, a persistent catalyst can occasionally hold both immediate and anticipatory UREV when the action is effort-filled, witnessed during creation, and leaves a footprint. These scenarios are rare, but they are still present in the framework. Moving forward our focus will be on physical catalysts that only hold one form of relational UREV, not both.

We'll start with an example. Assume Fish 1 destroys Fish 2's clothes while no in-house individual is immediately present. This potential physical catalyst acts as a kind of time bomb waiting to go off. The potential catalyst was built upon a physical action; UREV is related to the anticipation of someone's discovery of this action, but it has yet to provide a valid opportunity to respond. At this point in a potential verbal catalyst's life-cycle, it would simply cease to exist. Preservation of natural means would become an impossibility without invocation. But this is not so with our potential physical catalyst.

Leaving evidence behind means that, upon discovery, a valid opportunity to respond is in full effect. The action itself isn't witnessed, but the real-world impact of the potential catalyst continues to exist. In this sense, the physical action is fully alive and thriving. It persists into the future. Once Fish 2, or any in-house individual for that matter, comes across it, they have been given a valid opportunity to respond. The existence of the action's footprint makes a confrontation plausible for those with standard knowledge, meaning natural means is still alive. When the opportunity to respond is encountered, anticipatory UREV has been realized, the action becomes an official catalyst, and Fish 1 has made criterion two content.

Natural means has a far more stable shelf-life with persistent physical catalysts than with verbal or ephemeral types. A potential persistent physical catalyst can lie dormant for days, weeks, or even the entirety of a whole season due to being well hidden, but so long as discovery through

natural means remains possible, the opportunity to respond might still be unveiled, and it has a chance of becoming criterion two content.

One might notice how this is reminiscent of a potential effort-filled verbal catalyst invoking Production when Production is invisible. In both cases, a kind of plausible deniability remains in effect. Schrödinger's content, if you will. Either effort-filled potential catalyst exists in a perpetual state of teetering on the edge of criterion two status. We cannot be sure if a valid opportunity to respond exists, but it very well could. So while we never count the potential catalyst as criterion two content before verification of such an opportunity, we can never fully discount it either. At least not until the season reaches its conclusion.

Another difference: because it breeds resilient natural means, a potential persistent physical catalyst isn't discounted as content just because a semi-omniscient figure presents it to individuals with basic knowledge. Natural means cannot be violated if the potential catalyst is still drawing breath. No attempt at resurrection or post-mortem transgression is taking place. So long as its discovery is possible, Production, TTS, or other semi-omniscient figures can inform others without detracting from the potential catalyst's chance of becoming criterion two content.

It's very important to keep this distinction in mind. First let's set the groundwork with a verbal example: Fish 1 ranting about Fish 2 in the privacy of their own room. No in-house individual is around to witness this action take place, and Production is never invoked. A classic instance of immediate annihilation post-creation, the potential verbal catalyst fades as soon as Fish 1 finishes their diatribe.

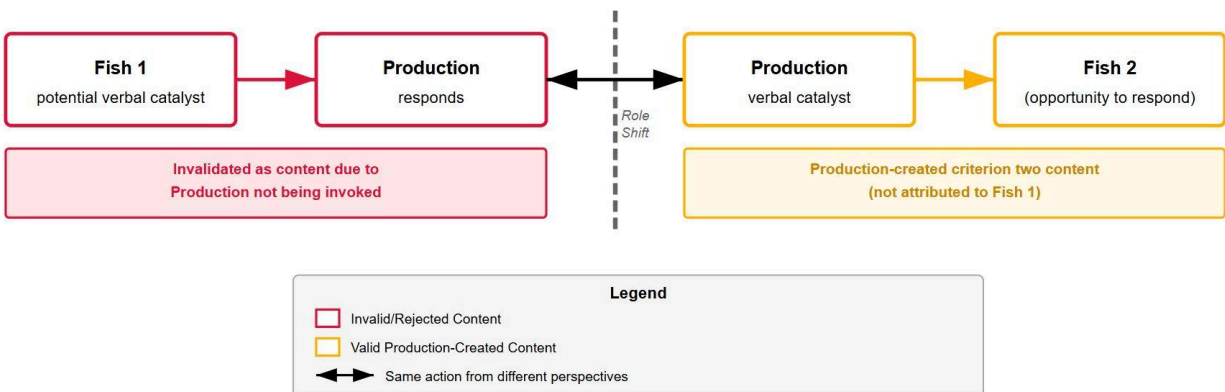
In an attempt to create conflict, but with the rant now in the past, Production decides to inform Fish 2 about what has occurred. Fish 2 isn't being given a valid opportunity to respond by Fish 1's verbal catalyst, as the two aren't linked by any feasible metric. Instead, Production has created a brand new instance of catalyst, and it is this catalyst that Fish 2 has the valid opportunity to respond to, not Fish 1's. Regardless of whether Fish 2 responds or not, Fish 1 has not made criterion two content.

The natural means violation stems from the following:

- Fish 1's potential catalyst no longer exists.
- Production creates a new catalyst.
- Fish 2's valid opportunity to respond is directly linked to Production's catalyst, not Fish 1's.

We can convey this scenario in the previously used diagram below:

Natural Means Violation - Production Intervention in Verbal Catalyst Chain



(Zoom for clearer detail)

The only reason this issue exists is because of the quick-to-fade natural means in relation to the potential verbal catalyst. If the natural means still existed, that is to say if Fish 2 could make direct contact with the potential catalyst using methods naturally available to them, Production's intervention becomes a non-issue. Fish 2 would be given a valid opportunity to respond by Fish 1's potential catalyst, and Fish 1's original catalyst would become criterion two content.

To demonstrate how things change with a persistent physical catalyst, we will be re-using the previous destroyed clothes example. Fish 1 cuts up the clothes of Fish 2. After completing the action, Fish 1 leaves, and time begins to pass between the potential catalyst's initial creation and the present moment. The destroyed clothes have yet to be discovered. Already the audience derives anticipatory UREV from a future expectation of response.

If Production, or some other semi-omniscient figure, were to tell Fish 2 about Fish 1 destroying their clothes, this does not jeopardize the potential physical catalyst's chance of becoming criterion two content in any way. Natural means still lingers since individuals with standard knowledge have the ability (possibility) of encountering this potential catalyst without Production.

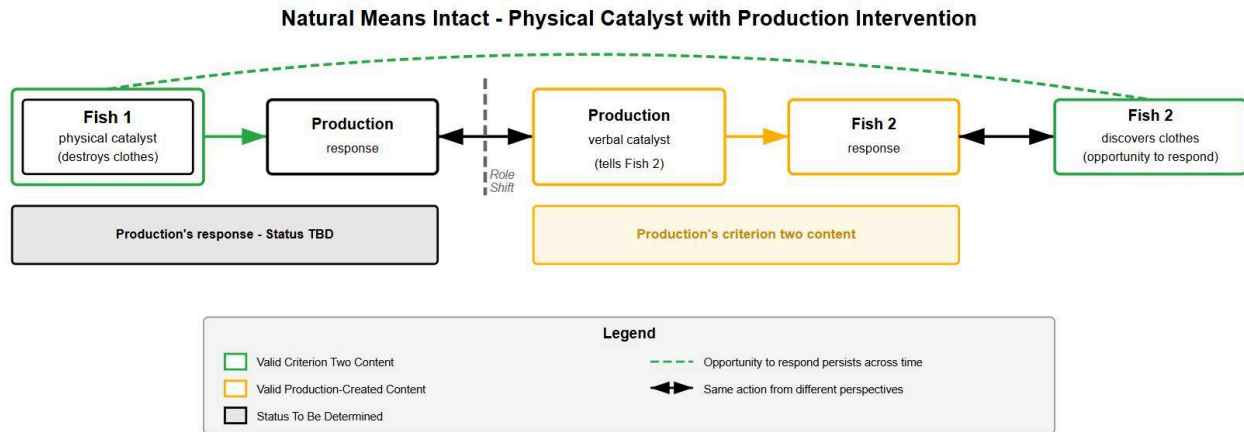
Fish 2 then takes this information given to them by Production and uses it to discover their destroyed clothes. It is at this point where Fish 2 has come in direct contact with Fish 1's physical catalyst, and a valid opportunity to respond is activated. The time bomb has gone off, and the anticipatory UREV has been realized. Fish 2 is now acquainted with the effort-filled catalyst that was originally created. Fish 1 has therefore generated criterion two content.

In this scenario:

- Fish 1's catalyst still exists in a findable space (it persists), meaning natural means is on the table for those with standard knowledge.
- Production creates a new catalyst.
- Fish 2 has a valid opportunity to respond to Production's verbal catalyst and does so by searching for Fish 1's physical catalyst.

- Fish 2 comes into contact with Fish 1's persistent physical catalyst. They now have a valid opportunity to respond to it. Anticipatory UREV has been realized at this moment.
- The result is Fish 1 being the creator of criterion two content.

These many interactions and their relationships with each other can be conveyed in the following diagram:



While looking complex due to its array of different colors and larger legend, this diagram is just a larger display of what we intuitively know. Right off the bat we can identify three different dynamics: Fish 1 to Production, Production to Fish 2, and Fish 1 to Fish 2. The diagram starts out simple enough, a physical catalyst created by Fish 1 that Production makes contact with.

Fish 1's catalyst is surrounded by two different boxes. Recall that in previous diagrams we've used color to indicate a potential catalyst's status as criterion two content. Because Fish 1's catalyst has created two response opportunities for two separate in-house individuals at different points in time, we need to account for each encounter's status as content in the chain as well as in the timeline.

The further out a box layer is from the core, the later the opportunity to respond happens in the chain. Box layers indicate sequence, inner boxes representing earlier encounters, outer boxes representing later ones. This layering feature is a unique attribute only persistent physical catalysts have, as unlike the verbal, a multitude of in-house individuals can make contact with the initial form of physical catalysts at different points in time.

Layering is especially useful for persistent catalysts that have both immediate and anticipatory UREV. As a hypothetical, if Fish 1 punches Fish 2, Fish 2 has an immediate valid response opportunity and criterion two content is made. But if Fish 1 leaves a bruise on Fish 2 as a result of this punch, a footprint has also been created. In the future, other in-house individuals can have valid opportunities to respond upon seeing the bruise, potentially resulting in many instances of criterion two content generation.

Getting back to our current model, Production makes the earliest form of contact with Fish 1's persistent catalyst (destroying Fish 2's clothes), resulting in them having the first opportunity to respond. Because of this result, the catalyst and Production's ability to respond have now been locked to each other, a connection that can never be reversed. What is discovered cannot become undiscovered. This instance of catalyst + opportunity to respond must be given its own color, something to label its final status.

In our verbal example, we would mark this encounter in red to signal no content being made. Production was never invoked, making their opportunity to respond invalid. Response or no, content cannot be made from the interaction. But because we have yet to discuss the validity of Production's opportunity to respond in the context of persistent physical catalysts, we still need to determine whether their response, even if not invoked, fulfills the conditions of criterion two content. We will therefore label the interaction between Production and Fish 1's catalyst in the neutral color black for the time being.

Production's response to Fish 1 is their verbal catalyst to Fish 2. This response connects to two different Fish in different ways. Depending on perspective, Production has created a response in relation to Fish 1 or a verbal catalyst in relation to Fish 2. Because the action's essence remains unchanged while its context shifts, we treat them as two separate instances connected by a double-headed arrow to demonstrate likeness.

Production provides a verbal catalyst to Fish 2 by telling them about Fish 1's physical catalyst, and Fish 2 now has a valid opportunity to respond to Production's effort-filled verbal catalyst. Production's catalyst derives immediate UREV from the expectation of Fish 2's response. This alone results in Production creating criterion two content. Such content falls outside of our analytical focus, but we can't ignore its existence. Knowing this, we mark it in yellow.

