

Praise for *A Companion to Media Fandom and Fan Studies*

“Twenty-five years ago, the publication of *Textual Poachers* by Henry Jenkins (1992), effectively launched an exciting new field of fan studies. The publication of this large, multidisciplinary volume demonstrates beyond a doubt that both fandom and fan studies have come of age in the digital era. Established and new scholars alike reflect critically on a range of media texts, fan identities and fan practices in a number of contexts – material, geographical and online. Taken together, the issues and concerns raised will be of interest not only to fans and fan scholars but to anyone with an affiliation and affinity to popular culture in a highly-mediated world.

Rhiannon Bury, *Associate Professor, Athabasca University. Author of Television. 2.0: Viewer and Fan Engagement with Digital TV (2017, Peter Lang)*

“Paul Booth brings together an impressive range of scholars, disciplines, and approaches in his *Companion to Media Fandom and Fan Studies*. Engaging with the most current research and broadening the field to include previously neglected topics, this collection raises the bar for fan studies scholarship.”

Kristina Busse, *University of South Alabama*

“As fandom becomes increasingly embedded in the structures and processes of our global, networked media environment, there is an urgent need to take stock of what we already (think we) know about emotionally involved media consumption. Paul Booth’s *Companion to Media Fandom and Fan Studies* does precisely that, providing a thought-provoking and highly readable anthology that maps out the complexities and contradictions of Fan Studies’ past, present, and possible futures. Pushing the field into previously uncharted waters while also impressively reassessing and adding to seminal debates, these essays will undoubtedly help to shape the landscape of fan research for years to come.”

Richard McCulloch, *Fan Studies Network Board Member and Lecturer in Film and Cultural Studies, Centre for Participatory Culture, University of Huddersfield, UK*

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A Companion to Media Fandom and Fan Studies

Edited by
Paul Booth

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It is with great happiness that I dedicate this book with love to my sister, Anna—although we share very few fandoms, we'll always have Gilmore Girls.

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Introduction

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This volume, *A Companion to Media Fandom and Fan Studies*, is intended to be a resource for contemporary scholarship of media fandom, a guide to avenues of fan studies research from the past, and an outline of new areas of fandom and fan studies research that could begin to be, or should continue to be. *A Companion to Media Fandom and Fan Studies* has five main aims: (1) to synthesize the literature surrounding important theories, debates, and issues within the field of fan studies; (2) to trace and explain the social, historical, political, commercial, ethical, and creative dimensions of fandom and fan studies; (3) to explore both the historical and the contemporary fan situation; (4) to present fandom and fan studies as models of twenty-first-century production and consumption; and (5) to identify and comment upon emergent trends in order to bring light, and relevance, to fan studies as a unique field of study. The importance of studying fandom has often been stated: Lucy Bennett (2014) notes that “the fan studies field of scholarship [opens up] an avenue where fans [are] treated and viewed as active and creative individuals; the study of which potentially offers rich insights into media consumption, identity, textual engagement and communications” (6). The study of fandom has taken many paths and informed multiple disciplines. This volume cannot hope to encompass all of fan studies, but is rather an attempt to distinguish unique attributes of the field and augment contemporary fan research.

There is little doubt that fandom—defined in various ways in the chapters that follow—has become a more viable and visible presence in today’s media environment (Booth 2015). New digital technologies and tools have illustrated a rise in prominence and visibility of the so-called “geek culture.” As fans have embraced technologies like Tumblr, Twitter, and YouTube, the ease of finding and spreading fan work has helped facilitate a rise in knowledge about fandom in mainstream culture (see Jenkins, Ford, and Green 2013). At the same time, media corporations are taking note of fandom as well, as the industries both market to fans and create opportunities for fan interaction (Booth 2015). Fandom is itself changing as it becomes more commonplace—some fanfiction authors are monetizing their fandom by publishing fanfiction as novels (e.g., E.L. James’s *Fifty Shades of Grey*), and other fans are behind the camera as professional filmmakers (e.g., J.J. Abrams). And just as more people may be aware of fandom because of super-sized conventions like Comic Con, so too are many fans residing in less public areas to try to avoid the spotlight that comes with negative media attention (see Bennett and Booth 2016).

Yet, fandom is *not* new nor something that emerged simply because of digital technology and Tumblr culture, and many of the digital activities that fans engage in in the digital environment are similar to the analog activities from years past (Booth and Kelly 2013; Booth 2016). As the chapters in this volume indicate, fandom is far older than Tumblr and far vaster than *Fifty Shades*. The major focus of this volume is two-fold. First, it offers *multiple* perspectives on key issues in fan studies. These perspectives speak to one another as the authors have been encouraged to read and comment on each other's work. The second focus of the volume is on exploring the issues of fan studies moving into the future. What are the ethical considerations of fandom in the twenty-first century? As fans become mainstream consumers, how can they retain their subcultural identity (Jenkins 2007)? The multiple chapters in this volume speak to scholars and students of fandom, a population that is growing, in a world where fan studies is constantly shifting.

Fan studies as a field is barely three decades old, but in that time, it has produced an enormous amount of literature and interest from the scholarly community. In just thirty years, fan studies scholars have seen the growth of two journals dedicated solely and specifically to fan studies (*Transformative Works and Cultures* and *The Journal of Fandom Studies*, not to mention additional journals focused on audience analysis such as *Participations* and *Intensities*). Fan scholars have witnessed the publication of scores of monographs and edited collections dedicated to fan studies, including some that are widely considered canonical within and outside the fan studies sphere (e.g., Jenkins's (1992; 2012) *Textual Poachers*; Lewis's (1992) *The Adoring Audience*; Penley's (1997) *NASA/Trek*; Hills's (2002) *Fan Cultures*; Hellekson and Busse's (2006) *Fan Fiction and Fan Communities in the Age of the Internet*; Jenkins's (2006) *Convergence Culture*; Gray, Sandvoss, and Harrington's (2007) *Fandom: Identities and Communities in a Mediated World*) and many hundreds of journal articles and book chapters that focus on fandom and fan studies. New book series (e.g., the Fan Phenomena series at Intellect, the Fan Studies series at the University of Iowa Press, the Transmedia: Participatory Culture and Media Convergence series from Amsterdam University Press) and new conferences and scholarly groups (e.g., the Fan Studies Network, the FSN Symposium, the Fan and Audience Studies SIG at the Society of Cinema and Media Studies) speak to the rise in interest in the discipline. There are fan studies programs at universities, fan studies networks of scholars, and fan studies tracks at major international conferences.

All this exists, and thrives, in the academic world; but this then begs a number of related questions. First, to what extent have fan studies become legible in the larger academic discourse? Have fan studies scholars created a new discipline? Is fan studies more legitimized than it has been in the past? Jenkins's (1992) influential *Textual Poachers* was originally written before "fan studies" existed (in fact, it helped usher in the field) but in the years since its publication, does fan studies remain, as Sam Ford (2014) suggests, "a robust, respected space within cultural/media studies" (54) or has it become a space of its own? For Ford "'fan studies' remain[s] an 'undisciplined' discipline" and "many of its practitioners ... are unwilling and quite averse to provide such discipline" (54). The contributors to this volume also remain unconvinced about the legitimacy of fan studies within larger discourses; there remains a certain "underdog" quality to fan studies in terms of mainstream academic respectability. Ford (2014) goes on to note that fan studies continue to be a powerful field *because of* this separation rather than *despite* it—we must "maintain a cohesive community around the concept of fan studies while not losing its porous boundaries that are essential to facilitate the continued incorporation of new methodological approaches, new types of fandoms and media industries, and new issues/angles to be tackled" (54). In my own work, I've attempted to navigate this disciplinary mechanism at a time when "fan studies has become a destination rather than a journey" (Booth 2016, 232).

At the same time, Matt Hills (2016) asks us "whether the formalization of an academic discipline and its legitimation are one and the same thing?" (xvi–xvii). Indeed, one of the most pressing

concerns about the future of fan studies lies in trying to maintain that porous boundary as the field itself concretizes. Fandom has become a popular topic across multiple disciplines; fan studies is a truly multidisciplinary field of study. Yet, to maintain that multidisciplinary emphasis, the less formalized structures of fan studies have to be maintained as well. That's the problem with disciplines: Jenkins (2012) argues that "Disciplines define borders and set priorities. Disciplines decide what counts and on what terms" (5). Indeed, the decisions made when putting this volume together matter. Books like this one can be detrimental to maintaining disciplinary porousness, as any attempt to create a repository of content—even one as vast as this one—necessarily leaves some things out, concentrates on others, and inches ever closer to more concrete boundaries. Certainly, it has not been my intention, in assembling the following 34 chapters, to deliberately include/exclude anything, but every choice has consequences, and every book has its own limitations (the strictures of the publisher, of publication, of availability of authors, of timing). I hope that scholars who read this book and see an absence or lacunae in its pages will endeavor to fill that gap, just as I have endeavored to bring together scholarship that has expanded the boundaries of what I've considered fan studies here.

Structure of the Book

One counter to this stricter disciplinary boundary is to approach topics through multiple perspectives, and in this volume I have strived to include a variety of content. The authors of these chapters come from a variety of backgrounds and experiences, and are at various stages of their careers, further highlighting the inclusive and diverse field of fan studies. After writing drafts of their chapter, authors were invited to read and comment on the other chapters in their Parts, with the intent of creating greater cross-fertilization of ideas and connections across topics.

The volume is divided into five Parts; very roughly, these Parts form a mirror, where the first and last Parts look to the past and future of fan studies, respectively, while Parts II and IV examine the fan experiences in historical and digital contexts. Part III emphasizes the cultural studies background of fan studies. Each Part explores the boundaries of fan studies while opening new avenues of exploration.

Part I, "Histories, Genealogies, Methodologies," focuses on the multiple genealogies that can be traced through fan studies. Although fan studies have their antecedents in cultural studies and media studies, the history of the discipline can be drawn from multiple perspectives. The first four chapters can be seen as complements to each other, as each explores these perspectives in great detail. We start with a chapter by Henry Jenkins that explores fandom as an aspect of participatory culture, one which facilitates the social negotiation of the meaning and value of popular texts, enables grassroots creative responses, and provides a context for debates about issues of representation, diversity, and inclusion in the digital age. Chapter 2 by Daniel Cavicchi takes us back in time to explore fandom from the main preoccupations of nineteenth-century America: baseball, celebrity, concerts, and theatre productions. By developing these avenues, Cavicchi reveals how much scholars' present investigation of fan studies depends on links to fan practices in the past. In Chapter 3, Alexandra Edwards develops an understanding of fandom based not on the science-fiction fans of the 1930s and 1960s, but on traditional literary practices such as scrapbooking, writing letters to the editor, and submitting stories to magazine contests. By articulating a point of view that emphasizes alternate modes of fan activity, Edwards illustrates the flexibility of fan studies as a field of study. As if to demonstrate this flexibility, Karen Hellekson, in Chapter 4, offers a more traditional view of the historical development of fan studies as emergent from the Science Fiction League. For Hellekson, linking fans to this originating group helps us see the sense of activism and shared sense of purpose common in fan communities today.

Other chapters in Part I help narrow (and expand) the definition of fandom through discussions of scholarship, methodology, representation, and ethics. In Chapter 5, C. Lee Harrington and Denise Bielby explore changes in the scholarship of fandom in the twenty-two years since the publication of their (1995) *Soap Fans*. Their chapter historicizes fan studies from a media studies perspective. Ross Garner's emphasis on autoethnography in Chapter 6 explores the methodological import of fan studies on investigations of self-reflexivity. Garner debates and discusses the most appropriate ways to use self-analysis as a methodology for fan studies work, and draws on his own fandom of Manic Street Preachers as a key exemplar. Lucy Bennett explores representations of fans in popular journalism in Chapter 7. Her chapter examines how fandom is constructed and "made sense of" by newspaper writers across a ten-year span—a span of time (2000–10) that saw increased digital fandom and a stronger visibility of fans in general. Finally, Ruth A. Deller summarizes and augments current research on the ethics of studying fans in Chapter 8 by examining topics such as participant anonymity, valuations of free labor, protection for vulnerable subjects, and qualms about participant observers. Deller offers practical advice for fan researchers, both novice and experienced, on how to respond to changes and challenges in a digital environment.

Part II, "Fan Practices," brings to light specific fan practices as they have manifested in fandom and fan studies throughout the history(/ies) of the discipline. Fans are often some of the most textually productive audiences, with fanfiction stories, videos, cosplays, and other creative works having been authored by fans for decades. Topics in this section include the material practices of fans, the creation of fan videos, fandom at conventions, fan nostalgia, fanfiction writing, fandom as productive activity, and fan costuming.

Part II begins with Chapter 9 by Lynn Zubernis and Katherine Larsen who describe fandom outside of textual boundaries—fandom, as they put it, in the "real world." While much attention has been directed at online fan activities, especially factoring in burgeoning social media platforms such as Twitter, Tumblr, Pinterest, and Instagram, less work has been done on the equally growing desire for physical interactions with objects of fandom and fellow fans. Zubernis and Larsen argue that physical fandom through conventions and tourist sites offers tangible and intimate experiences that differ significantly from those of the textual. The focus on materiality continues in Lincoln Geraghty's Chapter 10 on nostalgia and remediation in children's culture. Geraghty brings to light pre-Internet media objects like Transformers and G.I. Joe, as they have been remediated through toys and video games. He argues that an explosion of nostalgia in contemporary media forces us to reconsider personal and public memory of childhood. In Chapter 11, Nicolle Lamerichs explores another tangible outgrowth of fandom and nostalgia—the fashion that accompanies contemporary media objects. Professional and fan-created clothing lines draw inspiration from contemporary cult media, like her example of the emerging phenomenon of fan couture.

The final two chapters of Part II explore more digitally-focused fan practices. In Chapter 12, Francesca Coppa takes perhaps the most notorious genre of fanfiction—slash fiction—and contextualizes it in terms of the theory and history of drag performance. She offers a number of salient areas of comparison, including appropriation and overdetermination, within both genres. Katharina Freund, in Chapter 13, turns to fan vidding—the editing of film and television footage set to music to create a particular story—as a way of expressing changes in the history of fandom through the advent of digital technology. Focusing mainly on the history of vidding, Freund's chapter delves into vidding communities through explorations of online spaces like LiveJournal and Tumblr.

Part III, "Fandom and Cultural Studies," focuses on fandom as a global and cultural phenomenon. Fandom crosses borders, and helps cohere different groups of people. Chin and Morimoto (2013) call this the "transcultural" aspect of fandom, whereas fandom can bond people in a way

nationality might not. In addition, this Part examines cultural issues—of age, gender, nationality, race, and ethnicity—as specific markers upon fandom and fan cultures. Although fandom is made up of multiple types of people, from various backgrounds, there are still significant cultural factors that play a role in the interpretation and development of fan audiences. For example, even as fandom has become a more mainstream identity, Busse (2013) has written about the way feminine styles of fandom have been devalued in contemporary culture. Here, astute fan studies readers of this volume will notice that there more attention has been placed on race and nationality rather than gender and fandom in this Part than may be expected—gender studies has been one of the most engaged aspects of the field. As far back as 1992, Jenkins discussed gender in *Textual Poachers*, Bacon-Smith concentrates on gender in *Enterprising Women* (1992), Jensen (1992) notes gender as a pathological characteristic of the fan, Fiske (1992) locates gender as a major theme (specifically noting that he has “not found studies of non-white fandom,” 32), and Lewis (1992) devotes an entire section to it in *The Adoring Audience*. Today, scores of books and articles focus on gender, while nationality, race, and ethnicity are still relatively untouched in fan studies (with some obvious exceptions: Stanfill 2011; Wanzo 2015; Warner 2015). In no way do I want to indicate that gender is not crucial to understanding contemporary fandom—it undoubtedly is—but in the interests of exploring new boundaries for fan studies I actively solicited chapters on nationality and race.

That is not to say that gender is not a concern of the authors in Part III. In Tom Phillips’s Chapter 14 on wrestling fandom, he delves directly into two largely misrepresented cultural identities: age and gender. His chapter examines representations of mature women fans of professional wrestling through what he calls “synecdochic fandom,” or how a particular kind of fan becomes shorthand for all fan activity. Mature women who are wrestling fans offer one type of synecdochic fandom where the fan stands in for what cultural commentators wish to *other* within cultural meanings of sports fans. Chapter 15 also uses gender as one lens to view the hierarchies within fan communities, but author Bertha Chin explores other ways that hierarchies can be formed as well. Chin’s chapter uses the works of Pierre Bourdieu to discuss social capital in terms of knowledge and presence on social media. In Lori Morimoto’s Chapter 16, the issue of transcultural fandom takes center stage, as she explores how fans from one culture mix with fans from other cultures. She uses ethnographic data from interviews to explore three such intersections: Japanese women fans of Hong Kong star Aaron Kwok; the clash of socially and industrially devalued women readers and writers of English language slash fanfiction with male-dominated production cultures; and African American women’s experiences as fans within a hegemonic subculture of normative online fandom.

The following two chapters, Chapter 17 and Chapter 18, both explore Otaku culture, a Japanese subculture with ties to fandom. Miranda Ruth Larsen’s “Fandom and Otaku” outlines both terms as mutually interactive, yet does not link the two as synonyms. Rather, she overviews the history of otaku as a term as a way of opening up fan studies to include different marginalized identities from non-Western cultures. In “Otaku Pedestrians,” Marc Steinberg and Edmond Ernest dit Alban develop a specific argument related to Otaku as a “mobile fan subject position” in relation to urban spaces, such as shops and stores. They develop an understanding of the otaku as a consumer subject position within infrastructures of commodity circulation, focusing mainly on Otome Road and Ikebukuro.

The final three chapters of Part III look specifically at issues of race within fandom and fan studies. In Chapter 19, Mel Stanfill unpacks the unspoken assumption of “whiteness” in fandom and fan studies, and the complications that arise with that assumption. Stanfill examines what makes fan studies avoid race as a topic and outlines the dangers of a “colorblind” analysis, and unpacks the dynamics of non-white fan audiences, arguing that race needs to be more centrally located within fan studies work. Rukmini Pande’s Chapter 20 uses an intersectional approach to

fandom, to critique the privilege surrounding notions of race/culture/ethnicity. She uses interview data to explore how non-white fans navigate white-centric spaces of fandom in order to develop a “lens of criticality” linked to ethnic identity, digging deeper into the operations of fandom communities. Finally, Chapter 21 by Jessica Seymour explores a specific race-related fan practice—racebending characters within fan art. Racebending describes the drawing and editing of characters in media to present them as more racially diverse. Seymour argues that although this may seem to be a transformative shift in fan works, in fact it challenges the default imagining of characters as white, even if the text never specifies race.

Part IV, “Digital Fandom,” examines the role that social media and digital technology have had on fan practices. Digital technology has in many ways paved new avenues for fandom: fans can now produce and distribute original materials in wholly unique ways, including self-production of media and self-funding on crowdfunding sites like Kickstarter. Topics in this Part include the use of digital technology in the classroom, the development of active fan communities through social media, transmedia texts, digital dislike and male privilege in digital fan communities, and online fandom of canceled texts.

In Chapter 22, Melanie E.S. Kohnen examines Tumblr as a pedagogical space and describes her experiences using it in the classroom. She argues not only that Tumblr is useful *for* the classroom, but that Tumblr itself can be a pedagogical space where critical conversations about media are already taking place. Our students need merely join them. The next two chapters approach digital technology as a way to harness social and active audiences. In Chapter 23, Casey J. McCormick underscores the affective attachment fans have toward the works of Joss Whedon. She explores a specific “Whedony” fandom as both powerful to fans and commodifiable by the media industries. Mélanie Bourdaa next explores fan activism in Chapter 24, focusing on the fan reaction to the death of a main character in the television series *The 100*. Bourdaa analyzes the organization of fans into non-profit groups that fight for better representation in the media. Bourdaa’s chapter segues into Chapter 25, in which Louisa Stein also examines the potential of digital technology to facilitate communication between fans and media producers. For Stein, new technologies have offered both the means for media producers to hear and potentially address fans’ concerns, but also a space for fans to create their own content. She specifically examines official and fan-created “spinoffs” of television series, especially those that fans can proclaim as canon.

Chapters 26 and 27 follow, both exploring different aspects of toxic fandom within the digital environment. In Chapter 26, Bethan Jones unpacks digital dislike and fan antagonism within online communities, especially those surrounding popular culture texts like *Fifty Shades of Grey*, the 2016 *Ghostbusters* reboot, and Gamergate, the sustained attack on feminists on Twitter revolving around video games. She argues that each of these texts engages with antifan discourses of dislike and hatred, and has different ethical considerations. Katie Wilson, in Chapter 27, also discusses Gamergate as a toxic space, but also includes the Rabid Puppies—the Hugo Award contrarians who attempted to disrupt the awards by stacking the awards against more liberal and message-heavy works. Wilson links both these groups to the rise of men’s rights conservative organizations that seek to fight feminism and perceived slights to the state of male privilege. The last chapter of Part IV, Rebecca Williams’s Chapter 28, explores her (2015) concept of “post-object fandom”—a fandom that survives longer than the media text. Through the case study of *Hannibal*, an NBC television series based on the Hannibal Lecter series of books by Thomas Harris, Williams considers how fans reacted to the ending of the series and how they continued their fandom post-object through material and digital practices. At the end of the Part, we turn again to the idea that digital and material practices are not that separate after all.

Part V, the final section of the volume, “The Future of Fan Studies,” develops ideas that took germination in Part I, but instead of looking to the past, explores new paths for fan studies scholars. In an attempt to present new ways of approaching the subject, this section critiques some of the methodologies and focuses of fan studies over the first thirty years. Topics in this section include areas of fandom yet unexplored, changing scholarship on fandom, and new approaches to fandom and fan studies.

In Chapter 29, Mark Duffett, the author of *Understanding Fandom* (2013), a textbook of fan studies, unpacks what “fan studies” has meant over the years and how it has focused primarily on media instead of music fandom. He outlines some thoughts on fandom after writing the textbook and his reaction to the field as it grows more cohesive. Matt Hills’s Chapter 30 uses a fan studies methodology to explore areas of high-culture media consumption that are not necessarily considered when discussing fandom. Using an approach he calls “implicit fandom,” Hills explores fandom of the “great author” Jonathan Franzen and unpacks fan-like activities of Franzen readers, such as generating debates, attending talks and festivals, and collecting rare first editions. The discussion of literary fandom is continued in Roberta Pearson’s Chapter 31, which examines literary societies like the Sherlockians and Janeites—those fans of the works of Jane Austen—as neglected fandoms. She argues that such groups are largely ignored by fan studies scholars and we must embrace that with which we are not familiar in order to develop fan studies further. A similar argument is made in Alan McKee’s Chapter 32, focusing instead on porn consumers as fan audiences. McKee brings together two disparate areas of scholarship—porn studies and fan studies—to argue that both have something to offer the other. Porn studies offers a specificity lacking in fan studies, while fan studies offers an analysis of consumer agency lacking in porn studies. For McKee, porn consumers can enter into fan-like habits and it behooves us to study them as such.

The final two chapters of the volume turn from specific focuses in fan studies to questions of methodology and interpretation. In Chapter 33, Anne Jamison examines fanfiction, with its networks of sources, allusions, tags, and communities, as a challenge to the ideology of the autonomous work of art. Using Deleuze’s discussion of the assemblage, Jamison raises questions about source, originality, autonomy, and authorship—and focuses on a unique fan-like text, “Text from Cephalopods,” to present a reading on fanfiction itself. Finally, in Chapter 34, we return to the questions of methodology that opened the volume, as Tisha Turk unpacks the meaning of the oft-cited interdisciplinary value of fan studies. She discusses the implications and misuses of the term “interdisciplinary,” offering *multidisciplinary* as a more accurate description of what fan studies has been. Looking forward, however, she uses interdisciplinary studies as a guide to developing ideas about what an interdisciplinary fan studies might actually look like, and the value of such an approach.

Throughout this volume, the authors have striven to maintain a connection to the fan communities about which they have written. We must continue to emphasize the *fan* in fan studies. As I’ve written previously (2016):

Fan studies needs to remain engaged in the fan communities, which themselves are ever shifting and changing. To define fan studies is to (artificially) define the fan; a limitation of disciplining fan studies would therefore be imposing an (already hypothesized) identity of the fan onto the investigative subject. (233)

In order to maintain its freshness, its cultural relevancy, and its power, fan studies must never stray far from the fan.

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Part I

Histories, Genealogies, Methodologies

Chapter 1

Fandom, Negotiation, and Participatory Culture

Henry Jenkins

News of the demise of the audience, much like the death of the author, has been greatly exaggerated. Recall Jay Rosen's (2006) description of "the people formerly known as the audience," whom he characterized as "the writing readers. The viewers who picked up a camera. The formerly atomized listeners who with modest effort can connect with each other and gain the means to speak." Rosen was certainly not alone in celebrating a not-yet-achieved emancipation of the spectator from the constraints of the mass media era. Here's Clay Shirky (2005): "Every time a new consumer joins this media landscape, a new producer joins as well, because the same equipment—phones, computers—lets you consume and produce."

Some of this anticipated shift has happened. More than 300 hours of videos are posted on YouTube every minute, many of them coming from amateur, semi-professional, non-profit, educational, activist, religious, and governmental producers producing media for noncommercial purposes but also involving content from commercial producers that has been appropriated, remixed, and recirculated, often at the hands of their most dedicated audiences.

Rosen asked, "If all would speak, who shall be left to listen?" Well, so far, we are still spending much more time listening (and watching) than speaking, though we may do so across a broader range of media platforms. Prioritizing production behaviors and separating them off from the other things audiences do overlooks the ways that curating, sharing, and discussing media content are themselves active practices that create meaning and context, even if they do not necessarily "produce" new kinds of media texts. In this changing realm, broadcast networks still have an enormous capacity to set the cultural agenda, determining which stories, performers, and topics engage the public. But conversations on social network sites also have an expanding capacity to set cultural and political priorities, often reframing and critiquing, making demands upon broadcast content, and increasing the visibility of some clips as users circulate them across their range of online connections (Jenkins, Ford, and Green 2013).

Those working in the media industry tend to imagine audiences primarily, if not exclusively, as markets for their products. As Ien Ang (1991) notes, the actual people watching television are "invisible" to media companies, a mass "hidden behind the millions of dispersed closed doors of private homes, virtually unmanageable and inaccessible to the outsider" (30). The industry's imagined "audience" consists of individual consumers, each making independent decisions about

what to watch—an audience that can be predicted based on demographics, counted through various audience measurement tools, commodified, and sold back to advertisers. Coming together via social media has increased the visibility of media audiences, making it easier to identify others with shared interests and coordinate their activities in pursuit of common cause. At the same time, today's media audiences are more fragmented and dispersed, making it harder for broadcasters to anticipate viewer loyalty and harder for Madison Avenue to calculate who is seeing their spots and under what conditions. Media audiences are thus at once more networked and more dispersed than previously imagined.

For the past two decades, fandom studies have provided us with an alternative set of models and concepts through which to understand media audiences—stressing their active participation within their own networked communities, foregrounding their own creative transformations and ideological negotiations with mass media texts, and imagining ways they speak back to texts, producers, and fellow fans, asserting their own agenda about what kind of popular culture they want to consume. This chapter will stake out a particular perspective on fans, informed by Cultural Studies writings about negotiation and framed by contemporary debates about participatory culture. And in order to illustrate this model, I will be describing how fandom is helping to work through contemporary debates around diversity and inclusion, race and gender in American society.

Negotiated Readings

From the start, Cultural Studies research assumed that media audiences were not simply markets and that a range of social and cultural factors, not just personal whim, determines what media we consume, under what circumstances, and with what consequences (Tulloch 2000; Brooker and Jermyn 2003). Stuart Hall's (1973) essay "Encoding, Decoding" (reprinted in 1980) argued that there could be no simple mapping between the ways producers encoded messages and the ways consumers made meanings; meaning-making takes different shapes depending on viewers' social positioning. Hall argued that social and semiotic codes (often, unexamined assumptions) inform choices about what content to produce, circulate, consume, and reproduce. For Hall, popular texts do not speak univocally:

If the forms provided by commercial popular culture are not purely manipulative, then it is because, alongside the false appeals, the foreshortenings, the trivialization and short circuits, there are also elements of recognition and identification, something approaching a re-creation of recognizable experiences and attitudes, to which people are responding. (Hall 1981, 513)

Hall rejects, on the one hand, the idea that the people are simply dupes of a powerful media industry and, on the other, what he describes as the "heroic alternative," a "whole, authentic, autonomous" popular culture outside "cultural power and domination." Rather, Hall writes: "Popular culture is one of the sites where this struggle for and against a culture of the powerful is engaged: it is also the stake to be won or lost in that struggle. It is the arena of consent and resistance. It is partially where hegemony arises, and where it is secured" (518).

Hall (1973) describes the ways different consumers relate to mass media messages. Some read them fully within the terms of dominant ideology; others resist or reject them outright; but many will negotiate, taking them apart and taking part in them in equal measure because they are imperfectly aligned with their experiences. Writes Hall:

Decoding within the negotiated position contains a mixture of adaptive and oppositional elements: it acknowledges the legitimacy of the hegemonic definitions to make the grand significations (abstract), while, at a more restricted, situational (situated) level, it makes its own ground rules—it operates with exceptions to the rule. (1973, 102)

Audience researchers (Morley 1980) who tested Hall's model through focus group interviews found that many more actual readings are negotiated than dominant or oppositional; diverse audiences have to retrofit media content to the contours of their lives. Such audiences have agency, but they do not have autonomy; various forms of power shape what meanings they can assert. These readers, viewers, and listeners embrace textual elements they recognize and value, but they also encounter problematic aspects that produce a discomfort that has to be addressed before they can claim ownership over these representations. Each of us is positioned somewhat differently in relation to dominant representations, negotiating different identities and identifications within ourselves, as Hall (1992) notes, but those whose gender, class, racial, and sexual identities fall within dominant groups find it easiest to forge identifications with mass media texts; they are the recipients the producers anticipated, while others have to fight for inclusion into the community of readers who are able to relate meaningfully with a particular story and its characters.

Let's consider an example: Alanna Bennett (2015) posted an illustrated story on *BuzzFeed Community* which described her experiences growing up as a mixed-race Harry Potter fan who felt a strong attachment to the character of Hermione:

Hermione wouldn't and couldn't deny her intellect; she was bossy, she had big bushy hair, and she had best friends who loved her even when she was a pain in the ass—and who frequently needed her to save *their* asses. She was also a Muggle-born, navigating a world that looked down on her for the situation of her very biology and culture.

Alanna found Hermione a point of identification on some levels, but her connection with this character was not fully authorized:

I'd dress up in Hogwarts uniforms for Halloween but avoid going overtly as Hermione because I knew I could never get my hair like Emma Watson's. I could never get it white-girl bushy ... My hair was a whole different kind of frizzy. I loved her so much, but it took me a long time to accept that I could never *be* her.

Here, performance in its everyday forms—from quoting a line from a television episode to impersonating an on-air personality to designing a Halloween costume—represents a creative extension of the reading process, a way readers take media content and make it their own. Bennett notes that Hermione as described in J.K. Rowling's books is much more racially ambiguous than in the Warner Brothers movies, but cultural norms still left her having to negotiate another space for herself in the fandom: "There's nothing there to indicate she didn't look just like me, yet I always pictured a white face under that bushy head. I always pictured her not-me." It is the nature of white privilege, however, that characters are sometimes assumed by white audiences to be white ("me"), even when they are explicitly marked as people of color ("not-me") in the source material. For instance, white fans protested Rue's blackness in *The Hunger Games* films, even though the books *explicitly* described her race (Williams 2015). What Bennett struggles to achieve as a black woman comes easily, even thoughtlessly, to some white readers who never considered any other possibilities for Rue's identity.

Hall (1973) imagined negotiated readings as occurring within the heads (or at least within the living rooms) of individual audience members, however shaped they might be by their access to certain cultural codes and knowledge. Hall certainly recognizes that reading is socially situated but he has less to say here about the ways it is also socially negotiated. Bennett was performing this process of negotiation via *BuzzFeed Community*, in part because she wanted to open up dialogue with other fans around issues of representational politics. Not unexpectedly, some responded that she was doing damage to their own conceptions of this character (even if they shared many

of her goals). Here, we need to think about negotiation differently—not in terms of how an individual negotiates their relationship with a text but rather how community members negotiate interpretations (and rules for forming interpretations) among each other. Even in a context where diversity of representation is a goal, people have different ideas about what are appropriate ways of achieving that goal.

Negotiation-based models allow us to complicate some basic assumptions that get made about fans: that they are an adoring audience that has little emotional or cognitive distance from favored texts, which sometimes has been the consequence of introducing a second term, the antifan, into our model of media audiences. Embodying Hall's concept of reading as negotiation, fan culture is often motivated by a complex balance between fascination and frustration, affirmation and transformation. Because cultural materials fascinate fans, they sustain their interests. Because they are also frustrating, fans actively rework them. Bennett's story is powerful because it builds on aspects of the character that interest other fans (including the book's discussion of her "mudblood" status), but she also shows how the character is personally meaningful to her. Understanding fandom, then, as a form of negotiation suggests a continuum of possible relations to popular texts, as well as an ongoing process of negotiation with changing meanings that reflect changing times, rather than fixed positions and binary oppositions between fans and antifans.

Interpretive Communities, Subcultures, and Imaginative Publics

The cultural studies of media audiences is interested primarily in the collective dimensions of meaning-making: all of us make idiosyncratic meanings and personal associations as we consume media (a character may remind us of our fourth grade teacher; a setting recalls a place we used to live), but the meaning-making process becomes culturally significant when those meanings are shared by a larger group. In reader-response theory, clusters of people who make meaning of a text in similar or related ways are described as "interpretive communities." Such interpretive norms (Rabinowitz 1985) might include rules of notice that give priority to certain aspects of narratives, rules of signification that determine what meanings can be ascribed, rules of configuration that shape the reader's expectations about likely plot developments, and rules of coherence that shape the kinds of extrapolations readers make. Bennett illustrates some of these interpretive norms when she debates differences in how Hermione is depicted in the books and the movies and how much weight we should ascribe to each. Members of an interpretive community do not always reach the same conclusions, as you will have noticed if you have ever spent time in an online discussion forum. These spaces place a premium on original insights or distinctive contributions. But they work best when there is some consensus about what kinds of interpretation are plausible. Fandom studies research helped to anticipate this focus on networked patterns of consumption and interpretation. Even before there were digital networks, fandom's interpretive communities came together around the desire to discuss favorite media texts. Fandoms developed distinctive patterns of interpretation, modes of social interaction, and forms of cultural production which emerged from the community's shared passions and interests.

In everyday speech, the word *fans* has a broad meaning, used loosely to describe anyone who forms an intense affective bond with a particular property, whether or not they share those feelings with anyone else. Sometimes, being a fan means nothing more than pressing a "like" button on some Facebook page. Fandom, on the other hand, refers to those who claim a common identity and a shared culture with other fans. News representations often define these fans in relation to singular texts (for example, "Trekkies," or the preferred "Trekkers" in the case of *Star Trek*), but, in fact, a fandom is better understood as a more expansive subculture, whose members engage with a broad array of different media objects but who share traditions and practices built up over many years.

Historian Michael Saler (2011) has described the ways that the letter columns for pulp science fiction, mystery, fantasy, and horror magazines in the early twentieth century functioned as “public spheres of the imagination.” In those pages, people invested in these genres, and their imagined worlds, engaged in heated debates around technological change (in the case of Hugo Gernsback’s *Amazing Stories*), race and racism (in discussions of H.P. Lovecraft), or colonialism (in the case of Arthur Conan Doyle’s adventure stories). Debating these issues through imaginary “as if” worlds gave participants sufficient ironic distance to grapple with topics that might be too loaded in a more immediate context. Saler’s phrase, “public sphere of the imagination,” flies in the face of efforts by cultural scholars and political theorists to draw a sharper divide between audiences and publics. In Daniel Dayan’s account (2005), audiences are produced through acts of measurement and surveillance. Meanwhile, publics often actively direct attention onto messages they value: “a public not only offers attention, it calls for attention” (52). Publics, Sonia Livingstone (2005) tells us, are ‘held to be collectivities, more than the sum of their parts, while audiences by contrast are merely aggregates of individuals’ (25). Publics, Dayan asserts, are defined around “shared sociability, shared identity” (46). Fandom might be described as an audience that thinks and acts like a public, conscious of its own “shared sociability, shared identity,” “calling for attention” by advocating for particular kinds of stories.

Let’s consider another (much more heated) example of fandom working through its collective and personal reactions to the diversification of American culture—in this case, the exchanges surrounding the announcement that black actor Michael B. Jordan would be playing the part of Johnny Storm (the Human Torch) in a 2015 feature film based on Marvel’s *Fantastic Four*. Some fans were shocked by the casting decision, relying on arguments about the character’s origins and previous depictions to push back against changes they feared were motivated by “political correctness,” as Ken Warren’s *Daily Kos* piece illustrates by highlighting some comments on *Variety*’s piece about the casting announcement:

Why do they keep casting black people in roles that were made and written in the comics as white people ... NOWHERE in *Fantastic Four*’s history has any of them EVER been black ... the comic geeks [*sic*] like myself that know the true history of comic series are up in arms over the discrepancies in these movies. (Comic geek, quoted in Warren 2014)

Here, fan expertise was often placed in the service of white male entitlement; textual fidelity was used to push back against casting decisions that might allow more diverse audiences a point of identification in the story. And white male fans assume that they have the authority to speak for fandom as a whole—indeed, that there may be no fans who think differently than they do.

Because such exchanges were taking place online, rather than behind closed doors, the discussion became increasingly visible, gaining mainstream media attention. Writing in *Entertainment Weekly*, Jordan (2015) himself responded:

To the trolls on the Internet, I want to say: Get your head out of the computer. Go outside and walk around. Look at the people walking next to you. Look at your friends’ friends and who they’re interacting with. And just understand this is the world we live in. It’s okay to like it.

If the news media focused on fans who felt that the producers had gone too far, other fans with different backgrounds and perspectives felt that the producers had not gone far enough, commenting on the decision to cast white actress Kate Mara as Johnny’s sister as a lost opportunity to bring even more diversity to the series. Others appealed to real-world trends to ground the casting choice. Writes online commenter skyhawk1: “These are times of bi-racial generation, blended families, adoption so why should it matter if Johnny Storm is black?” (comment in response to

Bricken 2014). Such responses reflect a hunger for a popular culture that reflects the demographic diversity of American society or perhaps even global culture, which invites fans of color into the conversation rather than forcing them to negotiate a place for themselves from the sidelines.

Such discussions across diverse fan forums revealed uncomfortable truths about where the United States was at in terms of its acceptance of racial and ethnic diversity, bringing different cultural histories into conflict. For many young and privileged fans, such exchanges might have been the first time they were being asked to rethink their taken-for-granted perspectives about race and representation. However, while fandom may constitute a public, fandom may also constitute a “mob” (Butsch 2011). I do not want to romanticize the quality of discourse within fandom: backlash against gender and racial diversity has often reached horrific intensity, including rape threats and online harassment, and sadly, has often been expressed by people claiming to speak as and for fans (see discussions of #Gamergate and Sad Puppies in Chapter 27 in this volume).

Fandom as Participatory Culture

My 1992 book, *Textual Poachers*, introduced the term *participatory culture* as a means of describing how media fandom operates. Fandom was *participatory* in so far as fans formed alternative interpretations that were often expressed through unauthorized cultural productions (fanfiction, remix videos, songs, artwork, costumes)—this mode of engagement contrasting with pervasive stereotypes about spectator culture. *Poachers* discussed five core dimensions of fandom: (1) as a particular mode of reception; (2) as a particular set of critical and interpretive practices; (3) as a base for consumer activism; (4) as an art world which supports particular forms of cultural production; and (5) as an alternative social community. Networked communications have made each of these aspects of fandom more widely accessible to the general public, but they have also broken down any simple relations between these different levels of engagement. A casual fan might adopt the community’s modes of interpretation (perhaps by reading recaps on a popular blog) without feeling a strong affiliation with its social norms or might encounter one fan text (a fan remix video on YouTube) unmoored from the larger tradition that inspired it.

Subsequently, I developed a fuller definition of participatory culture which stresses the ways such communities can be understood as sites of informal learning (Jenkins et al. 2009): a participatory culture is characterized by low barriers to artistic expression and civic engagement; strong support for creating and sharing creations with others; some type of informal mentorship whereby what is known by the most experienced is passed along to novices; members who believe that their contributions matter; and members who feel some degree of social connection with one another. (They care what other people think about what they have created, even if what they are creating are only “meanings” and not yet expressive artifacts.) Media fandoms are simply one of many different kinds of participatory culture communities (Makers, Gamers, Modders, Vidders, Collectors, Subbers, etc.) that have flourished within a networked culture. Engaging within a participatory culture requires and fosters skills and knowledge, and it provides a safe space with which to experiment with new passions or activities. If more people today are producing media, they are often doing so in part because of the scaffolding that participatory culture offers them; without such a community, they often would lack an audience for what they produce. In other words, participatory culture predates the digital, but the emergence of digital networks altered the ways that participatory culture operates, allowing people who might not encounter each other otherwise to have meaningful exchanges and creating a context where forms of expression flow quickly and broadly, both within and between social networks.

Early writers (as assembled in Hellekson and Busse 2014) described fanfiction as a form of “women’s writing,” at a time when those same writers (Joanna Russ 1983, for example) were calling out the various mechanisms by which women’s writings were being suppressed or marginalized (Merrick 2009). Fanfiction writers self-published, routing around many of those traditional gate-keepers; the early fanfiction writers were overwhelmingly female and were consciously producing their stories for the entertainment of other women, often reworking genre conventions to foreground their common experiences as women in a patriarchal society or reimagining masculine characters to rethink how romance might operate on the basis of greater equality.

Karen Hellekson and Kristina Busse (2006) tell us that fan stories emerge from collaboration and conversation among fandom’s community of readers:

Every fan story is in this sense a work in progress, even when the story has been completed. To create a story (or, indeed, almost any other fan artifact; we just speak of stories here for convenience), some writers compose and post the story, with or without beta-readers who critique, read and help revise on various levels, including spelling and grammar, style and structure, and canonicity and remaining in character ... In most cases, the resulting story is part collaboration and part response to not only the source text, but also the cultural context within and outside the fannish community in which it is produced ... However, when the story is finally completed and published, likely online but perhaps in print, the work in progress among the creators shifts to the work in progress among the readers, and a whole new level of discourse begins. (6-7)

Read in this way, fan artifacts are collective expressions, the byproducts of the social negotiation of meanings and the subcultural production of fantasies, but they are also intended as provocations for further elaborations. No fan story expects to speak with the same level of authority ascribed to the source text; it is not unusual for the same fan to write radically different versions of the same characters, as they work through possible explanations for what makes them tick.

At a time when our scripts for thinking about race and gender are being called into question, as genre conventions are being rethought and reworked to pave the way for what many of us hope can be a more diverse media culture, these writing processes seem especially effective at encouraging reflection about what kinds of stories we want our culture to tell. Lori Kido Lopez (2012) has provided us with a detailed account of how protests around the “white-casting” of characters from *The Last Airbender*, a series noted for its portrayal of a multiracial society, built upon the various mechanisms of fandom’s participatory culture. Close analysis of “appropriated cultural practices, architecture, religious iconography, costumes, calligraphy, and other aesthetic elements from East Asian and Inuit culture” led many fans to expect a much more racially diverse cast for the live-action feature film adaptation than emerged. Almost all of the core roles were cast with white performers. Lopez documents how fan opposition coalesced through online forums; how fan writers, artists, and video-makers began to generate and share resources to educate the community about the history of race-based casting decisions; how they formed partnerships with other activist groups who were concerned about employment opportunities for Asian-American actors; and how they showed up at screenings, often in costumes, to call out the producers. In short, Lopez argues, fandom provided the scaffolding these young people needed to be able to take their first decisive steps as political activists (as part of what became known as the racebending movement).

The racebending movement is simply one of a number of examples of recent cases where discussions that began within fandoms inspired participants to take stronger public stances on social justice issues, often tapping into the infrastructure fans have developed to sustain their cultural interests or deploying skills they had acquired through their cultural productions.