Fish 2 chooses to respond to Production's verbal catalyst, searching for and eventually finding the physical catalyst created by Fish 1. Fish 2's response to Production's verbal catalyst is conveyed through the act of discovering Fish 1's physical catalyst, so we treat them as two separate instances and connect them with a double-headed arrow. Fish 2 now has a valid opportunity to respond to Fish 1's initial action. Because of this new encounter, Fish 1's physical action officially becomes a catalyst (which is why I never called it 'potential'), and has met all requirements to be labeled as criterion two content.

To define this new instance of physical catalyst + opportunity to respond as a valid form of criterion two content, we label both Fish 1's initial catalyst and Fish 2's discovery in green. Doing so creates a second differently-colored box around Fish 1's initial catalyst, conveying that it has had two different encounters at different points in the chain. Finally, we stretch a dotted green line from Fish 1's initial catalyst to Fish 2's valid opportunity to respond, indicating the two are clearly linked and showing that natural means is preserved across time.

We should acknowledge some boundaries of the model. While layering is limited only by the number of in-house individuals who can plausibly run into a persistent physical catalyst, the

diagram grows increasingly complex with every subsequent encounter. The specific example we've used includes one creator and two responders as opposed to the typical one-creator, one-responder model. With the addition of just one responder, we already see a notable increase in variables at play.

Each encounter requires another path for discovery and more layers around Fish 1's initial catalyst. We need to consider how other in-house individuals ran into it and received their opportunities to respond. Did they discover it on their own or through some other medium? Are their opportunities valid or invalid? Every additional player means more arrows, more layers, more boxes, more color coding, and greater confusion as we weed through intersecting dotted lines to keep track of what connects to whom.

Instead of the simple horizontal arrow pathing we see above, we'd eventually need to include upward and downward pointing arrows to convey different relationships at different points in the diagram. Not every discovery is a linear progression after all.

The use of the model is strongest when we limit the total amount of individuals and potential catalysts present. Potential catalysts are better viewed as individual instances, so trying to account for every encounter and shift in perspective quickly becomes a logistical nightmare.

Physical Criterion Two Content With Production as a Responder

The relationship Production has with persistent physical catalysts differs from that of verbal catalysts, but in many ways it's far easier to understand. With the verbal, a lack of invocation means any response from Production amounts to nothing. No criterion two content would be generated from such an interaction.

These restrictions account for Production's semi-omniscient abilities and the standard life-cycle of potential verbal catalysts as a whole. Without invocation requirements, these abilities give Production the power to interact with every potential verbal catalyst that comes into creation at any moment within a season's runtime, resulting in an overinflation and the subsequent diminishment of the criterion two content label to a point of worthlessness.

Persistent physical catalysts operate differently. For these types of catalysts, a response from Production can fully satisfy the response opportunity condition for criterion two content. Even if Production is never invoked, their encounter with the effort-filled persistent catalyst and subsequent opportunity to respond is valid. The requirement for invocation is removed in its entirety.

Production going out of their way to interact with a potential verbal catalyst not directed at them would fail to result in criterion two content generation, but Production going out of their way to interact with a potential persistent physical catalyst, equally uninvoked, qualifies. Why the difference?

Two main reasons, both related to natural means. The first is that, unlike potential verbal catalysts lacking invocation, potential persistent physical catalysts maintain natural means in the long run. A potential verbal catalyst without invocation fades immediately after creation, but a potential persistent physical catalyst leaves a footprint that keeps natural means so long as it is possible to discover, regardless of invocation.

What is it that invocation does for the potential verbal catalyst? It creates relational UREV with an expectation of Production response. This allows Production's opportunity to respond to become valid. Invocation ensures that if Production demonstrates an opportunity to respond at any future point in the season, it will fulfill the criterion two condition.

A persistent physical catalyst already starts with extended natural means for all in-house individuals through the footprint it leaves—that includes Production. The primary need for invocation, the preservation of natural means, is no longer required because the footprint already entails its maintenance. So whether Production encounters it a few minutes or weeks after the physical catalyst's creation, the opportunity to respond is valid since natural means was preserved by default.

The second reason involves invocation itself. The boundaries of invocation become somewhat blurred when we apply them to the dimension of persistent physical catalysts. In the previous case of potential verbal catalysts, invocation can be something as simple as a Fish addressing a Production member by name, or perhaps conversing with them directly. Invocation is heavily implied in either scenario.

Persistent physical catalysts would require an extreme form of specificity if they are to be specifically invoking Production. While easy to visualize in some ways—for example, a Fish leaving a gift outside the basement door with a Production member's name on it—we'd have to rely on generous assumptions for others.

Persistent physical catalysts, by nature, are open to response from every in-house individual. The same way a verbal catalyst provides an opportunity to respond for every individual who witnesses it, persistent physical catalysts do the same for every person who discovers it.

Also consider, Production is traditionally given more leniency by the audience when it comes to interacting with evidence leftover from a persistent physical catalyst. One hardly considers how Production would react to a potential verbal catalyst not directed at them, but potential persistent physical catalysts lead the audience to include Production in their expectations more often. Anticipatory UREV tends to make room for Production in this context.

A number of arguments can be proposed as to why this is. Physical evidence exists in shared space and persists over time, making Production's eventual discovery feel natural rather than intrusive. Discovering physical evidence feels like a natural part of their monitoring duties, whereas Production responding to a private verbal rant can feel more like an overextension into territory they should let be.

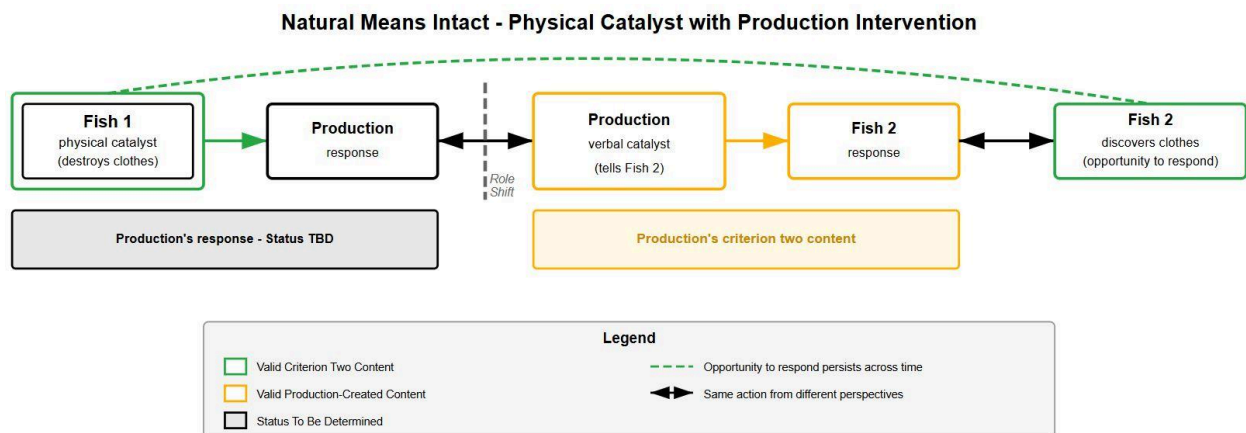
Perhaps it even has something to do with Production's role as a physical authority figure that's responsible for the house, its contents, and the safety of Fish. When Production interacts with persistent physical catalysts, they're more likely to leverage that authority to gaslight and manipulate Fish, and the audience finds this dynamic inherently entertaining. Whatever the case, the audience seems to be incredibly receptive to Production involvement in the persistent physical catalyst medium.

To demonstrate the descent into blurry presumption, we'll propose an example. Let's say Fish 1 is dogpiled by multiple in-house individuals. Production notably turns a blind eye to the dogpiling. At the end of the day, Fish 1 goes into their room and punches a hole in the wall out of frustration. Production then comes face-to-face with the hole, meaning they've been given an opportunity to respond.

If we hold our initial requirement for invocation steady, does Production's opportunity to respond fulfill the condition for criterion two content generation? Is it valid? The hole created by Fish 1 wasn't necessarily directed at anybody. It came as a result of multiple actions by numerous individuals within the same timeframe. In this way, how can we determine whether or not the hole in the wall was intended for Production for turning a blind eye and not, say, some other in-house individual who partook in the dogpiling?

If we make invocation a prerequisite here, accurate content analysis requires us to make an assumption. Either Fish 1's action was too broad for consideration of intent (Production opportunity is not valid), or Fish 1's action was, in some way, intended for Production (Production opportunity is valid). There's no direct invocation we can point to as a smoking gun. No name on the hole to demonstrate directed intent with certainty.

For these reasons, we say that Production can hold a valid response opportunity to persistent physical catalysts without the need for invocation. We can now return to the Physical Catalyst with Production Intervention diagram and address some unfinished business:

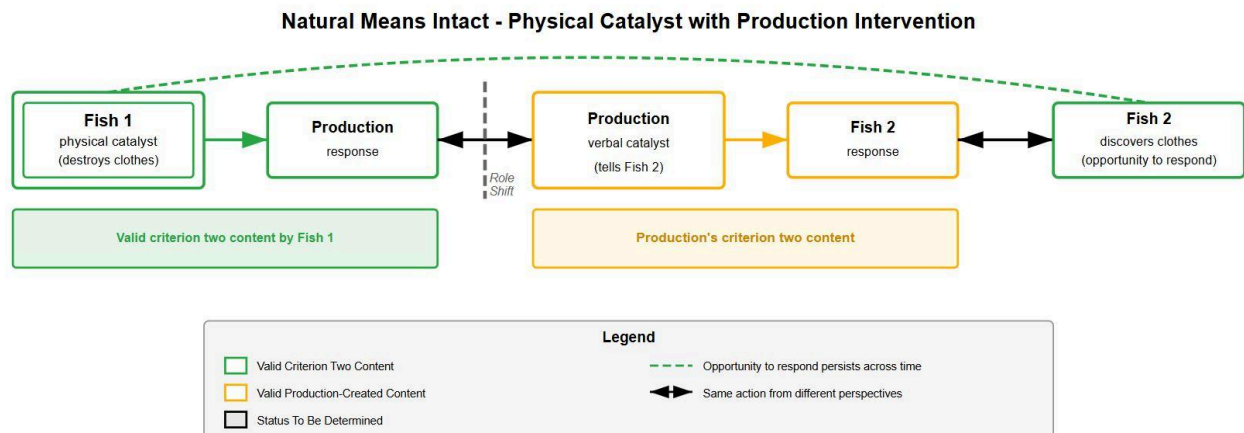


(Zoom for clearer detail)

Recall that we labeled the interior box for Fish 1 and Production's response as black because we had yet to determine the status of that part of the chain. Now that we have addressed some of the initial blockades to our understanding of this catalyst + response opportunity, let's take another look.

Fish 1 has created a persistent physical catalyst. The destroyed clothes exist in a new state and with visible damage. Production responds to it by telling Fish 2 about the destroyed clothes. Note that Production doesn't have to interact with the clothes or view them in person to prove a valid opportunity to respond exists. The act of telling Fish 2 is simultaneously an acknowledgment and response to the initial catalyst, proving an opportunity to respond existed.

Because Production is included in the audience's expectation of response, and natural means is already extended by default, Fish 1 has therefore created criterion two content with Production fulfilling the opportunity to respond condition. The diagram can be updated accordingly:



(Zoom for clearer detail)

Now the interior box surrounding Fish 1's catalyst is green, as well as Production's response to said catalyst. The arrow between the two is also marked green to show the opportunity to respond resulted in criterion two content generation.

Ephemeral Physical Catalysts

Most that needs to be known about ephemeral physical catalysts has already been discussed in previous sections, effectively making this section a glorified review of verbal catalysts. Potential ephemeral physical catalysts, like potential verbal catalysts, fade as soon as they are created without a proper witness. The most common ephemeral physical catalysts, the default examples fans think of, usually have a built-in responder and immediate UREV. If Fish 1 punches Fish 2, the catalyst is physical, yes, but a valid opportunity to respond immediately follows.

Potential ephemeral physical catalysts without witnesses function the same way as potential verbal catalysts in the same predicament. It comes into being, immediately fades out, natural means is destroyed, and the action either falls under a different criterion or is relegated to the

vault of *Fishtank*'s forgettable moments forever. If Production tries to resurrect it, or if they try to respond to it without being invoked, it is not counted as criterion two content. Attempted resurrection of these types of potential catalysts creates the same problem as before—Production becomes the catalyst creator.

If Production is invoked during an effort-filled ephemeral physical catalyst, assuming they are invisible, the natural means of the catalyst is extended (no different from Production-invoking verbal catalysts). Any future response from them in the season's runtime fulfills the action as criterion two content. If the season reaches its end before an opportunity to respond is proven by way of Production response, it is not considered criterion two content.

Naturally then, we can conclude that if Production is invoked by the effort-filled action while in person, their presence alone is enough to verify a valid opportunity to respond exists. Therefore criterion two content has been made, regardless if a response takes place.

As I said, they're almost word for word the exact same as your standard verbal catalyst. The main difference is only the essence of the catalyst itself—the prerequisite for causally-linked force and contact. Interestingly enough, this means actions designed to be physical but that miss their target are not counted as physical catalysts. These misses are where the paper-thin distinction between verbal and ephemeral physical catalysts is revealed.

For example, if Fish 1 attempts to punch Fish 2 but misses, they've failed to meet the prerequisite for contact. In this scenario, Fish 1 has effectively created an effort-filled verbal catalyst. They haven't vocalized anything, but the attempt at harm in and of itself is a form of verbal communication substitute; the action has expressed Fish 1's disdain for Fish 2 in an understandable way. Fish 2 has a valid opportunity to respond. Therefore Fish 1 has generated criterion two content through a failed physical but successful verbal catalyst.

Even though they're nothing groundbreaking, ephemeral catalysts still exist within our content framework. Their predisposition towards immediate annihilation poses the question: can potential persistent physical catalysts fade in a similar manner, or even fade at all?

Can Potential Persistent Physical Catalysts Fade?

We've established that potential ephemeral physical catalysts evaporate upon creation if no witness is present and no invocation of Production takes place, but what about the persistent alternative?

Potential persistent physical catalysts come in a variety of shapes and sizes. Some are more reversible than others. Depending on their reversibility, or how easy it is to erase the footprint, these potential catalysts do have the ability to fade, just less readily than other potential catalyst types.

We have three general scenarios where a potential persistent catalyst fades. Scenario A has the evidence leftover destroyed/removed by the Fish who created it in the first place. Fish 1

destroys Fish 2's favorite sweater, regrets their decision, throws it in the garbage, and the garbage is taken to the dump that day. The initial potential catalyst has faded from existence. Fish 2 can no longer discover their sweater torn and tattered. However, it's now been replaced with a new and equally effective potential catalyst: Fish 2's favorite sweater is now missing entirely.

Fish 2 could not possibly have a valid opportunity to respond to Fish 1's initial action with standard knowledge. The sweater has left the house, and unless brought back by a semi-omniscient force like Production, Fish 1 has completely substituted their initial catalyst with another one. But Fish 2 absolutely has natural means when it comes to their missing sweater. The removal of one footprint has created another.

It should be noted that the creator Fish must be the one to destroy/remove the potential catalyst in order for the annihilation of initial natural means to take place. If a different in-house individual does it instead, they would effectively be responding to Fish 1's action. In that scenario, the natural means relating to Fish 1's initial catalyst hasn't been annihilated, but rather "resolved." It provided a valid opportunity to respond to another in-house individual, so it has attained the status of criterion two content. If Fish 3 finds the destroyed sweater (Fish 1's catalyst) and throws it away before Fish 2 discovers it, Fish 3 has fulfilled the original catalyst's condition for a valid opportunity to respond.

Scenario B has the potential persistent physical catalyst reversed to the point where it's no longer noticeable by other in-house individuals. Fish 1 steals Fish 2's favorite sweater, regrets it, and returns it before Fish 2 notices. While incredibly effective at destroying natural means, this scenario is somewhat difficult to pull off when compared to destruction/removal.

Instead of burying the potential catalyst in a trash can or throwing it out the window, the catalyst-creating Fish must restore everything to its original state and in such a way so nothing seems amiss. If an in-house individual takes notice of any differences, that notice functions as a valid opportunity to respond, resulting in criterion two content generation.

Scenario C involves acts of God that result in the complete destruction of natural means. If Fish 1 destroys Fish 2's favorite sweater, then a sinkhole opens up underneath the house killing everyone inside, it's safe to assume nobody has a valid opportunity to respond anymore. While improbable, acts of God still should be accounted for in our theoretical framework.

There's still one glaring issue across all three scenarios that prevents them from fully erasing natural means. That issue's name is Production. Destruction, removal, reversal, and acts of God might destroy the natural means for normal in-house individuals to stumble upon persistent catalysts, but Production, as we know, is special.

Persistent catalysts do not require invocation for Production's opportunity to respond to be valid. Production has, until season's end, the natural means to respond to any and every persistent physical catalyst. Just because Fish 1 returned Fish 2's sweater doesn't mean Production hasn't

seen a clip of their theft in action. Even when natural means fades for in-house individuals with standard knowledge, if at any point in the season's runtime Production proves they had themselves had an opportunity to respond, that action would still be a catalyst and criterion two content.

Think of it this way: If Fish 1 invokes Production in private through a potential verbal catalyst, and nobody else is around to witness it, only Production has the natural means to respond. For every other Fish, the ability to witness that specific instance of catalyst has come and gone in the blink of an eye. But Production's natural means holds strong.

With potential persistent physical catalysts, natural means exists for all in-house individuals for the foreseeable future. Even if natural means is somehow removed for in-house individuals with standard knowledge, Production still holds semi-omniscience. With this semi-omniscience comes the added ability to view past events, even if they've seemingly been erased in the present.

So can a potential persistent physical catalyst fade? Of course. But only with extreme difficulty. One of the three scenarios needs to unfold, and then the season needs to go by without Production acknowledging the potential catalyst even once. It's no wonder where the persistent label comes from.

Recap of Physical Criterion Two Content

- Physical criterion two content has some shared aspects with verbal criterion two content.
 - Both require catalysts that pass the EFC test and derive UREV from expectation of response.
 - Both require catalysts that give others within the house a valid opportunity to respond.
 - Both have specific rules for how Production can fulfill the condition of a valid opportunity to respond.
 - If Production is not initially present, opportunity to respond must be proven through response/acknowledgment (with invocation required for verbal and ephemeral physical catalysts, but not for persistent physical catalysts)
- Physical catalysts have some very obvious differences from verbal catalysts.
 - All physical catalysts require a causally linked combination of human force and contact.
 - Physical catalysts can be split into two categories: ephemeral and persistent.
 - While ephemeral physical catalysts are similar to verbal catalysts in all but essence, persistent physical catalysts extend natural means into the future for all in-house individuals.
 - Effort-filled ephemeral physical catalysts have immediate UREV; effort-filled persistent physical catalysts can have anticipatory UREV if unwitnessed at creation.

- Effort-filled persistent catalysts can also have immediate UREV in addition to their anticipatory UREV, but this requires an immediate witness and a footprint that persists.
- The natural means relating to a persistent physical catalyst stays intact because of the footprint left behind. Even if nobody is around to view its initial creation, a valid response opportunity is still possible.
- An effort-filled persistent physical catalyst can be responded to by any in-house individual and turn into criterion two content This includes Production even when not invoked.
- The time delay between a persistent physical catalyst's creation and when it provides a valid response opportunity for another in-house individual does not matter when considering it for criterion two content.

As they are not much different from verbal catalysts, rules for ephemeral physical catalyst content identification are as follows:

1. The action the ephemeral catalyst is built upon passes the EFC test (with UREV at least partly derived from expectation of response).
2. The effort-filled ephemeral catalyst gives an in-house individual a valid opportunity to respond.
3. The opportunity to respond exists through natural means.

When Production is the only possible witness to an ephemeral physical catalyst, criterion two content is not made until the following conditions are met:

1. The effort-filled ephemeral physical catalyst invokes Production (making response opportunity valid).
2. The action the ephemeral physical catalyst is built upon passes the EFC test.
3. Opportunity to respond must be verified with one of the following:
 - a. If Production is present: Their presence proves opportunity exists (immediate UREV realized).
 - b. If Production is not present: Production must provide a response or acknowledgment to prove opportunity existed (anticipatory UREV realized).

The rules for ephemeral catalysts strongly mirror those of verbal catalysts, demonstrating the shared fragile state of their natural means. Both have a predisposition to fading after creation without witness.

With their unique attribute of extended natural means at creation, rules for persistent physical catalyst content identification are as follows:

1. The action the persistent physical catalyst is built upon passes the EFC test (with UREV at least partly derived from expectation of response).

2. The effort-filled persistent physical catalyst gives an in-house individual a valid opportunity to respond (possibly deeper into the season's runtime).
3. The opportunity to respond exists through natural means.

As we already know, natural means in the case of persistent physical catalysts has been extended for all in-house individuals because of the footprint left behind. So long as the footprint remains, natural means for all in-house individuals persists.

For persistent physical catalysts, Production does not need their own special set of rules. Production's semi-omniscience grants no special advantage while the footprint remains, as all in-house individuals share the same natural means. If the footprint is somehow erased before discovery, Production still has natural means despite others losing it. Their semi-omniscience affords them the knowledge of past events. After erasure, if Production responds, criterion two content will still have been generated.

With these rules laid out, we reach the end of criterion two content 101. Out of all the criteria, criterion two remains the most dense. A lot of that density stems from analyzing Fish in relation to what they do in front of other individuals. Where criterion one content lives on a plane not concerned with the affairs of others, criterion two content depends on, and in fact derives its UREV from, relational interaction exclusively.

The more Fish we add to the equation, the more we zoom out to better view the social perimeter of *Fishtank*, the harder individualized analysis becomes. Criterion two content is all about isolating specific actions, asking who interacts with who and when the interaction occurs, and acknowledging that to go outside the isolation leaves us with literally thousands of interconnected actions, potential catalysts, responses, and interactions to sort through. To identify every piece of content a Fish has made would be a torturous endeavor. In-field content analysis relies upon hunches and generalized assumptions for efficiency and to preserve sanity.

The final of the criteria—criterion three content—concerns itself with narrative progression rather than social interaction on a molecular level. It's the first time where we begin to appreciate the bigger picture in our analysis, where the idea of broad hunches and assumptions start to bleed into the framework out of necessity. While we still analyze specific actions, our focus starts to deviate from the immediate interaction and towards the broader narrative it might be pushing forward.

One more criterion that needs to be analyzed. Let's begin.

Criterion Three Content

The effort-filled action contributes to a major plotline.

What is a Plotline?

A plotline on *Fishtank* is a series of interconnected actions relating to an underlying conflict, from which a larger cohesive narrative forms. Plotlines can vary in importance and recognizability depending on their scope. Certain plotlines involve large amounts of Fish, while others have very few. Likewise, the extent of a plotline's duration varies depending on a number of different variables such as the interpersonal skills of Fish, Production intervention, social dynamics, house environment, and the lasting nature of the actions it is built upon.

Plotlines can be naturally occurring or, with the assistance of Production, artificially generated. Multiple plotlines can be going on at once and even overlap with one another. A Fish who acts as a protagonist within one plotline might be a side character in another. Really, it's about perspective, how we center ourselves in relation to a series of actions contributing, whether positively or negatively, towards the conflict being analyzed.