Neta Kligler-Vilenchik (2013), for example, has documented the “mechanisms for translation” by which organizations such as the Harry Potter Alliance, Imagine Better, and the Nerdfighters have helped their members to forge connections between key issues within fictional worlds and real-world concerns. So, for example, when one of the leaders of the Harry Potter Alliance came out as “undocumented,” he produced a video to help educate other fans about the immigrant rights movement. He used his inability to travel across state lines to attend a Harry Potter convention to dramatize how the lack of official identification hampers mobility for many undocumented youth, and the organization developed a campaign around the launch of *Man of Steel*, which called attention to Superman’s own immigration narrative and asked fans to reflect on what made someone an American. Abigail De Kosnik (2016) discusses writing challenges, such as one conducted by a group called *dark_agenda*, which encouraged fans to write stories focused on “chromatic” characters or rethinking how established white characters might experience their world differently as people of color. These practices, she argues, constitute an alternative archive where different characters gain visibility as fandom seeks to “answer the erasure, exclusion and diminishment of characters of color” (169).

Such questioning may lead to full-scale mobilization or cultural production, but it may also be integrated into the discussions that have long been central to fandom as a “public sphere of the imagination.” As part of Fandom Forward, a new outreach program intended to forge alliances with other fandoms, the Harry Potter Alliance released a study guide in late spring 2016, encouraging fans to engage in reflection and conversation about representations of gender, disability, and political engagement within the extended Marvel Universe (Jenkins 2015). Fans were encouraged to reflect on the kinds of microaggressions Agent Carter encounters from the white men in her workplace and to consider ways fan women are sometimes excluded or marginalized within fandom itself. Fans were invited to take a range of actions, from taking a stronger position in online forums where diversity casting is discussed to “changing the script” by creating their own artworks or writing their own stories where different racial or gender assumptions shape the depiction of these characters: “What would *Agents of SHIELD* have been like with May as director of SHIELD? What about the Avengers with Black Widow in charge? Captain America with Peggy Carter instead of Steve Rogers ... Imagine your favorite piece of Marvel media with the major male and female characters switched.”

The Fandom Forward study guide also flags the Hawkeye Initiative, where feminist fans have been critiquing the ways female superheroes get depicted in comics, often in contorted, subordinate, and sexualized positions (Scott 2015). These fan artists apply their creative skills to redraw these same images, recasting the male protagonist Hawkeye in the position occupied by the female characters in the originals. This ongoing discussion of gendered representations within comics meant that this fan community was prepared to mobilize when, for example, a proposed cover for Marvel’s *Spider Woman* comic deployed an artist previously known for his erotica to depict the superhero slithering along the rooftop with her behind sticking up in what might best be described as a primate self-display behavior. The public outcry, in this case, was strong enough that Marvel withdrew the cover. Earlier feminists would have described such activities as “consciousness raising” and “movement building,” that is, they increase the awareness and commitment of these women to feminist causes and help them to acquire the skills and networks required to act upon those beliefs when needed.

These various examples show how the different layers of fandom *Textual Poachers* described work together as fans grapple with the politics of diversity: at the level of affective investment and identification with particular characters (Bennett’s complex investment in Hermione), at the level of interpretive practice (The Race-Benders’ strong conviction that “Aang Ain’t White”), at the

level of fan cultural production (the various efforts to “change the script” in terms of how gender and race impact superhero characters), within the context of their social community (the ways that a shared identity as a fan may help defuse tension), and toward the cause of fan activism (advocating for alternative stories that might more fully support their desires and fantasies). Yet, these same mechanisms can be deployed in more reactionary ways—to block efforts to expand the canon or rewrite genre conventions in order to promote a multicultural agenda. Fandom is a conflicted space and does not speak with a single voice; there are also diverse fan communities, not simply because of different tastes and interests, but also because of different norms, values, ideologies, and practices.

In what sense is participatory culture participatory?

All cultures are participatory to some degree, but different configurations of culture invite or facilitate different degrees of participation. So, for example, in a traditional folk culture, many are allowed to participate (e.g., through crafts or folk dance), skills are passed along informally between members, and there is less focus on personal authorship. By contrast, mass culture refers to culture that is mass-produced and distributed for mass consumption; the means of production are highly concentrated, and most people are consumers but not producers and thus have little say about what kinds of culture are produced. With the emergence of digital tools and platforms, there are more opportunities to produce and share culture, suggesting a return to something closer to the logics of folk culture ... with some differences. While folk cultures were heavily grounded in relatively stable face-to-face communities, much of today’s participatory culture (including fan culture) takes place in highly fluid social contexts, where people come and go voluntarily, where content flows easily beyond the community where it is produced, and where mass culture often provides the raw materials for media producers.

Participatory culture can thus be understood as a relational rather than an absolute term: forms of culture may be *more* or *less* participatory. Our traditional ideas about media audiences operate within a mass culture model and involve limited degrees of participation beyond deciding what to watch, whereas networked audiences embrace a broader range of different ways to participate, including sharing and curating, critiquing, lobbying for, and promoting certain kinds of content, as well as various forms of media production, all of which shape their media environment. These emerging practices explain why some have begun to imagine a blurring of the lines separating producers and audiences.

There is not uniform agreement about how we might distinguish between what constitutes desirable or undesirable forms of participation or, say, when participation becomes so minimal that it is no longer appropriate to apply this concept. Chris Kelty et al. (2015) proposed seven different dimensions around which we might assess participation: (1) opportunities for informal learning; (2) involvement in decision-making and goal-setting; (3) control or ownership over resources; (4) the voluntary status of the activities and thus the ability to refuse or exit; (5) a commitment to supporting individual and collective voice; (6) shared norms or measurements for assessing the quality of each other’s participation; and (7) some shared affective experience. Because of its long history, members within fandom have developed fairly well-articulated norms, designed to insure diverse and multiple forms of participation. There is a particular strong alignment between the different forms of participatory culture Kelty and his team flags and the five core dimensions of fandom I identified in *Textual Poachers*.

By contrast, Web 2.0 companies adopt a rhetoric of participation, offering a varied set of tools and platforms and competing terms of participation designed to court and capture audience engagement, but these projects often fall far short of the ideal in terms of their commitment to

shared governance or collective ownership of resources. Fan communities have been early and vocal critics of Web 2.0 practices they feel delimit the full range of participation they have traditionally enjoyed.

Because so many commercial interests have adopted a rhetoric of participation, critics of the concept fear that embracing participatory culture involves accepting the inevitable cooptation of these cultural expressions into the underlying logics of neoliberal capitalism (see, e.g., Butler 2016; and Jenkins 2016a). Critical theory provides us with useful tools for understanding the various ways that corporate interests profit from our participation, from the translation of fan culture into “user-generated content” to various forms of data-mining, central to Web 2.0 business models, but often at the cost of dismissing any prospect of meaningful participation. On the other hand, there is a tendency to romanticize participatory culture as somehow more authentically grassroots than other forms of cultural production. Here, we may want to return to Stuart Hall (1981), who talked about popular culture as neither defined entirely as a market category (that which sells the best) nor entirely as an expression of bottom-up forces (that which comes from or belongs to The People). Rather, Hall told us, “The danger arises because we tend to think of cultural forms as whole and coherent: either wholly corrupt or wholly authentic. Whereas they are deeply contradictory” (513).

Fandom is not autonomous; its products are not in any simple sense “authentic.” For starters, fans are responding to products that are mass-produced and distributed for commercial profit, and they intervene in those practices to generate forms of culture that more fully address their own fantasies, desires, and interests. As fan activities migrate into new media platforms, their activities are also often taking place within commercial contexts, where their attention is commodified, their data are extracted and sold, and their texts are claimed as the intellectual property of the host companies. Fans as negotiating readers (rather than purely oppositional ones) embrace and reproduce many aspects of the core ideology shaping the media properties that are the objects of their fascination, but their frustration also leads them to critique and rework these popular fictions to make them more appropriate vehicles for their fantasies.

At the same time, fandom may become a force of resistance to some of those commercial logics, with fans mobilizing rapidly to challenge corporate decisions that run counter to their perceived interests (e.g., the pushback to the *Spider Woman* cover). Early on, media companies issued cease-and-desist letters to stop unauthorized use of their content, seeing fan cultural production as another form of media piracy. Fans countered, arguing that what they created might legally be classified as transformative works, which altered the original for the purposes of critical commentary. Such issues as copyright reform or net neutrality look different when, as Yochai Benkler (2007) suggests, they are viewed through the eyes of someone who can and does participate and not simply someone who consumes products being sold to them. Even forms of cooperation or collaboration between media companies and their fans can be short-lived, depending on the “good will” of the corporate rights holders, as *Star Trek* fans discovered when CBS and Paramount issued a set of “guidelines” for fan filmmakers that would prohibit many long-standing practices and provided no explicit acknowledgment of the rights of fans to “fair” or “transformative use” of shared cultural resources (Jenkins, 2016b).

Increasingly, media companies have discovered that there is money to be made by soliciting and sustaining audience engagement, while also asserting ownership over what fans produce. Francesca Coppa, a spokeswoman for the fan advocacy organization, the Organization for Transformative Works, described the shift in the struggles her group has had to address across its six years of operations:

In the past, I found myself arguing for the legitimacy of our works; now, I find myself arguing against their exploitation. The commercial ownership of the infrastructure means that money has now complicated fandom's gift economy, and like it or not, we now need to think about who should benefit. (as part of roundtable dialogue in Banet-Weiser et al. 2014, 1073)

What Coppa describes as “fandom’s gift economy” refers to the ways fan cultural production has historically been motivated through logics of social exchange. Fan productions are read as a labor of love and as a gift shared with fellow fans, rather than understood as intellectual property (Scott 2009; De Kosnik 2013; Turk 2014). Corporate media seeks to reframe fan gifts as “user-generated content,” now viewed as a means for making money, either because it can be sold to other consumers or because consumer attention can be sold to advertisers. The term *user-generated content* fits within a logic of commodity culture, where the creativity of fandom gets exploited as a form of free labor (Carpentier 2011).

In what sense is participatory culture a culture?

Participation involves some form of collective experience. We participate *in* something - a shared activity, some kind of community. So, when we describe audiences in relation to participatory culture, we are drawing attention to the shared production and exchange of meanings and in the case of fandom, the production and exchange of artifacts built upon mass media content. Culture, Raymond Williams told us in 1958 (republished 2011), is “ordinary,” the total way of life for a particular set of people; cultural norms and values get expressed through, embodied by, and reaffirmed by routine activities, as well as innovative and expressive practices. Culture is not simply what gets produced by those working within the media industry or what gets taught within elite educational institutions. Contemporary popular culture includes texts produced and exchanged by media audiences (such as the race-bent Hermione or the altered comic book covers generated by the Hawkeye Initiative). These texts may, on the surface, seem ephemeral (of the moment, not likely to persist over time) and are often unauthorized, but they are also highly generative, in so far as they provoke significant conversations, become vehicles by which different people share their fantasies, assert their identities, and negotiate change in their cultural environment. Rather than map the contents of the culture (as a set of fixed relationships), Williams argued, we should seek to understand the logics by which materials and practices come in and out of cultural prominence and the ways different forms of cultural production impact each other over time. Understanding fandom as a participatory culture invites us to think more deeply about how cultural materials get produced, evaluated, circulated, and exchanged within a community that has come together around shared passions and interests.

In what ways is it problematic to think about contemporary media audiences through the lens of participatory culture?

The frame of participatory culture helps to explain some fundamental aspects of how media audiences—and especially media fandoms—operate in an era of networked computing. But, there are a few words of caution we need to consider before applying this concept to all contemporary media audiences:

1. Most of us, much of the time, are still involved in consuming culture produced by others. Whatever other changes are taking places in terms of extending access to media produced for non-commercial purposes, we are still often “the people known as the audience,” and only sometimes not.
2. Fan activities remain subcultural practices; today’s media consumers may consume media in the context of various social networks, but a much smaller number participate within a fandom. Many of the mechanisms of Web 2.0 works to individualize, personalize, and localize

consumption, pushing us back towards a conception of the audience as an aggregation of eyeballs. If social media has made it easier for networks of media consumers to find and engage with each other, it has also made it easier for media companies to quantify and measure individual consumption (Andrejevic 2007).

3. Many are still excluded from meaningful participation as a consequence of lack of access to core technologies (the digital divide) or lack of access to skills and knowledge, mentorship, cultural capital, and opportunities needed to meaningfully participate in the most sophisticated kinds of audience practices (the participation gap) (Jenkins, Ito, and boyd 2015).
4. While many fan communities explicitly embrace the ideals of democracy and diversity, many of them are far less inclusive than they imagine themselves to be. Fandom studies is increasingly investigating the mechanisms of exclusion by which the fan communities define who belongs and who doesn't (Stanfill 2011). While fans have shown the capacity to organize and mobilize to promote their favorite media properties, to defend their own practices against regulation and constraint, or to promote a variety of charities and political causes, we are also seeing these same mechanisms allowing more reactionary fans to organize backlashes against those whom they see as threatening traditional forms of privilege, especially that enjoyed by male fans in the areas of comics or computer games.
5. If their networked capacity empowered some fans to take collective action, fans often also underestimate and belittle their own capacities. Mechanisms of fan-shame (Zubernis and Larsen 2012) limit the degree to which fans feel authorized or entitled to speak in defense of their tastes and values. Many of the same discourses which seek to expand the concept of fan to include any and all consumers marginalize or exoticize more hardcore fans as taking things too far, as not having a proper sense of proportion, and therefore as falling outside the mainstream.

All of this brings us back to the idea that participatory culture is a relational rather than absolute term. As such, we should be talking not about *a* participatory culture (as if a fully participatory culture had already been achieved) but rather a *more* participatory culture. *More* people are able to participate in the creation and circulation of media than ever before, but we should remain concerned about mechanisms that limit or discourage participation. People have *more* capacity—collectively and individually—to produce and share media, but there are also important struggles being waged around the terms of their participation, especially over how much control participants have over governance, how much ownership they have over shared resources, and who profits from their activities. Such limitations matter as we think about, for example, the ways fans are lobbying for a more diverse and inclusive model of popular culture.

And all of this forces us to rethink Rosen's claim that we are now "the people formerly known as the audience," because whatever else networked audiences and fan communities are becoming, they are *also* still audiences, and much of the work they perform starts with the kinds of things audiences have historically done—assessing and interpreting pre-existing media representations or advocating for alternatives. Yet, we cannot adequately account for these audiences and their activities by looking only at the ways readers relate to texts or producers; we also have to factor in the ways they relate to each other, the ways their debates and cultural productions change the context in which media texts get received. Insofar as that process is occurring more and more in public, these actions can impact the ways those texts are read by fans and non-fans alike. And, through their ability to take their concerns public (as, e.g., fans did in response to *The Last Airbender*), fans put pressure on cultural producers, who now depend on their engagement and loyalty for their profits, to respond (as Jordan did to critics of his casting in *Fantastic Four*). Our focus here on participatory culture requires us to be ever more nuanced in describing the rapidly changing relations between media producers and audiences, but for that very reason, we need concepts like fandom and audiences to identify the competing or conflicting interests at play.

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Chapter 2

Foundational Discourses of Fandom

Daniel Cavicchi

A large part of fandom's history involves understanding how people have talked about audiences. "Fan," after all, was a descriptive label that emerged in the vibrant, slang-filled culture of late nineteenth-century professional baseball, the result of managers and writers looking for interesting ways to account for the behaviors of players, teams, rooters, and the intensity of their contests (Riess 1999, 16; Nash 2005, 7). And the term became popular in mainstream media discourse, in the first two decades of the twentieth century, not so much through fans' self-labeling as through the publication of curiosity pieces in the pages of national magazines, newspapers, and other publications (see Edwards's Chapter 3 in this volume). In multiple essays, profiles, sidebars, and photo montages, writers and editors surveilled enthusiastic followers of sports and popular culture—and encouraged readers to do the same.

Stories about baseball fans led this publicity. "Fans and Their Frenzies: The Wholesome Madness of Baseball," for example, in a 1907 issue of *Everybody's Magazine*, featured photographs of large stadium crowds, as well as celebrity fans (John Philips Sousa, Supreme Court Justice Edward Everett McCall), and defined fandom as an enlightened state of commitment: "Having passed through the stages of rooter and bug, the soul of a fan frequently achieves a Nirvana that enables him to express untold passion by a mere eye-glint ... He is the sublimation of baseball fervor, getting out of it all there is in it" (Sangree 1907, 379). A 1910 piece in *American Magazine*, simply entitled "Fans," with multiple photos of young men gesturing emphatically from the stands, explained the participatory power of spectators, in which "no matter how partisan a baseball fan may become, or how wild in his desire to see the home team win, deep down he wants fair play" (Figure 2.1, Fullerton 1910, 465).

Lippincott's Monthly, in a short bottom-page item entitled "Baseball Fans," offered the humorous observation that "occasionally a baseball fan (which of course is the vernacular for fanatic and connotes an admission of the charge herein) will venture to assert that his doctor has prescribed outdoor amusement, but even he would probably have engaged a new doctor if the old one had not so prescribed" (Jones 1910). *The Saturday Evening Post*, *McBride's*, and *The Independent* all published similar pieces.

This kind of attention soon spread beyond baseball. The *Saturday Evening Post* declared in 1915 that "the great factor in the moving picture business is the fan ... there are a hundred times more fans in the moving-picture theatres than there ever were in the national game" (Brady 1915, 50).



FANS

MOTTO: *May the best team win; But ours is the best*

By HUGH S. FULLERTON

ILLUSTRATED WITH PHOTOGRAPHS BY VAN OEYEN

"**W**OW! Wow!! Great eye, Eddie! Make him put it across! Bust a fence! You can do it! Wow! Wow!! Wow!!! ROBBER! All right. Tough luck, Eddie. Two and two. Make her be over. Home run, Eddie, old scout. Break the gate. Wow! Wow!! Wo—."

The red-faced, apoplectic young man in the front row made a trumpet of his hands and yelled until the veins in his neck turned purple. In the middle of the final "Wow" he collapsed, looked disgusted and turning to me said:

"What do they keep that hunk of cheese for? He can't hit. Never could. Striking out in a pinch like that!"

The fan, howling encouragement or bawling abuse at the ball players is the spirit of the town. Just how great an influence this spirit exerts upon the playing strength of the team representing the town or city is impossible of calculation, but it is certain that it is part of the national game. He and his fellows exert almost as much influence upon the team as does luck, and this spirit is so inextricably mixed with the element of luck that it is impossible to determine cause and effect. There are cities in which the loyalty of the fans has waned and turned to gibes, and in these cities no player does well. There are crowds that remain loyal in victory and in defeat. These inspire the players to give their best efforts to win. Ball players will tell you that teams invariably play better with

friendly crowds applauding. The fan invariably will respond that he would be loyal provided the club would win games enough to justify loyalty. The players accuse the fans, the fans accuse the players and both are in a measure right. The majority of patrons will "root" when the home team is winning. Any team will play better ball and win oftener if the patrons are loyal. The fan, voicing the spirit of the town, is a power for victory or defeat.

Conditions in different cities comprising the circuits of the major leagues assert a powerful influence over their teams. Players will tell you they would rather play for the Chicago White Sox or for the New York Giants than for any other teams. They will assert that twenty Cobbs could not win a pennant for Cincinnati under conditions which the management is now striving to change. The fanatical loyalty of the White Sox rooter and the Giant patron, the angry abuse of players by the annually disappointed Cincinnati public, the sarcasm and raillery of Washington crowds, trained for years to expect nothing but defeat, have an immense effect upon the players and teams. They make or mar players, and weak men win for one type while brilliant ones fail and lose for the other.

The baseball fan is an unique American species and the most rabid of all enthusiasts. Compared with him the golf fan, the bridge fan, even the bowling fan are mild. Baseball is the most serious pleasure ever invented.

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Figure 2.1 Fans, *American Magazine*, 1910

Source: In public domain. Fullerton, Hugh, "Fans. Motto: May the Best Team Win; But Ours is the Best." *The American Magazine*. August 1910: 462-467. Courtesy of Daniel R. Cavacchi.

Theater Magazine, that same year, explained that "the movie habit, the same as the baseball habit, the cabaret habit, or any other habit growing out of a desire for something to do, has developed a great many movie 'fans' who revere their Mary Pickfords and their Charlie Chaplins" (Edwards 1915, 177). Explanations of movie fans, such as "Unique Fan Clubs" (1916) or "You—At the Movies" (Wagner 1920) proliferated. In 1921, a writer for *Educational Film Magazine* postulated that "the fan is distinctly a product of our complex modern civilization" and involved "problems in

evolution, anthropology, individual and mass psychology and sociology” (1921, 3). Even the 1918 *YWCA Manual for Advisors* (YWCA 1918, 215), containing program activities for girls’ summer camps, playfully suggested debates about various “fans” that girls may have encountered:

Baseball, Japanese, movie, window.
 When is a fan not a fan?
 Are fans necessary?
 Name some ways of “fanning out.”
 Do you know any girls who are window fans?
 How does it affect them?

These stories in the 1900s and 1910s sensationally emphasized fandom’s alleged extremism with metaphors of religious zealotry, mob disorder, or illness, but they usually softened it with humor or overriding conclusions about fans’ sociality and democratic values. Increasingly, however, such analogues were presented as actual dangers. As early as 1912, for example, a feature on New York stage star Priscilla Knowles described her need for police at the stage door to protect her from “too insistent admirers” as well as “crowds along Fourteenth Street [that] average four to five hundred persons” (Peacock 1912, 67–68). In 1916, when film star Mary Pickford arrived to thousands of “expectant picture fans” at Chicago’s Motion Picture Exposition, *The Moving Picture World* worried, “The ovation was remarkable both as a tribute and a psychological incident” (*The Moving Picture World*, 1916). In 1926, the *New York World* described the thousands of fans that attended actor Rudolph Valentino’s funeral as a “riot;” the *New York Times* claimed that “the New York Police Department tried to bring the order to the mob, and there were reports of despondent fans committing suicide” (*New York Times* 1926).

Much has been made in fan studies about journalistic and popular media uses of the term “fan” that have tied fandom to various negative stereotypes and discourses of social pathology. Joli Jensen (1992, 14), for example, has established that particular kinds of associations with the “obsessed individual and the hysterical crowd” flourished in portrayals of fandom in twentieth-century critiques of mass culture, something which she argued could be “connected with deeper, and more diffuse, assumptions about modern life.” Richard Butsch has thoroughly outlined the ways in which media audiences have been characterized as passive or active, crowds or individuals, and often opposed to democratically meaningful publics (1999, 2008; see also the summary by Duffett 2013). Indeed, based on this work, one could logically link, forward in time, the metaphors with which fans were portrayed in the 1910s to various kinds of later mass culture critique, tracing the origins of a twentieth-century critical understanding of fandom.

However, we can also think about fan portrayals from the 1910s in the other direction, toward the past rather than to the future, an interpretive move that would specifically recognize the long *emergence* of the term “fan”—which, by the early decades of the twentieth century, was nearing an end. Fandom may have become a new subject in nationally distributed general interest publications in the 1910s, but sports commentators had been using the term since its invention at least fifteen years earlier, in the 1880s. Even then, the term echoed similar labels that circulated more broadly in the sporting world, namely “the fancy,” which had its origins in eighteenth-century British boxing and pigeoning (Cavicchi 1998, x; Dickson 2009, 304–307). In fact, outside of strict etymologies of “fan,” fan-like audiences—for example, literalist readers of sentimental fiction in the 1840s, “music lovers” caught up by “Lind mania” in the 1850s, firefighting “buffs” in the 1860s, celebrity-focused “matinee girls” of late nineteenth-century theatre—had existed long before, in a variety of contexts, and they had also been the subject of public commentary by journalists and cultural critics (see, e.g., Braudy 1986; Cavicchi 2014). Can we understand how people talked about fans in the 1910s as the culmination of what came before rather than the origins of what came after?

In this chapter, I want to explore some of the key ways in which Americans publicly made sense of audience avidity in the fifty years before the 1880s, when “fan” first emerged in the world of slang. My aim is not to relocate the origin of fandom as a phenomenon but rather to provide a wider context of associations for understanding fandom’s mainstreaming in the early twentieth century. What kinds of ideas and assumptions were brought to bear on enthusiastic participation in cultural forms or events in the nineteenth century? In particular, how did metaphors of religious zealotry, individual desire, or disorderly crowds, suggested in the early popularization of “fan,” make sense in the contexts of nineteenth-century American society?

Mental Intoxication

Understanding audiences in the nineteenth-century United States means, first, having to understand the profound shifts, especially in the antebellum era, in people’s capacity to *become* audience members. Between 1820 and 1860, the United States underwent enormous economic, social, and cultural changes. Industrial capitalism introduced new frameworks of wage labor and mechanized production. New transportation networks helped to expand goods distribution to wider regional and national markets, reshaping the role of cities as networked centers of commerce, politics, news, and culture. The movement of people to cities, for jobs and new identities, increased the social and economic diversity of urban areas, both exacerbating racial, ethnic, gender, and class differences while also creating new demands for “cosmopolitan” experiences (Sellers 1991; Howe 2007).

Most importantly for the development of audiences, urbanization created new institutions of commercial amusement that were focused on providing regular experiences of theatre, music, and other forms of amusement to anyone who could pay the entrance fees. While older pastimes were local and temporary gatherings that relied on amateur performers, urban commercial entertainment in the 1830s and 1840s, aided by new transportation networks and ambitious entrepreneurs, featured professional musicians, actors, and orators, often visiting as part of a “tour.” And, especially beginning in the 1840s, certain segments of large urban populations—generally younger and aspiring members of the middle class—excitedly discovered that they could use accumulated wages from factory and shop work to buy such cultural services in a commercial sphere. The demand for performances, services, and lectures in cities before the Civil War often outpaced the number of venues cities had; theatres, churches, and government buildings had to be used interchangeably for religious, theatrical, and speaking events (Kilde 2002).

Engaging in urban amusements was not simply about convenience, or a quick fix of excitement, but rather about shaping a new kind of urban, modern identity. Migration and immigration eroded local traditions of generational apprenticeship, which yielded to dreams of economic autonomy in the city. Few migrants realized such dreams, but it is clear from the diaries of the period that the spectacle of commercial entertainment, with its capacity for self-renewal, remained seductive (Lears 1995; Augst 1999). Even slaves, who could not participate at all in this world, and women, the poor, and free blacks, who were afforded only limited access, invariably found their lives were interpreted in relation to the growing ideology of autonomy in a context of market capitalism. As Richard Bushman (1992, 29) notes about the growth of gentility before the Civil War: “As rapidly as distinctions were drawn between refined and vulgar, people strove to overcome the invidious comparison, and to secure, if they could, a foothold in the ranks of polite society.”

In particular, for young, rural, white men—away from their families for the first time to work in the city’s merchant shops and manufactories—cultural diversions were powerfully alluring. Nathan Beekley, a young clerk newly-arrived in Philadelphia, for example, kept a diary in 1849 in which he chronicled his frequent attendance (sometimes four or five nights a week) at Philadelphia’s

Musical Fund Hall, Chestnut Street Theatre, the Walnut Street Theatre, the National Theatre, McGuire's Dancing Rooms, and the local Barnum's Museum and enjoyed minstrel shows, vocal performances, magic shows, and opera. Like many young clerks of his time, he aspired to middle-class status, finding that aspiration looming over his choices (August 2003; Luskey 2011). He regularly chastised himself in his diary, for example, to be more careful about the money he was spending on "places of amusement," characterizing some ticket prices as "too salty." But his warnings were unable to overcome his desires; he still found himself constantly drawn to the city's various performances, and even its church services, to hear music (Beekley 1849).

Around the same time, another young man-about-town and diarist, Walt Whitman, was an equally active participant in nearby New York City's rapidly growing number of theatres, lectures, exhibitions, and concerts. He was a regular at the Bowery Theater in the 1840s and loved the intense emotionalism of actors like Junius Brutus Booth and Edwin Forrest. He was an enthusiastic follower of oratory, attending political rallies and abolitionist meetings at Broadway Tabernacle to study the fiery rhetoric of reformers; he especially was eager for lectures by Brooklyn preacher Henry Ward Beecher or temperance speaker John Gough. Perhaps most of all, Whitman was a huge opera fan, following what he called "special enjoyments" and his "musical passion." Not only did Whitman hear most of the major virtuosos who passed through New York in the late 1840s and early 1850s, but his ardent listening, participation, and spectatorship shaped his poetry in *Leaves of Grass*, as well as his criticism, essays, and reminiscences.

Beekley and Whitman were not alone; other young diarists in Philadelphia, New York City, Boston, Cincinnati, Charleston, and New Orleans described similarly ardent, almost uncontrollable engagement, with various forms of urban popular culture (Cavicchi 2011; see also Lawrence 1988). In fact, journalists and lecturers of the time took note. Publications ranging from *The Massachusetts Teacher* (The Teacher as Enthusiast 1851) to *The Yale Literary Magazine* (Enthusiasm 1857), to *Popular Science Monthly* (Professor Tyndall's Address 1874) addressed what the *Yale Literary Magazine* called "the stupendous power of an enthusiasm which concentrates all interest, activity and vigor upon the single object of pursuit." In fact, in an 1873 piece for *Galaxy Magazine*, Kate A. Sanborn, looking back over several decades of the nineteenth century, claimed that an enthusiastic "kindling of the soul toward a favorite object or idea" characterized American society as a whole. After accounting for European enthusiasms of the past—for mathematics, alchemy, tulips—she observed: "The Americans cannot boast of superior coolness," citing Jenny Lind fever, excitement about Dickens, night-time croquet matches, base-ball, and hen fever.

Medical metaphors of fevers, contagions, and epidemics were not uncommon in newspapers and magazines as a way to signal questionable investment in cultural activities, whether in jest or with more critical intent. New York City columnist Donald Grant Mitchell (1854), for example, purposefully reported the polka dance craze as a kind of "infectious" contagion: "Not only has it taken educational possession of Misses who have not cast their nursery strings, but it has smitten men grown gouty." Boston Theatre owner and manager William Clapp (1853) looked back at ballerina Fanny Elssler's visit to Boston of 1840, writing, with tongue-in-cheek, "In every store window articles were displayed flavoring of the mania. Elssler boot-jacks, Elssler bread, etc. etc., were to be seen, showing how violent was the attack of *Fannyelsslermaniaphobia*." A song entitled "The Base Ball Fever" debuted in 1867 with the opening verse: "All 'round about we've queer complaints/Which needs some Doctors patching/But something there is on the brain/Which seems to me more catching/'Tis raging too, both far and near/Or else I'm a deceiver/I'll tell you what it is, now, plain/It is the Base Ball fever" (see Figure 2.2).

Mania was a particularly potent metaphor. French doctor Etienne Esquirol (1845) first identified "a disease of the sensibility" called monomania, in which someone could function normally in most aspects of life while also suffering from a fixation characterized by "maniacal excitement." While Esquirol created the diagnosis for legal purposes, to explain "crimes of passion," the idea of monomania

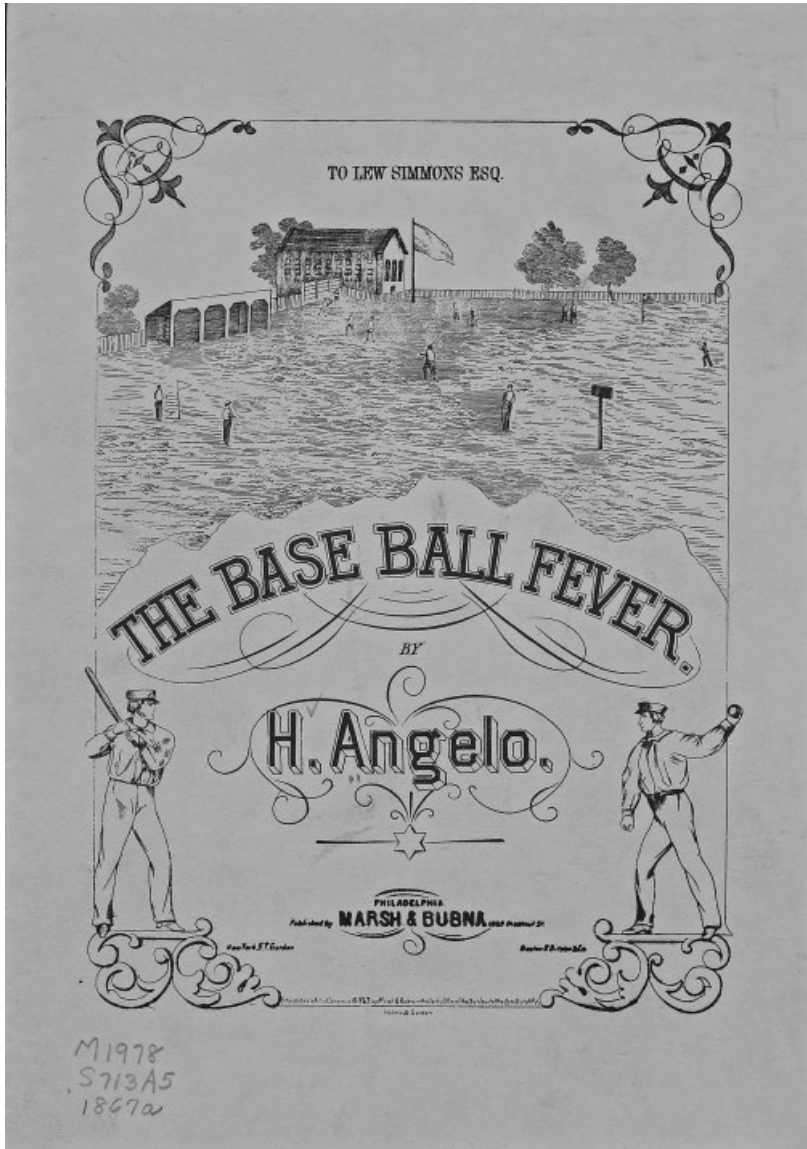


Figure 2.2 The Base Ball Fever, 1867

Source: In public domain. Angelo, H. *The Base Ball Fever*. Monographic. [Notated Music] Retrieved from the Library of Congress, <https://www.loc.gov/item/ihas.200033310/>. Courtesy of Daniel R. Cavacchi.

nevertheless, in Leonard Davis's words, "opened the doors to a wide-ranging application of the idea of insanity to the general population" (Davis 2008, xx). In fact, the *Oxford English Dictionary* (2008) notes that two-thirds of all words using "mania" to refer to "passions marked by ... enthusiastic (and often fashionable) participation in certain activities" come from the nineteenth century. Public interest in the tour of Swedish opera singer Jenny Lind, in 1850, was dubbed "Lindmania," but there was also balloomania, railroad mania, Lisztmania, bibliomania, and orchid mania. Various kinds of mania appeared widely in works of literature, from the protagonist of Edgar Allen Poe's "Tell-Tale Heart" to Captain Ahab in Herman Melville's *Moby Dick* (Van Zuylen 2005).

References to enthusiasm, obsession, fever, or mania, of course, exist in contemporary discourses around fandom, but in the nineteenth century these were attempts to use existing explanatory frameworks from philosophy and medicine to think through new mental states and behaviors created by commercialized urban culture. In an environment where cultural events were not merely sporadic or seasonal but part of a wider system of continuous entertainment, what was the force that determined how much and how long an individual might pursue his or her interests? What *was* necessary, healthy, or appropriate fascination? What might be the effects of long-term access to an array of theatres, museums, opera houses, bookshops, and lecture halls on more traditional habits of life balanced by family, church, and work?

Enthusiasm was complicated. On the one hand, it referred simply to a “passionate interest,” evoking early-nineteenth-century Romantic writers, philosophers, and critics who had revived enthusiasm’s purpose in a burgeoning industrial age, embracing it as a means for achieving a “lively sensibility” (Wordsworth 1909). “Sensibility,” in fact, had become, by the early nineteenth century, a desirable quality for those aspiring to middle-class status, indicating genuineness of feeling and responsiveness to the arts in contrast to crass money-getting.

However, enthusiasm also resonated with older, more worrisome connotations, from the transcendent delirium suggested by the Greek word “entheos” (meaning “God inside”), to heretical worship in the Middle Ages, secular non-conformity during the English Civil Wars of the seventeenth century, and dangerous irrationality during the Enlightenment. Romantic ideas of responsiveness to artistic expression could contradict equally important middle-class values of discipline and order, or could be taken too far by those without the education and experience to balance its power (Mee 2005; Herd 2007). As *Yale Literary Magazine* indicated, enthusiasm “demands cultivation; a judicious system of discipline will bring it into frequent exercise” (Enthusiasm 1857, 334). Even Sanborn (1873), who concluded that enthusiasm was “by its very nature ... uncalculating and unselfish” and needed to “get through life,” warned readers to distinguish between true and false enthusiasm, the latter marked by an “effervescence of the imagination [that] often leads to mental intoxication” in which “the understanding reels and totters.”

Medical terms like “mania” similarly harked back to the past, evoking medical conditions involving the arts and lack of control (Gouk 2004). Mesmer’s use of piano or glass harmonica during his “magnetic” treatment sessions in the 1770s, or dancing diseases, like tarantism, became a subject of renewed interest in the antebellum era as examples of the dangerous effects of music or dance. Indeed, literary historian Justine Murison (2011, 3) has noted that ideas about the effects of the environment on the body’s nervous system, popularized in the antebellum United States by Sylvester Graham and others, were paramount in how people thought about their participatory actions and decisions: “By the 1830s, a popular language of the nervous system helped Americans express the consequences on the body and for society of major historical changes: from the pace of technology and urbanization to the rise of Jacksonian democracy; from the turmoil of social reform to the fraught relations between classes, races, and genders.” In that light, calling something “Lindmania” was not just an amusing metaphor but potentially real, something that urban migrants undoubtedly felt themselves as they bought tickets, scoured the newspapers for announcements, and sat in rapture before performers.

Peopling the Self

Contemporary fandom has been explained by some critics as a form of fantasy, or imagined relationship, between stars and their audiences (see, e.g., Caughey 1984; Gledhill 1992). This has been questioned and complicated by fan scholars, but nineteenth-century critics were still working out how one should understand celebrity, which was a new phenomenon of the mid-nineteenth century.

In addition, middle-class audiences were still working out how to position themselves in relation to the many authors, actors, and virtuoso performers who, literally—through new advertisement mechanisms like “puffery,” as well as the force of their own exhilaration—had entered their lives.

This process of working out the significance of new levels of encounter with performers was amplified by changing meanings of selfhood and autonomy in antebellum culture. Republican philosophy had previously afforded individual agency to property-owning individuals, but new ideologies of evangelism from the Second Great Awakening had called greater attention to the self, not in the limited terms of civil rights but rather as an open-ended project of becoming “born again” through conversion, something that Daniel Walker Howe (1997, 8) has called “the first form of conscious self-reconstruction that many Americans encountered.” Religious notions of individual autonomy were further echoed and reinforced by the new opportunities provided by the market economies of burgeoning American cities, which contained a chaotic and shifting web of populations sorting themselves out on new class, ethnic, and gender lines that upset older, established communal standards of interdependence. Social interaction in capitalist society was often still “top-down” in terms of its power relations, but such realities were nevertheless inflected by a public rhetoric of “psychic self-development” (Sklansky 2002; see also Gay 1995, 11–12).

Thomas Augst (1999, 91) has studied the ways in which young, aspiring, middle-class men and women in cities faced the prospect of their own development apart from usual paths of apprenticeship or inheritance. Not only did they face a challenge of “self-command,” but they found that they had to, literally, “compose themselves” in the midst of the city’s unpredictability and abundance, “to commit themselves to a vision of the future despite their limited experience, despite uncertainty about their own natures and capacities.” Engaging in self-narratives, both one’s own, in diaries, and those of others, through literature, were an especially important means for this work.

In the 1840s, America’s “biographical mania” (Casper 1999) gave birth to a huge industry that offered diverse young men and women a chance to explore modern and fluid notions of identity. Accounts of naïve migrants undergoing trials in the big city abounded in literature, from re-publications of Ben Franklin’s *Autobiography* (1849) to novelist’s J. T. Trowbridge’s *My Own Story*. Lecturers like Ralph Waldo Emerson philosophized about self-reliance; the new technology of photography enabled entrepreneurs like Matthew Brady to make a living selling portraits of individuals at his New York studio, and autograph-collecting first came into vogue (Blake 2006). Newspaper columnist N. P. Willis likewise developed a style of journalism that was based as much on personal anecdotes about his experiences among writers, artists, and musicians, as reasoned analysis about their works (Baker 1998). Performers like actor Edwin Forrest or singer Jenny Lind became famous as much for their personal characteristics as for their professional achievements.

The star system that emerged in cinema and music in the early twentieth century purposely enhanced the larger-than-life qualities of stars in ways that appeared to psychologically manipulate fans, something that concerned cultural critics like Theodor Adorno and fed stereotypes of fans as damaged people seeking redemption through vicarious living. But the celebrity of the mid-nineteenth century was of a different order, blurring audiences’ and performers’ self-making in what David Blake (2006, 34) called “a collective performance of celebrity.” Middle-class Americans in the 1840s and 1850s developed a new and heightened awareness of and interest in the authors and performers they were encountering in the public sphere, but they did so with democratic motivations. As audience members, they were not necessarily interested in emulating the specific characteristics of performers, nor did they express the desire to actually become stars. Instead, they tended to write and think about celebrities as accessible, fellow, human beings, like themselves, with admirable personal qualities. As Lucia McMahon (1998, 67) explains,

“Individualism asserted that one’s ‘true’ or ‘inner’ self was unique private, and concealed from the outer world. But to assert and validate one’s individuality, it was perhaps necessary—and desired—to realize a sense of connection with other individuals” (see also Braudy 1986, 506–514).

This sharing of selfhood was reinforced by ideas of German and English Romanticism, which espoused the existence of a deep inner “psyche” that was linked to Nature and the divine, concepts popularized by American celebrities like Ralph Waldo Emerson. Readerly communion with authors, in fact, was first popularized by Romantic critics in Great Britain, who conceived of literature as “available to readers first and foremost as private, passionate persons” (Lynch 2014, 6–7). The prevalence of “literary biography” in Great Britain especially “helped produce among print’s eighteenth-century consumers the sense of a passionate human presence, a supererogatory something lying behind the certain books” (Siegal 2000, 22). Historian Leo Braudy (1986, 382) has characterized eighteenth-century biographer James Boswell, who obsessively sought out writer Samuel Johnson, as the “quintessential representative of the new audience,” seeing his profound connection to Johnson as marking the “advent of the fan” (see also Darnton 1984).

In the United States, similar attitudes developed in the antebellum era around various kinds of popular fiction, from the thousands who sought out a meeting with Charles Dickens during his visit to the United States in 1842 to those who flocked to New York City throughout the antebellum era to visit the alleged gravestone of the main character in the best-selling novel, *Charlotte Temple* (Davidson 1989). Michael Millner (2012, 12–13) has thus argued for greater understanding of the erotics of antebellum reading, “founded on affective feeling and embodied attachments,” embodied best, perhaps, by Walt Whitman’s *Leaves of Grass*, which addressed readers quite directly: “This is no book/Who touches this, touches a man/(Is it night? Are we here alone?)” (Whitman 1982, 182). Even after authorial fame had become more institutionalized at mid-century, fan letter-writing still functioned as a means for readers, in the words of Courtney Bates (2011, 1.8) to “mitigate their own sense of anonymity by writing back to the author their own story ... an attempt to make the author inhabit the reader’s space and experience” (see also Ryan 2011; Rasmussen 2013; Weber 2016).

Realizing a personalized “bond of feeling” factored heavily in the intense expressiveness of people’s accounts of witnessed performance. Diary writers, especially, expressed moments of surprising communion with those they felt to be “kindred spirits.” Swedish opera singer Jenny Lind, for example, inspired listeners like young Boston woman Caroline B. White (1851, November 22), to write about her familiarly, with close attention to her own self:

I have heard her! The wonderful Jenny! And though language itself has been exhausted in her praise—it seems to me too much cannot be said, such a volume of such sounds—singing, clear melodious—can any one listen to them and not feel one’s aspirations glow warmer, loftier, holier, than ever before?