Fishtank acts like a choose your own adventure for viewers. Certain audience members will have their own opinion about who they want to watch and when. It's impossible to keep up with every single Fish, their individual arcs, and the hijinks they get up to throughout a season. This is especially true earlier on when the Fish population is at its highest and easily separated. Some Fish are considered more niche than others.

Even still, dedicated viewers of these Fish will be able to view and experience plotlines that other viewers might be unaware of. Multiple stories unfold at the same time, sometimes with great distance from each other, but this has no bearing on whether or not each plotline exists. Like catalysts, plotlines are analyzed within their own context, even if they are connected to others. Plotline interconnectivity, while absolutely a real part of *Fishtank*, has no impact on content categorization, and is therefore beyond the scope of the current analysis.

Plotlines are built on action interconnectivity in relation to an underlying conflict. This type of interconnection is the folding of one action into the next with distinguishable direction towards a goal. This end goal can be vague or evident, plausible or impossible, real or fake, the nature of it hardly matters. What matters for a plotline's existence is whether each action contributes to the underlying conflict through goal pursuit.

I want to stop on the word 'contributes' here. An action can be related to a goal in a number of ways. It could advance plot progression towards goal achievement. It could directly impede the goal from being accomplished. It could bring about the goal's resolution. Goal pursuit is the mechanism by which actions engage with conflict; in every case, an action must relate to the plotline's underlying conflict to count as contribution.

Plotlines of all sizes encapsulate actions both related and unrelated to the underlying conflict. Fish 1 walking from the kitchen to their bedroom while being involved in a week-long rivalry with Fish 2 is technically an action that occurs under a given plotline (rivalry), but it's unrelated to its underlying conflict. The only conflict being addressed here is Fish 1's insomnia. This action is purely incidental.

Meanwhile, Fish 1 ranting to a camera about their rivalry with Fish 2 has a perceptible connection to the underlying conflict. Regardless of the action's status as content, it is related to the plotline that is unfolding in some way.

While some edgecases do exist for the relationship between plotlines and contributing actions, this requirement sets up a comprehensible standard for criterion three content later down the line. Narrative analysis has fuzzy boundaries by nature, but with the combined use of the EFC test along with the requirement for relation to underlying conflict, we will be able to properly identify criterion three content when the time comes.

By these definitions, any combination of actions (basic, non-basic, and effort-filled) that form a monolith relating towards an underlying conflict can collectively be considered a plotline. The broader scope of their entertainment value is of no concern except when analyzing for the content viability of said actions. These are no longer actions in a vacuum, but actions part of the greater whole.

Plotlines can be split into two categories, minor and major. For now, we will condense their differences into a singular attribute—universal recognizability. There is a second attribute all major plotlines must hold, but we will ignore it right now for simplicity. So under our current framework, major plotlines hold universal recognizability, minor ones do not. For an action to be considered criterion three content, it must be effort-filled and contribute to the underlying conflict of a major plotline specifically. The specifics of criterion three content derives its UREV will also be discussed later.

Plotlines themselves aren't actions, but a series of actions. Therefore the concept of applying the EFC test to them is a pointless errand. It's also philosophically problematic: How does one label the entirety of a plotline 'entertaining' without picking apart all the actions that make it up?

To label an entire collection of actions as entertaining or not grows to be an actual chore. Depending on the size and scope of the plotline, you'd be pairing more or less thousands of actions against others. Any example of an effort-filled action pushing the narrative forward can be countered with a basic-action that does the same. A plotline, being composed of many parts, has the potential to be a highly complex structure to analyze. It would be like taking a series of thousands of catalysts and putting a singular label of 'content' or 'not content' on them as a whole. One catalyst is easy, thousands? Not so much.

Putting a plotline through the EFC test is like ramming a square peg into a round hole. Because sorting plotlines by their entertainment value seems to be a fruitless endeavor, we rely upon something we can somewhat discern, at least comparatively. The question is: would the average *Fishtank* viewer, regardless of focus and viewing biases, recognize the plotline being analyzed?

Unlike entertainment value, which is an inherent trait of each individual action that becomes indeterminate when aggregated, recognizability is something that actually grows clearer as we zoom out. Viewers may not recognize every action within a plotline, but they can recognize the story it is a part of. Rivalries, romances, redemption, the structure of such arcs is universal to storytelling. The whole is recognizable, even if individual parts aren't memorable.

The universal recognizability of the plotline will become a crucial part of criterion three content determination. The UREV of criterion three content is, in part, beholden to the plotline it lies under. If the plotline it's pushing forward isn't universally recognizable, in other words, if it's not major, then the action cannot be considered criterion three content.

Let's examine the distinction between major and minor plotlines in greater detail. We will start with minor plotlines, as they represent an overwhelming majority in terms of all plotlines that come into existence.

Minor Plotlines

Under the current framework, minor plotlines are plotlines not considered universally recognizable. That doesn't mean they aren't entertaining to the niche groups they appeal to. Nor does it mean the actions connected to the minor plotline aren't effort-filled. It doesn't even mean that the plotline is particularly small in scale or scope. But what it does mean is that all actions, including effort-filled actions, that relate to the underlying conflict and form the cohesive narrative of a minor plotline lack criterion three status. They might be criterion one or two, just not three.

Minor plotlines are incredibly diverse, and, like all plotlines, are made up of a subset of similarly diverse actions. All we're looking for is a goal, and a series of actions performed by at least one Fish that relate to the underlying conflict of the goal. Plotlines spring up more than you might think, it's just that we barely register them as separate from other *Fishtank* background noise.

Let's say Fish 1 is making some eggs for breakfast. This is a minor plotline involving a Fish, a goal, a conflict with one's own biological imperative to eat, and a series of actions related to that underlying conflict (ingredient searching, cooking) through goal pursuit. It's likely that most, if not all actions that contribute to this plotline fail the EFC test. Even still, the minor plotline exists without any regard to the labels of the actions.

The viewers who are aware of this plotline likely have adamant viewing preferences for Fish 1 over other contestants, or they are mindlessly flipping through cameras, scavenging in hopes of coming across something to engage them. Regardless, the plotline itself is extremely niche with very little visibility. While there's no absolutes, we can rationally infer that the elements of this plotline: early hours + mundane actions + presumably short lifespan, are going to equate to an unmemorable narrative nobody will recognize. The average up-to-date viewer isn't going to register something called 'the fifteen minute egg cooking narrative.' Therefore, we categorize this plotline as minor.

Even if an effort-filled action emerged from it, the plotline remains minor. Let's say Fish 1 burns their eggs to literal ashes and accidentally sets off the fire alarm. Scorching the eggs to this extent is a simple form of criterion one content, the burnt eggs act as an effort-filled potential physical catalyst, and the fire alarm acts as a footprint, giving other Fish a valid opportunity to respond regardless of their location—at which point the catalyst is verified and criterion two content is generated.

Content has undeniably been created here, but the previous negating factors still persist: early time + mundane actions + short life span. The act of cooking eggs is now over, and even though the original goal was never achieved in the purest sense, an objective resolution to the narrative has been reached. While content occurred in the process of the minor plotline, it's not going to outweigh the sheer mundanity and unmemorable nature of the narrative. Entertaining in the moment perhaps, but as we zoom out it's only an indistinguishable drop in a 42-day ocean.

Criterion three status is inaccessible to the content solely contributing to such a plotline. It's easy to explain why actions that fail to pass the EFC like walking or cooking eggs couldn't be considered criterion three content, despite their relation to the plotline conglomerate. Any action that fails to pass the EFC cannot be considered any type of content; that includes criterion three. Fish 1 taking out a pan to cook the eggs is an action in the spirit of goal pursuit, but it still fails the EFC test. It was never content to begin with, so obviously the label of criterion three doesn't apply.

But what about effort-filled actions? If not criterion three, what are they to be labeled? While their exclusive attachment to the minor plotline discounts them as criterion three content, it does not prevent the effort-filled action from falling under some other criterion. If the effort-filled action holds UREV even with context removed, it's sorted into criterion one. If it creates an effort-filled catalyst resulting in an opportunity to respond and derives UREV from expectation of response, it is sorted into criterion two. Perhaps it's both, in which case it encapsulates both criteria in equal amounts.

Each Fish will be a part of many minor plotlines depending on how long they last over the course of a season. Results may vary depending on the personalities and activity levels of each Fish, but the broader definition of what constitutes a minor plotline ensures that each Fish can create plenty in a short period of time.

Within the larger landscape of content analysis, minor plotlines exist as backdrops from which criterion one and two content occasionally emerges. Sometimes criterion one and two content pops up from them, sometimes not. All things considered, they are mostly unnoteworthy outside of potentially being backdrops from which clusters of content form. Because content exclusively linked to minor plotlines is incapable of being criterion three, we will not be diving much deeper into this topic.

As of right now, the only reason minor plotlines are worth mentioning is to prepare the foundational ideas that make up major plotlines. Like how actions vary in status but remain firm

in essence, or how verbal and physical catalysts are two expressions of the same basic properties, minor and major plotlines both share the same nucleus. Minor plotlines just happen to be the simpler expression.

Major Plotlines

A major plotline is a plotline that is universally recognizable with an effort-filled underlying conflict at its center. The average up-to-date *Fishtank* viewer would be fully aware of its ongoing status, and remember it as a defining moment of the season after it concludes. Before we even dive into what an 'effort-filled underlying conflict' is and why it matters, we must first explore the previously established trait of universal recognizability. The conditions that create such narrative recognizability are difficult to achieve naturally, but not impossible. *Fishtank* is a long show after all.

Why is this? To understand we must first consider what's required for a plotline to become truly universally recognizable. On average, a mainline *Fishtank* season has roughly 10 starting contestants (Fish). Each starting contestant is going to attract their own share of the viewership—viewers who default to them as their go-to Fish.

Additionally, some viewers don't congregate to any Fish in particular, rather they prefer a nomadic viewing style, flipping cameras to view whatever catches their eye in the moment. Each Fish holds a different share of the viewership at different points in time. Viewers are also not locked in their ways. Even viewers who have a preference for certain Fish occasionally deviate when noteworthy occurrences are happening elsewhere.

Individual Fish form minor plotlines all the time, of which their dedicated viewers will be intimately familiar, but unless a Fish holds a majority of the viewership over an extended period of time (something that is nearly impossible, even for the best Fish), the broad viewerbase will remain functionally unaware of the plotline they are involved in.

For a major plotline to naturally achieve universally recognizable status, you need to somehow ground the ever-changing, overly-complex viewing habits of the audience onto one centralized underlying conflict, long enough so that it becomes embedded as a distinguished narrative in their minds. It's not enough for the audience to be exposed to a plotline. They must recognize it as a cohesive story, not just witness individual actions that happen to connect to a goal. The narrative must cohere as a unified whole, where the story is seen as distinct from its individual parts.

The only way this can realistically be accomplished is through enough Fish coming together and forming interpersonal connections, at which point the individual viewership shares of each Fish converge on a centralized social dynamic. A plotline must then emerge from these social developments, and that plotline's underlying conflict must survive long enough to solidify itself as a consciously recognized narrative in the minds of the viewers.

The more Fish that are involved, the more viewers are going to become familiar with the core underlying conflict they all share. This paves the way for universal recognizability. Consider a season with ten Fish: if Fish 1 and Fish 2 share a heated rivalry where they mutually try to get the other eliminated, it might be somewhat known. Dedicated viewers to either Fish are going to be aware of this conflict, and on occasion drifting viewers might congregate to them if a particularly intense dispute happens between the two. A plotline exists, but it's not necessarily show-defining.

Now imagine the rivalry evolves into a house-wide dispute. Fish 1 and Fish 2 are at the center, but with their own set of allies. Half the Fish ally with Fish 1, and the other half with Fish 2. The underlying conflict extends well into the future, surpassing a week in length. The same underlying conflict remains, but it becomes a notable part of the season's identity.

Even when looking at the whole 42-day period a typical season occupies, this plotline makes up a noticeable timeframe. Because it encapsulates all Fish, no viewer would be able to escape its grasp. Other Fish, being allied to a specific side, are involved by proxy, meaning their fans are exposed to the plotline on a near constant basis, regardless of their preference. This allows for the plot to be universally recognizable.

When it comes to non-theoretical analysis, there's no exact moment we can point to and say, "This is where a major plotline started." Like many things in our framework, the boundaries are fuzzy. Since major plotlines are determined by the wider-audience's conscious recognition, they're felt rather than mathematically demonstrated. Not all major plotlines are going to fit into a singular box with identical qualities.

Major plotlines do have another prerequisite in order to be considered as such. This is that 'second attribute' I talked about earlier. A lot of universally recognizable plotlines have come and gone without so much as making a blip on *Fishtank* discourse. While universal recognizability does a good job at filtering things down, there still exist unignorable edge cases that have yet to be addressed.

When we only use universal recognizability as the standard for major plotline identification, we face a similar problem with that of criterion two content and semi-omniscient entities. In the section on those topics, we discussed how Production's presence implied every effort-filled action created an opportunity to respond by default, leading to an overinflation of criterion two content.

Here, the predicament is narrative-based, but overinflation remains the core issue. Every *Fishtank* season is set up the same way: an elimination-based reality TV show, where the winner is awarded a grand prize. Every Fish, regardless of their previous knowledge of *Fishtank*, knows they're on a reality TV show. The majority of these Fish share the same underlying conflict motivated by one goal—they want to win the show.

The audience is keenly aware of this ever-present, season-encapsulating narrative. By our logic then, every effort-filled action made that relates to this massive underlying conflict is criterion three content.

But this doesn't seem right. Any number of effort-filled actions could be categorized under this goal, so long as it relates to *Fishtank's* elimination-based reality TV principles. A Fish being friendly with another isn't just a friendly conversation; it can be interpreted as alliance building, thus relating to the ultimate goal of the show. This action is therefore criterion three content under the incomplete framework.

A Fish falling for another interferes with the goal of winning, therefore it is criterion three content in the same way. A Fish attempting to bond with the audience in private is gaining favor of a semi-omniscient force that could protect them from elimination, again, it would be considered criterion three content. The overinflation problem resurfaces in a different form. If every effort-filled action vaguely relating to this core conflict becomes criterion three, the label loses any use it might've had.

How do we intercept this problem? Previously, we determined that the EFC test was not applicable to plotlines as a whole, but the same cannot be said about underlying conflicts. In the context of a plotline, the underlying conflict is the core tension that drives the plotline forward. Even as a plotline evolves and actions pass, the core participants and connecting thread should remain consistent, otherwise the essence is changed and it becomes a different plotline entirely. Fish 1 and Fish 2's rivalry might shift from competition to betrayal to uneasy alliance to friendship, but viewers recognize these developments as being part of one continuous narrative arc, not separate plotlines. The relational tension between Fish 1 and Fish 2 remains a constant.

Because the underlying conflict maintains this kind of consistency as an identifiable element and is simple in essence, we can apply a test we couldn't apply to plotlines as a whole. We're no longer trying to determine the UREV of perhaps thousands of interconnected actions, but a singular, relatively unchanged core tension. The EFC test is fully in play.

Like every action connected to a plotline, criterion three content ties directly to the underlying conflict. Narrative context is an inseparable part of criterion three's identity. If the effort-filled action has no relationship to the underlying conflict of a major plotline, it fails to differentiate itself from other criteria.

No underlying conflict means no plotline, major or minor, exists to begin with. But not all underlying conflicts are equal, in fact, we've seen that most are fairly mundane. While mundanity acts as a natural filter for universal recognizability (a conflict usually isn't going to gain traction if it's boring), some conflicts are fixed in such a way as to be front and center, regardless of UREV status.

We will use our previous egg-cooking example as an edge case. If the Fish are all gathered in the kitchen at peak viewing hours, and one decides to cook eggs, the majority of the audience has now been exposed to this plotline. Despite its mundanity, the audience is watching a series of actions related to an underlying conflict unfold right in front of them. Does this not make the plotline universally recognizable?

As another example: each season has its share of challenges. Challenges are quite literally designed with a predetermined goal in mind, and often involve all, or at least a large majority of the Fish. The actions undertaken by the Fish during a challenge have a strong connection to the underlying conflict the challenge creates. We see dozens of challenges over a season's runtime, and we are inevitably drawn to them for their multi-Fish involvement. Only using universal recognizability, any effort-filled action made in relation to the challenge's underlying conflict would be considered criterion three content.

These edge cases demonstrate why applying the EFC test to the underlying conflict is so important. If the conflict itself has no UREV, then the plotline cannot elevate an action, effort-filled or otherwise, to criterion three status. An effort-filled action would need to hold UREV independent of the plotline, making its connection to said plotline coincidental rather than constitutive. The action happens during the plotline, not because of it.

The relationship between plotline and content becomes meaningless, no different from how content might coincidentally occur while a Fish is breathing or walking. It's filler, void surrounding the point of interest, completely irrelevant in our analysis.

Overinflation of criterion three content occurs when we mistake the void for the actions worth analyzing. In the case of our egg cooking example, the underlying conflict is rooted in the basic necessity of hunger. So while all viewers are technically being exposed to it, the underlying conflict itself is so rudimentary that viewers fail to register it as a distinct plotline. It's a Fish making food, not some epic rollercoaster of narrative development. The conflict fails the EFC test because it registers as basic, falling short of the first filter.

Even if content were to occur under these conditions, its UREV is in no way linked to the underlying conflict of hunger. If Fish 1 is making eggs, then decides to attack the other Fish with the frying pan they are using, the initial hunger Fish 1 is trying to resolve might as well not even exist to the viewers.

The underlying conflict of challenges also fails the EFC test. Challenges themselves are externally imposed structures with artificial timeframes designed to evoke content generation from participants. One of *Fishtank's* core properties is the regular use of challenges. Nearly all elimination-based reality TV shows have challenges central to their identities. When challenges are removed, the genre shifts into something else entirely.

Challenges might create competitive environments with UREV, but the underlying conflict is identical across all challenges—win the competition. This conflict repeats dozens of times per

season, failing the third filter of the EFC test (unique/uncommon occurrence). To the audience, challenges are usually treated as isolated special occurrences. We don't recognize them as a continuous narrative, but rather as self-contained events. This means they fail the initial requirement of universal recognizability all major plotlines must hold.

Challenges act as incubators where 'real' consequential underlying conflicts spawn and ideally carry over into the day-to-day happenings of the show. They aren't major plotlines themselves, but events that major plotlines happen to overlap with.

Looking back to the core underlying conflict of *Fishtank*; the desire to win the show, we see a similar problem. There's nothing inherently unique about this conflict. It's expected from the start of every season, and will be a part of every season moving forward. Unless given a unique flair (e.g. Famous House), this level of repetition causes it to also fail the third filter of the EFC test.

So, for a plotline to truly be categorized as 'major,' the following conditions must be met:

1. The plotline is universally recognizable.
2. The plotline's underlying conflict passes the EFC test.

Briefly going back to the definition of a minor plotline, we can make some proper adjustments. Under the incomplete framework, a minor plotline was any plotline not universally recognizable, but this has shifted slightly. With everything laid out, a minor plotline is any plotline that fails one or both of the requirements listed. A minor plotline's underlying conflict might pass the EFC test, but if the plotline itself is niche or unknown it's never properly formalized in the minds of *Fishtank* viewers, being more of a sideplot than a season-defining narrative.

A minor plotline could be universally recognizable in certain edge cases, but if its underlying conflict fails the EFC test viewers will, again, fail to register it as anything other than background noise. Mass exposure to a minor plotline does not guarantee its canonization as a fully-fledged major narrative.

Identifying Criterion Three Content

Now that we have explored the variation in how plotlines form, we can finally crack into what criterion three content is. After a plotline with an effort-filled underlying conflict forms and becomes universally recognizable, effort-filled actions relating to the underlying conflict of this major plotline are given criterion three status. But before diving into criterion three's unique mechanism, we should briefly revisit how other criteria derive UREV. This recap will help differentiate criterion three content from its predecessors.

The UREV of criterion one content is intrinsic. You can strip away the plotline, the catalyst-response dynamic, or the Fish's history. Whatever you do, the UREV remains in place because it's bound to the action's essence rather than its context.

Criterion two content focuses on a more relational framing. Catalysts and response opportunities involve a wider perspective with more complexities than the simple compound that is criterion one content. Here, the UREV of the action is derived from an expectation of response. The viewer holds their breath waiting to see how other in-house individuals will react to the effort-filled catalyst. The initial action may not have UREV when looked at in a vacuum, but because of the circumstances and the potential responses that stem from it, it exudes UREV it otherwise would not have intrinsically.

Criterion three content, like criterion two content, is context-based. The UREV of the action isn't necessarily derived from the literal action itself. But interestingly, it also isn't relational like UREV stemming from the catalyst + response dynamic. Instead, criterion three content is an effort-filled action that contributes to a major plotline's underlying conflict. Here, the context-dependent portion of an effort-filled action's UREV is linked to the major plotline's progression. The UREV of criterion three content is derived from the underlying conflict's UREV.

We already know that UREV can be related to many different things. At a base level, Fish 1 punching Fish 2 is inherently entertaining from the mere notion of violence happening on screen. Regardless of context, the action holds UREV for that reason.

If we zoom out, we see that the depth of UREV is enhanced when we consider the potential reactions the initial action creates. This isn't a one-sided affair, Fish 1 has made an effort-filled physical catalyst, and now Fish 2 has all the potential in the world to conjure up an equally entertaining response. The anticipation of a response and the potential for an escalation stemming from said response intensifies the content's potency significantly, as now UREV is both intrinsic and relational.

But once again, we can dramatically change the impact this piece of content has when we apply another non-immediate context. If Fish 1's action enhances the progression of some grander narrative most viewers are aware of (a major plotline), the depth is once again amplified.

Nothing new was added to the action. It's still a punch. But the impact of this punch is much more profound when we consider its place in a series of interconnected actions continually pushing a narrative forward. The major plotline has become central to the season, making this act of violence into a narrative turning point viewers tune in for. In other words, viewers recognize some UREV in the action *because* it advances, impedes, or resolves a conflict they're already invested in. While the UREV of the punch is intrinsic and relational, at least a part of it is also narrative-based.

One of the most unique aspects of criterion three content is how it obtains some or all of its UREV from the plotline it is attached to. The plotline's widespread recognition can supply universal recognizability that the action might otherwise lack; the action's entertainment value is universally recognizable because everyone knows about the plotline it's connected to.

All actions have some degree of entertainment value. For an action to be content this entertainment value must be universally recognizable. But criterion three content, at least in part, relies upon the universal recognition of its plotline for assistance. The plotline is so well-known that it can fill in for the UR component of an action's UREV if it has none.

To demonstrate, consider the following example: Fish 2 decides to leave chocolate on Fish 4's bed. On its own, this is an effort-filled potential physical catalyst. Clearly it's non-basic, and it's not every day that a Fish decides to leave secret gifts for another. Anticipatory UREV is created (how will Fish 4 react?) but not yet realized. A valid opportunity to respond has yet to be provided. While awaiting discovery, the action is not yet content.

But now, let's add a major plotline to the mix. Fish 2 has been experiencing an unrequited crush for Fish 4, and this one-sided dynamic has become a primary narrative in the eyes of the viewers. Fish 2 is a fan-favorite, and Fish 4 is known for their cutthroat competitive style, both are front-runners for a place in the finale. The only other Fish who remain, let's say Fish 1 and Fish 3, have sided with Fish 2 and Fish 4 respectively. At the moment, the show's driving narrative centers upon Fish 2's and Fish 4's dynamic.