Lucy Lowell (1882, May 8) who was fascinated by opera singer Etelka Gerster, wrote in her diary about how Gerster could be a friend: “She is altogether, as I have said, many times, a perfectly charming, attractive, loveable woman, you feel all the time a strong affection for her. Should like to know her, I’m sure she is charming, she must be, with her face + whole manner and bearing.” Poet Anne Lynch had more erotic feelings for violinist Ole Bull, recognizing in his playing an explosion of feeling that mimicked her own desires, writing to him:

I have never met a nature who could return to me the half of what I could give, and so my life has been one long famine and my heart the cannibal of itself. If I seem to you too enthusiastic in my expressions of friendship for you, remember that my heart has been frozen for a whole lifetime and it must naturally overflow on meeting one so large and so noble as your own. (Smith 1947, 67)

It is important to remember, of course, that self-making with commercial performances or products was always fraught with tension. In what context and with whom should one commune? Social divisions of race, class, gender, and ethnicity defined aesthetic relations as much as social relations, something realized most acutely by those in marginalized groups. For example, before the Civil War, the middle-class ideal of self-making had special liberatory resonance for free black men and women in the context of legal slavery in the South and racist oppression in the North. “Middle-class black communities in large urban areas such as Boston, New York, Philadelphia, and Washington, DC, readily supported busy schedules of concerts and musical soirées” (Karpf 1999, 606), and free blacks often had great enthusiasm as audience members for exhibits, oratory, and concerts. Joseph Willson described his experience of free black society in Philadelphia in the 1840s, for example, by declaring that “the love of music is universal; it is cultivated to some extent—vocal or instrumental—by all; so that it is almost impossible to enter a parlor where the ear of the visitor is not, in some sort or other, greeted therewith” (Willson 2000, 99).

However, African American selfhood had to be constructed against a social system in which such selfhood was routinely and explicitly denied (Peterson 1992; Young 1996; King 2006). While free blacks in northern cities after 1840 were allowed to attend public theatres and concert halls, they were typically relegated to the “gallery,” a section of the balcony furthest from the stage and also the traditional place where prostitutes traditionally plied their trade. Attempts to physically relocate to more respectable parts of the theatre were almost always rebuffed, sometimes violently. As James O. Horton and Lois E. Horton (1999, 74) have described:

In 1847, Julian McCrae purchased tickets to a Boston theater but was forcibly excluded because of his color. When he sought redress through the courts, the judge ruled only that McCrae be reimbursed for the price of the tickets. In a similar case of discrimination, William C. Nell, Sarah Parker, and Caroline E. Putnam were denied their reserved seats at a Howard Theater performance. Nell protested when theater manager Palmer ordered them to the gallery, a section reserved for blacks. Police officer Philbrick then tried to eject the party from the theater.

This segregation was only one way in which it became clear that the connections between self and enthusiasm for the arts would be limited to middle-class whites, as apparent promise of a new urban context was erased by a broader American racial order.

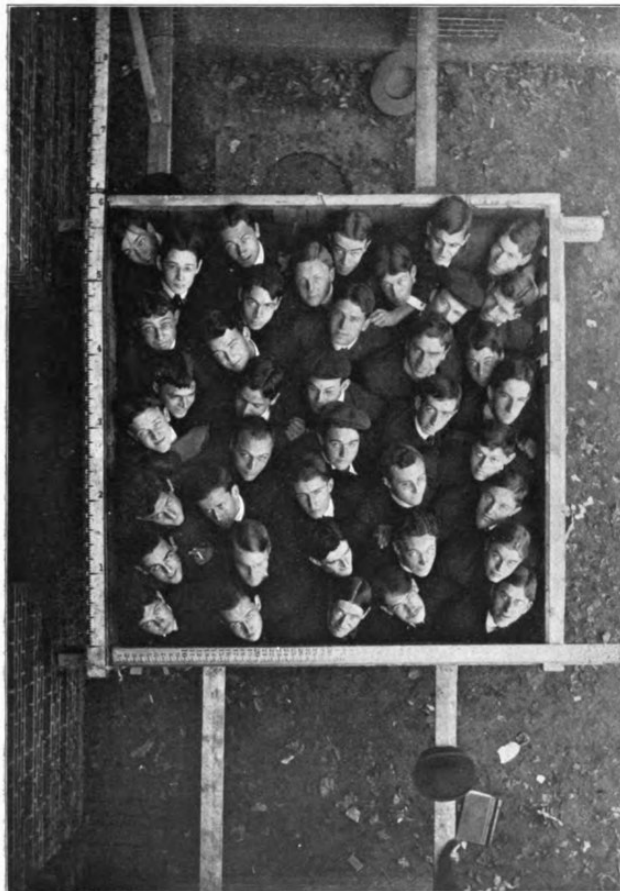
White middle-class women, with many more privileges, still had to negotiate between cultivating emotional sensibility and avoiding the dangers of sensation, which could lead to uncontrolled impulses, poor decisions, and a ruined reputation. This was situation for “matinee girls” of late nineteenth-century theatre. Entrepreneurs created midday “matinees” in the 1870s to move theatre away from its unsavory nightlife connotations and attract new middle-class audiences, especially women. But while it cultivated middle-class decorum, it also enabled critics to label its women patrons in negative ways. Many young women at matinees, like other audience members before them, found pleasure and meaning by engaging with the offstage personas of actors, but because they were all women and in a designated women’s space, this led to caricatures of the easily-manipulated girl, “indulging in her ... wild, silly, and absurd craze for the dudes of the stage” (*The New Bohemian* 1895; see also *Munsey’s Magazine* 1897).

Despite this situation, women found that matinees enabled them to express themselves, together, in ways normally forbidden by the rules of Victorian propriety. In fact, the most meaningful feelings of communion at matinees turned out to be not between the women audience members and the male stars onstage but between the women audience members themselves (Rabinowitz 1993). In fact, the gendering of theatre audiences’ identification with stars in matinees helped to create new kinds of intensely shared and resistant audience subcultures, ones not dissimilar to twentieth-century girl subcultures around movies and rock’n’roll (Butsch 1999, 123–125). Thus, Frances Shaw, in a sympathetic article in *Metropolitan Magazine* (1900, 618–619) could

state that “in the singular number, the matinée girl is merely an impulsive, light-hearted creature,” but also assert that as a group, an “army of merry young women,” matinée girls were “a power not to be despised.” In fact, Shaw noted that experienced matinée girls were far more invested in leading actresses’ depictions of audience members’ “own girlish, youthful buoyancy.” Instead of falling for male idols, “the real matinee girl is more deeply fascinated by young women who depict the lighter emotions of every-day life.”

Managing the Multitude

A corollary to the era’s fascination with self-making through audiencing was a concern with the dynamics of social groups, especially as gathered in public theatres, lecture halls, and opera houses (see Figure 2.3). How could distinct individuals engaged with commercial popular culture form cohesive, democratic, and functioning publics? Tensions between individual rights and the



CROWD WEIGHING 181.8 LB. PER SQ. FT.
40 MEN, AVERAGE WEIGHT OF EACH, 168.2 LB., IN SPACE 6 FT. SQUARE.

Figure 2.3 Live Load, 1904

Source: In public domain. Schneider, C. C., “The Structural Design of Buildings.” *Transactions of the American Society of Civil Engineers*, Paper No. 997: 442. Courtesy of Daniel R. Cavacchi.

common good, of course, had long-standing resonance in the United States, rooted in Revolutionary-era political debates about republicanism. But thinking about audience members as potential publics had urgency in urban contexts where the sheer scale of life seemingly had changed in profound ways (Butsch 2008).

The nineteenth century's almost continuous waves of immigration changed the very experience of socialization and community; just the sheer numbers of people that one would encounter in a day increased exponentially. Cities shifted from smaller, mixed-use "walking cities" of the early nineteenth century to something that was far more sprawling, its sections separated by ethnicity, class, and function and connected together by new systems of public transportation (Chudacoff and Smith 1994, 77–110). Cultural events, too, worked at new scales. While an audience might come together for single engagements by a touring star in the early days of the concert business, later frameworks invited audiences to attend multiple performances over days and sometimes weeks, enabling new levels of repeated and deepening engagement, as well as attention to ongoing publicity, reviewing, contests, and other kinds of ancillary activity. Jenny Lind's tour of 1850 was the first sensation of this sort, relying on previews, song-writing contests, and merchandising and attracting so many auditors that her performances had to be held in non-musical venues like the Castle Garden Pavilion in New York City or the newly-built Fitchburg, Massachusetts, Railroad Depot.

A few years later, audiences enthused about French conductor Louis Jullien's "Monster Concerts for the Masses," a series of 200 concerts in New York City at reduced ticket prices. But it was the 1869 National Peace Jubilee and Grand Music Festival in Boston, developed by band leader Patrick Gilmore to celebrate the end of the Civil War, that turned out to be the largest single concert gathering at the time in the United States, including an orchestra of 1,000 and an audience of 50,000, all in a temporary coliseum constructed entirely out of wood (see Figure 2.4). Derek Valliant (2003) explains that the concert "captured the imagination of audiences by inviting them to become part of the civic pageantry ... the scale and organization blurred the lines between professional and amateur musician, performer and spectator, producer and consumer, and ultimately artist and citizen" (15).

Between 1830 and 1880, people were fascinated not only by monster concerts but also dime museum exhibits, life-size panoramas, and live re-enactments of natural disasters on a larger-than-life scale (Dennett 1997; Booth 2016; Ekstrom 2016). These were marked social events, in which audiences marveled not only at performances but also at each other, gathered in huge crowds. Indeed, artists' renderings of such events were almost always offered from a bird's-eye or landscape format not available to ordinary sensory experience, which further dramatized the scope of such events. *Frank Leslie's Illustrated* included a four-page fold-out image of the 1869 Peace Jubilee's Coliseum, for example, drawn from the perspective of the upper rear balcony and emphasizing the stage as a very distant vanishing point (Bush 1869). The *Boston Advertiser's* Scrapbook (1869) described the sound of the audience's applause after the "Anvil Chorus" as "so overwhelming in its demonstration that timid souls have said their prayers and trusted blindly in the stability of wooden rafters ... a tempestuous storm of stamping, cheering, waving hats and handkerchiefs, that gives such a start to the blood it rings louder in people's ears than the chorus itself."

The shared drama and sheer scale of these events, for many middle-class observers, however, could also evoke the chaos of religious camp meetings, or "revivals," that had started to rise up in New York State and then throughout eastern seaboard during the Second Great Awakening in the first third of the nineteenth century. According to R. Laurence Moore, revivals were more like a "mammoth picnic" than a solemn church service: "Campsites came complete with concession stands selling gingerbread, lemonade, and, in the days before temperance took over, liquor" (Moore 1992, 44–45). In fact, images and descriptions of frontier camp meetings during the period emphasize what John Watson called the "unprofitable emotions of *screaming*,

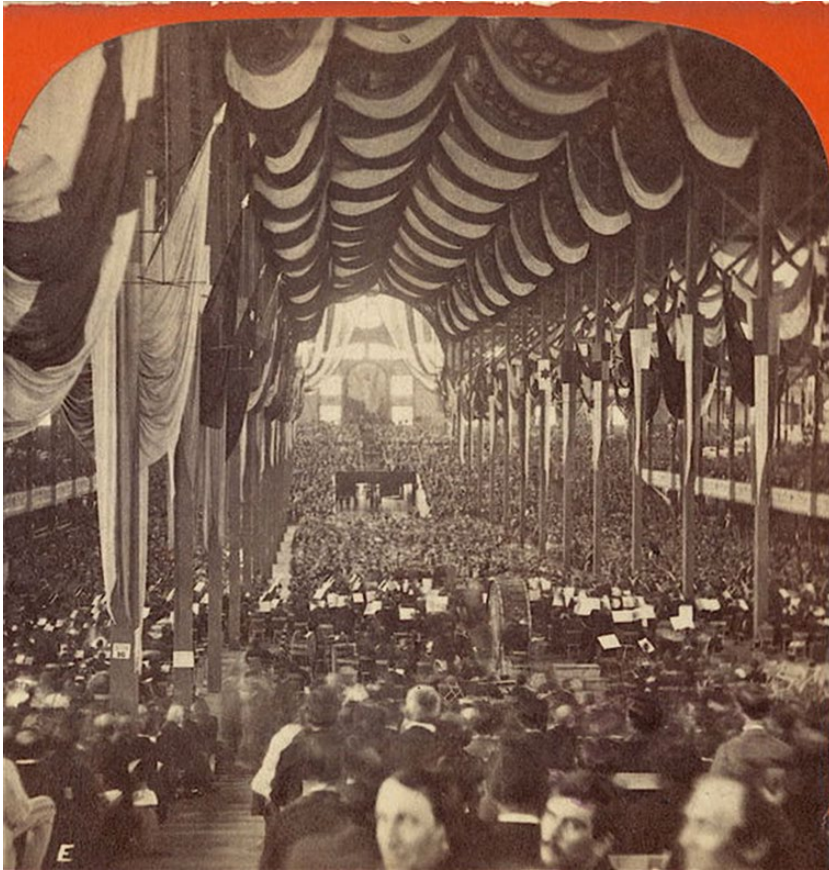


Figure 2.4 Great Peace Jubilee Boston, June, 1869

Source: In public domain. Soule, John P. Great Peace Jubilee Boston, June, 1869. [Image] Retrieved from Wikipedia Commons, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Great_Peace_Jubilee_Boston,_June,_1869.jpg. Courtesy of Daniel R. Cavacchi.

hallooing ... and the stepping and singing of senseless, merry airs. Methodist camp meetings in Illinois and other frontier states developed a reputation for carousing and disorder not dissimilar to perceptions of rowdy working-class theatres (Stowell 2008, 221).

One of the main problems with such large crowds was the possibility of anonymity and the risk of deception that went along with it. Historian Karen Halttunen (1988, xv) has explained how outward display in the nineteenth-century city was vital for measuring character: “In what was believed to be a fluid social world, where no one occupied a fixed social position, the question, ‘Who Am I?’ loomed large; and in an urban social world where many of the people who met face-to-face each day were strangers, the question, ‘Who are you really?’ assumed even greater significance.” In crowds, there was very little chance of measuring one’s individual character or of avoiding those who might damage or harm one’s reputation or hard-earned moral development.

This anxiety about deception among theatre and concert-goers was exacerbated by known practices of deception among theatre owners, for example, whose tricks of the ticket trade include “deadheading,” which created demand for a ticket by giving away most seats for an opening night to associates to create an irresistible “full house.” Other managers paid carriage drivers to line the curb outside their theatres, suggesting that people must be fascinated with something going on inside.

Most deceptive were *claqueurs*, professional applauders, derived from a practice common in eighteenth-century Parisian opera (*Harper's Monthly* 1854, 310).

P. T. Barnum, well-known for his willingness to engage in fraudulent spectacle (Cook 2001), was suspected as a master of these techniques during his management of Jenny Lind's successful national tour of 1850. Thus, in a lithograph entitled "The Second Deluge," artist Franz Hinderoth (1850) showed the citizens of New York as sheep, turkeys, and donkeys being herded into Castle Garden (renamed "Modern Ark of Noah"), while P.T. Barnum, depicted as a mischievous satyr, sits in a tree thumbing his nose at the people lining his pockets.

Another way in which popular culture crowds created a great deal of anxiety was their relation to mobs and social disorder. Especially in a rapidly urbanizing nation like the United States, many middle-class Americans were nervous about anonymous masses of immigrants from Ireland, Britain, and Germany, as well as thousands of new migrants from the countryside, whose crowding in the streets raised the threat of instinctual mob-rule over more traditional frameworks of virtuous leadership. As summarized later in the nineteenth century in the work of social psychologist Gustave Le Bon (1903, 82), crowds were thought to be devoid of individuality and reason and instead were susceptible to the "emotional contagion" of suggestion. In fact, Le Bon directly equated crowds with "religious sentiment," and the "whole-souled ardour of fanaticism." Le Bon proposed that this kind of susceptibility was specifically enhanced among certain "barbarian" races and classes, as well as in specific contexts of oratory or theatre, where an audience's emotionally-heightened "crowd mind" might be easily manipulated by savvy performers (see also Butsch 2008, 33–35).

Depictions of theatre and music crowds in the press, when not praising the beauty and refinement of elite attendees, tended to focus on disorder, with an emphasis on crowd violence, lack of control, and metaphors of savagery or animalism. Boston Brahmin Catherine Healy Dall (1850) described her experience of a Jenny Lind concert in 1850 as if she had just visited the cramped quarters of an inner-city tenement: "No one could conceive a more horrible crowd. Dark windows looked into the offices, and in no way could fresh air be obtained. We sat about 8 seats from the narrow ... I have seen crowds before, but I never imagined what a suffocating crowd would be." An image in London's *Punch* magazine in 1850 depicted the enthusiasm for the Jenny Lind tour in America with Lind sitting sheepishly on a stage, being crowned by a triumphant P. T. Barnum, as thousands of music lovers, looking like filthy, clownish peasants, climb on top of one another, cheer, bow, and gesticulate wildly.

Toward the end of the nineteenth century, supported by widespread middle-class efforts at reform of urban conditions, a new awareness of "overcrowding," and of crowd management, began to emerge. This ranged from sociological equations of overcrowding with crime, disease, and death (Brace 1872, 51–63), to published photographs of the poor by reformers like Jacob Riis, whose framing and composition emphasized multiple bodies contorted into cramped, dark spaces, to government investigations of urban "density" (*Report of the Tenement House Committee* 1895). Responses to overcrowding, discussed among reformers and promoted in public hearings, pamphlets, and books, included new kinds of engineering solutions, especially building regulations. Railway design, too, was an important leader in this movement, innovating new ways to use platforms, enclosures, barriers, and intermediary stations to control surging and flow of large numbers of people and to sort passengers from "idlers" (Ivatts 1885, 406–410).

Most prominent for participation in popular culture were the attempts by baseball and football team owners to create stadiums that could both accommodate and control the behavior of larger and larger audiences for games. Before stadiums and bleachers organized the flow of sports crowds into designated areas, rooters and fans tended to congregate as close as possible to the players. Rooters helped to shape the field's broader outlines and area of play and

had no problem entering that field when necessary to support one's team. However, around the turn of the century, several teams and their managers decided that something had to be done about the constant disruption. As Walter Camp (1894, 121) explained in his book, *American Football*, fans created problems for highly ruled play and needed to be separated from the game, up on grandstands and behind barriers. City baseball parks, too, were increasingly constructed with high walls and other barriers to prevent the sightlines and accessibility of surrounding "rooftop bleachers," which encouraged all sorts of street chaos during games (Lewis 2006, 764–768).

Temporary "stands" were one thing; it became clear that the lasting appeal of sports would require more scientific examination of how create solid, safe, and enduring audience structures (see Figure 2.5). Expansions of stands were a tricky business, especially when dealing with tens of thousands of people. In fact, "live loads" became an important subject for engineers, something that was tied to both safety and control. One engineer explained:

It should be remembered that a closely packed crowd is not likely to be in a mood to take calmly any undue deflection or appearance of weakness in the floor, and the result of such seeming insecurity is not pleasant to contemplate ... a large standing assemblage, such as is common at political meetings, likely to applaud by stamping ... might call for an additional impact provision. (Schneider 1904)

Such concerns, in many ways, shaped turn-of-the-century descriptions of baseball crowds—massive, loud and enthusiastic, but carefully constructed as a "wholesome madness" (Sangree 1907).



Figure 2.5 Fans, Polo Grounds, 1913

Source: In public domain. Bain News Service, P. (1913) *Fans, Polo Grounds*. October 9 date created or published later by Bain. [Image] Retrieved from the Library of Congress, <https://www.loc.gov/item/ggb2005014488/>. Courtesy of Daniel R. Cavacchi.

Conclusion

Discourses around enthusiasm, selfhood, and the crowd all provided nineteenth-century Americans ways of understanding and talking about new kinds of participation in commercial urban culture and to sort through issues related to sensation, excess, autonomy, identity, interaction, and control. These are fairly familiar concepts in fan studies, but it was really not until the beginning of the twentieth century, when cultural critics and reformers finally succeeded in “disciplining spectatorship” (Kasson 1990), that these ideas and debates began to coalesce into the figure of the fan.

Thanks to middle-class anxiety about the effects of industrialization after the Civil War, including class conflict, poverty, and a growing dissatisfaction with the effects of urban culture (Lears 1981), cultural critics and reformers explicitly sought to govern audience behaviors and responses more strongly than ever before, reconfiguring arts education toward specific canons of artists and works, that, in turn, helped to promote an ideological separation between high and common forms of culture (Levine 1988). This not only brought new expectations for etiquette to boisterous working-class audiences but also focused the attention of arts-loving middle-class audiences on the artistry of works rather than the dynamism of stars and forced many to reclassify their own behavior as either educated, reverent, and controlled, on one hand, or passionate, insatiable, and disruptive, on the other (Cavicchi 2011).

There is no definitive evidence that the first uses of “fan” in baseball during the late 1880s came directly from this new framework for understanding audiences. Some baseball historians have suggested that “fan” was a not-altogether-complimentary label coined by a team owner who disapproved of the excessive enthusiasm of hangers-on around the clubhouse (Dickson 2009, 307). That wealthy Boston businessman Thomas Lawson published a guide to “the krank,” an older term for a baseball fan, in 1888, and described kranks as having “reached a high state of cultivation,” suggested an awareness of, and joking resistance to both the label “fan” and cultural reform. At the same time, as the examples at the start of this chapter indicate, “fan” seems to have been used by some writers and critics as a general signifier for popular culture audiences, a provocative example to enable those not invested in the politics of baseball, theatre, or movies to consider the meanings of modern participation.

The constant references to religion, health, and disorder in turn-of-the-century journalism on fans at least show that the concept of the fan was shaped by some of the main preoccupations of nineteenth-century American culture. And while journalists and critics, in the past, narrowed competing ideas about audiences into the general concept of the “fan,” we would do well today to expand our understandings of fandom *outward* to this pre-history. Fan studies scholars have tended to bracket the history of fandom within the known history of the label “fan” itself, with most work focused on forms of twentieth-century technologized engagement, from listening to phonograph records to watching television. This particular historical frame has emphasized fandom’s meaning—and value—mostly in terms of media transformations (Reagin and Rubenstein 2011). Pre-history, accounting for “what came before” established understandings, offers fan studies an opportunity to consider a wider scope of inquiry that may re-contextualize its object of study, with new connections and reference to new bodies of research (Zerubavel 2003, 82–100).

The idea of “fervor,” for example, mentioned in many early popularizations of fans in the 1900s, makes sense today mostly as an obsessive psychological condition, or perhaps, as an example of cultish participation. However, at the turn of the century, it was likely referencing religious evangelism in its many political and social connotations. Likewise, the idea of self-making through leisure and “lifestyle” choices is commonplace in post-1920s consumer culture, but that process was of a very different tenor up until at least the 1900s, marked by moral questions of individual autonomy and obligation in a context of profound social and environmental change.

Of course, it may seem premature to mention “pre-history” when we have yet to fully debate, define, and cohere narratives of fandom’s actual history. And widening the scope of what constitutes “fandom” to include, say, Trekkers *and* kranks, comic-cons *and* monster concerts, may make fandom less distinct overall, not so much about any one form or one time period than about the varieties of human avidity. But fandom, as much as any subject, invites that kind of exploration. As Fred Vermorel and Judy Vermorel (1989, 126) have pointed out, fandom’s reimagining of key moments in social and political history as temporary pauses amidst the ongoing “pleasures, necessities, and ambivalences of consuming popular entertainment” is one of its most radical challenges to scholarship. Historians of fandom must decide how much of that reimagining ought to shape their own work.

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Chapter 3

Literature Fandom and Literary Fans

Alexandra Edwards

The discipline of English teeters at the edge of a fannish turn. Recent work on topics such as the periodical press, popular culture, and celebrity has expanded the study of English-language literature beyond a small canon of books. But while media studies has embraced this turn to fandom as a legitimate area of inquiry, English as a profession has cautiously skirted the edge. Consider this chapter a gentle push.

It proceeds in four sections. The first is an appraisal of current scholarship that examines nineteenth- and twentieth-century literature “fans.” In mapping some ways literature scholars have used fandom as an interpretative frame, I sketch the challenges that this work faces and the pitfalls and successes already apparent in the scholarly record. In the second section, I argue that fan studies’ published accounts of the history of US media fandom have obscured the relationship between early twentieth-century fandom and the literary marketplace out of which it developed. To better illustrate these connections, this section presents an alternate history of the birth of US media fandom, one that takes into account the many ways that the periodical press, both literary and pulp, helped shape fans and fandom. Practices like scrapbooking, writing letters to the editor, and submitting stories to magazine contests made literature participatory in a variety of rich and complex ways. It is nearly impossible to name a writer of the time period whose work was not caught up in this interactive print culture. Popular magazines like *Scribner’s* modeled a wide variety of writing and then asked readers to respond, either by letter or in stories of their own. While Willa Cather apprenticed at *McClure’s Magazine*, Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings submitted to *Scribner’s* magazine story competitions, and Marianne Moore clipped newspapers to build her poems. Modernist writers printed their work in “little magazines”; fans of the science fiction pulps did the same. Though literary scholarship, especially that focusing on modernism, insists on the dominance of a cultural hierarchy, print culture was not strictly stratified.¹ In the same *Saturday Review of Literature* column, one could read about science fiction fandom and Edna St. Vincent Millay. The third section turns specifically to that popular weekly magazine, reading across its issues and features to develop a case study of other literary fandom communities in the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s. The final section suggests questions that fan studies and literature scholars might address in the future, opening the issues considered here in a handful of productive, though not exhaustive, directions.

Fandom in Literary Scholarship

For academics well versed in fan studies, reading literature scholars' tentative forays into fandom analysis can be frustrating. Anachronisms abound. Definitions are scarce. Foundational texts are shallowly understood and randomly deployed. These weaknesses point to the challenges of any interdisciplinary academic work, requiring as it does mastery of at least two disciplines in order to make their synthesis successful.

The following examples demonstrate a few of the problems currently hindering potential works of literary fan studies. Primarily, and most importantly, the tendency of literary scholarship to privilege the author as a singular figure, exalted above readers, obscures the varied ways that texts can be composed and influenced across networks (and persists, despite Roland Barthes' (1977) declaration that the author is dead). Additionally, anachronisms, muddy timelines and claims to historical specificity, and paternalistic attitudes toward women readers raise significant concerns about how scholarship replicates systems of power. We need more clarity, more precision of language, and a more robust framework for moving between literature and fandom.

The approach to fandom that sees it as a prop in the analysis of literary fame is symptomatic of a long-standing scholarly preoccupation with Great Writers and their works abstracted from the audiences who encounter them. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the growing body of literary scholarship on celebrity. The Modern Language Association, the largest professional organization for modern language and literature, dedicated a special issue of their journal, *PMLA*, to the topic of celebrity in 2011; the issue's Introduction suggests that the chosen essays demonstrate that "celebrity demands a gaze" and "resides in the public sphere" (Boone and Vickers 2011, 907). The editors admit there are "gaps in the range of topics covered" (908), but never acknowledge the emptiness in the place where the audience should be. The audience is likewise a glaring absence throughout book-length works on literary celebrity, especially books interested in the early twentieth century (see, e.g., Aaron Jaffe's *Modernism and the Culture of Celebrity* (2005), Faye Hammill's *Women, Celebrity, and Literary Culture between the Wars* (2007), and Jonathan Goldman's *Modernism Is the Literature of Celebrity* (2011)). Jaffe and Goldman's co-edited collection, *Modernist Star Maps* (2010), suggests the heart of the problem in its very title: literature scholars, especially those working on modernism, are too often lost in star-gazing. The audience becomes a faceless crowd, easy to ignore.

But even when scholars attend to the audiences of "fans" who sustain an author's celebrity, they can lack the necessary critical and historic specificity to prevent their work from lapsing into anachronism. This is the case in David Haven Blake's (2012) "When Readers Become Fans: Nineteenth-Century American Poetry as a Fan Activity." The title of this article for *American Studies* perches its argument somewhere between historical causality and a suspended present tense: the nineteenth century as a moment when readers magically "become" fans. But there is very little attention to the historical specificity of the word "fan," nor the related "fandom," "fan group," or "fan activity," all of which Blake uses. It would have been impossible for admirers of Edgar Allan Poe, Walt Whitman, and Henry Wadsworth Longfellow to identify themselves as "fans," given that the word did not come into use until the late 1880s, a full decade after Blake's primary examples. Even then, the term "fan" was initially used to describe a follower not of poetry, but of baseball (see Cavicchi, Chapter 2 in this volume).² Blake's anachronisms result from a lack of definitions. His article assumes that "fan" is a monolithic identity that speaks for itself, rather than a historically specific and contingent identity that demands careful definition. Furthermore, despite Blake's final assertion that "The history of fandom reminds us that poetry is equally interesting when readers seize upon it as their own crucial equipment" (119), the body of his article suggests that he is more interested in reading "fandom" as evidence for the widespread "fame" (101) of the singular authors he chooses to focus on.

Anachronisms also plague Eric Eisner's (2009) chapter on "Elizabeth Barrett Browning and the Energies of Fandom," from his book *Nineteenth Century Poetry and Literary Celebrity*. Though Eisner's intended focus on "the experiences and practices of actual individual readers within determinate histories" sounds promising (14), his repeated use of the terms "fan" and "fandom" with little pause for definition or consideration is troubling. Eisner himself admits the anachronism in a parenthetical aside (3), but seems untroubled by the fact that his key terminology did not yet exist in the decades when his subjects were writing. Indeed, Eisner writes that he prefers the word "fan" because "the delirious partisanship of fandom is a mass-cultural phenomenon" (139). The repeated use of pejorative language about fans demonstrates more clearly why his theoretical and historical looseness should worry us. Eisner turns nineteenth-century readers into "besotted," "mad" fans who hunt and haunt celebrity poets, "devour[ing]" gossip about them and "schem[ing]" to have sex with them (1). Even the poets he studies cannot escape his judgment: in Eisner's account, Byron was "obsessed" with Napoleon and local boxers, while Barrett Browning is described as being "a Byron-worshipper in her youth" (5). When Eisner characterizes Barrett Browning's private expressions of appreciation for George Sand as "almost hungry" (137), he enacts a systematic degradation of female readers and reading practices that fan studies scholars, among others, have been working to counter for decades. Furthermore, he then applies this outdated approach to fandom to Barrett Browning's 1856 long poem *Aurora Leigh*, framing the literary work, its author, and her readers in the same worrisome light, as those "hungry" for (137) and seduced by (153) the literature they enjoy.

Blake (2012) also replicates the fandom-as-gendered-pathology model that fan studies has worked so hard to move beyond. Thus, in his work, a deluded admirer who claimed to be Longfellow's wife is aligned with the women who transformed Poe's texts for the purposes of furthering their own poetic endeavors. Blake reduces fandom to the worship of famous men by delusional women, and in this approach we can see a reenactment of troubling gendered hierarchies that fan studies has already rebutted (see Kristina Busse's 2013 article "Geek Hierarchies, Boundary Policing, and the Gendering of the Good Fan" for an overview). And though Blake (2012) offers that "it would be a mistake to conclude that fandom was an explicitly female identity" (118), his over-reliance on anecdotes of women offering or being asked to perform free labor (the woman who wanted to bear Walt Whitman's child (106)) and the 2000 letters per year that Lydia Sigourney received from readers asking for favors (104)), along with his reduction of fannish activity to mere boundary transgression of the non-famous into the world of the famous (104), problematically feminize the parasocial relationships he wants to analyze.

By yoking fandom to a feminized desire for "intimacy" with the famous, Blake (2012) forestalls his own intention to "[explore] the benefits of thinking about fandom as a way of reading" (104) and prevents his argument from being able to grapple with fandom as an anachronistic but useful model for reading, writing, and responding to literature in community. Thus, a potentially promising reading of Sarah Gould's poem "The Serpent Horror," which transforms Edgar Allan Poe's poetics, instead becomes weighed down with the troubling suggestion that "fandom is indeed an irrational, haunted state" that "produces a tormented, divided work" about being both a fan and a poet (115). At the same time, Blake's reading neglects to attend in any way to the striking sexual imagery Gould embeds in her poem. Surely issues of gender, fandom, and professional authorship are worth thinking through here, as Gould's lyric narrates a speaker possessed by a poet in the form of a serpent, causing her to exclaim, "O, ye heavens! I shuddering moan, / I too am a serpent grown" (Gould, cited. in Blake, 115). If the pen is the snake is the penis, then Gould's poem suggests women must grow their own "serpent horror" to succeed in the literary world.

More successful are the approaches to literary fan studies taken by Mike Chasar and Janet Badia. Both counter sloppy anachronisms with careful attention to historical moments and the provenance of terminology, and both also carefully unpack issues of gender as they affect reading, writing, and representation.

In *Everyday Reading: Poetry and Popular Culture in Modern America*, Chasar (2012) uses particular instances of fannish activity as a frame for understanding how deeply poetry was embedded in US popular culture in the first half of the twentieth century. Chasar has performed an impressive amount of archival research, including amassing his own collection of vintage poetry scrapbooks via eBay, in service of his mission to explore commercial and popular uses of poetry. This research gives attention to cultural sources and repositories not often considered when working with modern and modernist poetry, and it takes Chasar right to the heart of literary fan culture. His chapters on poetry scrapbooking and radio show fan mail are particularly relevant, for the way they model the use of oft-neglected archives, their close and distant reading of extra-literary sources like fan letters, and their positioning of period-specific fan creations in a larger context of the history of fanworks and the gift economy. However, Chasar's focus on poetry as distinct from prose in this context is overdetermined and under-investigated, and he frequently stops short of making explicit connections between the fan culture surrounding popular poetry and other expressions of culture, either those with high cultural capital (literary modernism) or more popular forms (film).

Janet Badia's (2011) *Sylvia Plath and the Mythology of Women Readers* addresses and challenges the stereotypical image of the depressive, uncritical, and death-obsessed female Plath fan that has appeared in popular culture since the 1970s. Badia's work stages an intervention against what she characterizes as the "literary bullying" done by academics repeatedly insisting that Plath's female fans have damaged her literary reputation (15). With historical accuracy and careful attention to terminology, especially the word "fan" (86–87), she demonstrates that the "pervasiveness of an exaggerated and distorted rhetoric about" Plath's female readers makes visible "the patriarchal ideologies that enable the rhetoric and make us blind to its implications" (23). But Badia's approach, drawing explicitly from cultural studies and reception theory (16), has little to say about Plath's texts themselves—on purpose. She makes it an explicit goal to "resist the ideology ... that insists the only responsible way to discuss Plath is through a close reading and explication of her literary texts" (16). Her book is thus a model of corrective feminist fan scholarship, but it is not a work that suggests how fandom could operate as a frame for literary analysis.

The assertion that we can approach texts in ways other than close reading is evinced in reception studies more generally, and is evidenced in the special issue of *Reception* on "Fans and the Objects of Their Devotion" (Ryan and Johanningsmeier 2013). Of the four articles, only two pertain specifically to books. One of these (Howe 2013) investigates a corporate-controlled *Twilight* archive, a topic firmly in the purview of media fan studies and engaged more with fan-corporate relations than with *Twilight* as literature. The other article, however, is of interest. In it, Barbara Ryan (2013) examines fan mail and other extra-textual sources related to Bruce Barton's 1925 novel *The Man Nobody Knows* and its connections to various versions of *Ben-Hur*. Ultimately, Ryan argues that these various textual connections demonstrate how *The Man Nobody Knows* spoke to Jazz Age US readers about their anxieties concerning Jewish assimilation (Ryan 2013, 11, 18). Strangely, though, Ryan fails to make explicit connection between the kind of fan writing done in the letters and in the novel. In other words, though fandom is her frame, she misses the ways in which Barton's novel might itself be considered a fan work, responding to popular images of Jesus and provoking further fan responses in kind.

The Birth of US Media Fandom: An Alternate History

Perhaps it is unsurprising that literature scholars have had trouble effectively applying a fan studies framework to literary texts, given fan studies scholars' fairly rigid adherence to a fandom origin story that obscures more than it reveals about the relationship between fandom, literature, and the larger networks that comprise the literary marketplace. How we tell the story of the birth of fandom dictates what we focus on and what we leave aside. Though British scholars often take the works of Jane Austen and Arthur Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes stories as common fandom origin points (see Pearson, Chapter 31 in this volume), Americans tend to trace the beginning of fandom back through the 1960s *Star Trek* television show to science fiction magazines of the late 1920s and early 1930s, and focus heavily on white male authors and white male fan communities in those interwar decades. This is, for example, the story favored by Karen Hellekson and Kristina Busse in *The Fan Fiction Studies Reader* (2014), a collection of foundational texts meant to move the field toward a comprehensive theory of fanfiction as fan-authored literary texts. As they explain, defining fanfiction involves a process of selecting key media texts; there are multiple possibilities. Hellekson and Busse (2014) prefer to define it as "a (sometimes purposefully critical) rewriting of shared media, in particular TV texts ... starting in the 1960s with its base in science fiction fandom and its consequent zine culture" (6). Citing Francesca Coppa's "A Brief History of Media Fandom," which Hellekson and Busse published in their 2006 collection *Fan Fiction and Fan Communities in the Age of the Internet*, the editors suggest that *Star Trek* fans "followed existing science fiction fandom infrastructure, with its vibrant convention and fanzine culture" (6). Hellekson and Busse's choice, they state, "follow[s] most academics working on fan fiction studies" (6). It also narrows their focus considerably. By crediting white male science fiction fan groups with the foundational work of fandom, this story erases crucial contributions made by women and people of color, as well as the work of scholars like Abigail Derecho (2006), Rebecca Wanzo (2015), and Jessica Leonora Whitehead (2016), who have made compelling cases for their centrality in the long trajectory of fandom and fan studies history.

Yet the science fiction version of fandom's origin has tended to dominate discussions of media fandom and, in particular, fanfiction, despite being based on an exaggerated reality. In the foreword to *Fic: Why Fanfiction is Taking Over the World*, Lev Grossman (2013) begins by connecting the 1966 debut of *Star Trek* with two published works of transformative literature, Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* and Tom Stoppard's *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* (xi). Anne Jamison, *Fic*'s primary author, flashes us back even further with her "Prehistory of Fanfiction," touching on Aristotle, Chrétien de Troyes, Shakespeare, *Don Quixote*, Samuel Richardson's *Clarissa*, and George Eliot's *Middlemarch*, in a playfully anachronistic retelling of literary history as fandom trajectory (26–36). Her irreverent anachronisms are useful, illuminating rather than obscuring connections between intertextuality, adaptation, and fan history. But that playfulness is quickly supplanted by the supposedly more factual version of the "Birth of Media Fandom," in which Jamison (2013) asserts, "At first, fandom culture and its zines ... were almost entirely male-dominated" (75). She backs this up with an essay by librarian and science fiction scholar Andy Sawyer, which examines 1950s and 1960s British fanzines and fanfiction to argue that fandom was born in the pages of the science fiction magazines—particularly the U.S. pulp *Amazing Stories*, with its letter column that "made fandom possible" (80). Sawyer's fandom origin story echoes the one told by Coppa and many others. It stresses the "radical decision" of *Amazing Stories* editor Hugo Gernsback to include that vaunted letter column that "enabled fans to start communicating with each other" (Spencer 2005, 94–95).

This story isn't exactly false (for an alternate take, see Hellekson, Chapter 4 in this volume). Yes, Hugo Gernsback included a letter column in his science fiction pulp magazine *Amazing*

Stories, beginning with volume 1, issue 10 (January 1927)—but letter columns had existed since at least the eighteenth century.³ Yes, Gernsback's letter column eventually adopted the practice of printing the full addresses of correspondents—but it did so at the suggestion of a reader who wrote, in October 1927, that arguments would be easier to pursue if readers could contact one another directly (*Amazing Stories*, 2.7, 713). And, yes, it was in the pages of the *Amazing Stories* letter column that several readers banded together to form a "Correspondence Club" that eventually hosted the first science fiction fan convention—but the club was originally "for the betterment of science," not the shared enjoyment of science fiction (*Amazing Stories*, 2.5, 515).

So this story isn't exactly true, either. It presents a history in which science fiction magazine readers and fans are completely cut off from the larger networks of print culture in which they participated. Like the science fiction stories Gernsback published, the story of the origin of media fandom has a basis in factual reality. But this reality has been exaggerated into myth—self-consciously styled by early science fiction fandom participants whose versions emphasized their own involvement—creating a narrative that leaves out whole swaths of important history, while also neglecting issues of interactivity in print culture, "fan" and "fandom" terminology, access to and safety in clubs and groups, interest in reading and writing, and alternative models of educational communities.

I present, then, a counter-history of early media fandom, looking beyond the science fiction pulps in order to trace another version of the spread of "fan" identity and "fandom" as community.⁴ In this version, *Amazing Stories*' community of readers was enabled by an already richly interactive media culture whose print aspects included corporate advertisements as well as personal and classified ads, contests, letter columns, and fan mail. These elements were important features of nearly all magazines published in the early twentieth century, from intellectual monthlies like *Harper's* and *Scribner's*, to popular "middlebrow" magazines like *The Saturday Evening Post*, to the massive industry of pulps that included not just *Amazing Stories* and science fiction but also dozens of magazines specializing in romance, Westerns, mysteries, horror stories, and more. Taking *Amazing Stories* as one element among many in the shifting relationship between the literary marketplace and consumers, the sketch that follows presents a fuller, though by no means comprehensive, picture of the birth of US media fandom.

It would be difficult to overestimate the amount to which wide-sweeping changes in media contributed to the development of what we now call fandom. As Carl Kaestle and Janice Radway (2009) argue in "A Framework for the History of Publishing and Reading in the United States, 1880–1940," the period's "communication revolution," which included major advances in technology and dissemination such as the telephone, commercial radio broadcasting, lower-cost paper for magazines and newspapers, half-tone lithograph reproduction, wire services, and newspaper syndication, enabled Americans in far-flung locations to share reading and listening material like never before (9–13). "The revolution in print, auditory, and visual communication," they note, "strengthened the possibilities for a national popular culture" (13). But even as national corporations gave rise to corporate capitalism and American nationalism, the population centers of America became increasingly diverse, due to both immigration and the migration of Southern African Americans to the cities of the North. As Kaestle and Radway point out, conflicts between corporate consolidation and diverse populations "led to the creation of alternate, diverse, locally generated bodies of knowledge situated within evolving subcultures and countercultures that helped people to make sense of these charged interactions" (15).

Furthermore, these subcultural bodies of knowledge did not operate in isolation. Rather, as Margaret Beetham (2006) argues:

Though each journal might constitute a particular community of readers, there was a great deal of overlap and borrowing. And, of course, readers entered into this circulation of ideas and images. It

was, and still is, one of the characteristics of the periodical press that it invited readers to become writers—most frequently through letter pages and competitions. To describe the periodical as an “interactive” form is to deploy anachronism but the form did invite reader participation well beyond any interior change of consciousness or silent participation in the “we” of the reading community. (235)

Though Beetham is describing British suffragette periodicals of the 1880s and 1890s, her assertions are relevant to print culture across the Atlantic in the following decades. Periodicals relied on reader interaction in ways that heavily influenced fandom, as I discuss below. But they also interacted with the larger literary industry: “periodicals were never self-contained entities. Endemic in the form were addresses to other publications, whether other serials or books” (Beetham 2006, 235). This interactive print culture set the stage for the birth of fandom at the turn of the century.

As I noted above, the word “fan” first appeared in the late 1880s and originally referred to enthusiasts who followed the emerging sport of baseball (see Cavicchi, Chapter 2 in this volume). The periodical press made it possible for readers to follow their teams in text, and to feel that they were part of a community of fans, without needing to make it to the ballpark. Here, as in all examples of textually-constructed fandoms, we see proof of Benedict Anderson’s (1991) assertion that “print-capitalism . . . made it possible for rapidly growing numbers of people to think about themselves, and to relate themselves to others, in profoundly new ways” (36). The word “fan” then began appearing in early film magazines, signifying a person who follows motion pictures the way a baseball fan follows his team.