Even the most dedicated viewers of Fish 1 and Fish 3 indirectly witness the plotline through their go-to Fish's involvement. The unrequited-love conflict is instantly recognizable to any fan who consumes media. Putting the underlying conflict through the EFC test, we can see it's non-basic, not easy to replicate (realistic ships are few and far between in any season), and holds UREV. Even viewers opposed to romance can recognize how it's entertaining in the realm of reality TV, as this is exactly the kind of dynamic the genre sets expectations for. We can therefore reliably conclude that a major plotline is ongoing.

Fish 2's action then—leaving chocolate for Fish 4—directly relates to the major plotline's underlying conflict. Even if other Fish are never given an opportunity to respond by Fish 2's action, its existence relates to the core tension in some way. The audience processes this action as a plotline intensifier because it serves as a form of dramatic irony. Viewers have now gained some insight into Fish 2's psychological profile through the action that other contestants don't have, creating tension and anticipation for the next narrative development.

What was once a catalyst awaiting validation has now been confirmed as a piece of content, even without the need for intrinsic or relational UREV. The relationship to a major plotline provides the means through which this action is elevated to content standing. At least part of its UREV is narrative-based.

Because of this dynamic, we can say in this case that the action's elevation is contingent upon its relationship to the underlying conflict. The UREV exists because of what it does for the plot. Its entertainment value is universally recognizable only because everyone knows what this action does for the narrative. A miniscule action is suddenly inflated to great importance when narrative context is considered.

Even viewers who personally find the action entirely disinteresting can recognize why somebody else would be entertained, and this recognition is based on the major plotline's existence. Remove the major plotline, and we're left with an action whose UREV is entirely based on its potential discovery as a persistent physical catalyst (anticipatory UREV) rather than being derived from narrative significance. Its status as content then would be up in the air, entirely dependent on its discovery since it has yet to provide a valid response opportunity.

Imagine instead that Fish 2 and Fish 4 were part of a greater remaining cast of ten Fish, and that this time Fish 1 and Fish 3 aren't involved. The plotline's underlying conflict remains the same, but the plotline itself has become more niche. It's not guaranteed as recognizable to the average *Fishtank* viewer, so while the conflict no doubt passes the EFC test, the plotline's status as major would be highly questionable. For simplicity, we will assume the plotline has become minor.

Now if Fish 2 leaves chocolate on Fish 4's bed, those who are aware of the minor plotline recognize entertainment value. They know of the narrative unfolding before them, so they are equally aware of the narrative significance of the action. Anticipatory UREV is still derived from how we expect some in-house individual to react, meaning criterion two status is still on the table.

However, because this plotline is minor, the narrative-based entertainment value is only recognizable to a niche audience—those who are aware of the minor plotline. This means the entertainment value of the action lacks universal recognizability. The action cannot derive UREV from the plotline, and therefore cannot be considered criterion three content.

That doesn't mean Fish 2's action is entirely useless, however. Recall that Fish 2 has made a potential effort-filled physical catalyst. If an in-house individual is shown to have a valid opportunity to respond, Fish 2 would have made criterion two content. The action's UREV is realized, but this UREV is relational rather than being narrative-based.

In our original example where we defined the plotline as major, the result wouldn't change much whether or not an in-house individual discovered Fish 2's effort-filled catalyst. In the case of discovery, a valid opportunity to respond has been proven and Fish 2 makes criterion two content. The catalyst already derived anticipatory UREV from the potential catalyst-response dynamic. But also consider that the action still contributes to the major plotline itself, which makes its UREV also partly derived from narrative significance. The action now carries both relational UREV and narrative-based UREV. The action, therefore, is an overlap of criterion two and three content, being categorized as both.

In the case of no discovery, the potential catalyst is never considered criterion two content as anticipatory UREV was never realized, but it still relates to the underlying conflict of the major plotline. The UREV is now solely derived from and entirely dependent on its relation to the major plotline's underlying conflict. Since no criterion two content was generated, and we are certain no intrinsic UREV exists, the action can only be criterion three content.

The final determination of criterion three content rests on the previously established principles: the plotline being universally recognizable, its underlying conflict passing the EFC test, and the foundational components all actions must live up to if they are to be categorized as content. A plotline's status is first and foremost when identifying criterion three content, as without its existence criterion three content would be an impossibility.

Only when this expectation is met can we truly analyze an action for what it is and how it relates to the underlying conflict. The EFC test is engaged twice during criterion three content identification, once for the underlying conflict, and a second time for the specific action relating to said conflict. This peculiar method is another way criterion three content distinguishes itself from the other criteria.

Ultimately, criterion three content analysis is a multifaceted affair, and relies upon the following rules in order:

1. The plotline is universally recognizable.
2. The plotline's underlying conflict passes the EFC test.
3. The effort-filled action relates to the major plotline's underlying conflict, therefore contributing to it.

You'll notice the first two steps strictly center around the plotline itself. Once the plotline has been confirmed to be major, we move towards the specific action we want to analyze. At this point, ensuring the action passes the EFC test is a given, so our only remaining concern is whether it relates to the underlying conflict. The action's UREV must be at least partially derived from the major plotline's underlying conflict. If this is the case, then the action cannot be labeled criterion three content.

Before moving on, we should briefly address two potential time-based nuances in our identification methods. First: criterion three content has an unspoken temporal requirement. A major plotline must be ongoing for an action to fully contribute to it. It's not enough for an action to reference a concluded plotline, it must actually relate to the major plotline when it is still active.

The use of temporal borders isn't something new to our content analysis. Criterion two content has its own rules for time and its effect on the validity of actions as content. Actions referencing a major plotline after the fact are akin to outside commentary on a story that has long since concluded. The commentary has no bearing on what has passed.

Second: Just like how actions after the fact cannot be made criterion three content by a major plotline that has already concluded, actions predating the major plotline share similar standing. If a minor plotline develops into a major one, we cannot say the actions relating to the plotline when it was minor suddenly become criterion three content.

To dictate what actions pre-dating the major plotline could be considered criterion three content quickly falls into one's own subjective determination. How far back can we go before actions of the past no longer meaningfully relate to the major plotline of the present? Precise questioning, while reasonable, exceeds the scope of our macro-level content categorization. Our framework identifies criterion three content through systematic rules applied at the time of action, not the exploration of retroactive narratives.

As we know, there is at least one in-house individual who isn't quite bound to ordinary temporal development: everybody's favorite set of competent show-runners, Production. While not quite as hands-on in the creation of criterion three content as they might be with criterion two, Production has a certain kind of influence that allows them to radically alter how a major plotline forms. Their capacity for such influence, while convenient during content lulls, is not without its drawbacks.

Criterion Three Content and Production

Production acts as a focal point for every person involved in the *Fishtank* experience. Other in-house individuals like Fish and Freeloaders rally around them as an anchor in a show known for its chaotic elements. Viewers are equally reliant on Production, but with an extremely volatile love-hate relationship. When the show is going well and the content flows abundantly, we praise them. When content begins to lull, general show discussion turns into heavy Production criticism.

Whenever Production is on screen, the attention of Fish and viewer alike is captured in full. We think perhaps, for a brief while, the directionless will be given direction. The show will have a short-term structure. Everyone will be given something to hone in on, but what that something is can take shape in a few different ways: challenge, task, confessional, a speech meant to rouse the Fish. Whatever it may be, these moments ground the Fish and herd the audience to the same camera, waiting to witness the next marching order and content that might flow from it.

Production wields a lot of power. They control the cameras, they filter audience-Fish communications, they herd the Fish, they decide when and how the audience interacts with the Fish, they hold each contestant's outcome in their hands. If they want to make a Fish the center of attention, they can do it. If they want to kick somebody off the show, they can do that. If they want you to hate or love a certain contestant, even if you think you're immune to suggestion, they have more influence on audience opinion than any other entity in the *Fishtank* universe.

How Production effectively utilizes their power will be a central topic spanning across multiple parts of the treatise, and while we have yet to explore this concept in detail due to being focused on the absolute basics of content theory, it will become even more relevant when we zoom out towards Fish dynamics and other broader sources of content interconnectivity. The show's direction, and by extension the quality of every season, is largely dependent on Production. And depending how familiar you are with *Fishtank*, that can be a very grim thought.

Production's involvement with criterion three content is the first of many times their presence will be scrutinized. Combine their camera control with their position as a natural focal point, and you have an entity who can make any plotline universally recognizable at will, regardless of what the audience thinks.

This means that so long as a minor plotline has an effort-filled underlying conflict, Production can force it into being universally recognizable with enough willpower. When a major plotline comes into existence, you typically need a bit of time for all components to fall in place. A plotline with an effort-filled underlying conflict that also engages the broader viewership faces many difficulties naturally forming on its own. Even when these conditions align, the plotline must persist long enough to solidify in viewers' minds as an actual story rather than incidental occurrences.

Production's power makes passing some of these stages trivial. If a minor plotline has an effort-filled underlying conflict from the start, Production can point the audience in its direction, dramatically expanding attention in a minuscule amount of time. What once would take a week or more can now be condensed into two days or less. Instead of the audience organically discovering the plotline and its recognition spreading through word of mouth, Production just cuts out the middle stage and elevates the plotline to universal recognizability.

But Production isn't limited to solely pre-existing plotlines. If they so desire, Production can form major plotlines out of nothing more than an idea and a malleable Fish. If Production wanted to create a major plotline with a specific underlying conflict in mind, they could use their position of authority to influence, convince, manipulate, or otherwise persuade a Fish into bearing this torch.

Being the ultimate authority figure of every Fish and the central decisionmaker regarding their fates allows Production to push submissive Fish into doing what they want them to do. There will always be Fish seeking validation, who look towards Production as the solution to their problems. To them, Production can be a gateway into the world of online infamy, a social circle they hope to join, a group that when appeased will perhaps reach down and bestow upon them the coveted *Fishtank* grand prize so they can say, "It was all worth it."

To these Fish, convincing might require only minor gaslighting and the occasional Production-given comment of pride and encouragement. Sometimes even that much isn't required. Once the Fish sets a plotline in motion because of the constant presence of Production, all Production needs to do to make it major is ensure the audience focuses on it. A goal easily accomplished since they themselves are a focal point.

This isn't meant to be an indictment on Production. They hold this power regardless of how they manage a season, and moral evaluation is irrelevant to content analysis. So long as Production uses the power from their position of authority to keep the content flowing and the show in good standing, nobody is going to complain. The potential issues originate from creating a major plotline that is less than fully baked in such a short timespan.

But why would Production want to form a major plotline at a lightning-fast pace, even when it threatens a plotline's quality? Why skip over the intermediate stages? Simply put, major plotlines are one of the best tools for content generation. They provide numerous benefits for the audience and Production while keeping potential risks and continual investment of effort relatively low for the content output they provide.

The existence of an underlying conflict acts as a natural motivator for all Fish involved. When a Fish is truly invested, their desire to pursue the goal set in front of them can become an all-consuming force. Their emotions spur them forward to act, intermingle with other Fish, socialize, take risks, and be susceptible to suggestions they otherwise would resist.

A Fish in a naturally-formed rivalry is going to use the genuine hatred and competitive drive they experience as fuel to topple their enemy. Their mind is consumed by real emotional pursuit, increasing the likelihood for them to act. A plotline such as this encourages social maneuvering and alliance-building. When the Fish begins to branch out towards others with this goal in mind, other Fish are exposed to it and are tempted to get involved themselves. They stake their position, form their own alliances, develop strategy, and make strategic decisions based on the rivalry dynamics around them. They are now active participants in the underlying conflict.

As more Fish get involved in the emotional feud, the likelihood of content generation starts to accelerate. The underlying conflict is now a shared driving force that spurs all involved Fish into action. When one Fish acts, others react in turn. This situation creates a self-sustaining cycle of content generation, all under the umbrella of that original conflict. The Fish begin to feed off each other's energy, creating an ideal content-making environment.

Emotional investment is the most powerful driver of content generation. When a Fish is checked out, and when they feel they have no stake in the game, they grow apathetic. A disinterested Fish simply has no reason to involve themselves in anything. But a Fish who is emotionally invested? They are driven by the constant urge to engage with the underlying conflict. Their mind has made the pursuit of the plotline's end goal into its primary focus. The Fish is constantly tempted to act, and through those actions comes content generation.

Plotlines are expressions of a Fish's desire to resolve an underlying conflict. We know they vary in intensity, but plotlines with an effort-filled underlying conflict are inherently compelling to the viewerbase. When such a plotline is made universally recognizable, the show now has a source of near-inexhaustible content viewers are actively tuning in for, sustained by nothing more than each Fish's genuine emotional investment. One underlying conflict can generate near-endless actions from multiple Fish with minimal outsider intervention once established.

So long as each Fish remains invested, the plotline will persist, and the content will continue to flow. With this newfound source of long-term content, Production rarely has to involve themselves. They have a content-making machine with each Fish acting as a gear contributing to its efficiency. Production might have to give a Fish the occasional nudge towards action, but this is akin to retuning the content machine to ensure it runs at its most optimal rate. Beyond

occasional maintenance, the major plotline allows the show to coast while keeping the audience especially entertained. It's the closest *Fishtank* gets to a perpetual content generator.

The ease with which major plotlines generate content is already enough reason for Production to want them throughout a season's runtime, but it's not the only reason. Assuming a season doesn't face catastrophic collapse, *Fishtank*, like reality TV of similar genre, is split into two sections: day-to-day life, and official competition.

The day-to-day life part of *Fishtank* is what somebody thinks of when they hear reality TV. This includes contestant intermingling, drama, friendship formation, rivalry development, and all the other social elements tied to *Fishtank*. If it's built on social dynamics and standard living activities, it's part of the day-to-day side of *Fishtank*.

The official competition part of *Fishtank* includes things like challenges, tasks, assignments, and any sort of Production-assigned event with stakes. The stakes could range from an ambiguous reward to determining whether a Fish stays or gets eliminated. The core similarity is Production being the organizer. These events are meant to be formally structured parts of the show that are proctored by Production.

The majority of *Fishtank* is made up of day-to-day life activities interspersed with the occasional challenge or task by Production. 'Friendtank' outnumbers 'Hellhouse' by a pretty big margin. While the numbers are in no way exact, I'd put the split around 80/20 between the day-to-day life and official competition parts of the show. Production cannot maintain constant involvement over a 42-day period. Even if Production maintained a constant presence, it would be extremely fatiguing for viewers and Fish alike. Non-structured timeframes with minimal Production involvement are needed for the show to maintain a stable content output.

Because these periods of non-structured downtime are unavoidable, the show necessitates a self-sustaining, long-term source of content that involves most Fish, provides the audience something they can reliably tune in to throughout the day, and allows Production to not be actively involved. A major plotline satisfies most, if not all of these requirements. Once achieved, it provides substantial content for very little maintenance.

Without any sense of narrative, the majority of time in a *Fishtank* day feels devoid of life. There's no sense of overarching anticipation for the audience. While content can still occur, the lack of narrative connection makes all content feel disjointed. Content for content's sake has value, but without a major plotline, all content feels inconsequential and ephemeral. Everything exists purely in the present without providing fuel for content in the future, and content starts to feel interchangeable.

Major plotlines cultivate content in the long term that provide a much needed contrast to the content without consequential purpose. Without them, the lack of any underlying conflict and emotional investment outside of challenges transforms that 80% of *Fishtank* into a glorified waiting room in between challenges. Major plotlines give the viewer something to reliably

anticipate during the downtime while allowing Production to let the Fish do some of the heavy lifting.

Production understands what major plotlines provide, even without the theoretical framework presented here. They may not articulate it in these terms, but they recognize the need for ongoing narratives between official competitions. The *Fishtank* community has internalized the concept of plotlines to the point of satirizing it. We make up character development where there isn't any and joke about how it makes for a meaningful narrative. We talk about how Production has a grand plan to tie loose ends together when no such plan exists. But these jokes are built upon the very real desire to watch a narrative unfold in front of us in real time. We crave plot.

It's no mystery then why Production would want to churn out a major plotline as fast as possible when the show is absent of one. A major plotline is everything a showrunner could dream of. But here lies the problem. The fact that major plotlines take long periods to form naturally isn't without reason. For a major plotline to truly mean something, its formation requires a lot of time and attention to detail. Time acts as a natural filter, ensuring only the most robust and structurally sound plotlines achieve major status. If a plotline never reaches major status on its own, it was likely never strong enough to begin with.

Think about it: if a plotline's underlying conflict is subpar, it will never capture attention and never become major. If a plotline has a good underlying conflict but is built upon shabby interpersonal dynamics, it will break down early and never become major. If the Fish aren't emotionally invested in the plotline, it will similarly stagnate due to lack of motivation and fail to become major. By the time a plotline naturally achieves major status, it's already cleared these difficult barriers. We can therefore be assured the plotline will be robust and last into the long-term while needing very little outside intervention.

If Production utilizes their power to surpass these natural barriers, it puts the quality of the plotline at risk. Perhaps the plotline becomes major temporarily, but there is no guarantee it will last without Production's assistance. The extent of each Fish's investment becomes uncertain. Are they truly invested, or are they just going along with what Production says? The content that flows from this plotline can come off as insincere since the plotline itself was built upon shabby ground. In doing this, Production is effectively gambling on future stability; they hope to create the major plotline first and address its weaknesses later.

When this occurs, Production has created an *artificial plotline*. An artificial plotline is a major plotline that depends on Production's continuous involvement in order to keep from collapsing. The moment Production stops involving themselves, the artificial plotline will stagnate almost immediately. The natural conclusion from their disinvolvement is the cessation of any narrative development followed by the plotline dwindling into complete irrelevancy. Where a plotline once was, there is a plotline no more.

To date, Production has only created artificial plotlines during especially drastic periods of a *Fishtank* season. If content generation drops sharply and remains low,

Production—understanding that major plotlines provide lots of content—will try to create one to alleviate the audience’s irritation. The growing frustration of the audience puts pressure on Production to act. Knowing that they need content now rather than later, Production will try to skip over the barriers major plotlines typically have to cross that ensure their quality.

If Production’s gamble works, the plotline will become self-sufficient. Production can step away, and the plotline is indistinguishable from your typical major plotline. At that point, the plotline is no longer considered ‘artificial,’ as it can survive on its own.

However, if this gamble fails, Production cannot step away without the plotline collapsing in on itself. To keep the plotline progressing, Production will need to constantly intervene, telling Fish what to do, why they should be doing it, and possibly offering rewards as a form of bribery to artificially motivate the Fish involved. The audience perceives content from the artificial plotline as forced rather than organic.

By contrast, natural major plotlines don’t require this level of intervention. The Fish’s emotional investment is enough motivation all on its own. Limited Production involvement in a natural plotline acts as garnish to an already delicious dish. But with an artificial plotline, the narrative hasn’t cleared that barrier. Without time for genuine emotional investment to develop, the Fish won’t be as active as they otherwise would have been over the course of a longer development period. The typical benefits of a major plotline are absent.

Even with natural major plotlines, Production’s involvement can spell disaster if they intervene too aggressively. Because they are content-generating hotspots, major plotlines draw the attention of Production quite easily. They see something that engages the audience and are tempted to create more of a good thing.

This is a fine line to walk, as even misplaced minor intervention when dealing with a major plotline can derail it entirely. Consequences include Fish becoming self aware of the plotline, their role in the story, or even an early elimination. If the Fish become aware, their emotional investment could dwindle, or at least be noticeably altered. Even worse, they might begin to perform and exaggerate rather than act authentically. In all cases, content generation deteriorates, and audience reception does the same.

But effective Production intervention could lead to a significant increase in the emotional investment of the Fish. For example, a well-placed gaslight by Production can spur the Fish into action, ultimately leading to more content generation. It’s standard high-risk high-reward decisionmaking.

Ultimately, Production’s decision to create an artificial plotline will be primarily motivated by the show’s current quality. There are theoretical cases where Production could let pride, ego, misguided ideas, or just unintelligent planning influence them into creating an artificial plotline unnecessarily. But we can only hope Production stays the course and properly evaluates all options before pursuing this risky maneuver.

Therefore, Production's relationship to criterion three content differs fundamentally from their relationship to criterion two. With criterion two content, Production functions as a semi-omniscient entity. Their presence alone potentially creates ever-present response opportunities, inflating content categorization in ways we must immediately correct for.

With criterion three content, Production's influence is incredibly broad in comparison. They cannot bring content into existence by their presence alone. Instead, they must actively construct a narrative from the ground up by manipulating Fish, manufacturing conflict, bringing the conflict to the attention of the viewerbase, and sustaining emotional investment of contestants. The use of power to influence key show structures and the need for constant intervention requires greater effort than just having a mere reaction opportunity.

This distinction reveals an important shift in our analysis. We're beginning to move away from examining individual actions and immediate dynamics (criteria one and two) to understanding overarching narratives and long-term content generation (criterion three). Content generation as a whole is now being viewed in the context of one large ecosystem. Criterion three is bridging the gap between content analysis in theory and content analysis in practice. Starting to adopt this broadening methodology will allow us to explain the volatile nature of every *Fishtank* season in future parts of the treatise.

In relation to criterion three content, Production's involvement doesn't create special categorical conditions. There are no special rules involving Production's presence. If Production encourages or manipulates a Fish into performing an effort-filled action related to a major plotline's underlying conflict, the integrity of the resulting content isn't threatened.

Artificial plotlines, while having a perceptible difference from natural major plotlines, still require universal recognizability and an effort-filled underlying conflict. Therefore, criterion three content generation uses the same conditions regardless of whether Production is very involved. Whether a major plotline is artificial or natural, a Fish creating content in relation to either is counted as criterion three content generation.

Our original rules hold firm:

1. The plotline itself is universally recognizable.
2. The plotline's underlying conflict passes the EFC test.
3. The effort-filled action relates to the major plotline's underlying conflict, therefore contributing to it.

In the same way Production can technically make criterion two content of their own accord (when they are a catalyst creator), they can also generate criterion three content. This fact remains largely irrelevant to our analysis, however. Yes, Production can create their own content, but we're strictly concerned with the content generated by Fish. Our focus remains on how Production influences Fish-generated content, not content Production creates directly.

We will revisit artificial plotlines in future parts, especially relating to analysis of Season Two. This season collapsed so early in its runtime and in such disastrous fashion that Production believed an artificial plotline was necessary. It provides us with the best example of an artificial plotline to date, making it ripe for examination. As for Production and the extent of their on-show involvement, they will also be greatly emphasized in future parts, becoming increasingly important as we begin to investigate why each season experiences sudden, almost cyclical peaks and collapses in quality.

Before concluding our discussion of criterion three content, and the three criteria as a whole, one more clarification is needed regarding specific *Fishtank* terminology that might be confused as interchangeable. We need to distinguish between arcs and plotlines.

Plotlines vs. Arcs

We already know that a plotline is a series of goal-oriented interconnected actions relating to an underlying conflict. Both the underlying conflict and goal exist in tandem with each other. It is the desire to achieve the goal that pushes Fish into action. Fish pursue resolution through actions that advance, impede, or resolve the underlying conflict that has formed around them, regardless of how well-known or how entertaining it is.