In a poem from the June 1911 issue of *The Motion Picture Story Magazine* (Figure 3.1), “The Motion Picture Fan” is described as a young man who demonstrates his superior knowledge of the film industry: he can judge good movies and expound on the technical details of the filmmaking process. The poem’s final stanza suggests this portrait might be more than a little satirical; the dandyish fan, it seems, simply cannot keep from having “his little say” on everything related to motion pictures.

Although this poem pokes fun at the feminized, know-it-all film fan, the film magazines soon realized that such devoted interest made fans the ideal consumers—both of films and of the magazines that promoted and even stood in for them. Thus early film magazines featured advertisements for other periodicals, especially those that appealed to what we might call the fannish sensibility.

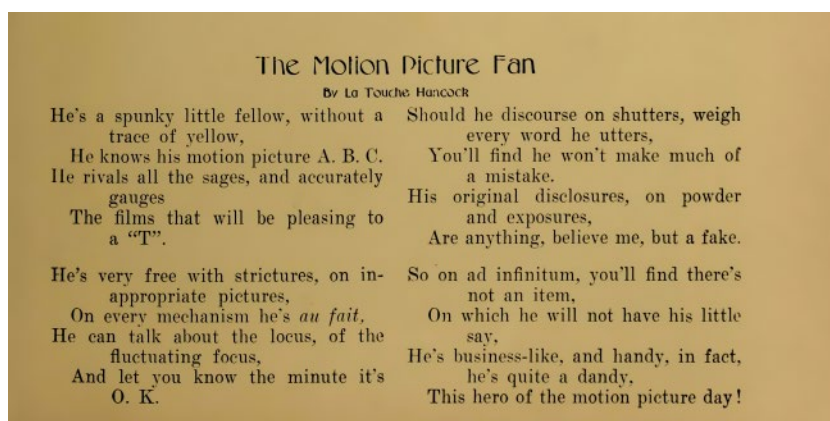


Figure 3.1 “The Motion Picture Fan” by La Touche Hancock

Source: From *The Motion Picture Story Magazine* 1.5 (June 1911): 93.

In 1911, *The Motion Picture Story Magazine* ran advertisements for *The New York Dramatic Mirror*, which called the paper “indispensable” for the “moving picture fan” (November 1911, 639), and for the *Strand Magazine’s* “146 Pages of Reading” including Arthur Conan Doyle’s “The Adventure of the Red Circle,” which the ad proclaimed in large text was a Sherlock Holmes story (April 1911, 396). These appeals to fans were not isolated incidents, but rather the editorial strategy under which the magazine functioned. As Kathryn Fuller (1996) argues, it was around this time that *Motion Picture Story Magazine* became “a lively, interactive colloquium for the sharing of movie fans’ knowledge and creative interests” (137). And only three years later, the November 1914 issue of *Photoplay* includes a reference to “dyed-in-the-wool fans” who possess comprehensive knowledge of motion pictures—not just the stars, but the production companies and their film series (20 [Figure 3.2])—but this time, in a tone of approbation.

Photoplay also advances the possibility that fans can become professionals working in the film industry. A “Thumbnail Biography” of scenario (script) editor Richard V. Spencer (1914) begins with his declaration, “I became interested in motion pictures early in 1909... Of course I had been a fan long before that” (168). While not all fans would, could, or wanted to become film professionals,



Figure 3.2 A promotional portrait of Mary Fuller
 Source: From *Photoplay* (November 1914): 20.

Spencer's casual assurance of his status as fan demonstrates how important the identity was to early film magazines. Once discursively defined, fans could be marketed to, not just as consumers but also as budding experts and hopeful professionals-to-be. *Photoplay's* advertisement section reinforces this multivalent aspirational matrix. In it, readers find ads for specialized products like the Fox Literary Keyboard, intended specifically "for photoplay writers" (157), as well as books and magazines that teach one how to write scenarios that will sell (165). Film fans who aspire to write photoplays are encouraged to enter a contest for new motion picture plots and receive yet another book on "How to Write Photoplays" (186–187), while "amateur photographers" can mail away for "2 Camera Books Free!!" (176). Fans without professional aspirations are offered movie star-branded perfumes (183), collectors' photographs (167, 179), and stamps (174), encouraging fans to collect not only knowledge but also consumer goods.

Advertisers had come to assume that consumers aspired to be fans, and the film industry would continue to lead the charge in promoting interactivity between fans and companies via contests, advertisements, opinions polls, and letter columns (Orgeron 2009; Whitehead 2016). But it is also important to acknowledge that early film magazines like *Photoplay* and *The Motion Picture Story Magazine* were primarily composed of narrative texts—of stories—interspersed with film stills and publicity images. In other words, these magazines appealed to the new market of film fans by capitalizing on the already-established conventions of literary periodicals like *Scribner's* in printing long stories ("novelettes"), short stories, and serials. That same November 1914 *Photoplay* boldly announces "Another Jesse Lasky Novelette" on its cover, suggesting that the inclusion of a long narrative story was a large part of the magazine's appeal.⁵ Fan interactivity and the sharing of "stories" went hand in hand; Kathryn Fuller (1996) notes that as *Motion Picture Story Magazine* moved away from interactive content, they also removed the word "story" from the title (145).

Once there were fans, there was "fandom," and again, the periodical press used literary forms to explicate and situate this growing yet amorphous community. The June 1916 issue of *McClure's Magazine* features baseball poems and sketches headlined "At Random in Fandom" (13) (Figure 3.3). Grantland Rice's mock-heroic verses may not be enduring works of great poetry, but neither do they make a mockery of fans' affective engagement with baseball. Rather, like much of Rice's celebrated sports writing, they work to elevate the sport and its fans to their own heroic level, mixing earnest emotional expressions and heightened language with sports slang.⁶ And lest we doubt *McClure's* literary pedigree, or its imbrication with popular media of its day, this page is followed by an illustrated story by future Pulitzer Prize-winning author Edna Ferber, here touted as the author of a successful play starring Ethel Barrymore (14).

The idea of the "fan" did not stay confined to the worlds of sports and film, and given the multiple links between sports coverage, film magazines, and literary periodicals, this spread seems inevitable. As Margaret Beetham (2006) points out, media like the periodical press "make for leaky boundaries" (231). During the late 1910s, fan identity was used to market literature to readers. "Fan" came to partially replace the clunkier "book-lover," in places like the letter column of *Argosy* in October 1917, where the editorial staff used it to describe a letter-writer who likes an author's stories (765). By the early 1920s, advertisements in publishing industry magazines like *Publishers' Weekly* and *Bookseller and Stationer* used "book fans" as shorthand for passionate consumers of the book form. The advertising copy in *Publishers' Weekly*, which encourages publishers to buy ad space in *The Chicago Daily News*, even notes the marked difference between "book-fans" and "the most casual of readers" (99.26 (June 25, 1921), 1882, original emphasis). This delineation suggests that the concept of the devoted consumer *as fan* had moved beyond the film and sports industries, and was thoroughly established in the literary marketplace.

At the same time, pulp magazines were coming into their own. Pulp, like their literary-intellectual and film-fan magazine counterparts, published a variety of short stories, serials, and

McCLURE'S for JUNE

13

At Random in Fandom

Sketches by Arthur William Brown

Verses by Grantland Rice



Here end the sorrows of the race — all want and wretchedness and crime,
Where Care must seek another place — where Sin must bide another time;

Here where the heart's wiped clean and dry — where in dull
breasts the flame is lit,
As young and old wait the reply — a Strike-out — or a
Two-base Hit?



TYRUS RAYMOND COBB
Take seven parts of hurricane and eight of
dynamite;
Add fourteen parts of flame and flash and
twenty parts of fight;
Toss in another twelve for speed and raw
wires on the job,
And if it breaks the ball game up you'll
know the answer's COBB.



WALTER JOHNSON
We know that Matty's Fadeaway comes
drifting by like Fate;
We know how Alexander's curve revolves
across the plate;
But what has Walter Johnson got? No living
player knows,
For no one ever sees the ball that Walter
Johnson throws.



THE COACHER
"Get in the game — head up, old scout,"
The Coacher's call rings to a shout;
So at Life's base the voice of fame —
"Get in the game — Get in the game."



THE VETERAN
What has he left of the name and fame
That came to him from the good old game.
The game that his soul had learned to love?
A faded dream — and a worn-out glove.



THE UMPIRE
An Umpire died — and went below,
To where hell's hottest flames glow,
"O, what rare bliss," he called in mirth,
"Compared to what I caught on earth."



AFTER THE GAME
Since Batting Eyes or proper breed
Are trained to go for Curves and Speed,
The player jumps his day's fatigue,
To sign up with the Chicken League.

ARTHUR WILLIAM BROWN

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Figure 3.3 "At Random in Fandom"

Source: From *McClure's Magazine*, June 1916: 13. The mock heroic couplets at the top of the page read: "Here end the sorrows of the race—all want and wretchedness and crime, / Where Care must seek another place—where Sin must bide another time; / Here where the heart's wiped clean and dry—where in dull breasts the flame is lit, / As young and old wait the reply—a Strike-out—or a Two-base hit?"

“novelettes” in a mix designed to attract readers who wanted complete narratives but also to bring them back each week or month to finish that longer story. Like other magazines, they encouraged interactivity by holding story contests, printing letter columns, and encouraging readers to think of themselves as a community.⁷ *Love Story Magazine*, a popular love pulp that debuted in 1921, featured not one but two departments where readers could interact with editorial staff and each other by writing in. “The Friend in Need” was an advice column that promised its primarily female correspondents, “Your letters will be regarded confidentially and signatures will be withheld,” and that letters that could not be answered in the magazine would be answered by mail (64.1 (May 25, 1929), 148). The other department, “The Friendliest Corner,” worked within these gendered privacy concerns to connect readers with each other, in what looks surprisingly like Internet fandom friending memes. Subtitled “Miss Morris will help you to make friends,” The Friendliest Corner printed brief correspondent biographies that listed details like age, interests, occupation, and physical appearance. Interested readers could then write in and have their letters forwarded to the friend they chose. The magazine actively worked to promote a sense of community that extended beyond singular readers and the editorial department: “Miss Mary Morris ... will see to it that you will be able to make friends with other readers, though thousands of miles may separate you” (143). However, it also cautions that only ‘appropriate’ matches will be made: “It must be understood that Miss Morris will undertake to exchange letters only between men and men, boys and boys, women and women, girls and girls” (143). Age and gender become limiting factors in determining suitable friendships.

It is impossible to know whether or not The Friendliest Corner succeeded at fostering friendships between readers. Nor can we know for certain if those readers who wrote in represented themselves faithfully, or if they adopted a different gender or age in order to solicit letters that would “match.” Nor, indeed, can we know if the department even sent on the letters it received, or if it simply kept the enclosed forwarding postage. But the popularity of the idea itself is evidenced by the roughly five pages the department took up each week, in which *Love Story Magazine* readers from Ohio to Nova Scotia sought to connect with others who had the same taste in reading material—before *Amazing Stories* even began publishing.

Pulps tended to be separated by genre in form, if not in audience or creator. At pulps’ height in the 1920s and the 1930s, readers could choose from multiple titles containing only mysteries, romance, science fiction, westerns, or sports stories. But genre crossovers were popular as well, leading to romantic westerns, mystery science fiction, and sports romances. These various genre-themed magazines were largely published by the same handful of companies, known as “fiction factories,” and written by a surprisingly small pool of professional pulp writers, who worked across genres at will but often under pseudonyms. As Lee Server (1993) points out, publishers were “ever mindful of consumer trends ... [and] turned every popular story into an instant genre, commissioning countless variations on a successful character type, setting, or plot twist” (18). Literature scholars might characterize this outpouring of fiction as cheap and forgettable (and they do—see Dinan 1998, 44; Nolan 2010, 65; Sorensen 2010, 501), but for this fan studies scholar, it is hard not to also see in it anticipations of our contemporary, thriving fanfiction culture, in which anonymous or pseudonymous authors turn out hundreds of thousands of words a year, in easily available stories conveniently sorted by genre, trope, and type. While there are significant differences between the fiction factories responsible for commercial pulp magazines and the fanfiction community—not least of which are the ability and desire to earn money for writing—Lee Server’s (1993) celebration of pulp stories as “thriving on unconstrained creativity, held accountable to few standards of logic, believability, or ‘good taste’” (9) reads like an anticipation, in many respects, of fanfiction today.

In the early twentieth-century period of media integration, few pieces of culture stood on their own. Newsstands displayed a range of magazines, which in turn advertised other magazines,

books, and films, and wrote about sports, theatre, and radio. In fact many magazines, including the pulps, had ties to other forms of popular media, especially radio. *Love Story Magazine* had a radio show featuring 15-minute radio drama adaptations of their stories. *Amazing Stories* owed its existence to the popularity of a short story Hugo Gernsback wrote and published in his magazine *Modern Electronics* (Server 1993, 118), and the science fiction pulp was co-branded with the call letters of Gernsback's radio station, WRNY. Listeners with an affinity for radio became known as "fans" too, and they sent massive amounts of fan mail to the personalities and shows they heard over the airwaves. A 1931 magazine notes, "Myrt and Marge, William Wrigley's radio ladies, are receiving about 800 fan mail letters each day" (*Sales Management* 28 (1931), 396). Some of these radio shows, like *Myrt and Marge*, were scripted radio dramas; others featured readings of prose and poetry or discussed popular literature of the time. Mike Chasar (2012) has written extensively about "radio poetry programs [which] produced a huge amount of material in terms of broadcast hours, fan letters that circulated millions of poems and editorial commentary on those poems, new reports and features, and print spin-off or tie-in products that took highly visible magazine and book formats" (20).⁸ Chasar notes particularly the ways that "listeners responded to, or even preempted, what they perceived to be a corporate commodification of their poetry by spelling out the terms of their participation and ongoing listenership in relation to the logic of gift exchanges" (21). Beginning in the late 1920s, with the debut of commercial radio networks, and continuing through the 1930s and the 1940s, the letters of these radio fans are a fascinating counterpoint to the myth of media fandom's singular emergence in the pages of *Amazing Stories*.

So the periodical press and other media outlets worked from the 1880s through the 1930s and 1940s to discursively construct "fans" and "fandom" via advertising and interactive content meant to unite readers in communities of interest, bonded together by their emotional responses to narratives and other forms of literature. Having an affective relationship with literature was hardly new.⁹ But having a streamlined, specific language for that relationship, as well as an identity that encompasses particular practices (of collection, mastery, and textual response) was new, and it changed the way the media talked about and to passionate readers. Fans and media worked together (and sometimes at cross-purposes) to construct reading as both interactive and communal—and this working together was not just something that happened in *Amazing Stories*. Rather, it was built into the very structure of the periodical press and the other forms of integrated media on the rise in the early twentieth century. As Sean Latham and Robert Scholes (2006) argue, "Periodicals ... are by their nature collaborative objects, assembled in complex interactions between editors, authors, advertisers, sales agents, and even readers" (529). The same can be said, to some extent, of radio, film, professional sports, and literature—in other words, of the broad range of US media out of which fandom was born.

Though I have focused on the textual traces of fandom in corporate and commercial media, my intention here is not to suggest that fandom was created by a top-down process in which corporate media created identities and dictated terms. Rather, as I've tried to make clear, the creation of fandom as group identity, practice, and model of community depended on the interactions between media creators and consumers at all levels of the culture industry hierarchy. The periodical press serves as a rich archive of US media fandom's history because it has been collected and preserved, and because its model of interactivity could, in many ways, sidestep copyright laws that have made publishing fanfiction difficult, if not impossible, for over 100 years.

This alternate version of the birth of US media fandom opens up a vast field of potential fan studies research. Case studies of early fandom history can be explored in context, for both the similarities and the differences of each burgeoning fan community. To that end, I now want to turn to another letter column—one that worked to gather and unite a fandom before and after its much-mythologized *Amazing Stories* counterpart, and even interacted with that particular community of early science fiction fans in some interesting and unexpected ways.

Literary Fandom in *The Saturday Review of Literature*

The Saturday Review of Literature (SRL) debuted in 1924, when the editorial staff of *The Literary Review* section of the *New York Evening Post* split from that paper. This staff included a few major figures of 1920s “middlebrow” publishing, including Henry Seidel Canby, Amy Loveman, Christopher Morley, and William Rose Benét. Though these names are obscure now, throughout the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s, they signaled quality middle-class literary values. Canby taught at Yale; Loveman served on the reading committee for the Book of the Month Club; Morley helped found the Baker Street Irregulars and was also an early judge for the Book of the Month Club; Benét was family friends with celebrated modernist poet Marianne Moore, and won the 1942 Pulitzer Prize for poetry. Their magazine sought to mediate between several points on the cultural hierarchy of the era, embracing and promoting a sophisticated yet fun mix of academic rigor, pulpy mass entertainment, and “highbrow” art. In its first 10 years, the *Review* published American and British literary figures like Edith Wharton, Lytton Strachey, George Santayana, Louis Untermeyer, James Weldon Johnson, John Buchan, Edwin Arlington Robinson, Robert Frost, Amy Lowell, Edna St. Vincent Millay, Conrad Aiken, Edith Sitwell, Langston Hughes, T.S. Eliot, Aldous Huxley, Lord Dunsany, Vincent Starrett, and Willa Cather, among many others.

Volume 1, issue 1, begins with a mission statement by Henry Seidel Canby that establishes the *Review* in the role of cultural mediator, as a place of balance between intellectual over-seriousness and uncritical enthusiasm. Of the art of literary criticism, Canby (Benét 1924) writes, “The half hearted intellectual afraid of his enthusiasm, is as much of a charge upon criticism as the entranced sentimentalist. One suffers from too little love to give and the other from too little sense in loving” (SRL 1.1, 1). Given love’s crucial role in the magazine, it is no surprise that its pages were, from this first issue, a gathering place for the burgeoning fannish sensibility in literature. Thus, alongside war poetry, book reviews, and a reading-themed advice column, the first issue features an H. G. Wells pastiche that would not look out of place in a science fiction fanzine. “The Nightmare,” credited to “H. Jeewells” but written by Christopher Ward, tells of Wells as a 16-year-old boy given to dreaming about strange future civilizations where everyone does science naked (SRL 1.1, 6). Written in an absurd reproduction of British dialect, the brief story features Wells trying to explain to his family his dream of England two thousand years in the future, where “on’y them works at anythink, flower beds an’ vegtibble gardens, as works fur love” (6). Wells’s family scoffs at the implausibility of his dream vision, which parodies the themes of socialism and eugenics in his early scientific romances. As the story ends, his uncle derides his dream as a nightmare that ignores hundreds of thousands of years of human nature, and begs him to “stick to wot you knows about” if he ever grows up to write a book (7).

Though Ward’s pastiche is critical of Wells, its set-up and punchline only succeed if the reader is familiar with Wells’s work, especially his 1924 novel *The Dream*. “The Nightmare” thus functions as an inside joke between Wells’s fans, who are assumed to be reading. This is corroborated by the *Review*’s choice to publish a response to “The Nightmare” in issue 3, written by a 17-year-old G. Peyton Wertenbaker, who had recently published his first science fiction story in Hugo Gernsback’s *Science and Invention*, and would go on to write for *Amazing Stories*. In the letter, Wertenbaker praises Ward’s parody as loving tribute, decries a recent *New York Times* review of Wells’s novel written by G. K. Chesterton, and effuses that “Wells is indeed a poet, the greatest poet in the world ... the Poet of the Dawn, the dawn of man’s true glory, the dawn of absolute poetry” (SRL 1.3, 54). Wertenbaker’s letter demonstrates further connections between readers of the pulps and the more mainstream periodical press, and between “fans” and “authors,” and amateurs and professionals. Above all, I would argue, it demonstrates that few if any fannish interactions take place in a vacuum. Book lovers and fans found many places for themselves at this time, and certainly more than one publication contributed to their understanding of their identities and cultures.

Indeed, most pages of the *Review* assume its readers are “book-lovers” (1.1, 15, 23) and “fans.” The word “fan” itself appears twice in the first issue: once in a back-page advertisement for a crossword puzzle book that promises interactive puzzle-solving (1924, 24), and again, more importantly, in the magazine’s “The Phoenix Nest” feature (22). Edited by William Rose Benét, this hybrid news and letters column was a *Review* mainstay, a convivial literary social space that encouraged its readers and correspondents to think of themselves as a community united by their love of books.

Each week until his death in 1950, Benét wrote as equal parts literary insider and enthusiastic fan, filling the Phoenix Nest with loving literary parody and pastiche, news, gossip, opinions, and reader contributions. He begins his very first column with a poem that gleans from Shakespeare and Keats, transforming their words into a teasing ode to the phoenix and dedication for the column itself (or “colyum,” as Benét colloquially renders it (1924, 22)). Benét’s column roams “the vast silence of this fantastical desert,” his mock-heroic diction turning the pages of the *Review* into a fantastical virtual space where “an occasional Chimaera may stroll our way, attracted by the rattle of our Underwood” and the phoenix cries out “From among the dates—publishers’ dates” (22). Benét’s column is full of such puns and juxtapositions, which, like Ward’s parody of Wells, hinge on readers’ knowledge and mastery of literary forms and figures. Having thus established this gathering space for his imagined community, he fills the remainder of the page with an allusive stream of literary notes and musings that ranges between Carl Van Vechten, Arthur Rackham, Edith Wharton, Douglas Fairbanks in the silent film *The Thief of Bagdad*, Eugene O’Neill, Ring Lardner, Mark Twain, *The Dial*, Rebecca West, and on and on. Benét begs to know who is publishing E. R. Eddison’s high fantasy novel *The Worm Ouroboros* in America, as he has been dying to read it; he then declares, “we register here and now as a thorough [E.M.] Forster fan,” before concluding the column as “the Arabian sun has set on our perfect week” (22). The virtual space of his column has transformed into the time between issues of the magazine, subtly inviting readers to reconvene in the next column, next week.

Benét’s friendly editorial “we” and his ready claiming of the identity of “fan” made “The Phoenix Nest” a lively virtual salon to which literary fans of all kinds could gain entrance. Benét welcomes all, and he never shies from his own fan status: in addition to Forster, Benét readily admits himself a “fan” of H.C. Bailey, a detective novelist whose main character “comes nearest to the dream of all good detective-story readers—the dream of the lamp lit again in Baker Street, the fog settling down outside and Watson smoking his pipe by the fire when the knock comes on the door” (*SRL* 10.20, December 2, 1933, 309). In the 1940s, in between discussions of “Great Authors” like Shakespeare or Milton and contemporary luminaries like Booth Tarkington and Henry Miller, Benét published a series of correspondence from the National Fantasy Fan Federation, remarking on just how many literary “big shots” were part of “fandom” (*SRL* 27.44, October 28, 1944, 32). In a 1945 column, he follows a discussion of Algernon Charles Swinburne with the answer to a reader’s inquiry about science fiction fandom terminology, and includes the National Fantasy Fan Federation’s recruitment address (*SRL* 28.5, February 3, 1945, 28). A 1947 column finds an ongoing debate about America’s favorite poet (suggestions include Conrad Aiken, Edna St. Vincent Millay, and Robert Frost) bracketing a letter from pulp magazine editor Mary Gnaedinger, who writes, “I was interested in the discussion of [William S.] Baring-Gould’s article in *Harper’s* [“Little Superman, What Now?”] which you ran in The Phoenix Nest for October 26. I read the article in *Harper’s* and I understand that ‘fandom’ was very pleased with this picture of themselves” (*SRL*, January 4, 1947, 32).¹⁰ That Benét chose to print her letter clearly shows a connection between the various fan communities his column hosted—a kind of Venn diagram in which readers of American poetry, the pulps, and the *Review* form overlapping circles. Indeed, Benét’s regular habit of printing pastiche or parody poems—written by himself and his readers and correspondents—suggests that the practices of those overlapping circles of fans had more in

common than not. That is to say, no matter the genre or form, literature fans of the era expressed themselves in the same way many fans do today: by crafting their own transformative creative works.

Literary Fan Studies: Moving Forward

The above is hardly a definitive reading of fannish sensibility in the pages of *The Saturday Review of Literature*. It is not intended to be. My hope is that this reading is intriguing enough to push others to seek out further examples of fandom and fannish activities in the literary marketplace of the early twentieth century. The rich archive of print material from this period deserves serious consideration by fan studies scholars; literature scholars of the period also have much to gain by considering an appropriately interdisciplinary, historically accurate fandom frame.

To that end, I conclude here with possible questions for further research on literary fandom in the early twentieth century:

- How might an integrated, transnational focus on literary and activist publications by writers of color deepen our understanding of fanzines and fan culture?
- Can modernist “little magazines” (independent literary magazines published for small but devoted followings) be considered a form of fanzine? What might fan studies make of the European avant-garde little magazines of the 1910s, many of which were devoted to the imagery and work of film icon Charlie Chaplin?
- How might a fan studies frame change our reading of allusive modernist poetry? For example, can we read T.S. Eliot and Ezra Pound as writing fan poetry? Should we? What are the implications of such a reading?
- How does the above alter the ways we understand modernist cultural hierarchies, which have traditionally been invested in maintaining the separation between aesthetically serious avant-garde work and popular literature for the “masses,” as well as between “amateurs” and “professionals”? And how, then, does it change the currently dominant model of postmodern literature that comes, in the words of Andreas Huyssen, “after the great divide”?
- How does a deeper understanding of US media fandom alter or enrich the current work being done on literary celebrity?

The recovery of early twentieth-century literary fan practices presents an intriguing challenge. Unlike science fiction fandom, which was self-consciously archival practically from the start, there are no archives dedicated to collecting examples of “middlebrow” literary fan mail. No cache of Book of the Month Club fanfiction exists. Copyright laws prevented fans from publishing continuations or retellings of their favorite stories. They almost certainly wrote them. But the diaries and notebooks they would have filled have been scattered, destroyed, or left to decompose in attics. If they do make it to the antique marketplace, no language exists to identify them.

Though difficult, I believe it is possible to find the textual traces of rich, diverse literary fan cultures that developed alongside the science fiction fandom that has so dominated fan history. Undoubtedly, as literature scholars, we are aided by a slew of trends in the field: new modernist studies, and its willingness to look beyond the modernist canon; periodical studies, the renewed interest in which has led to increased access to periodicals; digital humanities, which is building technology that lets us read those periodicals, including pulps and modernist little magazines, and visualize their interactions. It is increasingly possible to survey the field of early twentieth-century media and make connections that we could not make before. What else might we find?

Notes

- 1 As Janice Radway (2009) argues, the early twentieth-century's "explosion of print" caused a backlash in which arbiters of taste sought to reinforce the cultural hierarchy

through the rhetoric of brow levels. Popular literary taste was branded as the "low" to literature's "high," demonstrating with the allusion to phrenology that a social cartography was being overlaid upon an aesthetic one. This racist biological innuendo defamed the literary tastes of many, including women, working people, immigrants, and African Americans. (199)

- For this reason, I use the words "highbrow," "middlebrow," and "lowbrow" sparingly in this chapter, and designate them with quotation marks.
- 2 The *Oxford English Dictionary* gives the following definition for the word "fan": "in modern English (orig. U.S.): a keen and regular spectator of a (professional) sport, orig. of baseball," with examples dating back to 1889.
- 3 See, for example, *The Spectator* No. 406, June 16, 1712.
- 4 I use "spread" here purposefully to echo the language of Henry Jenkins, Sam Ford, and Joshua Green (2013) in their book *Spreadable Media: Creating Value and Meaning in a Networked Culture*, and, in doing so, follow Margaret Beetham's argument that periodicals and the Internet operate in similar ways.
- 5 In this case, the story was a novelization of *The Virginian* (dir. Cecile B. De Mille, 1914), a silent Western produced by Jesse Lasky, adapted from a stage play by Kirk La Shelle that was based on a novel by Owen Wister. The "novelette" is credited to Harold S. Hammond and illustrated with pictures from the film, making it an early example of what we might now think of as adaptive transmedia (*Photoplay*, November 1914, 3).
- 6 Perhaps the most enduring example of Grantland Rice's mock-heroic sports writing is "The Four Horsemen," published in the *New York Herald Tribune*, October 18, 1924. In it, Rice recasts the four horsemen of the Biblical apocalypse as University of Notre Dame football players, creating what we might now call a mythology AU RPF story.
- 7 Lee Server (1993) explains the unsavory implications of these story contests. Contest entries often became the sole property of the magazines, meaning that even non-winning entries "could be published without remuneration" (18). We might see significant similarities with contemporary fandom issues of affective fan labor being exploited by corporations for profit, like the ones Sara K. Howe (2013) examines in her *Reception* article on *Twilight* fandom.
- 8 It is also worth noting, as Chasar (2012) does, that established literary-intellectual figures like *Poetry* editor Harriet Monroe were often critical of radio poetry programs and their fans (89). But, following Radway (2009), I would argue that the need to assert cultural hierarchy shows just how intertwined various forms of media were in the early twentieth century.
- 9 See *Loving Literature* by Deirdre Shauna Lynch (2015).
- 10 Baring-Gould's 1946 article presents a fascinating look at post-World War II science fiction fandom, including *Amazing Stories'* incredible fall from grace under the editorial guidance of Raymond A. Palmer. Baring-Gould notes that the once-vaunted pulp now has "a place at the very bottom of the list" of American science fiction magazines (285). He attributes this fall primarily to Palmer's decision to devote much of the magazine to "The Shaver Mystery," a series of articles, purporting to be factual, about a race of evil men with telepathic powers living underneath the major cities of the world (286). Palmer himself claimed to believe this conspiracy theory, and devoted much of the magazine's letter column to wild corroborating accounts written by readers (286–287). Baring-Gould cites fan magazine *Fantasy Commentator*, which calls *Amazing Stories'* readers and correspondents plainly "crackpots" (286). It is worth noting that, though fan studies scholars have vaunted *Amazing Stories*, science fiction fans of the 1940s did not necessarily hold the magazine in similar esteem.

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Chapter 4

The Fan Experience

Karen Hellekson

It is of course impossible to generalize regarding a single fan experience. My own experience—face-to-face *Doctor Who* fandom in the early 1980s, mailing list- and blog-based *Star Trek* fandom in the early 2000s, and now various Tumblr-based fandoms in 2016—although plenty broad, has taught me that fandom cannot be essentialized. Each fandom has its own community and mores; each fandom decides what is appropriate and what is not. My personal experience is in science fiction media fandom based on TV shows, with a side of SF literature fandom, thanks to my convention-going period in the mid- to late 1980s. The fan experience is necessarily unique and personal; mine does not match that of the fannish ethnographies of SF media fandom described by Henry Jenkins (1992) or Camille Bacon-Smith (1992), despite our engaging in fandom at about the same time (see Harrington and Bielby's Chapter 5 in this volume).

Looking back, I had two fan-convention experiences that, at the time, shocked me. At one, a fan at a *Stargate SG-1* (1997–2007) convention asked a star what he thought about homoerotic fanfiction featuring his character, thereby admitting the very existence of a genre that all the fans I knew were keen not to directly discuss with the actors. Did this fan not know that slash was to be kept from the talent, so as to avoid the hideous event that occurred in *Blake's 7* (1978–1981) fandom, when a prominent actor withdrew his presence and support after being confronted with slash zines? (Clearly not.) At another, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997–2003) fans walked directly up to the all the actors, directly addressed them, and even touched them, rather than waiting for the carefully choreographed fan-actor interactions at paid-for photo or autograph sessions—the result of fan-actor altercations and, alas, sometimes unwanted sexual attention paid to stars by their fans (Jancelewicz 2012). Indeed, Lynn Zubernis and Katherine Larsen (2012) note fans carefully police the social space at conventions, where hierarchies are preserved. I found out later that in *Buffy* fandom, this kind of interaction was common, the result of early, small, intimate cons attended by actors, producers, and fans, who had no understanding that there were *rules* about these things—and no understanding that they were freaking out many of the fans and actors in attendance at a larger multifandom con. Now my fears seem quaint: fans discover each other via the Internet these days, not at face-to-face events. Those *Buffy* fans had met up at the Bronze, an online

bulletin board. They had made up their own rules on the fly; no one was there to teach them otherwise. This stance is now the common one. Fandom is the better for it.

Although the understanding of fandom today has broadened to consider as fannish any cultural expression by a group united by a particular interest that provokes an affective response, it has its roots in science fiction fandom, particularly its flowering in the 1930s. Under this rubric, the term “fan” ought not be taken to mean simply an aficionado, avid reader, or lurker. Rather, “SF fandom is made up of people engaging in one or more” activities such as writing letters, joining clubs, collecting, costuming (cosplay), and attending conferences (Hartwell 1984, 157). These activities were hallmarks of the fan experience until the advent of the Internet in the early 1990s. Of this era, fan studies scholars Jonathan Gray, Cornel Sandvoss, and C. Lee Harrington remark, “Rarely in such accounts do we encounter fans who merely love a show, watch it religiously, talk about it, and yet engaged in no other fan practices or activities” (2007, 3–4). But that is precisely the point: such people are not invested in a productive community.

Of course, it would be wrong to imply that the fan experience is solely the purview of science fiction fans. However, these fans created and named what we now know as fandom, and they laid out the blueprint for many fan activities that remain important within various fan subcultures, whatever their focus. SF fans created an exclusionary realm, with its own culture and a vocabulary heavy on portmanteau words and acronyms. The rallying cry of these SF fans was—is—“Fandom Is a Way of Life,” or FIAWOL (“FIAWOL,” *Fancylopedia* 3, n.d.), with a community considered separate from “real life,” or RL. As the fan experience has broadened, thanks to Internet-provided access to like-minded people, FIAWOL and RL have merged.

Much of the face-to-face fan experience can be traced back to the extraordinary era of American fandom in the 1930s—including fandom in other countries where English is not the primary language spoken, such as Finland (Roimola, n.d.), Poland (Jenkins 2013), Russia (Prassolova 2007), and Japan (Plunkett 2014), which borrowed the basic bones of fandom as created in the United States in the 1930s and then added local twists. Media fandom broadened the fandom base, notably by drawing in scores of girls and women in what had, in literature-dominated fandom, been a male-dominated effort. Further, fandom early on had roots in advocacy and attempts to make the world a better place—something that continues today. Technology—the Internet, the ubiquity of smartphones, and the ease of creation and consumption via various online sites and tools—greatly changed the tenor of the fan experience by democratizing it. No longer do fans study at the feet of their elders, absorbing the rules of engagement. The fan experience fundamentally shifted as near-instantaneous, ubiquitous communication began to occur not only among fans but between fans and producers.

Founding Fandom: Hugo Gernsback and the Science Fiction League

Fandom grew out of that most American of impulses: the desire to increase sales and make a buck. Hugo Gernsback (1884–1967), a Luxembourg immigrant who lived in New York and who coined the term “science fiction,” was editor of numerous pulp magazines including early science fiction titles, most notably *Amazing Stories*, which launched in 1926. He published a letter column in which he printed writers’ names and addresses, thus permitting fans—mostly boys and young men, although there were of course notable exceptions—to write one another (for an alternative take, see Edwards’s Chapter 3 in this volume). Those who lived in close proximity met up and formed clubs. But in another title he published, *Wonder Stories* (launched 1929), Gernsback in April 1934 boosted the Science Fiction League, another correspondence club he had launched,

the creation of which Robert A. Madle calls “the single most important event in the history of science fiction” (1994, 35). Gernsback writes:

There are now actually thousands upon thousands of active fans, who take the movement as seriously as others do music or any other artistic endeavor. Many fans collect SF stories. ... Research is being conducted by others... The writer now feels the time is auspicious to coordinate all who are interested... into one comprehensive international group. (cited in Madle 1994, 42)

The SFL was unique in that it sought to link fan clubs together under a larger umbrella, all in aid of a “great mission”: the founders of the SFL, and by extension its members, “believe in the seriousness of SF. They believe that there is nothing greater than human imagination, and the diverting of such imagination into constructive channels” (Gernsback, in Madle 1994, 42–43).

This extraordinary pronouncement in 1934 lays out the premise of fandom as having a purpose; of being intrinsically important (as important as music!); and of uniting people in a common, even utopian cause. The fan experience was thus laid out as a coming together of like-minded people who engage in active fan experiences like collecting and research, all in aid of a common goal motivated by the object of their fandom—here, progress driven by human imagination.

Fans in the United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia formed SFL charters, and it was around this time that important early fan clubs began in major American cities, most notably New York. Gernsback profited by selling bling—“insignia, lapel pins, special stationery, etc.”—and the publicity didn’t hurt either (Knight 1977, 2). Although the SFL folded in 1943, the infrastructure Gernsback helped promote by putting not just people but entire clubs in touch with each other and by boosting a sense of national, even international, common interest consolidated disparate groups into one unit, which self-styled itself fandom. This sense of disparate, geographically diverse groups united despite their differences also became a hallmark of the fan experience.

The number of fan clubs grew during the 1930s. Members engaged in face-to-face meetings, sponsored speakers, elected officers, and wrote review newsletters and letters in fan magazines, first known as fan mags but which came to be known as fanzines, a term coined in 1940 (“Fanzine,” *Fancylopedia* 3, n.d.). The Futurians, whose members included a number of now-famous SF writers and editors, even rented a series of apartments in New York, where some members would live and others would drift in and out—at least until the landlords kicked them out for being disruptive (Pohl 1978). There are even fans of fandom, known as “fannish fandom,” particularly in the realm of congoers (*Fancylopedia* 3, n.d.).

Fannishness was marked by activity: writing (and publishing) lots of letters, creating and distributing small-print-run fanzines, and, as of 1936, hosting fan conventions. The first World Science Fiction Convention, held in New York at the same time as the World’s Fair in 1939, had a program that would be familiar to congoers today. Frederik Pohl (who was, ironically, shut out of the con for political reasons) remembers that

[the organizers] had persuaded the professional editors to cooperate. They had secured professional writers to speak. They had hired a hall. They had pledges of attendance from fans as far off as Chicago and California.... We met [fans] ... stylishly dressed in fashions of the Twenty-fifth Century and turning heads in every cafeteria they entered. (1978, 95)

(On the first Worldcon, see also Wollheim 1971; Moskowitz 1974; Knight 1977; Hartwell 1984; Madle 1994.) The stylish dressers—California superfans Forrest J. Ackerman and Myrtle R. “Morajo” Jones—heralded the costume balls that began at cons soon thereafter, and that continue to this day

(Pohl 1978; Madle 1994). In June 1983, costumer Nobuyuki Takahashi coined the term “cosplay,” a portmanteau of the words “costume” and “play,” in a Japanese-language article featuring photos of fans dressed up as anime and manga characters at Comiket, an annual convention held since 1975 in Tokyo that drew inspiration from Western-style SF conventions, which began in Japan in the 1960s (Plunkett 2014). As an activity, costuming and cosplay have thus broadened out from science fiction and fantasy fandom to anime/manga and furies.

No discussion of the fan experience would be complete without an honest reckoning of fan interactions. The early ethnographic work of Jenkins (1992) and Bacon-Smith (1992) focuses on the positive aspects of fandom, in part because the topic was so fraught at the time; fandom was considered strange, perhaps even pathological (on which, see Jensen 1992); Jenkins and Bacon-Smith saw their work as corrective of misperceptions. Yet fandom, from its earliest days, has been marked by feuds, infighting, and power struggles. Although early SF fandom provided important social outlets, providing the (mostly) young men with the fellowship of like-minded peers, it was also a cutthroat game, as described in the biographies and histories of the early SF fandom era by noted science fiction authors and editors Isaac Asimov (1979), Lester Del Rey (1979), Damon Knight (1977), Sam Moskowitz (1974), Frederik Pohl (1978), and Donald A. Wollheim (1971). In fact, Moskowitz titled his memoirs *The Immortal Storm* in honor of the many contretemps that characterized First Fandom.

As David Hartwell notes, “Fan politics is a serious game and the losers sometimes pay inordinately” (1984, 169). The war games of the 1930s saw Moskowitz pitted against Wollheim and William F. Sykora; Sykora against Pohl and John B. Michel; the first Worldcon organizers against rival would-be organizers who were members of the Futurians; and—well, there are too many to list here. Fan club members were expelled because they didn’t agree politically, because they didn’t agree with specified fan clubs’ focuses, such as science saving the world, or because they were perceived as threatening or disruptive. Entire clubs would be dissolved by their leaders just to make a point. Even Gernsback got into the fray: he dissolved the New York chapter of the Science Fiction League because of a feud with Wollheim that Wollheim made public (Knight 1977, 9). As these 1930s-era examples demonstrate, the utopian notion that fans create an important space of acceptance and love has never been true. Fandom has always been the site of power plays, and it has always been as reliant on member exclusion as inclusion. These struggles continue today: one important example, from 2009, is RaceFail, a complicated and messy blog-based fan blowout that addressed fraught topics like the Other, race, privilege, authenticity, power, and pro versus fan writers, the echoes of which continue to reverberate within certain corners of fandom (“RaceFail ’09,” Fanlore, n.d.; on fan status, see also Sabotini 1999).

Media Fandom and Fan Advocacy

Media fandom, which arose in the mid-1960s around television programs like cult SF show *Star Trek* (1966–1969) and the stylish spy drama *The Man from U.N.C.L.E.* (1964–1968), borrowed its infrastructure from SF literature fandom. Indeed, the idea to form a fandom around *Star Trek* came from attendees of the 1966 Worldcon in Cleveland, Ohio, at which the *Star Trek* pilot was screened. These fans responded by creating the first media zine, *Spockanalia* (1967) (Verba 2003, 1). Media fandom differed from SF fandom in that the majority of its adherents were women.

Media fandom also midwived two important expressions of fandom: media fans invented a new form of artwork, the fan music video, on which more below; and they engaged in advocacy by banding together to create a “save our show” campaign—a strategy repeated often in the years to follow, with varying levels of success. After a mere two seasons, *Star Trek*’s poor ratings meant it was slated to be canceled. The fans leapt into action; fan advocacy relied on organizing fans, and

the fannish infrastructure was just the ticket to organize fan action. John and Bjo Trimble began a letter-writing campaign, working the fannish infrastructure to whip up enthusiasm and action. A press release put out by NBC noted that more than 115,893 letters had been received, which surprised the network because the show had such a small audience (Sullivan 2013, 196). NBC renewed the program for a third season, after which it was finally canceled. Yet as Joan Marie Verba notes in her study of early media fandom, the organized fan activity around *Star Trek* that continued even after its cancellation “kept interest in the show alive and flourishing” (2003, 96), resulting in several films and then the TV series, *Star Trek: The Next Generation* (1987–1994), which relaunched the franchise—a franchise that continues today with a rebooted film series, all thanks to concentrated fan activity.

Fan advocacy around saving beloved TV shows are legion. Meredith Woerner (2012) provides a handy list of “Fan Campaigns That Actually Saved TV Shows.” Many of the shows Woerner mentions were saved by old-school letter-writing campaigns, but some fandoms ranged widely in a quest for memorable quirk. For example, *Jericho* (2006–2008) fans sent packets of nuts to CBS, and *Chuck* (2007–2012) fans purchased sandwiches at the Subway sandwich chain, a show sponsor, in massive numbers. Relatedly, some TV, film, and music stars use their fandom cred—and huge fan followings—to promote specific ideologies via social media, such as Gillian Anderson, Ho Denise Wan See, and Kevin Smith (Jenkins and Shresthova 2012b, ¶3.3), as well as *Supernatural* (2005–present) star Misha Collins, whom Louisa Stein (2016) identifies as, along with collaborators, having created

in GISHWHES [The Greatest International Scavenger Hunt the World Has Ever Seen, an event sponsored and promoted by Collins] a frame that fosters multiple communities of creativity and social action, with 14,000 participants in 2014. But the power here is not in celebrities as elite or fans as elite, but both together as expansive and diverse collective.

However, fan activity has broadened out from fandom-specific “save our show” campaigns to deployment of these strategies to “support campaigns for social justice and human rights, inspiring their supporters to move from engagement within participatory culture to involvement in political life. Fan activism of the kinds we’ve known about for years models many effective approaches for using social media to create awareness and mobilize supporters” (Jenkins and Shresthova 2012b, ¶1.8). The contributions comprising “Transformative Works and Fan Activism,” edited by Henry Jenkins and Sangita Shresthova (2012a), analyze these fan deployments in detail, including fan-activists engaged with Harry Potter, the Nerdfighters, and *The Colbert Report* (2005–2014), where fandom extends from love of a show to a desire to save the world—a view that Gernsback, with his desire to make fans able to effect human progress, would certainly approve of. Suffice it to say that fan activities can teach activists a lot when it comes to organization and outreach; and suffice it to say that when fans decide to get engaged, they can certainly deliver.