Major plotlines are especially interesting to the broader *Fishtank* audience. Each major plotline typically encapsulates a narrative that spans a noteworthy part of a given season. When analyzed, they mirror patterns of the traditional story structure (setup, rising action, climax, and resolution). This is not surprising, as viewers naturally impose narrative frameworks onto events, seeking anticipatable progression they are familiar with. While *Fishtank* is entirely based in reality, we automatically seek out narrative structure typically found within fictional works.

Many plotlines involve or even define themselves upon the character development of certain Fish. Put simply, Fish can undergo character arcs in real time. The continuous development of a major plotline and the Fish involved has been referred to as an 'arc.' Again, this isn't surprising since the *Fishtank* community borrows terms associated with cinephilia as a form of tongue-in-cheek rhetoric.

I'm not criticizing the use of these terms, the ironic vocabulary adds to *Fishtank's* charm, but in the confines of this work we must distinguish between plots and arcs for analytical clarity.

In our framework, we define arcs as phases of the show defined by specific conditions and tone. They effectively act as thematic containers, time periods with shared characteristics that conclude when the conditions of the show change. Unlike major plotlines, which have an underlying conflict and goal being pursued, arcs are defined by external conditions rather than their resemblance to a narrative.

While plotlines can exist within an arc, they are not the arc itself. Arcs function primarily as a tool to identify important timeframes in a season's runtime, streamlining discussion in the process.

They describe when and under what conditions an action, plotline, occurrence, or piece of content took place.

For example, when referring to the period of time in Season One following Jon's elimination and marked by a sudden downturn in content, a person would likely just say "the Camping Arc" rather than referring to a specific set of days. If you wanted to talk about notable timeframes of Season Three, arcs such as Famous House, Famous House 2.0, the RV arc, and the Vegas arc would all come to mind.

An arc might be closely associated with a major plotline if that plotline sets the tone for the show at that point in time. For example, if Days 10-18 on Season X are defined primarily by a major rivalry between Fish 1 and Fish 2, that phase would likely be named after the rivalry (e.g., 'the Rivalry Arc'). However, they are not mutually exchangeable. The plotline describes what goal was being pursued while the arc makes clear the conditions the goal was pursued under. The arc is only named after the plotline because the plotline dominates that time period.

With this final distinction out of the way, we can move into a comprehensive recap of everything we have discussed in Part I.

Moving Forward and Some Brief Review

This concludes the coverage of the foundations of content theory. We can now separate basic actions from content, as well as sort content into the proper criteria. While Part I has been theory-heavy and puts great emphasis on the details, keep in mind that it encapsulates the micro-level of *Fishtank* analysis. While we still have a ways to go before theory can be put into practice, we will finally be able to stretch out and broaden our analytical horizons to concepts distinctly recognized as *Fishtank* in future parts.

Now that we know what content is, we can begin to examine content in aggregate rather than isolated actions of unique origin. In future parts, we will focus far less on the individual identities of actions, instead shifting our focus to the agents that bring content into reality. We can begin applying parts of our theoretical framework to on-show social dynamics every viewer intuitively understands.

We know what content is on the micro scale and instinctually understand that its generation affects a season's quality, but we've only just begun to put this relationship into words. However, before we can appreciate how even the tiniest pieces of content can alter the course of a season, we need to set our sights on a more comprehensible target.

When treating it as a component to a theoretical framework, it's easy to forget content exists outside the borders of a page. It is a tangible, inseparable part of every season. Content, therefore, cannot spring into existence from nothing. It needs a bridge between nonbeing and being. The next logical step then is to view content in relation to those who create it—the Fish.

In Part II, content generation will be viewed as a compounded grouping that determines the individual quality of a Fish. To truly reach the point of full season analysis, we must first focus on Fish as content-creating individuals rather than breaking down each piece of content they make.

By aggregating the content each Fish produces over time and tracking how their content generation fluctuates, we can assess their individual quality and understand how micro-level content accumulates into macro-level season shifts.

This intermediary stage of content analysis will be a central theme of Part II. We will explore Fish as content generators and take the first steps in exploring how different amounts of content generation can determine a season's quality. But just because our focus will shift doesn't mean past concepts become any less significant. The terms we've discussed will continually be used throughout future parts as blocks to build upon, making familiarity with these terms essential for understanding.

Before we conclude Part I, let's review the key concepts we've discussed, along with some important details about them.

Note: The definitions below will not be exact word-for-word repeats. Because this is a recap of the topics we've broken down in detail, the definitions will be somewhat simplified and partially updated. Certain content-specific terms will also be used in definitions that were introduced before the full scope of our terminology was established. This is intentional, as we now have better vocabulary to explain these terms.

UREV "Universally Recognizable Entertainment Value"

- The ability for a viewer to see why a specific action is entertaining to others, regardless of whether they personally find it entertaining.
 - The fundamental axiom upon which all content analysis is built.
 - The known unknown.
 - Operates within *Fishtank's* genre conventions (what the average viewer tunes in for).
 - Can be intrinsic, relational, narrative-based, or multiple at once.

Actions

- Anything an in-house individual does at any point in a given season's runtime.
 - The precursor to all content that is to be generated.
 - Performed by every in-house individual, but in this work we primarily focus on Fish-based actions over others.
 - Every piece of content is an action, not all actions are content.

EFC Test "Effort-Filled Content Test"

- The filters used to determine whether or not an action is effort-filled.
 - Basic or Non-Basic?
 - UREV or no UREV?

- Has the action become functionally basic through repetition?
- An action must pass all three filters to qualify as content.

The Law of Diminishing Content Returns

- The idea that with enough subsequent repetitions, an effort-filled action can lose universal recognizability of its entertainment value.
 - Heavily associated with the third filter of the EFC test.
 - Repetition negatively affects an action's potency, turning it functionally basic.
 - Unique flairs can counter diminishing returns; longer pauses between repetitions allow UREV to recover.

First Day Rule

- The idea that no content can be made on the first day of a season.
 - More of a convenience-based rule than actual fact.
 - Day 1 involves technical issues and incomplete cast introductions, making concrete analysis impractical.
 - Excitement surrounding a new season muddles analysis.
 - Allows viewers to acclimate to the new cast and observe without their analysis being swayed by new-season excitement.

Content

- A label used for any action that has passed the EFC test and the First Day Rule.
 - Content is sorted into three different criteria.
 - A piece of content can occupy multiple criteria at once.
 - Certain criteria require specific contexts or met conditions beyond the initial EFC test for sorting to take place.
 - Interchangeable with the term 'effort-filled action.'
 - UREV can be derived from different sources/contexts.

Criterion One Content

- An effort-filled action that is recognized as having UREV by Fishtank viewers, even with context removed.
 - Clippable content, no context required for understanding its UREV.
 - UREV is linked to the action itself as a spectacle (intrinsic).

Criterion Two Content

- An effort-filled catalyst that provides other in-house individuals with an opportunity to respond through natural means.
 - UREV is context-based, being linked to interpersonal dynamics and anticipation of response (relational).
 - Opportunity to respond is a requirement for a catalyst to be considered criterion two content.
 - Whether a response occurs is irrelevant; only the opportunity to respond matters.

Catalyst

- Any action performed by an in-house individual that provides other in-house individuals with a valid opportunity to respond.
 - Categorized by two distinctions: basic or effort-filled (based on EFC test), and verbal or physical (based on medium).
 - Catalysts must pass the EFC test and provide a verified opportunity to respond to be considered criterion two content.
 - Basic catalysts cannot become content.
 - UREV of an effort-filled catalyst can be immediate (witness present at creation), anticipatory (opportunity to respond exists but awaits discovery/verification for UREV to be realized), or both.

Natural Means

- The ability for an in-house individual to validly fulfill the opportunity to respond through naturally available methods based on their default knowledge and access.
 - 'Ability' refers to potential/capacity to validly fulfill the opportunity to respond.
 - Semi-omniscient figures have a greater degree of natural means than those with standard knowledge.
 - Natural means will vary depending on the catalyst created and whether or not an extension is given through proper invocation (for Production) or through discoverable evidence leftover.

Verbal Catalyst

- A catalyst that primarily utilizes verbal expression, the emulation of verbal expression, vocal sounds, or language as a medium for its existence.
 - Ephemeral by nature. Fade immediately out of existence if nobody is around to witness them. Fragile natural means.
 - Includes non-vocal communicative acts (gestures, facial expressions) that share the ephemeral quality.
 - Natural means related to a verbal catalyst can be extended when invoking Production directly, but criterion two content generation is not guaranteed until they prove they had the opportunity to respond.

Physical Catalyst

- A catalyst that uses a combination of human force and physical contact as a medium for its existence.
 - The human force and physical contact must be causally linked for a physical catalyst to exist.
 - Split into two types: ephemeral and persistent.
 - Ephemeral catalysts have very fragile natural means, similar to verbal catalysts.
 - Persistent catalysts leave discoverable evidence (footprints) that continue to persist over time. Footprints create the conditions for natural means to persist in the future.

- For persistent physical catalysts, invocation of Production is not required for their response opportunity to be valid.
- Extremely difficult for them to fade from existence without leaving natural means behind.

Criterion Three Content

- An effort-filled action that contributes to a major plotline.
 - UREV of the action is at least partially derived from the plotline's underlying conflict, linked to the action's narrative significance (narrative-based).
 - The major plotline must be ongoing at the time of the action; actions predating or postdating the major plotline do not qualify.

Plotline

- A series of interconnected actions relating to an underlying conflict in the pursuit of a goal, from which a larger cohesive narrative forms.
 - Split into two types: major and minor.
 - Major plotlines require universal recognizability and an effort-filled underlying conflict.
 - Minor plotlines fail one or both of the requirements above.
 - Major plotlines in particular are fantastic sources for long-term content generation.
 - Major plotlines can form naturally over time or be artificially accelerated by Production.

Artificial Plotline

- A major plotline reliant on Production's continuous involvement to prevent its collapse.
 - Typically employed during the meager points of a season to satisfy content withdrawals in the short term.
 - Not sustainable in the long term. Require constant effort for mediocre content returns.
 - If the artificial plotline becomes self-sustaining (potentially through Fish developing genuine emotional investment), it is no longer considered artificial.
 - Often criticized by the audience as feeling 'forced.'

Arc

- A time period of significance identified for specific conditions, thematic expression, or a particular tone.
 - Used to easily pinpoint when in a season something took place.
 - Given a name relevant to the arc for easy recognizability.
 - Not to be confused with plotlines. Arcs describe when and under what conditions something occurred; plotlines describe a specific underlying conflict and what goal was being pursued.

End of Part I

Thanks for reading. This work has been roughly two years in the making, and Part I represents roughly 1/5th of what I currently have saved up. Even with multiple revisions, the treatise continues to grow from what I originally intended. The original plan was to revise the treatise in its entirety then upload, but as it turns out, writing is hard.

Part II does exist, but it covers a lot. It didn't originally, but including Season Two, a total of three seasons have been started and (sometimes prematurely) finished since writing began. As you can imagine, each season results in more mayhem, and more mayhem leads to greater amounts of *Fishtank*-centric pondering and the emergence of new ideas.

As of right now, Part II dives into Fish as content creators and how we can perhaps rank them in comparison to one another. This shouldn't come as a shock, but some Fish tend to be, let's just say, on the inactive side. But each has their place. Not everyone can be a Jon or an Alex B, and in many ways that's a good thing. Ten Alex B's in one house would make even the most dedicated *Fishtank* fan long for the simplicity of the RV arc.

Along with that, Part II includes a highly theoretical structure for determining content quality. What makes one piece of content superior to another? Can we possibly sense or predict how a piece of content will affect the show, be it negatively or positively? These questions tie into the original intent of this work: determining why the quality of a season fluctuates at such an extreme level.

Revisions for Part II will start soon enough. At the very least, this work acts as a containment measure to keep me from filling an already pretty active thread with overly complex *Fishtank* analysis. Some people just want to watch retards degrade themselves on reality TV, and I completely understand.