Fans and Technology: Medium and Message

The 1930s-era foundational SF fan experience relied on fan activity; indeed, David Hartwell’s (1984) notion of the fan relies on this activity, not passive reception. This fan activity took a number of forms. The most famous of these is the fanzine, a fan-created publication mailed to fan club members and including such things as reviews of relevant pulp magazines and reports of current events. Early fanzines were reproduced via hectograph, by simple carbon paper, or by letterpress; later zines were mimeographed, photocopied, or offset printed. Print runs were astoundingly

small, often ranging not in the hundreds but in the tens or fewer. Publication was random or infrequent. If color was involved, it was added by hand to each individual issue. My analysis of fanzine collections held at the University of California, Riverside, and the University of Liverpool, UK, indicates that early (late 1920s and 1930s) fanzines spoke to a small audience, and fan-group-specific fanzines would refer to each other, creating a small, intimate, self-reflexive readership, with conversations bouncing among zines. World War II created a kind of fanzine hiatus, with transatlantic fandoms unable to contact one another. Yet enough appeared in print—often in formats meant to save paper, with either half sheets or surprisingly large extra-long sheets designed to maximize mimeographing technology—to keep fandom active despite wartime rationing of resources. Fanzines were distributed by mail. They could be sent directly to a subscriber, who paid a small fee for a specified number of issues; sent in exchange for a zine received from another fan; or sent via a packet of bundled zines sent by zine contributors, known as apas (for “amateur press association,” a mode of distribution borrowed from weird tales fandom). Zines were also sent to SF mag editors, in hopes of a mention.

David Hartwell (1984) notes:

The publication of amateur magazines devoted to science fiction began in the early 1930s as a means of communication and self-expression among fans beyond letter writing. Newsletters, public letters, magazines of fiction and nonfiction were spawned in significant numbers and formed an enduring bond among fans who participated in these publications.

Yet a second form of zine focused on the “activities of the fans themselves, their daily lives and interactions.... The activity of fandom is an end in itself” (160). The fan experience thus relies not only on activities related to a shared fandom but also on relationships to fellow fans—that is, fans studying and engaging with fandom itself (an activity known as “meta”), distinct from the source material that ostensibly brought the group together. In early zines, reviews and letters held sway; later media fandom-era zines focused on fan fiction, a term that originally meant “fiction written about fans.” The term came to mean “fiction written by fans set within a particular fandom” only with the advent of media fandom (“Fan Fiction” and “Faan Fiction,” *Fancyclopedia* 3, n.d.).

Another major fannish cultural expression is that of fan videos, a genre also known as songtapes or songvids (Bacon-Smith 1992; Jenkins 1992; see Freund’s Chapter 13 in this volume). These comprise clips from a visual source, like a TV show, set to music, often to tell a new story. As Francesca Coppa (2008) outlines, the genre was invented by Kandy Fong in 1975. Fong set pieces of *Star Trek* film rescued from the cutting room floor to a recorded filk song, “What Do You Do with a Drunken Vulcan?,” clicking a slide projector to advance to another static image at appropriate moments indicated by the song’s lyrics. Its popularity encouraged Fong to create new vids and to add a second projector. Later she videotaped her shows. This genre morphed into clip-based fan vids, with images perfectly synchronized to carefully selected song lyrics, as technology advanced to permit playback and recording of source material. Coppa notes, “Vidders have worked with slide projectors, VCRs, and computers; they have used film stills, VHS tape, and DVD source footage; they have shown their work at conventions and distributed it through the mail and over the Internet in both downloadable and streaming forms” (2008, ¶1.4). Because of the expense in the 1980s and 1990s of VCRs (two were needed to make a vid, one to play and another to record), fans created vidding collectives to share the purchase price among themselves, as well as to share expertise. An entire convention, Vividcon (launched 2002), is devoted to devotees and creators of the fan vid genre. The advent of YouTube has also made it easier to disseminate fan vids, although copyright-related takedowns, usually related to the music rather than the images, are distressingly common.

(Vidding in anime and gaming, which developed independently, is known as “anime music video,” or AMV; see “Anime Music Video,” 2016.)

As should be clear by now, fans seize on technology and bend it to their own ends; they are the quintessential early adopters. The advent of the Internet in the early 1990s radically changed fandom. Usenet groups devoted to fandom sprang up (and many still exist). Mailing lists and Yahoo! groups permitted targeted sharing of fandom love. The year 1999 saw the introduction of the blog platform LiveJournal, which fandom adopted with gusto, appropriating blog software to not only journal and engage with fellow fans but also to create fanfiction archives, as well as carefully indexed lists of fanfiction, fan art, fan vids, and recommendations. Blog culture reigned until Tumblr knocked it down in 2007, with its ability to easily post multimedia and its sharing ethos. The Internet fundamentally changed fandom. Before, attending face-to-face conventions was required to engage with the object of fandom and one’s fellow fans. After, it was much easier to meet up with like-minded fans without the mediation of a fannish gatekeeper—that is, feral fans, or “someone who came into fandom without being introduced by a gatekeeper” (“Feral,” Fanlore, n.d.).

Fans and Producers: Beyond Gift Culture

The impact of old-style fandom has held sway in one particular aspect of today’s fandom. Within the ethos of the fan world, many fan artworks—manipulated images, macros, fanfiction, fan videos, costumes, prop creation, and so on—may only be exchanged through a gift culture, without money (except for shipping or materials) changing hands. Indeed, the print fiction fanzines in the late 1960s onward would recoup expenses (they paid contributors with a free copy of the zine), maybe seed the next project, and then donate everything left over to charity—perhaps one favored by a star of the show. Although some cultures permit fan-created texts to be sold for a profit, notably the world of *dōjinshi* in Japan (Lam 2010), in the world of English-speaking media fandom, the “no money made” mantra is so strong that it appears as a caveat attached to almost all fanfiction. Fannish rules indicate that such creative materials ought not be stolen or plagiarized, so its creator would receive credit; but the fan may also not profit. This gift culture is strongly embedded in the Western fan experience: many online fanfiction archives (including the one I run), for instance, have boilerplate wording that specifically notes that no money is made. This notion of fan gift culture is particularly relevant in that it is embedded in the notion of fandom as a series of exchanges, the result of which, in this cycle of giving and receiving, is fandom itself (Hellekson 2009). Gifts are not given freely; they are given with the understanding that there is to be an exchange within a “currency” understood by and valid only in a particular fandom. In fan communities, items of exchange may be such things as comments, fan artwork, fanfiction, parodies of fan artworks, podcast readings of pieces of fiction, and shares on social media.

This gift stance grew out of a belief that if no money was made, then the fan could not be sued for copyright or trademark violation (Hellekson 2009, 2015; but see De Kosnik 2009). Writers of fanfiction and creators of fan films, particularly in fandoms known to have hands-on producers, such as the Harry Potter and Star Wars franchises, did not wish to receive cease-and-desist letters accusing them of copyright or trademark violation, with requests to remove online content or cease zine publication (Suezhahn 2012; “Legal Disputes over the *Harry Potter* Series” and “Open Letters to *Star Wars* Zine Publishers by Maureen Garrett,” Fanlore, n.d.). Indeed, informed in part by controlling producers’ attempts to quash fan activity, many fans are concerned that they are doing something illegal by putting creative artworks out there: is their fan video a copyright violation? Can they be sued? Rebecca Tushnet (1997) addresses these concerns in detail, noting that fan activity falls under parody (meant in the legal sense) and fair use. Tushnet concludes that

“when no lucrative market share is sought and productive use is made of copyrighted characters, fan fiction should be recognized as expressing a protected and valuable form of human creativity—if only in the margins” (686).

Related to this is the fan experience with producers—those who own the property and whose attention fans seek to deflect by engaging in a gift culture. Before the Internet, fans communicated with producers by writing letters. As Jenkins’s *Textual Poachers* (1992) makes clear, part of the early face-to-face fan experience was powerlessness: fans could reach out and make their wishes known, but absent sheer numbers of on-message letters, as in “save our show” campaigns, it seemed unlikely that anyone was actually listening. Thus, fans had to poach the material from the producers to populate their own artworks and fuel their engagement. After the Internet, however, producers could respond to fans directly if they wished. The first auteur producer to receive recognition for his engagement with fans was J. Michael Straczynski during the run of his epic TV show, *Babylon 5* (1994–1998). The Straczynski–fan relationship has been addressed in detail by media scholar Kurt Lancaster (2001), whose book includes quotations from online bulletin boards (since removed) in which Straczynski, responding to fans, holds nothing back. Straczynski presented himself as the visionary man in charge, and indeed his creation of a story line designed to last five years, with each season its own story arc, was groundbreaking in the industry. Straczynski definitely policed the fan–producer divide, yet he also talked directly with the fans and took the time to understand their points. Yet occasionally fans’ voices could make a difference in terms of plot: *Lost* (2004–2010), for example, killed off unpopular characters Nikki and Paulo in 2007. The *Lost* production team thought they had fresh new stars; the fans were wondering where the heck characters they actually cared about were. However, even when *Lost* fans got their wish, did Nikki and Paulo have to die so horribly? It seems the producers still had all the power (King 2008).

Yet producers long to tap into the unbridled enthusiasm of their fan base. Because fans are, by definition, engaged, plugged into a community, and creative, their help has been sought by producers, particularly as viral marketing has proven to be a successful strategy. As “save our show” campaigns and fan-advocacy programs have demonstrated, when fans decide to get organized and come together, amazing things can occur. However, from the producers’ point of view, the fundamental problem is that fans really prefer to do their own thing. It is difficult to corral them into a desired pattern of activity. Producers have sought to get around this by encouraging engagement within a limited scope of acceptability. For example, the Star Wars franchise has run a fan film contest under several names since 2002 (with a brief hiatus), but extensive rules (no sex!) and a provided palette of sounds, music, and images ensure that the results aren’t too copyright-infringing or, well, inappropriate (“Star Wars Fan Film Awards Contest Official Rules,” 2016; “Official Star Wars Fan Film Awards,” 2017). Yet fans may still hold out hope: in-world live-action fanfiction-like films were originally prohibited by the Star Wars contest runners, but that rule was changed to respond to fans’ desires. In this example, the producer is seeking to create a community with itself in charge: it sets the rules and judges the submissions. Fans do not get to judge each other, but many fans would be delighted to have their work critiqued by a professional.

It is one thing for producers to seek to use the unpaid labor of fans who would likely be doing similar activities on their own. Smartphones with amazing cameras and video capabilities mean that creating a short live-action Star Wars film is easier than ever, and the Star Wars short-film contest provides a usefully delineated project, a deadline, and free promotion—all things that can spur creativity. However, occasionally producers seek to directly profit from fan artworks, usually fanfiction. One well-known example is the 2007–2008 FanLib kerfuffle, in which a new company partnered with content holders to create a multifandom fanfiction archive. The partners ensured that the fiction, which was written in response to contests and other sponsored events, had the approval of the property’s copyright holders (Hellekson 2015). As the Fanlore wiki notes,

Submitting fic to the contest forfeited the fan writer's rights to the fic, allowing it to be used for commercial purposes. Additionally, to qualify for some contests, the fics had to be of a specific type, and for a designated scene. The winner would then have their scene written into canon.

The fan-written stories weren't really stories, of course; they were, as FanLib's promos to potential sponsors noted, "market-friendly consumer generated media" ("FanLib," Fanlore, n.d.). In fandom, access to the producers is a solid kind of currency. Having a story written into canon? That might be worth something. Yet fandom rose up in outrage: the benefits were too few, and all risks and liability had to be accepted by the writer while FanLib took none. Outrage at a lack of control of one's own artworks led directly to the creation of the Organization for Transformative Works and its fan-run fiction archive, the Archive of Our Own. Relatedly, an Amazon project, Kindle Worlds, launched in 2013, seeks to monetize fanfiction written for properties that have signed up for inclusion (Hellekson 2015; Noppe 2015), although the promotional wording appealing to an audience of fanfiction readers and writers was later removed. Other pro sites attempting to monetize fan artworks include Wattpad, Scribd, and Smashwords (Hellekson 2015).

FanLib and Kindle Worlds both sought to provide the imprimatur of acceptability by the rights holder. Yet fans are generally not constrained by such concerns. Many fans are also turned off by extensive lists of don'ts. To take one Kindle World property at random, *The Vampire Diaries* (2009–2017), the following, among others, are forbidden: porn; offensive, infringing, or illegal content; crossovers; and erotica ("*Vampire Diaries* Content Guidelines," n.d.). For Kindle Worlds in particular, fans interested in becoming professional writers might consider submitting, as Kindle Worlds is really a sales site for producer-approved media tie-ins. However, the terms are so unfavorable that pro writers are unlikely to submit, so why ought fans? More compelling was the idea that the producers would read and take an interest in the work, thus providing a kind of special access to the fan. (To avoid plagiarism lawsuits, most producers refrain from visiting fan sites to read their property's fanfiction. These tie-in sites, on the other hand, are on their radar.) Most of the spaces seeking to make money from fan writing attempt to create a space and then invite a community to populate it with content, tapping into the world of fandom, with its ready-made engagement, to generate content that would snowball through community building and word of mouth. Yet that mode of advertising may not work either: after all, Kindle Worlds took down wording directly addressing fans and fanfiction.

In addition to companies that own media properties are authors who have distinct opinions about their work. Marion Zimmer Bradley was well known for her shared-world collaborative work with fans, for example. Then there is Anne Rice (n.d.), who states, "I do not allow fan fiction. The characters are copyrighted. It upsets me terribly to even think about fan fiction with my characters. I advise my readers to write your own original stories with your own characters. It is absolutely essential that you respect my wishes." John Scalzi (2007) says of fan fiction, "Have fun. Don't show it to me." (In keeping with the gift culture that so defines fandom, he also says, "*Nothing* you do in my universes may...generate any sort of economic benefit for you, in any form.") Thus, a major component of the fan experience is the fan's stance vis-à-vis property owners and questions of fair use. With large, soulless corporations with high-powered lawyers on retainer, fans are quick to respond to the unequal power differential: a takedown request is usually immediately honored, although it is more likely that fan artwork isn't entirely deleted but instead made inaccessible to the rights holder's prying eyes, usually by locking the content. A beloved author is a different story; she is not an antagonist, like media copyright holders are. Surely her wishes ought to be considered. For authors who dislike fan artworks, fans may take their activity underground to avoid upset and confrontation, although this will affect readership and make it hard for new fans to join in. The Archive of Our Own hosts fanfiction derived from Anne Rice's work, but there are relatively few of them.

Conclusion

Fandom's two best-known activities, creative works and conventions, follow in the footsteps of 1930s-era early science fiction fandom. The fan experience, however, revolves around fandom, that community of like-minded fellow travelers who share a—dare I say it?—fanatic love of a particular media property, be it a book, film, TV show, or video game. The ubiquity of the Internet means that most newbies now stumble on fandom online. No longer must youthful fans learn about a fan club by seeing members in costume answer phones during a PBS fund drive, then have their mother drive them to meet-up picnics in parks, as I did in the mid-1980s.

Some fans prefer to stay in the communities they themselves have created; others are happy to use for-profit platforms and find their engagement there. Community is necessary for fandom—it is in the very definition of the word. Fans will take community where they can find it. They will select the mode of engagement that fits with their way of dealing with their fannish world, be it face-to-face, on a device (computer, phone, tablet), or at conventions. Online, Usenet gave way to LiveJournal and then to Tumblr, but the older modes still exist, and fans still use them. The history of fandom is in many ways its current story: people with a common interest create a community that revolves around a shared sense of purpose, and they use the technological tools of the day to do so.

As I noted above, fans who, say, merely watch a particular TV show are not actually fans, who by this definition must actively engage in fandom. They are just people who watch a show; this is not an expression of the fan experience. The fan experience is fandom, which comprises people who post, engage, write letters, talk, meet face-to-face, dress up, or make vids. Central to fandom is this shared community. The connotation of the word “fan” may be now leaning toward people who faithfully follow their TV show, with the term “superfan” reserved for those who actually engage. I object to the word “fan” being used so loosely. There is no need to add “super” to the word to indicate merely that the fan engages. The term “fan” will do nicely.

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Chapter 5

Soap Fans, Revisited

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In January of 1991, when we launched the project that was published in *Soap Fans* (Harrington and Bielby 1995), television was a low-rent cultural form, electronic bulletin boards were in their infancy, joining a fan club meant snail-mailing a personal check, and buying *Soap Opera Digest* at the grocery store virtually guaranteed a conversation with the checker, bagger, or another customer about which soap(s) you watched and what you thought of the latest romance, infidelity, or long-thought-dead lover who suddenly hit town. Soap operas themselves were thriving—dominating daytime television, a still-flashy presence on primetime schedules, and surrounded by bustling ancillary industries including daytime magazines, network-sponsored conventions, and an active publicity machine bringing soap stars to local amusement parks, county fairs, and ribbon-cutting ceremonies at shopping malls. Our decision to study the social organization of the US daytime soap fan community was born out of our love for the genre (we each had a decades-long viewing history), our awareness of soaps' rock-bottom status on cultural taste hierarchies despite their popularity, and our initial experiences with organized fandom (if memory serves, a *General Hospital* (ABC) luncheon in Los Angeles) which convinced us that soap fandom was a site, and a community, ripe for research.

In hindsight, the project was massive. As detailed in our Appendix to the book (and in light of recent calls to bring systematic empirical analysis and methodological discussions back into fan studies; Evans and Stasi 2014), our data included 700+ viewer questionnaires, 20+ formal in-depth interviews with fans, another 30+ interviews with fan/industry insiders (soap actors, writers, producers, journalists, photographers, fan club staff members, etc.), participant-observation including hundreds of casual conversations at organized fan events, and analysis of fans' electronic bulletin board discussions on Prodigy, CompuServ, Genie, and America-Online. For the duration of the project we read every fan magazine available at supermarkets and subscribed to several more, and watched all 11 daytime soaps aired by NBC, CBS, and ABC. How we ever found time to write the book is a mystery. Our aim was to contribute to “the sparse but growing literature on audiences, fans, and fandom” (as one reviewer put it; Gamson 1996, 1744), drawing on the unique case of daytime soap opera to offer an alternative insight into fan identities, communities (subcultures), and industry-fan relations.

Our project was launched prior to, but shaped by, scholarship published in the early 1990s (e.g., Bacon-Smith 1992; Jenkins 1992; Lewis 1992; Penley 1991a, 1991b) now routinely cited as the watershed era in fan studies. It was also influenced by several key works on late twentieth-century celebrity (e.g., Braudy 1986; Gamson, 1992, 1994; Schickel 1985), foreshadowing the explosion of celebrity studies soon to follow. Finally, it was shaped by powerhouse scholarship of the 1980s/1990s in cultural studies, audience reception studies, literary theory, and feminist media criticism, including that by Charlotte Brunsdon, Christine Geraghty, David Morley, Janice Radway, Dorothy Hobson, John Fiske, Ien Ang, Tania Modleski, Robert C. Allen, Roger Silverstone, and Stuart Hall (among others).

Soap Fans was well reviewed in sociological outlets (Adams 1996; Gamson 1996), seen by our disciplinary peers as astutely capturing connections between micro-level processes (e.g., fan pleasures) and macro-level concerns (e.g., industry-fan relations). Moreover, it was clearly received by sociologists as “about” media fandom (Grindstaff 2008; Grindstaff and Turow 2006), whereas it is often omitted from histories of fan studies (e.g., Busse and Gray 2011; Jenkins 2014). Until Matt Hills’s positive engagement with our book in *Fan Cultures* (2002), it was more likely to be cited by cultural sociologists and soap opera experts than by fan studies scholars (whom we suspect received it as “about” soap opera¹). *Soap Fans* can reasonably be positioned in the first wave of fan studies (Gray, Sandvoss, and Harrington 2007, 3) in its attempts to re-claim and normalize this maligned fan community (though that positioning is inexact; see below), and also in the third wave for its serious treatment of the inter- and intra-personal pleasures and motivations of fans (2007, 8). The ultimate aim of our project was to explore the social, industrial, and psychological dimensions of fandom.

Re-visiting the book some 20 years later, our aim in this chapter is to explore areas and ways in which fan studies did (and did not) take up issues proposed in *Soap Fans*, as well as the under-examination of key aspects of fan cultures in our early research. This re-visitation will hopefully shed light on the present and future trajectories of fan studies, which have come under increased scrutiny lately. The core of the chapter will examine three related issues: (1) fan-industry relations; (2) fan-object specificity; and (3) fan identities, practices, and communities.

Fan-Industry Relations

Our analysis of soap fandom was squarely situated in the infrastructure and processes of the daytime industry and of celebrity culture. This was an atypical strategy in 1990s-era fan studies that remains atypical today, given the general lack of dialogue between fan studies and celebrity studies. Our overall goals of the book were as follows:

We take a different approach in this book [than prior fan studies], focusing less on fan-to-fan relationships than on how fandom and fan culture are shaped by the cult of celebrity and by fans’ relationships with the entertainment industry. We move outside the context of the fan world itself to explore how that world interacts with media production in general. Not that we ignore the private world of the fan; in fact, we pay particular attention to how one integrates being a fan into one’s day-to-day leisure activities, experience of pleasure, and personal identity. (Harrington and Bielby 1995, 5)

Influenced by Diana Crane’s (1992) concept of culture worlds, we analyzed the fan worlds of soaps as one constructed by fans’ personal and private engagement with favored texts and by social activities organized by fans and by the industry (Grindstaff and Turow 2006, 117). Significantly, in the daytime context of that era, fans did not define themselves in opposition to the industry

and the industry did not stigmatize its own fans (Harrington and Bielby 1995, 182–183). As such, our book fits uneasily within fan studies' first wave, which approaches fandom as marginalized, resistant, and/or oppositional to entertainment industries (Gray, Sandvoss, and Harrington 2007), even as we aimed to normalize the fandom and its practices (a hallmark of first wave scholarship).

Rather than a marginalized community, we found a fascinating symbiosis between soap fans and the daytime industry. Fan pleasures were sanctioned and legitimized by industry members as leisure (not deviant) activities—one reviewer of our book described soap fans “as unoppositional as [they] can be” (Gamson 1996, 1744). Moreover, their textual investments and participatory status in the soap “family” (see below) were authenticated and made visible in the pages and websites of daytime magazines, and soap actors collaboratively constructed strategies to engage with and manage their fans: “Soap fanship is distinctive in that fans and industry participants reciprocally construct the subculture, doing so across a range of sites and through myriad social processes. That cooperation differentiates soap fandom from those that must struggle to overcome industry efforts to suppress them” (Harrington and Bielby 1995, 176).

We used a family reunion metaphor to describe soap fan-industry relations of that era. Most media fans, such as those described by Jenkins (1992) and Bacon-Smith (1992), represented “the overeager, uninvited strangers at the reunion to whom family members nod hello ... and wonder who invited them” (Harrington and Bielby 1995, 182). In contrast, soap fans were expected guests at the gathering. Industry members viewed them as participants in daytime storytelling, integral to the production and success of the soap opera form in both economic and non-economic terms (182), and an explicit function of the daytime press was to mediate between the industry, soap viewers, and the broader public. We found a greater degree of communication and a more formalized set of expectations between soap fans and industry participants than had been documented in prior research.

The family reunion metaphor was appropriate, in part, because daytime TV itself was (and is) stigmatized in the larger entertainment landscape—considered a lesser counterpoint to prime-time TV, film, and theatre. Soaps' paradoxical status (popular but ridiculed) results from two related factors: (1) its gendered narrative form and viewership; and (2) its never-ending format, which makes it resistant to being interpreted according to standard literary protocol (Allen 1985, 3). Industry members and soap fans were “in it together” and knew it—they understood the importance of cultivating mutually beneficial and respectful relationships given their common ghettoized position(s) (Harrington and Bielby 1995, 183). As soap fandom migrated online alongside other fandoms beginning in the late 1990s, and as soap fans are now fully engaged in the range of creative practices associated with participatory culture, our family reunion metaphor may be a thing of the past, or may need redefinition given significant changes in the meaning and construction of modern families. These are empirical questions, subject to further research.

Given current discussions within fan studies over the commodification and exploitation of fans and fandoms,² we emphasize that the family reunion metaphor was not a misreading or naïve reading on our part. We were certainly aware of and documented fan-industry struggles and negotiations underway at that time, from daytime journalists debating whether and/or how much space should be given to fan voices with their so-called expert opinions, to electronic bulletin board users' cognizance of industry lurkers who could co-opt fan expertise without acknowledgment or compensation, to actors gritting their teeth at their employer's non-negotiable expectation that they attend network-sponsored fan events on weekends. Chapter 5 of our book was devoted to an analysis of fans' claims to moral authorship/ownership over soap opera texts, a larger concern in fan studies today regarding both copyright infringement and other legal and extra-legal issues. But soap fans *were* insiders of sorts; as noted above, given their comparably ghettoized positions (daytime, within the entertainment landscape; soap fans, within broader

popular culture) the industry and its fans relied on one another to an unusual extent in the entertainment world (Harrington and Bielby 1995, 183). Again, whether soap fans currently enjoy an insider-y status compared to other media fan communities remains an empirical question.

As part of our emphasis on fan-industry relations, we argued for an understanding of fans and fandom in the context of celebrity culture. Somewhat surprisingly, fan studies and celebrity studies have developed along separate lines; as noted, there is little engagement between the two areas of study.³ We were interested in the “dangerous stalker” stereotype of media fans at that time (e.g., Schickel 1985) and, more importantly, in sociological research on the construction and meanings of celebrity. Celebrity is a central site around which many media-based fandoms are organized. However, in soap fandom, it takes a unique form because the genre forges unusually close and enduring ties between actors, their on-screen characters, and soap viewers. Our family reunion metaphor was explicitly contrasted to Gamson’s (1994) description of celebrity/fan relationships as a “hunt” during which fans collect autographs, or pictures, or sightings of celebrities and compare their spoils with one another. Various institutional resources, including daytime industry patronage, the role of the soap press in both giving voice to fans and rationalizing soap fandom to the wider public, and the organizational structure of soap opera fan clubs helped transform the hunt into a reunion.

Soap Fans introduced the gradual emergence of soap stardom as a distinct realm of celebrity culture. The origin of TV soap stardom is probably the 1970 publication of the first dedicated soap opera magazine (*Daytime TV*). Other historical milestones include: (1) the 1976–1979 AFTRA (labor union) contract that finally required soaps to list cast credits weekly (though as Butler [1995] points out, they scrolled so quickly as to be nearly indecipherable); (2) the presence of soap actors at fan club luncheons beginning in the late 1970s; (3) the 1981 on-screen wedding of super-couple “Luke” and “Laura” on *General Hospital* (ABC) which landed the actors on the covers of *People* and *Newsweek* and drew the highest Nielsen ratings in US soap history; (4) the national conversation about Susan Lucci’s bid for an Emmy for her role as Erica Kane on ABC’s *All My Children* (she finally won in 1999 after 19 nominations); and (5) the 2000 launch of SoapNet (now canceled) which aired original ancillary programming that helped celebrity soap actors and other industry insiders to viewers. Due to the characteristics of the genre itself (described below), soap celebrity was marked since its infancy by a sense of intimacy, familiarity, and know-ability in the celebrity-fan relationship.

Soap stardom—admittedly C-list or D-list—is alive and well in the United States today, though there is a surprising lack of research on the topic. As Harrington (forthcoming) documents, most scholarly work on soap opera treats celebrity as a side-note (if at all) and the same is true in reverse for research on celebrity.⁴ There are at least two reasons for this research gap. First, the decline of US soaps over the past two decades coincided almost directly with the rise of celebrity studies, offering celebrity scholars little motivation to study a seemingly disappearing form of stardom. Second, as noted earlier, soap operas have a marginalized or ghettoized status within the US entertainment landscape overall, perhaps further contributing to scholars’ disinterest. This marginalization is in stark contrast to other parts of the world—for example, soap opera is central to the star systems of Australia (Turner et al. 2000) and Brazil (Coelho 2005), and a cornerstone of the economies of British cultural production (Couldry 2000). In those cultural contexts, and in contrast to the USA, soap stardom generates sizeable scholarly attention.

A convergence of trends beginning in the mid-1990s shaped both the fate of the US daytime TV soap industry and the research interests of celebrity scholars—including the rise of cheaper-to-produce reality and lifestyle programming, the widespread adoption of the internet and the migration of fandom online, changing audience tastes toward short-form storytelling, embracing social media, and the popularity of and visibility of DIY entertainment across multiple

formats and platforms. These combined trends have opened up entirely new discourses of soap opera celebrity that transcend the daytime TV context. For example, De Kosnik (2011) suggests that celebrity stories themselves have come to replace traditional TV soap narratives. As contemporary media fans draw on celebrity gossip to “perform as storytellers for and with each other” (235), the celebrity stories they co-create “might be regarded as the soap operas of the digital era since they deliver more of the enjoyments traditionally associated with the soap genre than do most currently airing daytime dramas” (234). Media fans today devote significant time and labor to creating or co-creating their own soap stories online. De Kosnik suggests that the title of the celebrity soap generated via these activities might reasonably be entitled “The Lives and Loves of Famous People,” with each individual celebrity “one player in that soap’s enormous ensemble cast” (238).

In a different context, Bignell (2014) points to the emergence and influence of docusoaps that transform our understandings of soap opera and soap stardom. Docusoaps such as *The Hills* (MTV) and *The Only Way is Essex* (ITV2) “impose on real events the conventions of soap opera, including editing techniques of parallel montage, character-focused narrative structure, and basis in a single geographical space and community” (101). In addition, the melodrama long associated with the soap opera genre has been adopted on docusoaps “in order to connect with audiences on the level of emotional realism rather than the realism of observing everyday situations” (111–112). The focus in docusoaps is less on plot per se than on the reverberations of plot development on interpersonal relationships and personal (character) development, which comes to shape celebrity in particular ways. For discussion of the past, present, and future of US soap stardom, see Harrington (forthcoming).

Fan-Object Specificity

Both fan scholars and celebrity scholars have long debated the relevance of object specificity in light of broader constructions of fandom and fame. Many scholars have moved away from examining specific fandoms—*Star Trek* or *Sherlock* or the Spice Girls—to focus instead on fandom and participatory culture as transcendent phenomena. For example, Jenkins (2014) writes: “From the start, the field [of fan studies] faced choices between studying ‘media fandom’ (as a specific configuration of tastes, interests and practices) or many different kinds of fandoms” (96). Similarly, a core question for celebrity studies is “the extent to which one continues to delineate distinctions between different media forms where the construction of fame is concerned” (Holmes and Redmond 2010, 4). To what extent are media distinctions still relevant in the current entertainment and technological landscapes? In *Soap Fans* we argued explicitly in favor of fan-object specificity, writing “Fans of different narrative forms are not interchangeable, and the activities through which they engage texts are not the same” (Harrington and Bielby 1995, 4).

In our analysis, the soap fan community’s distinctiveness reflected that of the soaps themselves: “The genre’s structure, including its genderedness, helps shape the soap fan community into a form of fanship (individual fan activity) and fandom (organized fan activity) oriented toward private uses and pleasures” (19). The immediacy and intimacy offered by television as a whole are exaggerated on soap operas in that they offer unique opportunities for fictional and “real” selves to unfold in tandem (e.g., Ford 2011; Harrington and Brothers 2010). US soaps’ open-ended format and lack of episodic closure allow characters to develop and grow much as viewers do, generating deep fan engagement with ongoing stories of human vulnerability and resilience (Newcomb 1974).

In groundbreaking research of the 1980s and 1990s, feminist scholars convincingly argued that soaps resonate with their (mostly female) viewership in their valorization of traditional feminine

subjectivities and practices of gender socialization. Soaps' emphasis on dialogue, problem-solving, intimate conversation, domestic or domesticated settings, close-up camera shots, and storylines centered on familial and romantic relationship networks offer uniquely pleasurable rewards to female viewers (e.g., Brown 1987). In this perspective, soaps are not regressive but explore radical potentialities of sex, gender, and sexuality by recognizing traditional feminine principles as "a source of legitimate pleasure within and against patriarchy" (Fiske 1987, 183).

If the above paragraphs accurately capture the "object" that is traditional TV soap opera, then fan attachments and fan practices necessarily reflect that object to greater or lesser extent. At the time of our data collection, soap fans rarely engaged in the range of fan practices familiar to us today—blogging, vlogging, GIF-making, cosplay, fanfic, fanfac (Hills 2014), and so on. "Of the hundreds of daytime viewers we surveyed, only a handful ever write original narratives based on soap characters and only one does it on a regular basis, for personal rather than communal uses" (Harrington and Bielby 1995, 161–162). We explained this by noting that soap fans were mostly (to use today's terminology) affirmational rather than transformational fans (Obsession_inc 2009). The characters and narratives depicted onscreen resonated emotionally and authentically with viewers, resulting in mostly non-oppositional readings and a non-oppositional fandom. Moreover, the daily open-ended structure of soaps decreased the need for alternative, user-generated storylines and other forms of fan creativity.

Historically, soaps were the quintessential water-cooler programming, generically marked by on-screen verbal discourse and inspiring real-world conversations that helped cement social ties and that long endorsed women's role in the flow of information (e.g., Brown 1987). Significantly, soap fans' first forays online clearly reflected the emotionality and "talkiness" of the genre. For example, Baym's (2000) influential analysis of the construction of community in online spaces points out that soap viewers were among the first to adopt the Internet for entertainment purposes (6), eager to talk about—gossip about—their soaps. Baym found character development to be the main topic of conversation among the Usenet newsgroup that she studied (rec.arts.tv.soaps), whereas the fans we studied mainly gossiped in-person or over the phone, and preferred speculating on future events (Harrington and Bielby 1995, 25). Regardless of research finding, both conversational topics of fan gossip reflect soaps' central questions: What will happen next and who will it affect?

Ford (2014) furthers our argument that object specificity has value in his distinction between accretion texts (such as soaps) and drillable texts (such as *Breaking Bad*):

[F]an activity surrounding accretion texts focus overwhelmingly on discussion, debate, criticism, and theorizing. With hours of new source material each week, there is often less need (or time) for many of the fan practices surrounding drillable texts. This volume from an accretion text encourages, in return, a sort of "accretion fandom," where the complexity and intensity of fan activity come not from producing discrete fan texts but from the deep, everyday practices of unpacking meaning and debating issues surrounding the flow of new source material. (64)

In his review of fan studies, Ford (2014) argues that scholars have prioritized drillable texts and their fandoms because they "provide a finite body of rich materials that fuel fan activity" (64) in contrast to the "less audio-visual or 'creative writing' production" that characterizes accretion fandoms such as those surrounding soap opera. Ford ultimately suggests that fan scholars should continue to diversify the types of fandoms they (we) study, along with the differences among them (55).

As noted above, from the inception of fan studies, scholars faced choices between studying "media fandom" writ broadly, or different kinds of fandoms with "the need to create a vocabulary that allowed us to make meaningful comparisons across them" (Jenkins 2014, 96). Jenkins's

decision in *Textual Poachers* (1992) to study the former was crucial in shaping the field and prescient in its anticipation of the dominant configuration of fandom today as a social, networked practice (the understanding of which he significantly advanced, of course, in *Convergence Culture* (2006)). In *Soap Fans*, we argued that object specificity matters but also complicated that notion in two ways. First, we pointed out that soap opera is not *one* fan object. At the time of our writing, there were eleven objects (soaps) generating distinctly different fan communities. Whereas to a non-fan or non-appreciator of the genre all soaps may seem interchangeable, within larger soap fandom, those distinctions matter deeply (Harrington and Bielby 1995, 115–116). Matt Hills (2016) echoes this line of argument in his discussion of competing fandoms surrounding different iterations of the Doctor in *Doctor Who*.

We also drew a distinction between *breadth* viewers/fans and *depth* viewers/fans. The former are engaged with soap opera as a whole, dipping in-and-out of different programs based on story quality, cast changes, or resolution of a plot point. The latter, in contrast, are deeply engaged with a particular soap opera and willing to suffer through weeks, months, even years of dissatisfactory storytelling because it is “their” story. Each type of fan engagement is incomprehensible to the other—breadth vs. depth represents a particular form of intra-fandom conflict, if you will. Drawing directly on the breadth/depth distinction in his recent book, Duffett (2013) suggests that fan scholars “should really be thinking about a kind of continuum that stretches between the least committed fans and the most dedicated ones” (44; see extended discussion of this point in the next section).

We sketched the traditional object of TV soap opera fandom, but in the current media landscape what constitutes the fan-object has expanded in intriguing ways. For example, as noted earlier, De Kosnik (2011) proposes that online celebrity gossip has become the soap opera of the digital era, and Dhaenens and Van Bauwel (2014) suggest that fans’ re-edited versions of European soap operas into webisodes that feature stories with gay characters point to the emergence of a new kind of soap fan—one unfamiliar with the original TV text but whose fan-object *is* that soap albeit in a reworked context. Here, the object is both same (the European soap opera) and different (the queer revision of that soap opera).

In our view, the choice of research subject—media fandom or specific fandoms—is not an either/or question. We need both to continue developing a broad understanding of the meanings and potentialities of fandom writ large, and to understand what makes individual fandoms and fan-objects distinct. Growing scholarly interest in evocative objects (*this* teddy bear, *that* rolling pin; e.g., Turkle 2007), generational objects (e.g., Hills 2016), inter- and intra-fandom battles (e.g., Hills 2012), post-object fandom (e.g., Williams 2011), and object development across time (e.g., Harrington and Bielby 2010a) attest to the continued relevance of object specificity in fan studies.⁵

Identities, Practices, and Communities

As mentioned in the introduction, *Soap Fans* was shaped by—but took issue with—the foundational fan scholarship of Jenkins (1992), Bacon-Smith (1992), and Penley (1991a, 1991b). Our initial discussions with soap opera viewers convinced us that there was an aspect of the fan experience under-examined in prior research. Specifically, we challenged the emergent (now dominant) emphasis on publicly visible (and thus quantifiable) fan practices as a measure of who is and is not a fan:

The popular perception of the fan is shaped almost exclusively by this subset of fans who engage in well-organized and public expressions of fanship. They create fanzines or original artwork, attend fan

club conventions or luncheons, write letters to the stars, or, in rare cases but with much publicity, stalk a celebrity. But what is the private meaning of being a fan? What are the personal and interpersonal pleasures and meanings derived from the role? What does it mean to call oneself a fan of something? (Harrington and Bielby 1995, 12)

Arguing that “being a fan is not merely about activity; it involves parallel processes of activity and identity,” and that “one can do fan activity without being a fan, and vice versa” (86), our book explores the visible *and* private aspects of the soap fan world. This claim is primarily what locates our book in fan studies’ third wave, with its focus on the fan experience as *both* personal and communal (Gray, Sandvoss, and Harrington 2007).

Part of our study aimed to differentiate between private, semi-public, and public fan activities.⁶ Private experiences might include watching a daily soap, constructing and maintaining a videotape library, gossiping with friends and family about storylines (creation of fans’ oral culture; Fiske 1987), and/or self-identifying as a fan. Public experiences might include attending network-sponsored fan events or joining a fan club. Semi-public or quasi-public experiences were more active than private ones but still allowed fans to avoid public scrutiny if they chose: “reading fan magazines and newsletters, writing to those in the production industry, exchanging photos and videotapes with other fans, and communicating on electronic bulletin boards” (Harrington and Bielby 1995, 27).⁷ Given the newness of electronic communication, we were further interested in the relationship between fans’ online and offline activities (31–32), which we addressed more fully in subsequent research (Bielby et al. 1999; see also Booth and Kelly 2013).

We explored the construction of fan identity by considering how it varied along two dimensions: (1) degree of privatization; and (2) degree of centrality. We were interested in how people came to see themselves as soap fans (becoming-a-fan narratives) and the salience of that identity vis-à-vis other identities: parent, spouse, friend, employee, etc. Drawing on Grossberg (1992), we further emphasized the centrality of affect and emotion (i.e., pleasure) in the construction of fan identities. One of the biggest stereotypes about soap fans at that time was that they could not tell the difference between fantasy and reality—the intimacy and familiarity associated with the genre (see prior discussion) resulted in fans talking about (and experiencing) soap characters as if they were real people. Core to our project was the analysis of this practice as strategic and purposeful—fans deliberately played with the boundaries between fantasy and reality to enhance the pleasures of soap viewing (see Chapter 4 of *Soap Fans*).⁸

The distinction that we posed in 1995—fan as “do-er” vs. fan as “be-er”—remains a core area of discussion in fan studies. Should fans be explored as individuals (e.g., Hills 2002; Sandvoss 2005), as an organized community (e.g., Busse and Gray 2011; Booth and Kelly 2013; Coppa 2014; Jenkins 2007, 2014), or as something else entirely (Sandvoss and Kearns 2014 propose the notion of an interpretive fair)? Jenkins’s *Textual Poachers* (1992) famously describes people “who self-identify as ‘fans’ full-stop, not as fans of this or that show, band, celebrity, team etc.” (Coppa 2014, 75). Similarly, Booth and Kelly (2013) argue for fandom as “an identity that transcends the text” (58); in their view, fans engage in comparable practices regardless of the text or object they favor. This perspective obviously counters our claims of fan-object specificity by arguing that fans are members of a larger community rather than individuals with emotional investments in texts (Jenkins 2014, 93). Jenkins writes:

[F]andom is the future. I use the word “fandom” and not “fans” here for good reason. To me, it seems a little paradoxical that the rest of the people involved in this conversation are more and more focused on consumption as a social, networked, collaborative process ... whereas so much of the recent work in fan studies has returned to a focus on the individual fan. (2007, 361; emphasis in the original)

We believe that studying individual fans remains vitally important. Here are some brief, non-exhaustive suggestions as to why. First, as has been widely noted, there is need to bring a wider variety of fan voices or subjectivities into our scholarship—voices of color, queer voices, poor voices, old voices, diasporic voices, voices who are differently abled, and so on. Unless we presume to simply layer the already-mapped subjectivities of fandom (read: mostly young, white, middle-class, educated, online, etc.) onto these understudied communities, we absolutely need to study psychologies of fandom (a point with which Jenkins 2014 agrees). Our own research on older fans in the context of human development theory confirms this imperative (e.g., Harrington and Bielby 2010b).

Second, we remain as convinced today as we were in 1991 that there are a Whole Lot Of People who self-identify as fans and/or engage in fan activities but who have little or no interest in being part of a networked community. In recent research, Sandvoss and Kearns (2014) found that social ties and community membership are *not* intrinsic to fandom. They interviewed people who do not feel part of a community, have no intention of becoming part of one, and “outright reject the suggestion that they may have built any forms of social contacts through their fandom” (95). They further remind us that the vast range of fan-generated texts online are produced by a small number of fans (92), so what looks like a giant (and hugely active) online community might not be all that. Coppa (2014), in her advocacy of transcendent fandom over individual fans as a research focus, suggests that fan scholars revisit a prior scholarly distinction between *fans* and *followers* (Jenkins and Tulloch 1994). Followers are described as those who regularly consume and enjoy media texts/objects but claim no larger social identity on that basis. Followers, who “arguably ... use media as directed” (Coppa 2014, 75), might seem to fit our analysis of early-1990s soap fandom as non-oppositional. However, we found, as did Sandvoss and Kearns (2014), plenty of people who want nothing to do with fandom as networked practice *but who self-identify as fans*. Far be it for us, as scholars, to re-write their identities for them.⁹

Third, and relatedly, we remain convinced that there are a Whole Lot Of People (maybe the same people as above) who reserve their fiercest fan pleasures as private experiences. Maud Lavin (2015), explaining why she chose to attend a 1978 Patti Smith concert by herself, writes “Not for sharing, this” (2.6). Love that. Did some fans live-tweet the finale of *Breaking Bad* (AMC)? Absolutely. Did others hold viewing parties complete with Walt and Jesse costumes? Sure. Did others kick their families out of the house so they could watch alone? Yep. For Coppa, it is the social descriptions of fandom among first-wave scholars that resonate with her experiences (2014, 76). They resonate with us as well. But we also recognize and legitimize the non-social/non-networked fans. Scholars may be less interested in them, media industries and marketers variably interested in them, and yes, it’s a slippery slope from consumption to fandom (Jenkins 2007, 361) ... but they’re out there and we ignore them to the detriment of a full understanding of fans *and* fandoms (note the plural in both).

In *Soap Fans* we proposed a continuum of viewer-to-fan positionality. More nuanced fan typologies or taxonomies have been proposed over the years (e.g., Abercrombie and Longhurst 1998), and scholars increasingly call for a movement past familiar binaries (fan/not-fan, fan/antifan) that now operate as conceptual blinders. We are not big fans of taxonomies as they seem to inevitably fail to capture the full range of possibilities. Perhaps, as has been successfully argued in gender studies, we should simply agree to conceive of fandom as a spectrum or constellation of experiences, activities, and communities—and leave it at that.

Finally, and briefly, there are no doubt stealth fandoms out there, fan communities once networked to the teeth but now operating underground—a pushback against industry co-optation and exploitation, sick of haters and shamers and bullies, and strangers, not to mention the endless jockeying to determine which fan knows more, has done more, has been to more, is a “better” fan. Stealth fandom is more methodologically challenging to identify and study than even

non-networked “regular” fans (see Sandvoss and Kearns 2014, 93, 103), but we suspect that it is out there. So, fan-as-private-identity? Check. Fan-as-networked-community? Check. *Soap Fans* focused on *both* conceptualizations—we studied the soap fans who “participated” as well as those who “did nothing” but consume—as does the leading anthology in the field (Gray, Sandvoss, and Harrington 2007). Perhaps a more fruitful set of questions for fan studies to pursue is: when do people participate (if at all), under what conditions, why, and to what end?

Conclusion

Much has changed, both in soap opera and in soap fandom, since the 1995 publication of our book. The daytime TV genre has declined dramatically, from 11 shows airing on broadcast network television in the early 1990s to four as of today. A number of daytime magazines have ceased publication and the publicity circuit for soap stars has shrunk noticeably. Soap fandom was an early migrant to online and digital spaces and remains vibrant, with fans fully engaged in the wide range of creative practices associated with participatory culture. Soaps themselves have moved online, with original web-only series (e.g., *Beacon Hill*) along with a short-lived attempt to resurrect two canceled ABC series (*All My Children* and *One Life to Live*) in web format. We continue to research soap opera fans, particularly in the context of age and aging, along with other aspects of media industries and audiences.

One of the biggest gambles we took in *Soap Fans* was *not* focusing directly on the genderedness of the soap fan community. We drew on the rich tradition of feminist soap scholarship of the 1980s (which Jenkins 2014 points out was a root of first wave fan studies) and recognized (and wrote about) the salience of the gendered structure of soaps to resulting identities and practices of its fandom. However, gender was not at the forefront of our analysis, and our stated rationale—that a more inclusive set of variables offered more explanatory power in understanding the fandom—was critiqued at the time (e.g., Gamson 1996). Since then our approach has generated productive lines of inquiry alongside that of scholars who have analyzed core aspects of gender and sexuality in soap fandom (Harrington 2003; Ng 2008), as well as the salience of intersectional identities (e.g., Scodari 2004), which was not theoretically developed at the time of our writing. Gender is, of course, central to contemporary debates in fan studies and has been explicitly addressed by numerous scholars. For example, see the multi-part and multi-party discussion hosted by Jenkins (2007) on his weblog (<http://henryjenkins.org/>) as well as ongoing fangirl/fan-boy debates (e.g., Scott 2010).

Because there was limited scholarly research on the concept of fandom-as-community at the time of our writing *Soap Fans*, we undertheorized this important concept, taking its meaning for granted rather than questioning it directly. Baym (2000) drew on soaps as a case study in her influential analysis of the formation, maintenance strategies, communicative practices, and normative expectations of online groups, and Hills (2001) builds on and critiques our use of Winnicottian theory in *Soap Fans* to develop his intriguing notion of communities of imagination.¹⁰ In recent years, and as part of the individual-vs.-community debate, fan scholars have begun to directly investigate the varied meaning(s) of community in fandom including the relationship(s) between online and offline communities (e.g., Booth 2010; Busse and Gray 2011; Booth and Kelly 2013; Reysen et al. 2015; van de Goor 2015).

It’s an interesting exercise to re-read something that you wrote decades ago. Some of our ideas still seem spot-on whereas others reflect now-dated scholarly perspectives. We agree with Ford’s (2014) observation that contemporary fan scholars have an explicit or implicit tendency to prioritize certain forms of engagement and place value on “certain *products* of fandom over the *process* of fandom” (63; emphasis added). Our current research on fandom and aging (e.g., Harrington

and Bielby 2010a; Harrington, Bielby, and Bardo 2011) explicitly addresses this concern in its recognition of the impact of globally shifting demographics on fan experiences. Understanding the life course means understanding how lives unfold across time and engages directly with questions of process, change, and human adaptation—an increasing interest in multiple areas of the academy, given rapid global aging. Ultimately, we agree with Ford’s assertion that fan studies “can’t have an absolutist answer to what does or does not warrant fandom, or whether certain kinds of activities constitute a ‘greater level of engagement’ than others” (62). Being a fan and practicing or performing fandom meant many different things in 1991...as it does today.

Notes

- 1 We are not entirely sure why this is so. Perhaps “soap” in the book’s title dissuades fan scholars from thinking it is about anything *but* soap opera. If so, this would support the relevance of object specificity, which we discuss in a subsequent section. Alternatively, perhaps it suggests an elitism within fan studies wherein certain texts or genres (e.g., horror or science fiction) are prioritized over others (e.g., soaps or YA novels). See Ford’s (2014) discussion of accretion vs. drillable texts discussed later in the chapter. Our aim, of course, was to contribute to fan studies broadly through discussion of soaps as a case example.
- 2 For example, see the special issue on fandom and/as labor in *Transformative Works and Cultures* (2014, vol. 15).
- 3 For recent and interesting exceptions, see Bennett (2012) and Click et al. (2013).
- 4 For early exceptions, see Fiske (1987) and Butler (1995) for insightful discussions of the construction of soap celebrity.
- 5 See the special issue on materiality and object fandom in *Transformative Works and Cultures* (2014, vol. 16).
- 6 See Fiske (1992) on semiotic, enunciative, and textual productivity—and Sandvoss’ (2011) discussion of Fiske in the context of fan typologies.
- 7 Dhaenens and Van Bauwel (2014) draw explicitly on our articulation of semi-public activities in their recent study of queering soap opera through online fan practices.
- 8 We drew on psychoanalytic theory, specifically Winnicott’s (1971) object-relations theory, in this analysis. See Hills’s (2002) critique of our approach and the ensuing scholarly debate (Hills 2007; Sandvoss 2005, 2008).
- 9 Sandvoss and Kearns’s (2014) notion of “ordinary” fandom may be useful here—“the commonplace, everyday life media fandom that constitutes the largest group of affective media engagements without high levels of social connectivity arising out of fandom” (92–93). They found that ordinary fans share practices and motivations with more active fan groups “yet seek to distance themselves from the two notions most commonly discussed in the academic study of fan audiences: creativity and community” (97).
- 10 According to Hills (2001), a community of imagination implies two things: that imagination is an affective process that “underpins the formation and fragility of any such community”; and that this process is located within Winnicott’s notion of transitional space (158, n. 1). Hills focuses on affect rather than theories of pleasure (as we did in *Soap Fans*).

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Chapter 6

Not My Lifeblood: Autoethnography, Affective Fluctuations and Popular Music Antifandom

Ross Garner

Discussions of autoethnography as a method for studying fandom, life fandom (Harrington and Bielby 2010a, 2010b) and antifandom (Gray 2003, 2005) have been disconnected areas of research within fan studies (see also Duffett's Chapter 29 in this volume). However, as Liz Giuffre (2014, 53) identifies, "Fandom is not a simple, life-long and unproblematic relationship, but one where positives and negatives, fandom and antifandom are often present all at once." By highlighting that attachments to fan objects endure over time, but that these affective investments rarely remain consistent as certain fandoms can fall in to periods of negativity and distance from the fan-self, the possibility of bringing these three previously-separate areas of research emerges. Addressing fandom from a personal and longitudinal perspective, this chapter uses my ongoing status as an indie music fan—focusing primarily on my long-term investment in the rock band Manic Street Preachers—to develop three main arguments about fandom. First, I demonstrate the advantages that using autoethnography to explore life-fandoms can offer. Second, by providing "a narrative of the self" (Monaco 2010, 107) and reflexively locating the account disclosed within the overlapping social, cultural, economic, and industrial contexts impacting my fan identity at specific moments in time, the analysis suggests how autoethnography can provide a nuanced understanding of what I call here the *affective fluctuations* that characterize long-term fandoms. Third, by reflecting upon an affective fluctuation which occurred in response to the release of the Manics' 2004 album *Lifeblood*, the analysis develops existing work on antifandom by introducing the concept of *intra-object antifandom* in relation to being a fan of a popular music artist. Intra-object antifandom suggests a new way in which "fan" and "antifan" identities can co-exist within the individual fan-self and discusses this in relation to the variety of external contexts that enable and sustain this type of practice.

Manic Street Preachers are an indie-punk-rock band who hail from Blackwood in South Wales and achieved initial success in 1992 with their debut album *Generation Terrorists*. At the time of writing they have released twelve studio albums (*Futurology* (2014) being their most recent), two Greatest Hits collections and a compilation of B-sides and rarities (*Lipstick Traces* (2003)). They have written many well-known and much-loved songs, including their UK number one hits "If You Tolerate This Your Children Will Be Next" (1998) and "The Masses Against the Classes" (2000). Although their more recent albums do not demonstrate the same level of cross-over appeal in terms of the UK singles chart—partly because of shifting ways in which singles are

brought and consumed in the digital era—new albums consistently debut in the top five during their first week of release and the band still play sell-out stadium concerts at home and beyond. Throughout their career, the band has articulated a strong working-class attitude linked to their Welsh background as well as demonstrating an idiosyncratic punk styling. The band's appearance has taken in the reappropriation of military regalia as well as elements of cross-dressing as personified in the stage appearance of their bassist, Nicky Wire. The Manics' history is also steeped in tragedy, however, following the disappearance of their guitarist and lyricist Richey Edwards in 1995. To date, Edwards is still missing (he was declared "presumed dead" in 2008) but his memory is kept alive by the band through their dedications to him during live performances and their ongoing embrace of their first three albums (to which Edwards actively contributed).

Since autoethnography centers on "discussion of the intersections of the personal and ... social, memory and cultural history" (Wolff 1995, 29), it is also appropriate to locate my own fan-self history alongside that of the Manics' career. At the time of writing, I'm in my early thirties, live just outside of Cardiff, Wales, and am a white, heterosexual, happily married, middle-class man (who originally comes from a working-class background via growing up in a small former-market town in Devon, England). I've been a fan of the Manics ever since the release of their anthemic single "A Design for Life," which counts as one of my all-time favorite songs, and the *Everything Must Go* album in 1996. However, in a comment on my masculinity, I have never embraced the band's more androgynous and glam punk stylings as guitarist and singer James Dean Bradfield has instead always been my point of identification. Additionally, despite having been a Manics fan for the best part of twenty years now and a shared interest in the band having characterized many of my social ties throughout my life (see below), I have never been involved in formal and communal fan practices linked to the band. My lack of engagement with communal Manics fandom is not necessarily a limitation to this chapter's arguments, though. This is because, as Sandvoss (2005) had argued, "the emotional core underlying our continuous consumption of the object of fandom cannot be explained in interpersonal terms alone" (68). Sandvoss suggests the need to also consider individualized meanings and experiences of fandom and, as returned to shortly, autoethnographic methods are well suited to engaging with these issues. What's more, as this chapter explores, I have not always been a massive Manics fan as there was a period during the mid-to-late 2000s when I had very little to do with the band. This period of detachment provides the focus for the latter half of this chapter's discussion as this affective fluctuation, and the factors that enabled and sustained it, are located against a variety of social, technological, and industrial contexts. Happily, this distance has eased and, writing from the perspective of the present, their *Rewind the Film* (2013) album is one of my favorite records by any artist this decade (seriously, listen to "Anthem for a Lost Cause" (2013)).

Finally, before commencing my autoethnography, reflection upon the "validity" of the data used in this kind of analysis should be provided. Because autoethnography focuses on analyzing the self, objections can arise concerning the subjective nature of the accounts it provides. Paul Booth (2015) implies this critique by mentioning that "an autoethnographic analysis is always constrained by a particular time and space, the temporal and spatial coordinates in which the researcher has undertaken the research" (107). Although this may lead some to question the reliability of autoethnographic data (e.g., "isn't this just your own personal perspective?"), these criticisms can be off-set in various ways. First, as Matt Hills (2002) advises about autoethnography, "Although this type of self-reporting cannot be assumed to be infallible or 'correct,' this is not really a problem" because, as returned to shortly, the use of self-reflexivity to interrogate the account of self-hood offered counters these dismissals (82). Autoethnography is therefore a useful methodology as it can address how "people actually take up ...discursive practices and really live through them. This is to say, the practice of autoethnography might ...develop

narrative accounts of what it means to take up these subject positions and use them to create a sense of self as a lived experience” (Evans and Stasi 2014, 15).

Second, as the accounts of my enduring Manics fandom provided here are drawn from memory, it is necessary to note that “memory work is always contextual and highly performative” (Monaco 2010, 109) within the context of the present. This means that the account of self-identity provided here says more about my current self-perception than historical accuracy as “the vignettes *construct* the subject” (Sturm 2015, 215; original emphasis) for the purposes of the research. Nevertheless, as Jeanette Monaco (2010) states: “Memory work allows us to make meaningful connections between the experiences of the personal and the cultural as we recall former periods of our cultural situatedness within the constraints of social class, race, ethnic and gendered identities, thus enabling us to make sense of our present selves” (110). The memories recalled for the purposes of this chapter, therefore, suggest the deep-rooted structures that have shaped, and continue to shape, my understanding of self-identity and, as becomes evident, indicate how remembered feelings of both positive and negative affect toward an enduring fan object work to construct the performed fan-self.

Autoethnography-as-Method and Studying Life Fandoms

Autoethnography has been deemed “Postmodern ethnography” (Gobo 2008, 61) and arose from critiques of established traditions within the disciplines of sociology and anthropology. These included the “narrative turn” (Sparkes 2003), which forced recognition of the formal techniques used by scholars for writing up field notes, and the “crisis of representation” arising from post-structuralist and post-colonial discourses. This latter criticism highlighted “the othering within ethnography” (Evans and Stasi 2014, 15) which comes from how researchers position themselves in an elevated position above their research subjects. Central to both of these debates is deconstructing the assumed objectivity that observational techniques grant to academics and how such claims become normalized through factors including the use of language and writing style employed to represent research participants encountered in the field. Autoethnography arises out of these complaints as it “aim[s] ... to apply to myself the same theoretical and ethnographic tools we so often use to analyze and judge others” (Chin 2007, 336) by making the researcher’s self-identity “alien, strange and sometimes unrecognizable” (336). This is partly achieved “through continuous self-reflexive questioning” (Evans and Stasi 2014, 15) of the accounts of self-hood and “objective” reality offered by the autoethnographer, and can include teasing out the wider discursive investments that structure and guide the accounts of culture and identity that are provided. Autoethnography is not a fully-legitimized research methodology, however. Insecurities surrounding its suitability for scholarly research arise, on the one hand, because of the level of personal voice it affords to the researcher (Coffey 1998, 17–18) and, on the other, due to its potential to slip into “intellectual masturbation” (Gobo 2008, 63) as a result of its required levels of self-reflexive examination. Nevertheless, it is a method that has been infrequently, yet insightfully, deployed within fan studies.

Previous aca-fans have conducted autoethnographies for various purposes (see Chapter 9 by Zubernis and Larsen and Chapter 5 by Harrington and Bielby in this volume). These include examining the similarities and differences between fan investments in objects coded as “high” and “popular” culture (Pearson 2007), demonstrating the dynamism and performative aspects of fandom and how these cumulatively construct a disjointed self (Sturm 2015), and reflecting upon the interaction between socio-cultural structures and personal history which can initiate becoming a fan (Knijnik 2015). Elsewhere, autoethnography has also been used for culturally politicized reasons such as interrogating one’s affective attachment to a fan object as a way of challenging

“objective” (e.g., masculinized) historical discourses constructing a popular culture icon (Wise [1984] 1990) as well as reflecting on the tensions between “fan” and “academic” identities that can arise when conducting empirical research into an object that resonates strongly with your own sense of self (Monaco 2010). Additionally, Hills (2002) has usefully argued that autoethnography can provide alternative insights into fan identities than those offered by ethnography alone. For Hills (2002), an overreliance on methods such as observation and interviews generate accounts of fan identity which have “been curiously emptied of the dimensions which ... most clearly define it; dimensions of affect, attachment, and even passion” (65). Prioritizing ethnographic methods produces what Hills (2002) calls a “fallacy of internality” (68), where statements made by fans concerning why they like their fan object are accepted as objective truth and used as evidence of fans’ articulate, knowledgeable, and self-rational nature. In other words, the unquestioning and sustained deployment of either asking or observing fan practices assumes that these methods can provide complete accounts of why fans like and do what they do. In contrast, Hills (2002) argues that the accounts that fans provide of their enjoyment exemplify the community’s “*discursive mantra* ... a relatively stable discursive resource which is ... used ... to ward off the sense that the fan is ‘irrational’” (67). Deploying an autoethnographic approach enables going beyond these limitations of encountering repeated and socially learnt justifications by recognizing how a fan’s affective investments may be intertextual and/or responsive to a variety of external factors derived from overlapping social, cultural and historical contexts (81–88).

One area of fan research where autoethnography has had little use is in studying life fandoms. A possible explanation for this absence is that life fandoms have been defined as understanding how “Popular media are ... implicated in life course processes and transitions” (Harrington and Bielby 2010a, 431) and endure on a long-term basis. This emerging field’s concern with longitudinal analysis of fan identities contrasts with the dominant ways that autoethnography has been deployed within fan studies as preceding work has prioritized analyzing specific moments of fandom, and therefore reflected on mere snapshots of the fan experience, rather than considering the development of fan attachments along a temporal axis (Wise 1990 [1984]; Wolff 1995; Knijnik 2015; Sturm 2015). Autoethnographic methods provide a highly appropriate alternative for studying life fandoms which can co-exist alongside the current dominant methodological approach of using interviews and observational techniques (Bennett 2006; Stevenson 2009; Harrington and Bielby 2010a, 2010b; Hodgkinson 2011; Bennett and Taylor 2012; Connell 2012). This does not mean that these previous studies have not produced insightful understandings about the long-term possibilities that fandom can offer. Nick Stevenson’s (2009) study of continuing David Bowie fans has, for example, highlighted how “during periods of stress and emotional turmoil, many of the male fans suggested that Bowie’s music had helped them” (84). However, observational and/or interviewing techniques risk settling for an understanding of life fandoms which reproduce the critiques identified by Hills (2002), where self-rationalizing statements offered by fans are accepted as absolute evidence of how and why their fan investments have endured. In contrast, complementing this preceding research with autoethnographic examinations of an (aca-)fan’s long-term fandoms can provide additional insights into “*why ... various fandoms become relevant and irrelevant to cultural identity at specific times*” (Hills 2002, 82; original emphasis). This can be achieved by locating the self against the broader social, cultural, and historical changes impacting upon fandoms throughout the life-course, reflexively interrogating the discourses underpinning the sense of self constructed and, hopefully, providing a starting point for generating new insights into how fan identities evolve and become performed over time (Hills 2002, 86).

Moreover, I would argue that an autoethnographic approach can also assist in developing nuanced insights into what I would call the *affective fluctuations* which form a normative part of long-term fan attachments. Stevenson (2009) identifies that “For most of the people interviewed, their relationship with Bowie had developed over time ... More often there were periods

of intense interest and relative disinterest. Many spoke about how they had ‘rediscovered’ Bowie in later life or more recently” (83). As evidenced below, the same is true of my own popular music fandoms as each of these have experienced peaks and troughs regarding their perceived relevance to my identity as an indie fan. Yet, analyzing these affective fluctuations via autoethnography can highlight how the spikes and declines in interest toward a favored fan object may coincide with a variety of factors including transition across different stages of the life course (e.g., adolescence to adulthood) and changes in socio-economic status, employment, or an individual’s social ties at different points in their life such as relationships with both friends and family (Hills 2002, 82). To demonstrate these points, I will now discuss my long-term popular music fandoms, focusing primarily on my enduring, yet historically-unstable, status as a fan of the Manic Street Preachers.

Accounting for Affective Fluctuations

Figure 6.1 provides an overview of some of my major music fandoms over a twenty-year period as understood from the perspective of the present. The importance of these fandoms was decided by looking through my record collection and using this to remember particularly intense investments in specific artists. These attachments were defined as those that went beyond listening to a group and buying their record, to instead involve attending concerts and consuming additional niche-orientated media (e.g., music videos, interviews) as well as merchandise like t-shirts, live performance bootlegs, and official DVDs (Abercrombie and Longhurst 1995, 138–139). Using my record collection as the stimulus for constructing my remembered fan-self is consistent with David Cavicchi’s (1998) argument that long-term music fandoms work as “a sort of photo album, organizing the passage of time and helping them create a linear narrative of their lives” (135). Yet, reflecting on this selection process indicates how deep-rooted discourses of gender impact my performed self as preceding scholarly work has suggested that there exists “an ongoing association between indie, record collecting and some masculinities” (Bannister 2006, 84) as reflected in such books as Nick Hornby’s *High Fidelity* (2000 [1995]; see also Straw 1997); it may not surprise you

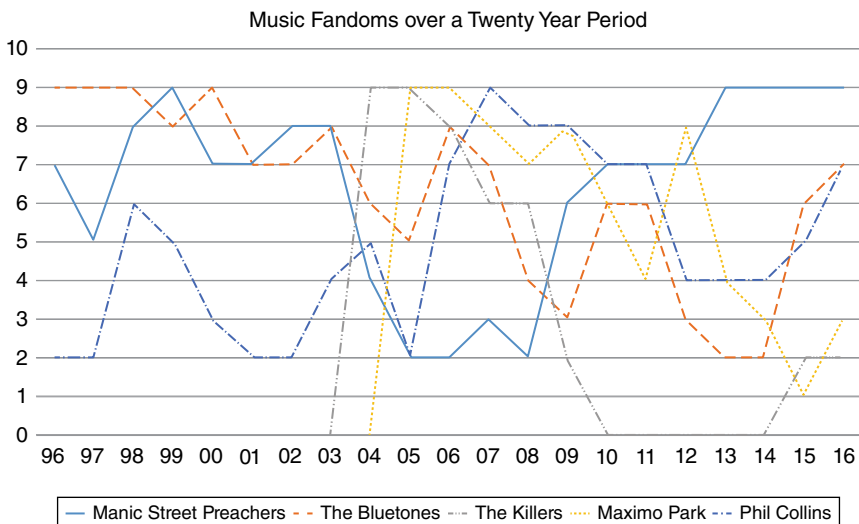


Figure 6.1 Mapping my music fandoms over a twenty-year period

Source: Courtesy of Ross Garner.

that both Hornby's book and its filmic adaptation (Frears 2000) are also favorites of mine. The fan-self that is remembered below is thus one defined through cultural discourses of masculinity and specialized/niche consumption.

The fandoms represented are, however, not exhaustive. Artists such as Radiohead, R.E.M. and Ellie Goulding, had to be omitted for various reasons. One of these was the chapter's scope as my first attempt at visually mapping my musical fandoms produced a chaotic chart that necessitated reducing the number of artists. Another relates to aforementioned critiques of autoethnography concerning the level of personal disclosure that the approach grants to the researcher and how partaking in such an exercise may violate the expectations of academic "*imagined subjectivity*" (Hills 2002, 3; original emphasis) by revealing too much about the self. For example, my fandoms of Radiohead and R.E.M. brought reminders of periods of withdrawal and low feelings in my life which compromise expectations of a professional, scholarly identity. Likewise, although my fandom for Ellie Goulding is linked to admiration of her vocal, technical, and compositional skills as a musician, these criteria also interweave with other, more shallow and culturally-masculinized, elements like her appearance. Given my contemporary status as a self-identifying feminist, this latter aspect generates dissonance in my understanding of self (see also Hills 2002, 87). While one outcome of autoethnographic inquiry should be to "destabilize secure or comfortable accounts of the self" (Monaco 2010, 121) by attempting to dislodge the construction of a unified (fan) identity, discussing either aspects of my fan-self produces feelings of inappropriateness and shame, demonstrating how scholarly expectations provide a set of deep-rooted investments that guide this chapter and place limits upon the fan objects and self-identity that I am willing to interrogate.

Following Hills's (2002) guidance that "multiple fandoms ... may cohere in intriguing ways" for the autoethnographer, there are clear indicators of how deep-rooted discourses generate and sustain my musical investments (81). Markers of gender and white ethnicity are clearly identifiable through my love of "indie" as a subgenre of rock (Wise 1990 [1984], 394; Bannister 2006) and my ongoing investment in artists linked to this musical form also signifies attachment to "anti-mainstream" and "anti-commercial" discourses which requires rejecting (culturally feminized, see Huber 2013) chart-friendly pop. However, reflecting upon the binaries that emerge here reveals contradictions within these investments that point toward the "undecidability" that arises when (popular) culture becomes split in to dichotomies (Derrida 1994; a point that would be worth examining further in relation to studying long-term fandoms as gendered and/or racial classifications of particular styles, artists and genres can shift over time). This is because, on closer inspection, such binaries are unsustainable around how I have constructed indie as a subgenre. For example, while indie has been culturally positioned as masculinized—and the practices I have engaged with here such as record collecting and discussing obscure acts adhere to these gender codings (Straw 1997)—it is also the case that "the masculine personae associated with indie performance tended not to be overtly sexual, aggressive and demonstrative" (Bannister 2006, 90). This is partly because of indie's historical development against the norms of other guitar-based forms as it has "attempt[ed] to accommodate feminist critiques of rock as sexist" (92). Such critiques are identifiable in each of my long-term musical fandoms as all construct a sensitive, feminist and/or androgynous masculinity. As mentioned above, the Manics have regularly committed to a feminist outlook in both their aesthetic and lyrics (see "Little Baby Nothing" (1992) or "4st 7lbs" (1994)); The Bluetones have been ridiculed by some music journalists because of their introspective lyrics (Robertson 2004); Maximo Park's tracks articulate an insecure and deeply-reflexive masculinity (see "Apply Some Pressure" (2005) or "Books from Boxes" (2007)). Cumulatively, these points suggest that while my fan habits adhere to culturally masculinized styles and practices, clear gender-based separations cannot be maintained due to the appropriations of femininity and feminism that have impacted upon indie.

Pursuing this point further, employing self-reflexive questioning to interrogate the summary of self that I have provided indicates a subjective investment in attempting to present myself as rational—and therefore as a knowledgeable academic (Hills 2002, 81)—as additional contradictions are observable. Giuffre (2014) identifies that “indie” has been developed as a market-orientated category to target consumers who disapproved of “mainstream” acts, subsequently alluding to its origins within, and attachments to, commercial discourses (54). At the same time, artists such as Phil Collins and Ellie Goulding are hardly “non-mainstream” and each of the Manics, The Killers, The Bluetones, and Maximo Park have experienced cross-over success and been signed to major labels for parts of their careers. Acknowledging this suggests that while a preference for “anti-mainstream” music and “anti-commercial” discourses is something I invest in, challenges to the binary logic that classifies indie through ‘rock’ associations are never far from the surface.

Additional deep-rooted cultural discourses are also readable from the musical tastes I have outlined here. Strong appeals to generational markers are observable through my preference for acts associated with the “Britpop” label (a period when the British music scene of the mid-to-late 1990s was defined by a resurgence of guitar-orientated indie bands) and its resurgence in the early 2000s. Many of my musical fandoms therefore support Janet Wolff’s (1995, 26) assertion that “the music of your teens is *your* music” and, given the ongoing nature of many of these fandoms, a discourse of nostalgia operates in maintaining my attachment to bands from previous stages of my life. Also, an investment in a discourse of authenticity associated with rock subcultures is identifiable across the artists I have mentioned. Allan Moore (2002) argues that authenticity “[i]n rock discourse ... has frequently been used to define a *style* of writing or performing, particularly anything associated with the practices of the singer/songwriter, where attributes of intimacy ... and immediacy combine through elements including live performances and writing your own material” (210–11 original emphasis). This discourse certainly applies to my love of the Manics (as well as the other artists mentioned here) as one factor that continues to sustain my fandom is James Dean Bradfield’s heartfelt lyrical delivery and passionate guitar playing which characterize them on record and during live performances.

Conducting an exhaustive autoethnography would require a holistic interrogation of the ways in which I am invested in the aforementioned discourses (as well as others), how they interweave across (contradictory) fan examples, and reflection upon how and why I am constructing the identity being offered to further bring out the deep-rooted investments of my performed self-identity. However, for the remainder of this chapter—and indicative of how academic priorities take precedence via seeking to complicate existing scholarly positions (Hills 2002, 86)—I want to focus on the affective fluctuation in my Manics fandom that occurred between 2004 and 2009.

Multiple social, cultural, economic, and historical factors can be addressed to account for why I drifted away from the Manics during 2004. Most notably, the latter half of this year saw a period of significant personal transition as I graduated from my undergraduate course at Cardiff University and left my parental home in Newton Abbot to move permanently to Cardiff and live with friends. Such changes suggest how factors such as geographical location can impact fandoms, as living in a city with a vibrant music scene and venues meant that I could continue to consume more “new” acts by attending concerts at small, specialist venues (as I had as an undergraduate). Additionally, if fandom’s “passions and attachments have to be linked to a localized sense of cultural value and legitimacy, even if this occurs only within a household or a small circle of friends” (Hills 2002, 78), then reconfiguring the location of my social ties can also be related to my affective fluctuation for the Manics. The band had provided an ongoing (if not always particularly loved—my Mum especially has always found the band “depressing”) touchpoint with my parents as signified by them buying me a ticket for the band’s Greatest Hits concert at Plymouth Pavilions in December 2003, as I couldn’t afford the ticket myself. At the same time, although I have never been involved in any organized Manics fandom (whether offline or online), the band

had provided a bridge to maintain friendship groups in-between university semesters; most notably, the band I played with in Devon were Manics fans. Following my decision to leave the area, the band split and so my affective links to the band weakened. What's more, one of my new housemates in Cardiff was a waning Manics fan (they had previously been heavily into the band but hadn't been for a number of years). Although unaware of it at the time, my desire to forge new social ties with people I hadn't lived with before, as well as a new post-university social identity, would have contributed to my increasing distance from the band.

My affective fluctuation can also be aligned with changes to my socio-economic status as the latter part of the year was the first time that I had been fully self-sufficient and able to deploy significant levels of disposable income for my own pursuits. My spontaneous Killers fandom could easily be located against this socio-economic change as I quickly acquired multiple pieces of merchandise including t-shirts and limited edition/imported CDs related to the band. Locating the self within shifting social, cultural, economic, and historical factors provides a set of contexts for understanding my affective fluctuation toward the Manics. The combined impact of these factors permitted me to forge a new identity which foregrounded signifiers of subcultural capital (Thornton 1995) at the same time as "cooling" a prominent music fandom linked to a previous life stage of living with my parents and growing up in Devon.

What's more, social ties also play a role in ending my affective fluctuation with the band. This was because I started listening to the band's new material again in 2009 following the release of the *Journal for Plague Lovers* album. My exposure to the album happened unexpectedly as I was lent a copy of the record by a lecturer, friend, and fellow long-term Manics fan in the School of Journalism, Media and Cultural Studies at Cardiff University, where I was studying for my doctorate. Although it would be naïve to assign this act sole responsibility, as other factors such as the portability of music through digital storage technologies must also be addressed (see below), it is worth recognizing that this instance exposed me to the band's new record and coincided with a re-evaluation of their more recent material. Yet, alongside this intertwining of socio-cultural discourses and demonstrations of personal agency, another factor contributing to my period of affective fluctuation toward the Manics concerns industrial rhythms of new releases. This is because positioning the start of my affective fluctuation with the band in 2004 partly aligns this with the release of their seventh studio album, *Lifeblood*, while the resurgence of my fandom for the band is undeniably linked with remembering the release of *Journal for Plague Lovers*. The temporality of my affective fluctuation opens up multiple avenues for scholarly discussion. First, the account I have provided supports Cavicchi's (1998) argument that "there seems to be something about the process of producing commercial music, with its continuing emphasis on new releases and the updating of hit charts, which serves to publicly document the passage of time" (152). In terms of autoethnography, however, recognizing that attachment to a favorite musical artist can increase (or decrease) in accordance with patterns of industrially-dictated releases is indicative of how a discourse of commodification works to sustain my construction as a Manics fan. Second, recognizing a reconnection with the Manics at a later period of my life prompts potential areas for scholarly investigation of "re-becoming a fan" narratives via autoethnography. Recent studies of fandom have called for revisiting "becoming a fan" narratives (Hills 2014) and an autoethnographic approach toward life fandoms could arguably develop new insights into the myriad factors relating to the self which encourage re-connecting with a previously muted fan object. However, recognizing that a negatively evaluated release by a favorite artist may trigger an affective fluctuation provides possibilities for analyzing personal perceptions and meanings associated with that text via theories of antifandom (Gray 2003, 2005). The remainder of this chapter pursues the latter of these trajectories by exploring my enduring construction and non-engagement with *Lifeblood* as an example of antifandom.

***Lifeblood* as Antifandom Object**

The love of Richard Nixon/Death without assassination/The love of Richard Nixon/Yeah, they all betrayed you/Yeah, and your country too.

(The Love of Richard Nixon)

Lifeblood was released in November 2004. Writing this chapter in 2016, it remains the only Manics album that I do not own in either physical or digital format, nor have I ever listened to the record in its entirety. My only engagement with *Lifeblood* has occurred in two ways relating to its (dreadful) lead single, “The Love of Richard Nixon” (2004), from which a sample of the track’s lyrics provide this section’s epigraph. My first encounter with the song arises from a fixed memory of the band performing it on the (now canceled) youth-targeting Saturday morning music show *CD:UK* (1998–2006) in 2004. The enduring images I have of this publicity appearance are that it was misjudged and embarrassing, that the band looked bloated and bored, and that the song itself was plodding and characterized by lyrics which were a pastiche of their previous achievements in being politically outspoken (the Manics’ intellectual lyrical content being one aspect of my continuing fandom for the band—see “Peeled Apples” (2009)).¹ In short, “Nixon” lacked the energy and passion which I’d come to associate with the Manics—a reading that was supported by my then-present social ties as my (non-Manics fan) housemates agreed. My second encounter with the song came more recently when a live version of the track was included as a bonus song on the 2CD special edition release of *Rewind the Film*. Listening to it infrequently (it forms part of my digital music library) has re-confirmed my perceptions of both the song and the album it was intended to create buzz for: lifeless, laborious, and pretentious.

The overview I have provided aligns with many preceding perspectives on fan identity and behavior while also alluding to further inflections of the discourses structuring my Manics (and wider music) fandom(s). For example, my investment in a discourse of cultishness, which is underpinned by industrially located processes of commodification, is signified by allusions to consuming fan-targeted Special Edition releases rather than standard versions (Hills 2010). Alternatively, the terms upon which I rejected *Lifeblood* offer support for Sandvoss’s (2005) argument that individual fans construct an “assumed congruence between fan and object of fandom, which is based on processes of self-reflection ... [via] the active construction of parallels, identity and ‘identity’ between fans and their object of fandom” (102). My ongoing evaluations of *Lifeblood* suggest that it compromises discourses which generate and sustain my Manics fan identity (such as passionate “rock” authenticity and intellectualism) and so the ongoing divergence between these and my perception of the record sustains my continued avoidance of it.

Extending this point concerning the intersection of textual readings and self-perceptions further, my attitude toward *Lifeblood* locates the record in relation to scholarly arguments concerning antifandom. Gray (2005; original emphasis) argues that antifans are “those who hate or dislike a given text, personality, or genre” (841) and that “their framing and expectations of the text, their level of *direct* interaction with it, and the feelings it inspires in them are frequently biometrically opposed to those of fans” (855). Such arguments frame my reading of *Lifeblood* as its subjective-positioning as a low point in the band’s career suggests an “intense experience” (Claessens and Van den Bulck 2014, 68) of dislike. Furthermore, antifan sentiments also demonstrate “different proximities to, understandings of, and engagements with that text” (Gray 2005, 842) as such practices are characterized by “distant reading” (Gray 2003, 71) of the negatively evaluated object which often arises from consuming a limited number of promotional paratexts (72). As my continued avoidance of *Lifeblood* is linked to memories of consuming “pre-text[s]” (Gray 2010, 120), such as the *CD: UK* performance, additional overlaps between the example under discussion and theories of antifandom are easily made.

Refining his position on antifandom, Gray (2005, 845) has also argued that “fandom and antifandom ... more accurately exist on a Mobius strip, with many fan and antifan behaviors and performances resembling, if not replicating, each other.” This suggests that both fan and antifan readings may demonstrate areas of overlap such as the demonstrations of passion that both direct toward their chosen cultural object. Reflecting on this point raises the possibility of “fan” and “antifan” sentiments co-existing within individual fan identities—an argument that has been explored in specific contexts in preceding work in fan studies (Theodoropoulou 2007) which I will now develop further by discussing my ongoing disposition toward *Lifeblood* as an example of what I have named *intra-object antifandom*.

From one perspective, my rejection of the Manics around the time of *Lifeblood*'s release, and then later reconnection with the band, are consistent with existing studies of fan and antifan identities such as Melissa Click's (2007) argument that “Fan positions and media texts are never stable or final” as individual affective relationships with fan objects fluctuate over time (314). The possibility of moving through periods of affective fluctuation and antifandom toward a once-cherished object has also been raised by Nathalie Claessens and Hilde Van den Bulck (2014) in their arguments concerning former fans, as they have argued that:

the case of antifans as former fans indicates that (the intensity) of antifandom is likely to change over time ... while fans can become disappointed in their object of fandom, turning into antifans, they are also very forgiving, criticizing but not terminally rejecting the former object of their fandom. Former fans can thus return to their initial fan status. (72–73)

Yet, although the idea of fans experiencing affective fluctuations as a result of directing antifan sentiments toward some aspect of the fan text resonates, my disposition toward *Lifeblood* complicates existing understandings of how *fan* and *antifan* sentiments toward a fan object can co-exist within individual fan identities (and affectively fluctuate over time). This is because the example I am discussing here occurs at the *intratextual* level by pertaining to a specific text that forms part of the wider (in this instance, band) mega-text. Preceding studies of fan/antifan coexistence have examined “cases where fandom is a precondition of antifandom and ... instances when for a fan antifandom is given and set” (Theodoropoulou 2007, 316). Sports fandoms have provided the immediate reference point here as “the emotional investment in antifandom is significant to the construction of fan identity” (317) and “binary oppositions ... are ... the structure through which ... identity statements” (323) are made and performed (see also Hill 2015). Such oppositional identity work has also been mentioned in relation to popular music fandom. Giuffre (2014, 52–54) has identified examples of inter-generic, as well as inter-artist, hostility such as dismissals of “teenybopper” pop by other genre fans (Baker 2013) while Sarah Thornton (1995), discussing musical tastes operating within subcultures, has discussed dance music enthusiasts denigrating “mainstream” fare. These prior discussions of individualized fan and antifan dispositions suggest a binary logic operating where certain texts, such as rival sports teams or musical artists who become positioned as representative of specific (sub)genres, are defined as Other. The example of *Lifeblood* that I am discussing here differs from these examples in many ways and points toward one example how fan/antifan co-existence may operate with regard to popular music fandom.

First, rather than operating at the *intertextual* level and involving the creation of rigid binaries between specific texts (or groups of texts) and the favored object, the fact that my ongoing rejection of *Lifeblood* operates at the *intratextual* level suggests that examples of *intra-object antifandom* instead involve negotiating fannish dislike and like in a more fluid manner. This is because, as Figure 6.1 indicates, although that particular record contributed toward my affective fluctuation with the Manics, I still occasionally engaged with the band's back catalogue. Instances of *intra-object antifandom*—like rejecting a particular album within a band's back catalogue—reveal

that *fan* and *antifan* sentiments can co-exist within an individual fan identity. However, rather than demonstrating a binary logic, affective responses to individual texts (e.g., albums) operate across a fluid continuum where dislike of a specific record might not equate to an outright detachment from the larger (band) mega-text.

Second, recognizing intra-object antifandom as a particular inflection of fannish disdain suggests how forms of antifandom can be shaped by discursive structures such as technological-historical contexts. This is because my residual fandom for the Manics during my affective fluctuation, such as listening to songs from their back catalogue while distancing myself from their newer releases, was partly enabled by the ways that digital reception technologies have allowed me to engage my music fandoms. Amanda E. Krause and David J. Hargreaves (2012) have argued that “The ways in which we consume music ... [are] determined by the technologies through which we experience it” (532). Developing these ideas, Marjorie Kibby (2009) has shown that some of the consequences of the rise in popularity of digital music players such as iPods for individualized music consumption have been both the increased portability of large numbers of files due to their storage capacity and the emergence of “new eclectic” listening practices via juxtaposing artists, styles and genres (Middleton and Beebe 2002, 167–170) through the “shuffle” option. These perspectives dovetail with my own experiences: I acquired a second-hand, limited capacity iPod Shuffle in 2006 which permitted me to create single playlists that prioritized current artists that I was listening to (e.g., little-known acts like The Young Knives and The Rakes) with cherished songs and albums from more enduring music fandoms. Manics tracks formed part of this as the odd song from *Gold Against the Soul* (1993) and *Everything Must Go* were frequently included. What’s more, as use of an iPod became a normative part of my daily routines, this resulted in upgrading to a newer model (circa 2009) with increased storage capacity and hence the opportunity to carry the Manics’ entire back catalogue with me; nevertheless, a preference for the shuffle function continued meaning that unexpected encounters with an increased range of Manics songs occurred. Such disclosures are, on the one hand, consistent with established ideas concerning music consumption via digital devices, as preceding studies have indicated how the material that gets uploaded to these devices is subjectively positioned as reflecting a sense of self (Krause and Hargreaves 2012, 534) and that users of these technological forms are unlikely to delete songs and artists that have fallen out of favor (Kibby 2009, 437). On the other, relating these consumption habits to theorizing affective fluctuations and intra-object antifandom, it is arguable that the mode of (non-)engagement I have outlined here demonstrates historical specificity via being enabled through available technological forms. Although previous historical eras have produced music players capable of allowing multiple records or CDs to be loaded and played continuously, these devices were linked more to social and/or domestic consumption contexts (Connell 2012, 273–274) rather than the individualized and portable mode of reception encouraged by the iPod. My example of intra-object antifandom, where certain tracks from the Manics’ back catalogue remained part of my musical consumption habits despite actively distancing my fandom from their current output, is thus partly a historically and technologically determined inflection of these sentiments.

Additionally, the example under discussion complicates previous assumptions concerning the temporality of antifandom as previous studies have implied an impermanence to these sentiments. Gray (2005, 855) mentions the “fleeting” nature of antifan attachments on *Television Without Pity*’s message boards while Will Brooker’s (2002) study of *Star Wars* fans reacting negatively to *The Phantom Menace* (Lucas, 1999) demonstrates that, even when instances of antifandom endure for some, many attempt to move beyond these positions. For example, Brooker (2002) identifies fan strategies such as “watching it repeatedly and trying to adopt a different viewing position” (91) or adopting the “the ‘eyes of a child’ gambit” (83) where *Phantom Menace* antifans tried to surpass their negative readings of the film by watching the movie from an alternative,

less “fannish,” perspective. What’s more, when addressing the hostility which did endure among some (anti-)fans, Brooker (2002) implies his own antifandom toward this by characterizing the fan-hate as “the sad predictability of a drawn-out war, an ongoing, everyday state of conflict between two stubbornly opposed sides rather than a lively series of rhetorical clashes” (95). Reviewing Brooker’s arguments reveals an expectancy that, for examples of intra-object antifandom, the hostility experienced will eventually move on or at least attempt reconciliation. Alternatively, where examples of enduring antifandom have been recognized, these instances have been characterized as hollowed through being linked to commercial discourses and contexts of publicity and marketing. Giuffre’s (2014) observation that “early models of industrialized antifandom can ... be traced back to perceived competition between bands as played out by the press” (55) indicates this point. In contrast, my continued disavowal of *Lifeflood* suggests that instances of intra-object antifandom can extend without reconciliation over an extended time-period, and still form part of the subjective performance of a fan identity, against the backdrop of ever-changing social ties and historical contexts.

Yet, reflexively questioning the self-account that arises from the enduring nature of my *Lifeflood* antifandom forces recognition that my ongoing rejection of the record is not purely autonomous. Instead it demonstrates my alignment with the preferred reading of the Manics’ back catalogue that the band themselves have sanctioned in paratextual sources since the record’s release. For instance, in a 2015 interview with online magazine *Noisey*, James Dean Bradfield (in Lindsay 2015, para. 4) ranked the band’s albums from worst to best. *Lifeflood* was ranked last and he stated about the record:

I felt like we were suffering from something called paralysis to analysis in the process of writing. Perhaps we’d run out of juice ... Also we didn’t really play together on that record—there wasn’t much live playing. I would lay down a vocal and guitar track, and Nick and Sean would come in and put down tracks separately. There is an element to that record where it feels slightly virtual and disconnected, and inorganic. It lacks our true instinct. It lacks the essence of what we are.

Similar retrospective sentiments toward the album have also been made by other band members (Bychawski 2011). These reflexive evaluations of their own back catalogue represent an inflection of the mode of engagement observed by Giuffre (2014) where “Artist engagement with an audience’s critical reception of their own work and the work of other artists can also be seen as a form of antifandom” (56). Through the band’s retrospective questioning of *Lifeflood* in the years since its release, my own ongoing antifandom toward the record has gained external endorsement and validation. Recognizing the presence of such statements by the band therefore demonstrates how my own affective fluctuation, and enduring antifan sentiment, suggest that my Manics fandom is constructed through interplays between individualized demonstrations of agency (e.g., aesthetic evaluations of new albums) while also aligning myself with external structures rooted in processes of commodification such as statements made by the band while promoting their current tours and albums. Moreover, the critiques of *Lifeflood* offered by the Manics resonates with my own investment in discourses of rock authenticity pertaining to them: by characterizing the production process as lacking in live performance, both my own perceptions of the album and my wider investments in the band gain additional external support. This suggests that, rather than arising solely through subjective aesthetic evaluations, my enduring antifandom toward *Lifeflood* is sustained by an intermingling of the social and historical development of my (Manics) fan identity, evaluations and memories of paratextual readings, and external endorsement by, and identification with, statements made by the band in (commercially driven) niche media. Recognizing this point again demonstrates the potentials of autoethnography for understanding the overlapping elements contributing toward affective fluctuations in life fandoms and how both antifan and fan identities can subjectively co-exist and endure.

Conclusion

This chapter has contributed to debates within fan studies by bringing together previously distinct areas of debate concerning autoethnography, life fandoms, and antifandom and pursued three main arguments. First, the role that autoethnographic methods can play in advancing the analysis of life fandoms has been demonstrated. Working alongside approaches that focus on “asking the audience,” autoethnography can supplement these by bringing out the more personal elements that color long-term fan attachments and produce accounts of these that complicate subculturally learnt discursive mantras regarding the historical development of the fan object. Instead an autoethnographic approach can provide nuanced accounts of how and why certain fan objects move in and out of importance for individual fans by mapping these against the multiple social, cultural, economic, and industrial structures that enable or discourage certain fan attachments at different moments in time. Recognizing this point suggests the need for an expanded range of methodologies to be considered in relation to the burgeoning study of life fandoms with a view to capturing the diversity of fan experiences as they unfold over time.

Second, by adopting a longitudinal approach to my popular music fandoms (chiefly that concerning the Manic Street Preachers), this chapter has introduced and reflected upon the idea of affective fluctuations. These have been identified as a normative part of long-term fan attachment within previous studies but have rarely been taken on their own terms. However, as I have reflected upon here, the reasons behind when and why a particular fan may distance, and then return, to a fan object are complex and involve addressing a range of structural factors (e.g., changing social ties) alongside demonstrations of personal agency. If fan studies is to capture the richness of fan practices, greater recognition of affective fluctuations is required and, by enabling scholars to move beyond studying individual moments of fandom, autoethnography seems an appropriate way to begin addressing these experiences.

Finally, this chapter has also demonstrated how using autoethnography to study affective fluctuations toward fan objects can generate new insights into topics such as antifandom. By examining my changing attachment to the Manics over time I have introduced the concept of *intra-object antifandom* as an alternative way of theorizing how *fan* and *antifan* sentiments can co-exist within an individual fan identity relating to popular music fandom. This is because while oppositional stances may take place toward new releases by a favorite band or performer (e.g., rejecting their latest album) and cause shifts in the fan’s affective attachment to the artist, but this does not necessarily preclude continued, albeit reduced, consumption of that act’s back catalogue. This type of intra-object antifandom has been discussed here as arising from the intersection of a variety of factors including personal biography and demonstrations of agency, as well as wider contextual factors including social ties, technologies for consuming music, and individualized engagement with statements made by the Manics in commercially driven official publicity. Moving forward, future research could be conducted to see how, and whether, similar examples of affective fluctuation and intra-object antifandom manifest in relation to different media(ted) forms such as negative appraisals of individual series of favorite television series or film franchise instalments. Such ideas could also be tested in relation to sports fandoms by addressing occurrences like periods of reduced success in a team’s history or negativity expressed toward specific players, managers or the club infrastructure. Given that my arguments in this area have occurred at the level of the individual fan, notions of intra-object antifandom could also be debated through the application of alternative methodologies such as returning to observational techniques (whether online or offline) and/or interviews. These suggestions indicate that intra-object antifandom may well represent a ripe area for discussion in fan studies as it allows the affective fluctuations that characterize fan attachments to be better understood.

However, reflecting on the self-account provided throughout this chapter suggests certain limitations. First, the identity outlined throughout demonstrates a deep-rooted investment in an academic identity that has been difficult to dislodge. This has manifested itself in the need to create neologisms, focus on aspects of my music fandoms that do not easily correlate with existing understandings of fandom, and a sustained attempt to present my Manics (anti-)fandom as rational and use theory to understand this. Some scholars may critique this approach for losing the charge and enthusiasm that characterize fan experiences, pointing to the need to debate and include different writing styles within autoethnographic accounts of fandom. Second, and following on from this point, the discussion provided throughout the chapter suggests how autoethnography always involves locating the self in relation to the experiences of others within a particular cultural space. Given that we live in a consumer-driven society where notions of individualism are rife, does this force autoethnographers to focus on experiences that do not fit within established knowledge and, through doing this, take us away from the majority fan experiences? It is for this reason that ideas developed through autoethnography require testing and refining in relation to other fan identities (both individual and communal). Finally, given that autoethnography invites the participant to question the accounts of self that arise through self-reflexive questioning, further interrogation of the identity forged here could occur. For example, given that the fan-self constructed for this chapter is drawn from memory, what role does this account play in providing me with a sense of stability in the present? What theoretical frameworks might be useful when analyzing the identity performed here? Addressing these questions falls beyond the scope of this chapter but hopefully raising these questions points toward autoethnography's central concerns—to keep questioning the self.

Note

- 1 The *CD:UK* performance is available to access on the video streaming site YouTube. For the purposes of writing this chapter, I deliberately have not rewatched the clip as I wanted to work with the enduring image I have of this rather than re-interrogating and re-evaluating it from a contemporary perspective.

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Chapter 7

Representations of Fans and Fandom in the British Newspaper Media

Lucy Bennett

Relations between news media and fans have historically been complex, with newspaper coverage representing certain and specific elements of fandom, often resulting in fans being depicted as pathological, hysterical, or as social losers and misfits. This is a matter of importance: as Roger Silverstone (1999) has argued, media function at the core of human experience and public understanding, since they operate “at the heart of our capacity or incapacity to make sense of the world in which we live” (ix). This chapter seeks to examine how fandom is constructed, represented, and “made sense of” by a sample of British newspapers across a ten-year period (2000–2010), focusing on the month of January across three five-year points: 2000, 2005, and 2010. Analyzing this coverage via a media content analysis, this study will specifically examine the main themes of news coverage, how fans are labeled and portrayed, and the sources that are given a voice in these stories. It will unravel how historical understandings of fandom have changed and morphed into a contemporary view that is shaped by technological development and stronger visibility and mainstreaming of fandom, and tease out the elements that form the way this behavior is constructed in the press.

This study will argue that:

1. Across the samples analyzed, sport was the predominant genre of fandom portrayed in the media, yet remains at the margins of the fan studies field, which has focused more on popular culture fandom and been markedly divided from sports studies.
2. Overall, the newspaper coverage analyzed, and sport fandom in particular, contest the idea of fans as always worshipping and adoring (as is often prevalent of popular culture fans in the media), offering more complicated depictions of fans being unhappy, powerful, and active individuals. Conversely though, sport fans are sometimes depicted as out of control and disruptive, a landscape which fosters images of hooliganism.
3. Male fans are given the strongest representation and voice in news coverage analyzed. Male fans were portrayed with a stronger negative slant than female fans, who were presented as more dimensional, yet simultaneously more invisible and absent. The results underline the male gender focus of sports fandom in the British press, with females confined to less active genres of fandom, or media fandom.
4. Newspaper representations of fans expand the current conceptions of what determines, and is approached as, a “fan” within academic research.

Fans and Media Representation

Fans and the media have long had a symbiotic relationship. For individuals who are not fans, and outside the boundaries of fan culture, the media can act as a space through which representations can be constructed and contested, negotiated or embraced by citizens. However, through the years, and most spectacularly evident in the 1980s, fans have often been represented as outsiders, misfits, socially inept, and even dangerous. Henry Jenkins's influential *Textual Poachers* (1992) opens with a description of William Shatner's "Get a Life" sketch on *Saturday Night Live* as the definitive showcasing of these stereotypical fan qualities. Joli Jensen also saw similar constraints, concluding that the two most recurrent representations of fans in the media are "the obsessed individual and the hysterical crowd" (1992, 9), and Daniel Cavicchi also lamented these restricted framings: "at worst, fans are characterized as pathological and deviant ... at best, they are amusing and quaint, suitable for a three-minute slot on *Entertainment Tonight*" (1998, 6).

Currently, as fandom is becoming a more mainstream practice and culture, representations of fans are becoming more visible in the mass media (Duffett 2013; Bennett and Booth 2016). These are not always similar to the images of deviance found by Jensen and Cavicchi. A recent study by Ruth A. Deller, examining newspaper depictions and narratives of older female music fans, discovered that there were similar patterns evident, but instead of being portrayed as a source of threat or deviance, these fans were depicted "as a source of humor" (2016, 198), *perhaps* indicating that depictions of fans, at least in the British press, are shifting (see also Phillips's Chapter 14 in this volume). However, thus far, there have been no comprehensive contemporary studies of fan representation in the newspaper media to analyze how fans are currently constructed and portrayed. This chapter, then, aims to fill the gap in this scholarship to unravel how fans and fandom are represented in the British media over a ten-year period, charting the developments, changes, and fluxes in the coverage. By placing an analytical lens on the news media, this study will reveal crucial elements surrounding how fans are currently being "made sense of" (Silverstone 1999, ix) in Britain. Consequently, then, it will also give an important insight into how the genre of fandom and the gender of fans are depicted, delivering us a greater breadth of understanding of the cultural constructions and boundaries surrounding these and the voices that are permitted to speak around fandom in new stories.

Methodology

In order to chart the differences across a long time period, a time span of ten years was selected, undertaking coding in five-year increments: 2000, 2005 and 2010. This was selected to demonstrate any changes occurring with the introduction of social media and networking, in the mid to late 2000s. To secure a manageable sample, the full month of January was selected and coded for each of the three years. All months were searched and resulted in a similar number of stories leaning toward sport. The search was conducted on Nexis and used the terms "fans OR fandom" appearing in the headline only. Newspapers included were *The Guardian* (broadsheet, politically left of center), *Daily Mail* (middle market tabloid, right of center), *Daily Mirror* (tabloid, left of center), and *The Sun* (tabloid, right of center), in order to have a balance across the political spectrum and newspaper formats. The editions of these newspapers were limited to the UK only, so any stories featured in the Irish versions of the *Daily Mirror* and *The Sun* were not included in the sample. The overall numbers of stories were as follows: 111 stories in 2000, 134 stories in 2005 and 182 stories in 2010. In total, 427 stories were coded. A coding sheet was created to explore themes within the coverage surrounding fans, genre of fandom, words used to describe fans and sources used within the news stories (a source was classed as someone contributing a direct quote to an article).

The corpus of different themes, genres, and words were added to as the pilot coding was undertaken, in order to ensure a more comprehensive set of results. This content analysis cannot claim to present *all* representations of fans across *all* these years and British newspapers, but instead it delivers a demonstrable snapshot over a ten-year time period in order to chart the fluxes and constants across how fandom and fans have been represented. Inter-coder reliability was undertaken on 10 percent of the sample and all categories achieved higher than 80 percent reliability.

January 2000

The content analysis of representations of fandom during January 2000 rendered visible some revealing patterns within the coverage, which resulted in 111 stories. Sports overwhelmingly dominated the representation, with 87.4 percent of the coverage across the four newspapers that month focusing on sports fans (Table 7.1).

However, as Table 7.2 demonstrates, there were also fan genres covered outside of the usual media/culture spectrum, including DIY (featured in a story in *The Sun*, “DIY Fan Killed by Washing Machine,” January 13, 2000), astrology (*The Guardian*, “Horoscopes are Serious Business These Days and Their Biggest Fans Are Female,” January 13, 2000) and crossword fandom (*Daily Mirror*, “Crossword Fan Gets Five Down to Safety,” January 28, 2000). These depictions of fandom are particularly valuable and thought-provoking, since they expand the current conceptions of what determines, and is approached as, a “fan” within academic research.

In terms of sources used within news stories, voices and opinions from sport figures received the highest amount of visibility across the coverage (Table 7.2). As Table 7.2 demonstrates, fans were featured over 20 percent of the time across sources, but this was still less than half of frequency of sports figures, who were regularly quoted in stories about match results and fan activities.

The themes within stories also deliver some striking findings, as evident in Table 7.3. The most predominant theme depicted fans as supportive, with sports fans in particular lending their encouragement through not only regularly attending games, but also chants, cheers, and songs, important elements of football fandom in particular: “the integral relationship between supporter and team demands, at least in theory, that fans must also do their part in the contest, which, disallowed as they are from entering the field of play, they largely manage through song” (Power 2011, 100). Abby Waysdorf also experienced this organized vocal element of football fandom, in that they were “making a difference at the game and could show off to the rest of the country—and the world—that we were real supporters, that we could hold our own with fans from countries with

Table 7.1 Genre of fandom across the January 2000 sample

Genre	Number	(%)
Sports	97	87.4
Music	6	5.4
Film	2	1.8
Games	2	1.8
Television	1	0.9
DIY	1	0.9
Horoscopes	1	0.9
Crossword	1	0.9
Total	111	100.0

Table 7.2 Top five sources used in stories within the 2000 sample

Source	Number	(%)
Sports person	112	54.1
Fan	44	21.3
Journalist/media	10	4.8
Other	10	4.8
Celebrity/public figure	6	2.9

Table 7.3 Top five themes across news coverage within the 2000 sample

Theme	Number	(%)
Fans as supportive	35	12.8
Fans unhappy with fan object	34	12.5
Male fans	19	7.0
Fans & activism/action	15	5.5
Fans as financial consumers	14	5.1

more storied traditions. By performing our fandom so flamboyantly, we could be respected” (2015). These performances then, are viewed as integral to many fans’ experience of the game, and were likewise visible in the news coverage, with one football team in particular aiming to encourage more engagement from fans:

HEARTS have become the first club in Scotland to launch a “singing section” in their ground. Jambos bosses feel there is a lack of atmosphere since Tynecastle was redeveloped into an all-seater stadium. So they have set aside a block of seats in the Roseburn Stand for fans who want to sing ... the club hope it will encourage supporters all round the ground to join in. (*The Sun*, “Fans on Song for Jambos,” January 28, 2010)

However, in close second place; fans were framed as being unhappy with the fan object, team or text, thereby indicating the complicated relations that can occur within fandom, and the pull of being supportive, but having to similarly negotiate discord and disappointment toward the fan object. Within sports fandom specifically, the support would often come from turning up at events and generally lending their vocal encouragement to favorite teams and players, especially if the team was playing abroad. Thus, whereas the chants and songs can be deemed as appearing supportive to a team or player, they could also be wielded in a negative fashion, to voice anger and displeasure.

Unhappiness with the object of fandom would also stem from the team losing or suffering from what is perceived as poor coaching or leadership. Football fans in particular are framed as being very vocal with their dissatisfaction with a team coach or player, sometimes resulting in an active campaign to remove the offending person. As a story in the *Daily Mirror*, “Fans Want Jones Out” (January 3, 2000), relates:

SOUTHAMPTON fans have began [*sic*] a campaign to remove manager Dave Jones after the team has wasted its good start to the season. The club’s top fanzine, *The Ugly Inside*, has fired the first shot. It said: “Accepting a mediocre position is one thing, but accepting grand old traditions being cast away on a wind of negative, fearful, tactical blundering is another. Saints must act now before it’s too late. We believe Jones has taken the club as far as he is capable.”

The story then includes a quote from Dave Jones in response to this, declaring that things could be put right: “The goals just seemed to dry up but we have managed to score in the last two games. I am disappointed the way the two matches went over Christmas but now we can put all that right against Bradford.” In this instance, the fans’ unhappiness with the fan object and their subsequent collective action result in the fan object having to answer and justify themselves to the fans, thereby further placing them as powerful individuals.

There was also an unhappiness demonstrated within music fandom—a concert by Barry Manilow where he had bronchitis and a broken toe yet continued to perform was covered in a *Daily Mail* article “Croaky Barry should have stayed away, say angry fans” (January 25, 2000) and featured responses from fans who expressed disappointment at the musician. In this article, we are repeatedly reminded how much these fans had paid and where they had traveled from to attend the concert: “‘He came on looking like death warmed up, and sounded like death warmed up. He didn’t sing, he croaked,’ said Mrs Hayes, from Crosby, Merseyside, who paid £64 for herself and a friend.” Manilow had apologized for his illness, stating, “I just did not want to cancel Manchester. You guys mean so much to me, it would take Mike Tyson to keep me away,” thereby justifying his appearance through commitment and loyalty to his fans. However, this article framed their responses as “angry,” demanding a better performance from their fan object due to the money they had invested in tickets and travel.

Overall, the notion of fans being represented as engaging in action and activism being the fourth most predominant theme across the coverage in January 2000 is striking, given the contemporary tendency to focus on the internet and social media in particular as delivering much strength for these activities. Although this may be true and these platforms have delivered many new possibilities for mobilization and organization, the results from January 2000 demonstrate that these practices were very much underway during this time period.

As Table 7.3 demonstrates, male fans were featured more than female fans, a notion which could have been dictated by the predominance of sport across the coverage. Fans are positioned here as having a sense of power—fans engaging in action and activism was the fourth most frequent theme, with fans as financial consumers being the fifth. Both of these themes have at their core a sense of fans’ important contribution to the financial landscape of the fan genre in question, and also how fans can take important action surrounding a belief or cause that is central to the fandom. Ultimately these results point to fans being powerful individuals *because of the support they can offer*, be it moral or financial. In this sense, support from fans is here a core element of sport that needs to be maintained. It also importantly demonstrates that if this support is lost, if the fans become unhappy, they can engage in collective efforts that, within the news landscape, often have to be answered to by the fan objects.

The terms used to describe fans were not very wide-ranging—the descriptive term “fan” was used most often, but they were also referred to as “supporters” on two occasions and in one news story an individual fan was termed as a “nut” and “superfan” (*The Sun*, “FAN DEL SEES 1,000 GAMES,” January 24, 2000).

January 2005

The representations of fans in January 2005 produced 134 stories in the sample. As Table 7.4 demonstrates, in terms of genre of fandom, as in the 2000 sample, sports again overwhelmingly dominated, followed by music. Holiday, celebrity, and fashion fandom were also mentioned once across the month, emphasizing the wide span of subjects that can be deemed as involving fandom. For example, as with the crossword fandom evident in 2000, holiday fandom is not a concept evident within fan studies, but, for some individuals, could be classed as a form of fan engagement (*The Sun*, “20 THINGS EVERY HOLIDAY FAN NEEDS TO KNOW,” January 13, 2005).

Table 7.4 Genre of fandom across the January 2005 sample

Genre	Number	(%)
Sports	111	82.8
Music	12	9.0
Television	3	2.2
Literature	3	2.2
Film	2	1.5
Holiday	1	0.7
Celebrity	1	0.7
Fashion	1	0.7
Total	134	100.0

Table 7.5 Top five sources used in stories within the 2005 sample

Source	Number	(%)
Sports person	120	58.3
Fan	46	22.3
Celebrity/public figure	9	4.4
Other	6	2.9
Law	4	1.9
Producer/Director	4	1.9

In terms of sources, the top two predominant sources in 2000 remained in 2005, with sports individuals maintaining their dominance, followed by fans. The appearance of journalists and media as sources declined to just three occurrences (from ten in 2000) and celebrity/public figures as sources slightly increased, as evident in Table 7.5.

The visibility of opinions and viewpoints from fans was again less than half of those of sports individuals, but the percentage of fans appearing as sources did increase slightly from 2000.

The themes of coverage did show some remarkable differences in the way that fans were portrayed. Whereas in 2000 the most predominant theme was fans as being supportive, this was replaced in 2005 with fans as unhappy with the fan object. An example of this is an incident where fans rejected a proposed involvement from investors in their team:

LEEDS fans have told Ken Bates – who is discussing investing £10m in the consortium which is bidding to take control of the club – they don't want him or his money at Elland Road. John Boocock, chairman of the Leeds United Supporters Trust, said: "He is not the right person for any club, let alone ours. He's an old man who should go away and play golf." (*Daily Mirror*, "Fans Blast Bates," January 12, 2005)

The introduction of a membership fee to the official website for the band U2 also prompted some fans to express disappointment and unhappiness toward their fan object:

OUTRAGED U2 fans have threatened to boycott the band's official website after being told they must pay to access it. It used to be a source of free news but now the site charges a \$ 40 ... premium for fans who want to watch live footage and rare interviews.

Life-long U2 fanatic Eamonn Finn said he has spoken to many others who are considering boycotting the site. He added: "I have followed U2 for more than 20 years and it's thanks to loyalty from people like me that they are so big.

Table 7.6 Top five themes across news coverage within the 2005 sample

Theme	Number	(%)
Fans unhappy with fan object	32	10.6
Fans as important	25	8.6
Male fans (inc. Trans)	21	7.0
Fans as supportive	21	7.0
Fans as out of control/disruptive	17	5.6

“Fans had a discussion on the net yesterday and most of us decided that it was not right for the official site to charge us for information that we should get for free.”

Superfan Eamonn said: “I don’t want a silly membership card, I want what most other bands’ fans get from the official sites – information about the group.” (*Daily Mirror*, “Anger as U2 Website Charges Fans,” January 19, 2005)

The describing of these fans as “OUTRAGED” also places a sense of power with them—they are more than unhappy; they are angry. The notion of collective power is also emphasized here, with one of the fans stating that he had been in touch with “many others” who could take action through boycotting the website, thus depicting the changes that technology began offering fans, who no longer needed to be in physical proximity to take collective action. In this sense, although fans can be portrayed as financial consumers, there needs to be a balance maintained surrounding that which is deemed should be supplied to fans for free. In addition, it is possible that the increased visibility of fans on the Internet in 2005, through their online discussions in forums, made their voices more visible to journalists and thus resulted in such an increase in representing fans as negative towards their fan object.

However, as Table 7.6 demonstrates, the second most frequent theme across coverage was the importance of fans. A story in *The Sun* from January 3, 2005 entitled “Fans To Swamp Borders” demonstrates the way that fans were perceived by some sports professionals as playing an important role within rugby and influencing the outcome of a game:

“The crowd were absolutely fantastic on Friday - and there is no doubt their upbeat attitude made a big difference to us.

“It was a tense and tight encounter but in the crucial last few minutes the fans gave us a dose of extra inspiration.”

A story from January 7, 2005 in the *Daily Mirror* entitled “Pardew Debt to Fans” showed similar sentiments surrounding the importance of fans, but most specifically in not letting them down after their football team losing: “West Ham boss Alan Pardew has vowed his side will be trying to repay their supporters when they face Norwich in the FA Cup tomorrow ... ‘We want to repay our fans for a deeply disappointing display. We want to put that right.’” *The Sun* on January 8, 2005 with “We’re Gunner Win for Fans” also contained a similar story focused on rugby, with Allan Jacobsen stating “Edinburgh MUST end their Heineken Cup hell today for the sake of their loyal band of fans ... I can assure our fans we will be just as determined because we owe them a win.” These types of representations of fans position these individuals at the core and driving force of events, with sports professionals being levered and influenced by their existence and satisfaction.

In 2005, male fans continued to have more coverage than female fans. Another noticeable difference was that the theme of fans being out of control appeared in the top five across the 2005

Table 7.7 Words used to describe fans (in addition to “fan”) across news coverage within the 2005 sample

Description	Number	(%)
Supporters	29	69.0
Yobs	3	7.1
Thugs	3	7.1
Superfan	2	4.8
Devotees	1	2.4
Morons	1	2.4
Hooligans	1	2.4
Neds	1	2.4
Admirers	1	2.4
Total	42	100.0

sample, appearing in 17 stories. Examples of this range from snooker fans warned by player Jimmy White to “hush” during games (*The Guardian*, January 6, 2005), *Da Vinci Code* fans facing bans from a Scottish church featured in the book, due to damage to its building and stone carvings (*Daily Mail*, January 10, 2005), and football fans being asked to stay away by Hull boss Peter Taylor due to their “jeers” at players:

Some are all too happy to boo. To do that to one of your own players, who is coming on to do an honest job, is disgusting. If that’s the way they want to support their team I would prefer them to stay away and go to the pub instead. (*The Sun*, January 17, 2005)

Although “supporters” was the most common term used besides “fan,” there was a wider span of words used to describe these individuals appearing in the 2005 sample, with a striking use of negative terms, such as “yobs,” “thugs,” “hooligans,” and “morons” (Table 7.7).

This landscape corresponds to Sandvoss’s observation that, in direct contrast to fans of music, television and film, “the portrayal of football fans in the media, especially the tabloid newspapers, has been more ambiguous, shifting between an emphasis on violent fans’ behaviour on the one hand, and active encouragement of fan practices and support for (national) teams on the other” (2003, 16). This shifting between polarities within representations of football fandom in British newspapers remains strongly evident within the sample analyzed. Overall, compared to 2000, the 2005 sample featured a landscape of representations of fans as more unhappy with the objective of fandom, as more important individuals, but also as potentially out of control in terms of their behavior.

January 2010

By 2010, the coverage on fans in the sample had increased significantly, which perhaps could have been attributed to the rise in visibility of fandom as a result of the growth and development of social media and the Internet. In tandem with the other years under study, the dominance of sports fandom across coverage predominated, with music fandom in second place, as evident in Table 7.8.

In a departure from previous years, fandom of particular colors, comedy, royalty, and technology arose in the sample, but on just one occasion each.

Table 7.8 Genres of fandom across the 2010 sample

Genre	Number	(%)
Sports	150	82.4
Music	16	8.8
Television	6	3.3
Film	2	1.1
Literature	2	1.1
Celebrity	2	1.1
Color	1	0.5
Comedy	1	0.5
Royalty	1	0.5
Technology	1	0.5
Total	182	100.0

Table 7.9 Top five sources across the 2010 sample

Source	Number	(%)
Sports person	136	56.0
Fan	43	17.7
Journalist/media	14	5.8
Celebrity/public figure	9	3.7
Business	9	3.7

In terms of sources, sports people and figures still dominated, with fans appearing the second highest. Strikingly, fan voices appeared at its lowest percentage across the years under analysis. This was surprising, since social media often points to more inclusivity in voices used in the media. In contrast, journalists/media and business owners or representatives were present more than in previous years (Table 7.9).

With regard to themes, fans being unhappy with the fan object maintained its dominance that was also evident in 2005. However, compared to 2005 and 2000, the theme of fans as important individuals now became more visible (Table 7.10). This sometimes occurred within sports fandom when a significant win was achieved, with fans thanked, or discursively placed as “deserving” the outcome, as evident in the following example that casts the team win as “for them”:

Simon Grayson, manager of Leeds United football team stated: “Our fans deserved this result, not because we have taken 9,000 to Old Trafford but because we have taken 4,000 to Bristol Rovers on a Tuesday night and every away allocation we have had. Our fans have backed us when sometimes they have not had to. They had excuses and they could have downed tools and decided football was an expensive business. So this is a result for them.” (*The Guardian*, “Football: Electric Leeds leave Ferguson in Shock: But Injury Time Awarded Was ‘Insult to Football’ Grayson Dedicates Famous Win to Long-suffering Fans”, January 4, 2010)

In this theme, fans also at times seemingly existed as an imagined audience, with football club owners, managers, and players placing their approval as a crucial and key factor in decisions:

GARY CAHILL would welcome the appointment of Owen Coyle as Bolton manager and, crucially, thinks the fans would, too. Gary Megson was sacked as Wanderers boss last week after a two-year spell in which he endured a fractious relationship with the club’s supporters. (*Daily Mail*, “COYLE CAN WIN FANS OVER, SAYS CAHILL,” January 4, 2010)

Table 7.10 Top five themes across the 2010 sample

Theme	Number	(%)
Fans unhappy with fan object	60	13.2
Male fans (inc trans)	40	8.8
Fans as important	35	7.7
Fans as supportive	29	6.4
Fans and activism/action	25	5.5
Fans as out of control/disruptive	25	5.5

This example is particularly striking as fans are constructed as individuals that need and require “winning over,” consequently placing them as a powerful entity.

Another noticeable difference in 2010 was male fans receiving twice as much press coverage than the previous two years. This year there was also more coverage devoted to fans engaging in action and activism, most strikingly through efforts of mobilization organized by fans themselves. This was evident through the use of online petitions in an effort to mobilize other fans surrounding the achievement of a specific aim:

ELVIS fan Malcolm King, of Glasgow, is celebrating his late idol’s 75th birthday with an online campaign to see his hit Just Pretend top next week’s UK charts. (*The Sun*, “ELVIS fan Malcolm King,” January 5, 2010).

A FACEBOOK petition to bring back hit BBC comedy Gavin & Stacey has been signed by 430,000 fans – in just three weeks. (*The Sun*, “FANS: GAV US A NEW SERIES,” January 25, 2010)

However, use of physical, non-online specific action was also strongly evident. Whereas the online campaigns focused on media fandom, offline campaigns, and initiatives were overwhelmingly situated within sports fandom. These often took place surrounding unhappiness towards the fan object, with fans “having enough” and subsequently taking action to contest club ownership:

PORTSMOUTH could anger their fans even more by naming just THREE subs for tomorrow’s relegation crunch with West Ham. That will enrage already disgruntled supporters, who staged protests before, during and after the game against the Black Cats about the way their hard-up club is being run ... More than 1,000 fans marched to Fratton Park. There they besieged the directors’ entrance and booed chief executive Peter Storrie as they handed him a petition calling for him and owner Ali Al-Faraj to leave the board. Pompey superfan John ‘Portsmouth FC; Westwood pleaded: “If anybody with money wants to invest in the club with the best fans in the Premier League we urge them to save us.” (*The Sun*, “CHIMES UP AS FANS PROTEST,” January 25, 2010)

Manchester United supporters fighting the Glazer family’s ownership of the club are contemplating asking Sir Alex Ferguson to make the ultimate sacrifice and resign in protest. The idea was put forward at a specially convened meeting of fans’ groups to determine an action plan to drive out the Glazers ... The fans’ meeting was followed by sustained anti-Glazer chanting at Old Trafford during the Burnley game and stewards confiscated a large banner that was briefly unfurled at the Stretford End and read: “Love United, hate the Glazers.” (*The Guardian*, “United Fans Will Ask Ferguson to Quit in Protest: Anti-Glazer Supporters in Letter-writing Campaign Demo Planned for Milan Champions League Game,” January 18, 2010)

Action and campaigning also took place anchored to the financial contribution from fans. This was communicated as fans “taking control” of the football club in their fandom, with their investments then delivering possibilities for them to replace the current owner and steer the fan object on to the path they desired:

NEWCASTLE fans have pledged more than £50 million to buy out owner Mike Ashley and take control of their club ... MirrorSport understands NUST have secured pledges from 2,000 fans who want to invest £25,000 each through their pension schemes, and 4,000 fans who say they will stump up at least £1,500 to buy a slice of the club off Ashley. (*Daily Mirror*, “£50M FANS BID TO BUY NEWCASTLE; FANS’ BID TO BUY UP TOON,” January 9, 2010)

Alternatively, financial investments from fans were positioned as being critical for the continuation and growth of a football club, allowing them to purchase vital new signings and deliver help and support to their fan object:

EDDIE MAY thanked Falkirk fans last night for digging deep to help finance his second signing in just three days ... May said: “The number of fans who have contributed to buying shares is remarkable. They have helped us get new players, put their hands in their own pockets and come up with a lot of money. Their support, added to the board’s work, has definitely helped us.” (*The Sun*, “FANS DIGGING DEEP,” January 15, 2010)

However, the notion of action and campaigning could often result in fans placed as out of control and a disruption (the joint fifth most prominent theme in 2010), with a letter published from a fan recounting how Manchester United fans were ejected from a match after holding banners against the owners:

It’s a standard response for a football manager, when asked about fans chanting for him to be sacked, to say the supporters are “entitled to their opinion”. Now, it seems, that is no longer the case. That Manchester United fans were ejected from the match at the weekend for unfurling anti-Glazer banners shows that supporters are entitled to an opinion just as long as it is one the club agrees with. This is a deeply worrying development which strikes at the heart of freedom of expression in this country. (*The Guardian*, “Fans Must Have Their Say,” January 20, 2010)

Football “hooliganism” was also apparent within this “out-of-control” theme, with fans being described as “intent” on creating disruption and violence:

MANCHESTER United fans seemingly intent on violence had golf balls, darts and other weapons taken from them as the dark spectre of football hooliganism returned to their Carling Cup meeting with neighbours City on Tuesday night ... Accounts from the Greater Manchester Police and from eyewitnesses revealed yesterday that there were skirmishes outside the stadium before and after the game, with rocks thrown across roads and bricks hurled through car windows. United fans also tried to break through police cordons guiding them to and from Eastlands to confront City followers, and there was one report of a man in his sixties being attacked without provocation near the stadium before kick-off. (*Daily Mail*, “Fans Armed with Golf balls and Darts, Stadium Seats and Toilets Trashed and the FA Probing Gary Neville’s Offensive Gesture to Carlos Tevez. The Ugly Truth Behind the Ferocious Battle of Manchester,” January 21, 2010)

In terms of words used to describe fans, “punters” made an appearance, as did “addict” and “follower.” Negative terms such as “idiots” and “troublemakers” also were introduced, but were not as prevalent as in 2005. However, as with the previous years, “supporters” was the predominant term used after “fan” (Table 7.11).

Table 7.11 Words used to describe fans (in addition to “fan”) across news coverage within the 2010 sample

Description	Number	(%)
Supporters	70	86.4
Idiots	4	4.9
Punters	3	3.7
Followers	2	2.5
Troublemakers	1	1.2
Addicts	1	1.2
Total	81	100.0

Overall, compared to 2000 and 2005, the 2010 sample featured fans constructed as similarly unhappy, but more as important individuals—a notion which could potentially be problematic for the object of fandom. This was also given further impetus by the stronger depiction of fans as taking action and activism. Male fans were featured more frequently in the news stories, but conversely, fans were given less of a voice overall in coverage, appearing as a source less often than previous years.

Discussion

Reflecting on the ten-year sample of analysis as a whole allows for a greater grasp of the breadth of coverage and trends within it. In terms of gender, as already outlined, male fans received a greater amount of coverage through the sample as the years progressed. Examining the trends of gender more closely across the sample as a whole allows for a more nuanced picture to emerge. In terms of gender and coverage, female fans appeared 27 times (25.2 percent), whereas male fans appeared 80 times (74.8 percent). Thus, male fans appeared more than twice the number that female fans did across the years under analysis, a finding that may have strong implications in how society defines and perceives fandom. Looking more specifically at the most frequent themes associated with gender also reveals much about cultural associations and constructions of gender. Male fans were most frequently associated with stories that (1) depicted them as unhappy with the fan object, followed by (2) with crime/committing a crime, whereas female fans were mostly depicted in terms of (1) fandom and older people, followed by (2) in connection with other male fans, young fans, or as financial consumers. Thus, in this sample, *male fans were portrayed with a stronger negative slant than female fans, who were presented as more dimensional, yet simultaneously more invisible and absent*. For, it is notable that only 20 of the 27 stories that depicted female fans featured them without male fans also being present, while 73 stories about male fans featured them only.

Examining the genre of fandom also raises significant patterns. Comparing sports and music/literature/TV/film fandom across the sample as a whole underlines some striking differences. While sports fans were represented in terms of being unhappy with the fan object as the most predominant theme (arising across 118 stories that featured sports fans), media fans were most often depicted in association with the theme “male fans,” appearing 11 times across the sample, followed by the themes female fans and fans as supportive, both appearing 10 times in total when music/literature/TV/film fans were discussed. Thus, there is a demarcation between media and sports fans within the coverage analyzed. Gray, Sandvoss, and

Harrington (2007) witnessed similar patterns when comparing these different genres of fandom in the press, arguing that:

While Harry Potter fandom, according to ... *The New York Post*, is infinitely geeky and fans the quintessential losers ..., we can rest assured that the editors of the *Post* would not like to see this description extended to their loyal, pinstripe-wearing readership of New York Yankees fans who are extensively catered to in its back pages. (4)

This demonstrates the polarity that often occurs between how different fan genres and texts are approached within the newspaper coverage—a prospect perhaps often dictated and bounded by readership, with sports pages being extremely popular and lucrative for some newspapers. Continuing these polarities, examining fandom genre and gender reveals that males were most frequently associated with sports fandom (84.8 percent), whereas females were most associated with “other” fandom (75 percent), such as crosswords and fashion. The divide between male and female coverage within sports fandom was sharply distinct—while males received 84.8 percent of sports coverage, females appeared in just 15.2 percent. This corresponds with Gosling’s lamentation that, despite the increased participation of females in sport and sports fandom, they “continue to be marginalized both in fan communities and academic research and literature on sport fans” (2007, 250; see also Crawford and Gosling 2004). Music/literature/TV/film fandom was more balanced (55 percent of males, versus 45 percent of females mentioned), but ‘other’ fandom also had a strong division, with 75 percent of coverage that mentioned gender featuring females, but only 25 percent mentioning males. Consequently, these results underline the male gender focus of sports fandom in the British press, with females confined to less distinct genres of fandom, or media fandom.

Conclusion

This study has examined how fans and fandom have been represented across British newspapers during a ten-year period. It has argued that sports fandom and male fans predominate coverage; fandom genre representations tend to be more expansive than found in fan studies scholarship; and that the newspaper coverage analyzed, and its depiction of sports fandom in particular, contest the idea of fans as always worshipping and adoring (as how fans have been framed in popular culture), offering more complex constructions of fans being unhappy, powerful, and active individuals. The study has shown that over the ten years under analysis, fans became depicted as more important individuals that are able to organize themselves into action.

These findings give rise to some key implications. Topics of fandom should be approached within academic research with greater breadth, encompassing genres that may be on the periphery, such as crosswords, fitness, and royalty. As Mel Stanfill (2013) has argued:

If representations of fans by non-fans in popular and news media have typically framed fandom as a practice of uncontrolled, socially unacceptable desire, scholarship has equally tended to understand fans as empowered through their fandom to have more control over their media experience, either by fighting the media industry or by being courted by it. What the two have in common is a tendency to consider fans as subjects with no history—both assume from the outset that these individuals or communities are already fully formed. (118)

I would argue that this tendency within fan studies scholarship to approach fans as “fully formed” could be partly contested through a re-examination of what we define as fans in terms of genre. More integration between media and sports fan studies scholars is thus also recommended. Sports fandom tells us much about the importance of fans and the power they can wield (Murrell and

Dietz 1992; Wann 1995; Reysen and Branscombe 2010), yet there is often a marked divide between media and sports fandom scholarship. Schimmel, Harrington, and Bielby discovered similar distinctions between sports and popular culture approaches to studying fans:

[R]esearch on sport fans remains isolated from research on other types of fans. Only recently have sport scholars begun to cite the growing body of literature on fans and fandoms of other genres, and while pop culture scholars acknowledge the importance of studying sport fans and sport texts, they seem largely unaware of the ways in which sport studies itself has conceptualized that significance. (2007, 593)

This present study underlines that this gap is also very much evident across fan studies scholarship today, with sports fandom being isolated from other approaches and studies of popular culture texts and activities.

The scant depiction of female fans across the months and years under analysis also deserves attention, and tells us much about how sports fans in particular are constructed, and the visibility of gender within fan representation. As outlined earlier, within this study male fans were mentioned 80 times, specifically in news articles across the entire sample and most often connected to sport, whereas female fans appeared just 27 times and most often in association with other, non-popular culture fandom, demonstrating the disparity. More research that examines how gender is portrayed within media representation of fans is thus required.

Finally, further studies that examine media coverage of fans in other countries (and especially those that are non-Western) could also be undertaken in order to examine how representations may or may not differ across different cultures.

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Chapter 8

Ethics in Fan Studies Research

Ruth A. Deller

In this chapter, I explore a range of issues relating to ethical practice in fan studies. I highlight some of the core areas for fan studies scholars to consider when embarking upon research and offer some potential approaches that have been adopted by different researchers. I draw on existing work on ethics in fan studies (e.g., Busse and Hellekson 2012; Freund and Fielding 2013; Whiteman 2012); the accounts of academics whose work has dealt with sensitive or “controversial” material; the guidelines and policies established by research networks and academic and professional institutions; and my own experiences both as an academic researcher and as a member of my faculty’s ethics committee (which approves research across a range of disciplines in the arts, engineering, math, and computing). I also discuss some of the ethical challenges researchers may encounter through a range of methodological approaches and contexts and at different stages of the research process.

While it is not possible within the confines of this chapter to discuss the intricacies of each potential research method within fan studies, we cannot entirely separate “ethics” from “methods.” Part of the process of conducting ethical research involves adopting the most appropriate research method for our particular project and respondents. For example, interviews with fans could be seen as giving fans more of a “voice” than observing and analyzing discussions in a forum. Conversely, forum discussions could be seen as more anonymous and less invasive than interviews. The most appropriate methods for our own research will depend on what we wish to discover, who we wish to talk to, what access we have to participants/environments, and several other contextual factors. As far as possible, the principles and questions outlined in this chapter pertain to as wide a range of contexts as possible (with the caveat that my own expertise is from a cultural studies, sociology, and communications background, and therefore may not cover all the eventualities of, say, psychological or criminological research), but it is worth remembering that each method comes with its own ethical challenges.

In this chapter, I am using the term “ethics” to encompass a series of moral (and sometimes legal) decisions involved in designing, conducting, and disseminating research. Such practices and decisions usually involve some consideration of “harm” or “benefit”—both of which can be defined in numerous ways, many of which I discuss in the chapter—pertaining to the researcher, their research participants, the audience for any findings and any other people, places, or things impacted by the work of the research.

Institutional and Organizational Parameters

As researchers, we often operate in contexts that are somewhat bureaucratic and sometimes highly regulated, particularly if we work for a large organization or university. In addition, the desire for research to be widely disseminated and accessible beyond the research community also brings with it a higher level of scrutiny. As Natasha Whiteman (2012) notes, “Researchers and students now need to be able to demonstrate and assert the legitimacy of their actions and ethical decision-making to a broader, more public audience than they would have in the past” (6). Most academic institutions, media organizations and professional/research networks have publicly viewable statements about their ethical approach, and it would be wise for fan studies scholars to familiarize themselves with these before conducting research.

For example, my own institution makes publicly available its detailed research policy, along with a list of FAQs and procedures, found at <https://www.shu.ac.uk/research/ethics-integrity-and-practice>. There is an expectation that all students and staff conducting research in the name of the university should abide by this policy. Anyone engaged as a research participant has the right to expect research conducted by members of our university to conform to these publicly available principles. If research is found to have been conducted without adherence to this policy or formal approval from one of our research committees, this can be grounds for a formal complaint to be made against the institution and the individual(s) concerned—something most institutions are, understandably, keen to avoid! It is vital, therefore, for all fan studies scholars to ascertain the way ethics approval operates in your own context.

Expecting researchers to operate within a particular ethical framework is not restricted to universities. Many professional organizations also adopt similar policies, and academic funding councils and research networks may have their own codes of conduct—these vary in specificity from general principles to detailed criteria. Therefore, a researcher operating as an independent scholar, who is not necessarily subject to the bureaucracy of an academic institution, may still find that there is an expectation on them to abide by the principles of other organizations or networks to which they belong. (See Appendix for links to some of the most useful for fan studies researchers.)

Ethics codes often include a range of different aspects of the research process, including gathering data, analyzing and disseminating results, health and safety, copyright, and academic honesty. Policies created by organizations and institutions are designed to cover as many eventualities as possible and are largely interdisciplinary in nature. Therefore, they can be something of a blunt instrument and not always tailored to meet the specific needs of individual researchers, so it is important to consider how best to situate our work within these frameworks, and identify any more complicated issues so that these can be addressed.

Organizations differ in the mechanisms they use for ethical approval, but it is common for research to undergo a process of approval by an ethics committee, IRB (institutional review board), or similar. These boards are usually comprised of other staff in the institution—possibly from a range of disciplines, who are tasked with ensuring all research falls within the boundaries established by institutional policies. Although the nature of these committees will vary from institution to institution, I will briefly discuss how this process operates in my own university. For many researchers, it may not be clear what happens in between submitting a research proposal and receiving the verdict from the committee, so I hope this will shed some light on the operation (see Appendix).

We expect all researchers to conduct an initial ethics form outlining first of all if their work includes “human or animal subjects.” With work that does not include human (or animal) subjects (e.g., text-based research), there are usually fewer ethical implications, but I will cover some of the potential areas to consider in this type of research later in the chapter. When work does

involve human subjects,¹ we ask for a discussion of issues including consent, anonymity, sampling, potential benefits and risks of the research for researcher(s) and participants, health and safety, and the right to withdraw. We ask for supporting paperwork (e.g., consent forms, sample surveys, participant information sheets) to demonstrate that the researcher has a clear and appropriate plan—and to ensure the research has also gained approval from any partner organizations who have their own ethical processes (e.g., educational authorities, health services). Not all research committees will ask for such thorough documentation, but others may ask for more.

After we have gone through and discussed each case, we decide on any recommendations or conditions for approval and inform the researcher. Sometimes projects come to the committee for consideration more than once, if they were lacking in detail, so it is advisable for anyone planning research to think through as many eventualities as possible—thorough and considered proposals are far more likely to receive ethical approval. There are also occasions where a process of dialogue and negotiation occurs between the researcher and members of the committee—sometimes via email or in-person correspondence, or sometimes with the researcher attending a committee meeting to discuss their case—this is usually in situations where the research is unusual, novel or complex, such as work with children and young people.

Even though this process feels quite daunting, the job of an ethics committee or IRB is to *facilitate*, rather than prevent, research. Sometimes researchers shy away from studying areas that seem “tricky” because they are worried they may not get approval. However, if the research has a clear and worthwhile, agenda, and ethical issues have been well considered, it would be more likely to be approved than work in a seemingly less complicated context without sufficient ethical consideration.

Another area for fan studies researchers to consider is their responsibility to those junior to them as colleagues or students. In my own institution, as both a doctoral supervisor and a taught module leader, I am responsible for the ethics and health and safety of my students. While the student has a responsibility to ensure the ethics of their project, I have to advise and oversee their process. Therefore, not only do I need to consider the ethical dimensions of my own research, I need to ensure those I supervise are approaching their work in an ethical manner. With junior colleagues, more experienced research staff are expected to provide leadership, mentoring, and guidance, including offering training and advice around the ethics of their research, teaching, and professional practice.

In addition to the ethical frameworks provided in professional and academic contexts, it is worth remembering that many fan communities have their own ethical stances. These can cover a whole range of issues pertaining to how users interact with one another, including: bullying and harassment, intellectual property and copyright, inclusivity, use of trigger or content warnings, recirculation of fan works, privacy, spoilers, and much more. Online communities often have terms of use and “rules” for appropriate behavior, and even if these are not formally enforced or communicated, there may well be an etiquette to how the community is used that members are expected to learn (see Massanari 2012; Deller 2015). Offline communities, likewise, may have particular ethical approaches, whether enforced formally (e.g., through written terms and conditions for attending a conference, or signs posted at a venue) or informally through behavioral norms. Therefore, as I will discuss, when operating within these communities and contexts, we should be mindful of their expectations and cultures.

Establishing Your Research: Common Ethical Considerations

Before conducting research, it is essential to determine the value, or worth, of the proposed project. What is gained from this research that is new, worthwhile and interesting? Why is it important to conduct this research, in this context, in this manner? Researchers should consider carefully the

aims of the project, the methodological approach that is most suitable, and the context for the research—and have a clear justification for all of these—and how and where the findings of the research will be disseminated. Research ethics should not only cover the design and conduct of research, but also the distribution and outcomes—the implications of how the findings are communicated are as significant as the process of conducting research itself (if not more so).

One of the key principles in most ethics policies is the principle of “beneficence”—the notion that research should have some sort of “benefit,” whether that is for the researcher, the researched, the organization, or for a body of knowledge/literature (or a combination of these!). It is worth remembering that just because we *can* research something does not mean we *should*—which is often connected to a second key principle found in most research policies: that research should “do no harm.” “Harm” could come to a range of agents, including: the individuals or communities being researched, the researchers themselves, the researchers’ institution/organization, the broader community,² or contacts of those being researched, media producers, public figures and even physical objects (e.g., property, the environment, artifacts). The nature of “harm” can be construed in many ways, although the most common include: physical, psychological, emotional, financial, damage to reputation, damage to property, contravening copyright or intellectual property rights, invasion of privacy, and (possibly) offense.

It is also worth noting that context plays an enormous role in the way “benefits” and “harms” are conceived of. Disciplines differ in approach and emphasis, as do institutions. National contexts also vary. For example, Annette Markham (2012) discusses the “utilitarian” approach to ethics, common in the USA, whereby harm tends to be assessed in terms of risks/benefits, and if benefits significantly outweigh risks, then this may be seen as viable (3). In contrast, other countries—including many European countries—may take a “deontological” approach whereby human rights such as privacy, self-determination, and informed consent trump any potential benefits (see Ess and AOIR Working Committee 2002).

Another common principle is the notion of “informed consent.” This means participants not only agree to be included in the research but have been informed of what the research will involve, how their contribution will be used, where the research will be disseminated and any potential benefits and harms of taking part in research.

Obtaining consent can be a straightforward process, such as giving participants an information sheet or briefing and asking them to complete a consent/release form, or providing a short statement of information/consent at the start of a survey. It is usually advisable to ask participants to consent not only to being researched, but to being named or anonymous (see later in this chapter) and to their contributions being used in “outputs” such as publications, blog posts, presentations, research reports, or media texts. However, consent is not always as straightforward as this—and many areas of research, including working with children and young people, researching the dead, researching online, and some forms of ethnographic research, complicate matters. I will look at each of these issues later in the chapter.

Another key principle of many research ethics policies is the “right to withdraw.” Participants should be aware of what rights—if any—they have to withdraw their contribution, the mechanisms for doing this, and any cut-off date after which withdrawal is not possible. Sometimes it may not be possible to withdraw at all (for example, anonymous surveys, once submitted, may be hard to discount)—but it is advisable to let participants know this. Offering the right to withdraw may seem cautious, but it means that if participants “let slip” something in the moment that they later regret, or if their personal circumstances change between the moment of participation and the moment of publication, they can opt out. Although this can be frustrating for the researcher, it offers extra safeguarding for participants.

I once interviewed a high-profile media professional. At the time of our meeting, they were experiencing difficulties in work, which had a bearing on the way they answered some

questions. This particular interviewee had requested I send them the extracts from the interview that I was intending to include before publication (i.e. just their words, not my own). I agreed to do this, as, due to the visibility of this person's role, they were being named in the study and they were concerned about the implications for their professional standing. When reading the comments back, they asked me to remove a few points that signified dissatisfaction with their employer as they were now in a different role and did not want those comments going on publicly available record with their name attached to them. The difference this made to my study was minimal—the deleted comments were not crucial to my discussion. It was more important to me to maintain a good relationship with this respondent and protect their employment prospects than to have a few extra juicy tidbits for my project. Had the discussion been essential to the argument of the thesis, I would have sought advice from my ethics committee about how to proceed—one possible solution might have been to find a way to anonymize their contribution, or to try and negotiate a compromise with the interviewee to retain the most important parts of their contribution without “harming” their professional standing—for example, choosing alternative phrasing for their comments, providing a caveat or updated statement—or a similar approach.

I do not usually offer respondents the opportunity to give approval in this way, as they always know that their answers are “on the record” at the time of gathering the data. However, if they specifically *ask* for this approval *and if it is practical to do so*, I am happy to oblige, particularly where they are named and their comments could therefore have implications for them. My perspective is that research is a process of co-creation between the researcher(s) and participant(s) and so both parties should, where possible, be comfortable and have some level of agency.

The final core principle most research policies identify is the “right to anonymity.” Note that the idea of a “right to” anonymity is not the same thing as ensuring all participants are anonymous. For example, the American Sociological Association (ASA)'s code of ethics states:

Sociologists do not disclose in their writings, lectures, or other public media confidential, personally identifiable information concerning their research participants, students, individual or organizational clients, or other recipients of their service which is obtained during the course of their work, unless consent from individuals or their legal representatives has been obtained. (ASA 1999, 13)

The issue of consent is crucial here—it is possible to name people, if they agree and are informed of likely consequences. However, in most cases, it is likely that anonymity is a sensible precaution for avoiding “harm” being done to participants. Identifying individuals comes with a number of risks, and even if they do not mind being identified at the time of study, it is possible that they may regret that in future years. For example, I examined a PhD student whose thesis dealt with contentious political issues in a country undergoing social upheaval. He had named his sources who, he said, were proud to stand up for their beliefs. However, crucially, he had not informed these sources about the fact that his thesis would be publicly available online and the examining team felt that the potential risks to these sources were significant enough that, coupled with the lack of information given, there was not sufficient reason for naming them.

There can be justifiable reasons for naming sources—as long as they are aware of the implications of the research and if these implications are unlikely to be life-threatening. Indeed, sometimes there is little point anonymizing them—high profile professionals, for example, may be impossible to disguise, or it may dilute the importance of the work to do so. At other times, people may want to see their name connected with the research, in situations involving “research participants wishing to be acknowledged in published research thus enabling them to retain ownership of their stories” (Grinyer 2002, 1).

One approach to anonymity is to use pseudonyms. These are attractive to researchers, participants and readers alike, as they ascribe more personality and a stronger identity than categories like “Reader 1,” “Respondent 534,” “Female 18,” etc., as well clearly distinguishing between respondents. However, the process of assigning pseudonyms is not “neutral” but comes with a set of challenges. Lahman et al. (2015) identify a range of concerns about their use:

Researchers have the power to strip a name to a number (Subject: 1), acronym (Subject: AC12), seemingly disloyal person (Informant 1), or joke (Curly Locks). Other than large or experimental data sets where researchers cannot or do not consider research relational, this type of naming process reflects at best thoughtlessness on the part of the researcher and at worse an abuse of power ... In relational research, as the researcher knows the identity of the participants, what is at stake is the level at which the research is confidential and what expectations the participant may have for confidentiality or desire for recognition. (449–450)

When the researcher chooses a pseudonym, there can also be unforeseen consequences, e.g., giving the respondent a name they associate with something negative; names with particular ethnic origins may either highlight a participant’s ethnicity and thus “out” them, or be assigned inappropriately and thus “change” someone’s ethnic identity. One answer could be to allow respondents to choose their own pseudonyms—yet this is also problematic. If they use a pseudonym they are known for online or socially, they may not be sufficiently anonymized. They could also choose a pseudonym that is the name or alias of someone else, which brings further problems.

In research outputs, creating a version of the respondent that they can recognize as themselves while others cannot is seen by many researchers as an ideal, although Grinyer notes this can still be a thorny issue when it comes to legal ordinances, such as the Right to be Forgotten, or the UK’s (1998) Data Protection Act, if such data can still “be reconstructed to identify the individual”:

The fundamental principle of the Act is the protection of the rights of individuals in respect of personal data held about them by data controllers—including academic researchers ... Once data have been completely anonymised and can never be reconstructed to identify the individual, they no longer constitute personal data and so are exempt from the Act. (Grinyer 2002, 1)

In fan studies there is an extra dimension to consider with anonymity, which is that, often, fans are recognizable to one another, particularly if several fans from the same community have participated. It can be nice for fans to recognize, and be recognized by, their contemporaries, giving a self-esteem boost and sense of kudos. Conversely, it could set up conflicts between fans whose contributions were used and those who were not included. More pertinently, it could cause tensions if the things some fans have said are not well received by others, such as the tensions in the One Direction fan community about which fans were featured in documentary *Crazy About One Direction*, discussed later in the chapter.

It is worth noting here that, in some professional contexts (e.g., investigative journalism), anonymity is only granted in exceptional circumstances and the norm is to name sources (see Lahman et al. 2015), so for fan researchers working in media production, there may be an extra tension here depending on the conventions of the media being produced. However, the potential “harm” caused by naming subjects in journalistic research or other forms of media can also be significant (see Ronson 2015).

None of these issues have an easy “answer”—in my own research, I have used pretty much every possible method of referring to participants. As with most ethical issues, it is a matter of context, and that context needs to take into account all the potential audiences for your research

and the long-term implications of it, as well as ensuring all participants have enough information to consent—including information about their anonymity or otherwise in the research outputs.

Unfortunately, being bound to the ethical and regulatory frameworks of institutions and organizations may mean that certain types of research are not possible. The reality is that there can be consequences if we do not abide by these parameters and it is necessary to acknowledge this. This may mean we have to let go of ideas—or look for alternative approaches. If the research is vital, we may want to look for ways of strengthening our case or questioning the restriction—but it is worth being honest: would the world be in any way a worse place if the research was not conducted, or was conducted in a different way? Does the potential importance of our work mean that there is a strong case for challenging the parameters set for us by institutions and organizations?

The Fan Researcher and the Fan Community

As researchers, understanding our own position in relation to our work is important. It is not necessarily the case that to be “ethical,” research must be “neutral” or fully “objective.” Indeed, research is rarely, if ever, neutral—we bring our own identities, expertise (or lack of), experiences, feelings, and agendas to any project and these have a bearing on the way we design research even before we come to conducting and analyzing it.

Fan studies is an area in which reflexivity and self-awareness has long been part of the research culture, with the notion of the “aca-fan” being a core part of its canon. This does not mean anyone researching fandom has to be a fan themselves, just as it does not mean people have to *not* be fans (see Hills 2002; Bury 2005; Busse and Hellekson 2012; Evans and Stasi 2014). It simply means that we need to be aware of, and open about, our own position in relation to our research—not just in the presentation of our research findings and analysis, but in our relationship with those we are researching. This is not only true of our relationship to fandom, of course, but to our identity—recognizing how identity markers shape both our own and our participants’ relationships to fandom, to research, and to one another.

Within many fandoms, a particular area of sensitivity is the way fans have often been stigmatized (see Jensen 1992; Hills 2002). Indeed, fan studies has often arisen from a desire to change the perceptions of fans—the prominence of the “aca-fan” was driven largely by the agenda to de-stigmatize fans, and get away from the idea of fans as an “other” (Jenkins 2011). Despite this, negative and problematic portrayals of fans still exist (see Bennett and Booth 2016) and several fan communities still feel sensitive about this. In addition, there is the possibility that academic research can belittle, stigmatize, or take advantage of fans in different ways, and several fan communities feel “exploited” or “used” by researchers (Musiani 2011).

Therefore, fans may be, understandably, wary of researchers. As Evans and Stasi note: “in fan communities themselves, ‘academic’ positions have often been heavily managed and policed” (2014, 11) and therefore there may be issues of access or disclosure where some things are hidden from us, or where fans reject our presence entirely. For example, Dianna Fielding notes that she had to prove her credentials as a fan and author before some respondents would speak to her: “Many authors asked me to provide my online alias before they would agree to be interviewed. One individual, after signing the consent form and logging on to begin our interview asked that I show I was a fanfiction author before we continued” (Freund and Fielding 2013, 333–334).

Even for self-identified “aca-fans” who may be part of the community they are studying, there can be tensions. Fielding notes that some of the fans she researched interacted differently with her, and were more guarded, when she was in “researcher” mode than when she was in “fan mode,” despite them knowing her “aca-fan” identity (333). This kind of mode-switching can pose

a dilemma for fan scholars, balancing the desire for an “authentic” representation of fan activity (“fan” mode) with the desire to operate within the established ethical parameters of a study (“researcher” mode):

I found two main difficulties with this dual-role ... If the researcher praises or disparages a work of fanfiction openly, they may unintentionally lead the participant to respond in a way they otherwise would not. Second, many of these authors seemed to feel reserved when I was in “researcher-mode.” This was emphasized when, after I had told them I had asked my final question, many would engage me in casual conversation and speak (or write) in a tone very different from the way they had been presenting themselves previously. (333–334)

A common approach within fan studies, due to the aca-fan identity, is autoethnography. While at first, this may seem to pose fewer ethical complications than researching other people, not only do we have a duty of care to ourselves (see later in the chapter), we cannot divorce ourselves from the social and relational contexts we belong to:

When we write about ourselves, we also write about others. In so doing, we run the risk that other characters may become increasingly recognizable to our readers, though they may not have consented to being portrayed in ways that would reveal their identity; or, if they did consent, they might not understand exactly to what they had consented. (Ellis 2007, 14)

Alongside issues of consent or anonymity, we should also consider the distribution of our research. There are advantages to keeping research within the walls of academia in conferences or publishing in closed access journals or prohibitively expensive books from academic publishers: here, our research is unlikely to reach a wider/public audience and therefore our sources’ identities are somewhat protected. Academic publishing also contributes to the kind of kudos institutions often seek. However, we may want to consider whether or not we have a duty to enable those we are researching to see the outputs they have contributed to, whether that is through publishing in open access environments, blogging or writing articles for more accessible sources, uploading work to sites such as academia.edu or Researchgate (although we run the risk here of falling foul of publishers’ copyright), or finding other ways to communicate with our fan audience.

A further area to consider is the way we record fan contributions in our work. As Annette Markham notes (2003, 60–61), practices such as correcting respondents’ spelling and grammar have ethical implications in the way that they transform the original communication. However, this is not always as simple as assuming the most appropriate approach is to record everything as originally communicated. She notes that, for example, grammatical errors may come from people whose grasp of language is normally correct, but they may be typing in a hurry or on a device (such as a mobile phone) that makes it difficult to communicate accurately. People in this situation may well expect the researcher to correct their spelling and grammar for the final publication.

One final area to consider when thinking about positionality is the extent to which we disclose our presence and intentions. The merits of covert research versus overt research are well debated within fields such as anthropology and sociology. And defining “covert” is somewhat problematic—if, for example, you wish to study a forum that requires a login, by virtue of logging in, do you cease to be covert? When working in fan studies, ethnography and “netnography” are considered useful approaches due to their emphasis on the practices of groups and environments. Given that, as we have discussed, the presence of a researcher can influence the way participants behave, it can be tempting to think that covert ethnographic research might produce more “honest”

accounts of how fan communities work, offering insight that would not be possible with overt research. However, I advise proceeding with caution if you wish to conduct covert research—and having a strong justification for why it is necessary—usually identifying significant benefits that will outweigh any potential harms.

Given fans have frequently been depicted negatively or treated as curiosities, particularly when they are unable to speak back, conducting covert research risks further upsetting fans and denying them agency. Researchers often have a privileged platform (e.g., in the media, academic publications, or other professional contexts) and therefore our words are likely to both have a wider audience and be considered to carry “weight” by virtue of our status—a status and privilege not afforded to the majority of fans. Not only that, but covert research risks contravening the terms of use of a site (if conducted online) or the ethics policies of the researcher’s own organization. Debates about covert and overt research are often connected with debates around the “private” vs the “public,” which I will now turn to.

Public, Private, and Bounded Research Contexts

One of the trickiest areas to negotiate within fan studies research—indeed within research in general—is the distinction between “public” and “private.” We have already seen how fans may communicate differently with a researcher in “research” mode as opposed to “fan” mode. In such instances, fans are creating boundaries around themselves when in the mode of “research subject” and therefore researchers have to consider issues such as authenticity and disclosure in choosing how to represent them.

There can also be formal and informal boundaries within fan communities and negotiating these can be complicated. When treating all fan communication, particularly when it is easily accessible online, as public and “fair game,” researchers run the risk of reproducing negative representations of fandom. For example, journalist Caitlin Moran infamously used quotes she had found in *Sherlock* fanfiction to embarrass the stars at a BFI event. In doing so, she was accused of shaming fan practices, particularly as she had not obtained consent from the fans to recirculate their work in this context (see Lam 2014; Larsen 2014; Booth 2015).

Deciding which fan practices to include and exclude has its own ethical dilemmas. Henry Jenkins (2013) notes that “fans have had to resist pressures that would shut down their reading of texts—pressures towards heteronormativity in their own everyday lives and in the public response to their interpretive and creative practices” (xxxii) and when he wrote *Textual Poachers* (1992), “some forms of slash were fandom’s ‘dirty little secret’ and I was asked not to write about real person slash” (Jenkins 2013, xxxiii) for fear of this “shutting down.” These tensions are still present for fan researchers today as we try to balance representing the diversity of fan voices and practices while being conscious of the sensitivities of fans whose interpretations and actions are often questioned or even silenced. This silencing can occur within fan communities themselves, as fans enact forms of boundary policing and “shaming” about what is and is not acceptable practice—meaning the voices of certain fans, often those who are young, female and/or queer, become marginalized even within fandoms (see Musiani 2011; Busse 2013; Deller 2015).

Documentary-maker and academic Daisy Asquith encountered the difficulties that come from attempting to represent the diversity of fan activities. Her Channel 4 documentary, *Crazy About One Direction* (2013), was accused of replicating pathologizing discourses about fans (Jones 2016b; Proctor 2016), yet Asquith states this was not her intention. Drawing on the principles already outlined in this chapter of informed consent and of documentary, she wanted to make her documentary inclusive, not exploitative: “If my filming of *Directioners* was to be ethical, it was necessary that I try to make the film in the language of the fans so that they became active collaborators

rather than defensive subjects” (Asquith 2016, 82–83). Yet, she notes, media products such as documentaries are not purely defined by the researcher and participants—a number of other parties are involved in the final edit and in the case of her documentary, third parties changed the title of the documentary from *I Heart One Direction* to the more obviously controversial *Crazy About ...* Even more problematic was the focus in the documentary (as in other media coverage of this fandom) on “Larry shippers” (those who pair band members Harry Styles and Louis Tomlinson). Her emphasis on “Larry” troubled fans for several reasons, the first being that some fans were uncomfortable being associated with that subsection of fandom. For these fans, the shippers did not speak for them, reinforcing the idea that real person slash remains an area of discomfort within fandoms (Busse 2013 Jenkins 2013). For the shippers themselves, this outing caused hurt and prompted the circulation of the #riplarryshippers Twitter tag after the broadcast. This, initially, seemed to contain posts mourning that it was no longer okay to “ship” the pairing, but quickly became an urban myth about shippers committing suicide due to the representation of them (see Asquith 2016). Fan anger also centered on the perception that, in reproducing fan works within the documentary, Asquith had infiltrated a private space, albeit one where privacy was not formally enforced through techniques such as passwords:

Although all the fan art I included was cleared with individual artists, the fandom assumed they must have been stolen. They consider Tumblr to be an almost sacred space, in which the Larry fandom can be private, and this false sense of obscurity may have prevailed for a few years because outsiders did not know what to look for. (87)

Asquith argues that online material in spaces such as Tumblr is easily accessible by all and for fans to consider it private suggests naiveté on their part. However, this highlights just one example of the ethical challenges when working with online spaces and communities.

Trying to come up with a fixed set of guidelines for online research is inherently problematic, as it depends on so many factors. As Annette Markham notes: “When I read or listen to the ongoing struggle to find ethical guidelines for Internet research (AOIR 2002), I cannot help but think that the struggle will not end, because solutions cannot be standardised and disciplined. (2003, 52).

However, there are some guidelines that fan researchers may find useful in negotiating this tricky area. The most well-known and widely adopted are, arguably, the ethical guidelines devised by the Association of Internet Researchers (AOIR) (Ess and AOIR 2002; Markham and Buchanan 2012). These guidelines do not claim to cover every eventuality, but act, instead, as guiding principles. The guidelines provide an extensive series of questions for researchers to ask about their own work:

We also advocate a casuistic, or case based approach, which attends to the specific needs of each case. Rather than prescribing a set of approved practices, we have deliberately chosen to suggest a characteristic range of questions that should be asked by Internet researchers as well as those responsible for oversight of such research. (Markham and Buchanan 2012, 12)

One school of thought would argue that if the material is publicly visible and accessible, we are free to do as we wish with it. However, there are a number of problems with the assumption that anything that is public is “fair game”—and important within this is to understand how privacy is conceived of in the minds of users. One helpful way of thinking about this is the assertion set out in the AOIR 2012 guidelines: “Privacy is a concept that must include a consideration of expectations and consensus. Social, academic, or regulatory delineations of public and private as a clearly recognizable binary no longer holds in everyday practice” (Markham and Buchanan 2012, 7).

We could argue that, by posting online, people have put their words, art, ideas, and presence in a space where they can be seen/heard. However, they have usually done so understanding the nature of that particular space and the audience for it. They have not necessarily posted with the intention that their content would be analyzed by researchers and re-published, often in a modified and decontextualized form—in articles, media products, conference presentations, or other outputs. The issue here is not necessarily one of how “public” or “visible” something is, but of *consent*. Consenting to the use of a forum or social media platform does not automatically equal consent for their content to be repurposed by an unseen third-party who does not inform them.

The use of third-party material is often regulated through terms and conditions of websites, publishers, and organizations. For example, Fanfiction.net is one site which, in its terms of service, forbids reproduction of work from the site, including fiction extracts, without express permission from the site itself (<https://www.fanfiction.net/tos/>). Other sites ask that users give permission before any material is quoted. *Transformative Works and Cultures*' guidelines discuss what they *require* and what they *recommend* or *prefer*:

TWC ... is committed to the free expression of ideas, particularly in the context of scholarly activity about derivative fan artworks. Therefore, we do not require the consent, explicit or implicit, of the original author of a transformative work under discussion, such as a piece of fan fiction or a vid. All citation URLs to such texts need only be open to the public ... TWC strongly recommends that permission be obtained from the creator for any fan work or blog post cited in a submitted article. When citing fan blog sites such as LiveJournal or Dreamwidth, only unlocked posts may be used. TWC prefers that the direct URL to a page not be provided ... This provides correct sourcing information while permitting fans a modicum of privacy. (Hellekson and Busse 2009)

However, as we have seen with the Larry shippers, consent is not necessarily just about the creators of works, as there may be consequences for the other members of the fan community. Even where fans *are* engaged in processes of consent, it is important to understand how they perceive this and ensure they are correctly “informed”:

An issue that was of some concern was that my participants were happy to give consent for interviews and “friended” me on various social media sites, but did not realise the extent of their personal information that I had access to once they did so ... one participant remarked, “When we write on LiveJournal, we write for ourselves and for each other in an assumed private environment.”... In this case, while the community was acting in the public view much of the time, they were not under the “reasonable expectation” that a researcher would (or could) be observing them. (Freund and Fielding 2013, 332)

Even in anonymous sites and communities, there can be issues of consent. In 2015, I researched the “SimSecret” LiveJournal site. As all posts and most comments are anonymous, seeking permission to quote or reproduce work proved impossible. However, when the community discovered I was conducting this research, a thread of (mostly anonymous) comments sprang up about the project and I was able to engage in dialogue with members that informed the finished article by providing their account of how the community operated rather than solely relying on my own interpretation. I asked users for permission to quote them—although I had to take on trust that those who consented were the same users I was quoting, as it was impossible to prove this. This experience taught me that, even in seemingly impenetrable or anonymous environments, there can be opportunity for fan participation in the research and for obtaining consent.

A further complication with online research, as Natasha Whiteman discovered during her own research into online fan communities (2012, 47–48), is that it is always subject to change. At any

given moment content can be modified or deleted, sites and apps can change their terms of use, previously open forums can become password-protected, or previously public profiles can become private. Therefore, during a research project, there may come a point when the researcher needs to reconsider their ethical stance in the light of such changes.

Consent is not the only issue to consider when citing or analyzing fan works in our research, and there are risks associated with attribution of fan works to their authors. As several authors (e.g., Jenkins 2006; Tushnet 2007; Wille 2015) have noted, when fan works potentially infringe copyright by their repurposing of media content, this can have consequences. The more visible the fan works, the stronger the likelihood of their existence being noticed by media corporations—and their lawyers. In many cases, producers either “turn a blind eye” to, or actively encourage, fan works—sometimes to the extent that they re-appropriate these works or make them “official,” although while some fans may receive credit or payment, others’ labor could be seen as exploited (see Lothian 2011). However, we cannot guarantee this response. This is one of the reasons why I would generally encourage gaining consent from fan creators to use their works—*informed* consent that details how and where the research will be disseminated—rather than simply assuming attribution is sufficient. Furthermore, it may be prudent in some situations to protect the fan creator through use of pseudonyms or by not reproducing and recirculating their creations in our work.

Even without the issues of copyright and ownership pertaining to “official” vs “fan” sources, there are other concerns about the propriety of fan works within fan communities. For example, professionalization of fan content, particularly if that is then removed from the community (as in the case of EL James’s fanfiction) is a contested area within many fandoms (Jones 2014; Stanfill 2013). Who “owns” material is therefore a murky and complicated arena in which we might want to tread carefully.

Research in Controversial and Complicated Contexts

In this section, I explore some of the more challenging aspects of research in fan studies, including research with “vulnerable” or “complicated” subjects, such as young people and the dead.³ I also interview two fan scholars about their work in “taboo” areas of fandom.

In researching fandoms, we will probably encounter inter-fandom tensions of one sort or another. Tensions may spring up from debates about the fan object; they may arise due to differences in opinion on political or social issues; they may emerge as some fans show discomfort with the way others express their fandom (Osborne 2012; Busse 2013; Asquith 2016); and they may lead to splits in communities, bullying, harassment, or other potentially negative consequences.

The affective nature of fandom means that it intersects with a number of potentially sensitive areas, including mental and physical health, grief, trauma, sexuality, identity, and belief (Fathallah 2011; Osborne 2012). As researchers we not only have to consider these issues in terms of how we approach and treat our respondents, but we may also feel a duty to advocate for fandom as a safe(r) space for people in difficult situations. Indeed, many fans often want there to be an acknowledgment of the role fandom and fan objects have played in supporting or uplifting them through different circumstances. Therefore, while we may not wish to recirculate old myths that pathologize fandom or treat people with, for example, disabilities or LGBTQ+ identities as curiosities, we may still feel it important to highlight the connections between identity, well-being and fandom. Indeed, to ignore or downplay the importance of fandom in people’s lives may, in itself, be ethically problematic. This means processes of consent and anonymity become even more important if we are to empower or “protect” those often perceived as “vulnerable” and allow them

to benefit from our research. Of course, the notion of “vulnerability” is one that is highly contestable—but nevertheless, it is the kind of language adopted in most policies and guidelines.

One of the groups usually identified as “vulnerable” in ethics policies, and one of the most challenging areas of research to negotiate ethically, is working with minors. *TWC*’s guidelines, for instance urge caution in this area: “Authors must be particularly wary of including informants who are minors because of the inherent problems in obtaining consent from guardians, particularly in online contexts” (Hellekson and Busse 2009).

There can be good arguments for excluding young people from research. By doing so, we avoid extra complications such as obtaining consent from parents/guardians or operating in environments where we need some form of official “disclosure” or “clearance” (e.g., Criminal Records Bureau checks) from before proceeding.

At the same time, children and teenagers are often those whose voices are marginalized in many societies, and we may feel we have a duty to give them a voice. Fandom has a significant place in the lives of many young people, and there is a strong chance we will encounter young people in our work and want to give them the opportunity to speak. Indeed, the ethics of conducting research in fan communities without involving young people could be questioned: if they are actively participating in the fandoms, shouldn’t they have the opportunity to participate in the research as their adult counterparts do?

In terms of consent, my ethics committee generally advises that, when working with young people under the age of 18, we should obtain the consent of both the young person themselves and a parent/guardian. However, there are times when obtaining the consent of a parent/guardian is either impractical or undesirable—for example, when doing some types of ethnography, or where the young people are involved in something that their parents are unaware of. For many youth, fandoms can be spaces where they find affinity and support that they cannot find through family or friends, and there may be a strong argument for foregoing parental consent in these cases—but this is likely to involve a process of dialogue and negotiation with the ethics committee or editorial team overseeing your work. For an excellent resource giving an overview of the ethics of working with children and teenagers, I recommend Alderson and Morrow (2011).

Of course, as with other aspects of fan studies, consent is complicated. When I was conducting my PhD, I interviewed a teenager who was featured in a documentary. Although this documentary had been broadcast in several countries, and although the teenager and their family had given permission to be named in the study, my ethics board asked me to only refer to the teenager by their first name. The rationale was that, although at this stage in life the teen had given consent, there was the possibility that, in adulthood, they may no longer want to be associated with some of the things they said and did in their youth. It may be that some of the fans we encounter may, in time, feel embarrassed or ashamed of their younger self’s fan activities, so this should always be considered in our work.

One other area of uncertainty is work involving the dead. In the sciences in particular, there are usually stipulations around working with dead bodies, but working with the identities and communications of the dead is less well articulated in many ethical policies. Wilkinson (2002) states that if “one supposes there are posthumous interests, in privacy, reputation, respecting one’s religious convictions, and so forth, then it seems arbitrary to protect subjects in research that involves their dead bodies while ignoring research on their lives” (39). In other words, why assume the dead don’t have the same rights as the living—especially when there may well be others (e.g., friends, family, members of the same community) who may be impacted by research we conduct with the dead? While it is true that dead people cannot give consent, we can still ask some of the same questions of our work with them, and in some instances, it might be important to seek ethical approval from an appropriate third party such as a relative, former partner, close friend or employer, if possible.

“Difficult” research in fan studies is not confined to “vulnerable” groups, but also to controversial topics. Chelsea Daggett’s research involved studying the (largely Tumblr-based) Columbine Community—who often identify as “Columbiners”—many preferring this term to “fan,” partly due to the stigma associated with being a “fan” of something so contentious (Daggett 2015). This community has been stigmatized in the press and via other users on Tumblr and Daggett was aware of this in approaching fans:

What was most important to me was approaching the community with the assurance that I didn’t share a stigmatizing view of their activities. I anticipated some skepticism from interviewees based on the negative messages and reaction the community receives from the Tumblr community in general. Indeed, the Columbine Community is one of the most cited examples of what needs to be kept off Tumblr and censored ... As such, I had to assure the community of my understanding and respect for their anonymity at the outset. (Daggett 2016, pers. comm. via email)

By obtaining the trust of participants, Daggett was able to gain in-depth insights into the community and the benefits of her research included the respondents having a positive experience of having their fandom and community understood, rather than condemned:

Most community members were excited by the prospect of someone properly investigating their community by actually engaging with them ... they both needed reassurance that this project would make an effort not to tread that same old negative ground and also grant them an opportunity to speak their piece. At the end of most of the interviews, the interviewees thanked me for giving them a chance to thoroughly articulate opinions that they had never had cause or opportunity to think through as a whole before. (Daggett 2016, pers. comm, via email)

A similar experience was recalled by Bethan Jones, who conducted research with fans of Welsh indie/rock band Lostprophets about their response to the conviction of the band’s former lead singer, Ian Watkins, for child sexual abuse:

What I really wanted to emphasise here, though, was that I wasn’t going to judge people if they were still fans of Lostprophets or Ian Watkins ... I was aware of how fans had been talked about⁴ ... fans felt relieved that someone was working on this and that they could talk about Lostprophets and Ian Watkins without being judged. (Jones 2016, pers. comm. via email)

In addition to the ethical responsibilities Jones felt to her respondents, when presenting on the topic at conferences (e.g., Jones 2015, 2016a), she prefaced her talks with a content warning⁵ so as to not inadvertently cause harm to her audience.

Although Jones and Daggett emphasize the importance of listening to fans without judging them, they note that not all aspects of fan behavior may seem acceptable to us:

I don’t mean that you’ll censor yourself or hold back elements of research because it makes fans look bad, but that you’re acting ethically and are aware of the role the participants have played and the duty of care you have to them. (Jones 2016, pers. comm. via email)

While I interviewed one individual who had, at one point several years in the past, begun to draft a plan for a shooting and another who condoned violence as a pedagogical tool of sorts (a shock into awareness, not necessary but effective), I wasn’t uncomfortable about those things. I was only made uncomfortable by one thing—my interview with a hybristophile. I was not uncomfortable about her attraction to Eric and Dylan. I was more uncomfortable about the lack of reflection she had on the

meaning of the shooting ... I don't, however, think that makes her violent any more than the others' interest in Columbine makes them violent. It simply made me less comfortable as a researcher. (Daggett 2016, pers. comm, via email)

These points about uncomfortable aspects of studying fandom lead me into the final area of this chapter, our ethical duty to ourselves.

Care of the Self

As well as ensuring the safety and well-being of our participants, researchers should also ensure their own safety, be that physical, mental, emotional, financial, or in any other area. Types of protection we may need to ensure include: the security of our research data (which protects both the researcher and the subjects of research); the safety of conducting research in different spaces (e.g., not meeting participants alone in private spaces, obtaining travel insurance if needed) and the protection of our own well-being (and that of our participants).

This is especially true in research such as autoethnography, which involves a high degree of self-disclosure and when researching communities we belong to ourselves:

I did have concerns that taking on the salient role of researcher might cut off research possibilities because my participants might not talk freely, and I might not have access to all the arenas of life that had opened up to me. If my master status became "researcher," rather than "friend" as researcher, would the close relationships I had formed be affected? (Ellis 2007, 7)

While many researchers would agree that it is important to study communities where there is bullying, racism, sexism, or other problematic behavior, working in hostile or "difficult" environments may have consequences for our own physical or mental well-being. Games scholars have faced abuse for discussing the controversial #gamergate movement, for example (Chess and Shaw 2015). Therefore, ensuring we have support within our professional and personal networks is key. Researchers whose work has involved controversial or sensitive areas, including Pearson, Jones, and Daggett note the importance of a supportive IRB or supervisor, and even then, people can be hostile to what we research:

I have had many people in my personal life or other students who have asked why I would want to study something so dark. These experiences are the biggest thing I have in common with those in the Columbine Community online—stigma over my research. Just last week, I visited a nearby institution and was asked by a leading tenured faculty member why I would want to study something as gruesome as Columbine. The simple answer is because people ask these questions. (Daggett 2016, pers. comm. via email)

As many fandoms and fan communities can offer support for those with mental or physical health problems, we may ourselves have sought support for our own issues in our fandoms and fan communities, and even explore this as part of an autoethnographic study. However, protection of our own well-being is paramount at all times.

I recently had an undergraduate student who wanted to conduct a research project within an eating disorder community. We had been encouraging self-reflexive modes of research and she wanted to draw upon her own experiences of using these communities in her ED recovery. Knowing her "vulnerability," and being responsible for her health and safety, I wanted to ensure she was as protected as possible during the project, and I knew the ethics committee would feel the same way—but I didn't want her to avoid researching a difficult area when she had such

a strong passion and clear rationale for conducting the project. We identified some key areas of support she could turn to if things became upsetting (e.g., an offline support network she belonged to and her trusted friends and partner, as well as sources within the university) and she decided not to ask questions that were likely to provide answers that would upset her. When it came to her use of literature, I flagged up sources that would include references to “pro-ana” sites or other potentially triggering content so that she could just read the sections that she found safer. While this did limit the scope of her research in some ways, all research has its limitations and boundaries—being honest about these could be seen as another form of ethical practice—demonstrating honesty. With safeguards in place for her (as well as her participants), the ethics board were happy with her approach and she produced a fantastic piece of research that increased her self-confidence.

Conclusion

As I have demonstrated in this chapter, negotiating ethical issues within fan studies involves a set of complex questions and interactions. There are no clear “rights” and “wrongs”—and every case depends on a number of contextual factors, including: the researchers themselves; the participants—as individuals and as members of groups or communities; the researcher’s place of work/study; professional bodies; the audiences for the research; the content and nature of research, and so on.

What is clear, though, is that we, as researchers, do not operate alone. Whether we are independent scholars or part of a wider organization, we still have obligations to our participants and readers to ensure we have considered a range of ethical questions. To create research that is “ethically sound” involves dialogue with relevant parties. Sometimes this means we need to fight to justify our approaches to research. At other times, we may need to acquiesce to the desires of our ethics committees, professional bodies, co-authors, and participants. We should think of research ethics as less of a series of rules, and more as an ongoing conversation:

We do not act on principles that hold for all times. We act as best we can at a particular time, guided by certain stories that speak to that time, and other people’s dialogical affirmation that we have chosen the right stories ... The best any of us can do is to tell one another our stories of how we have made choices and set priorities. By remaining open to other people’s responses to our moral maturity and emotional honesty ... we engage in the unfinalized dialogue of seeking the good. (Frank 2004, 191–192)

One of the driving motivations for many fan studies researchers has been to give a voice to individuals and communities that are often maligned and misunderstood. We argue that fandom is relational and involves multiple forms of dialogue between different parties. The way we approach ethics within fan studies should be no different. It is about devising appropriate methodologies, strategies, and discourses in a relational way. By engaging in dialogue with others, we can identify what is most important and significant about the research we are doing and hopefully present our work in a way that fairly represents those on whose behalf we may be speaking.

Notes

- 1 I am assuming very few fan studies researchers will conduct work with animals, so have not discussed this in the chapter. In addition, the term “human subject” is problematic (see Markham and Buchanan 2012, for a useful discussion of this), but it is a term used in most ethics policy statements, therefore I use the term in this chapter where relevant.

- 2 As an extreme example of this, *The Sun* newspaper's controversial—and untrue—allegation that Liverpool fans urinated on, and stole from, the bodies of victims of the 1989 Hillsborough stadium disaster harmed not only the Liverpool fans, but football fans in general and the wider community of Liverpool (see Jemphrey and Berrington 2000 Scraton 2016). Even within fan communities themselves, the focus on a niche group of fans in academic research or media representation can be seen to have a negative effect on the wider fan community—as we see later in the chapter.
- 3 While I cannot cover every controversial area within this chapter, for researchers whose interest in fan studies involves studying sexually explicit media, volume 12, issue 9 of *Sexualities* journal (2009) offers a good primer on research ethics, particularly Attwood and Hunter's (2009) editorial. Another "extreme" area of fan studies is fandom and criminality. Here, Geoff Pearson's (2009) account of participant observation within football hooligan communities is an insightful and interesting read.
- 4 As with the Columbiners, Lostprophets fans who remained as such had been portrayed in the media as "dangerous" and "sick" (Jones 2015, 2016).
- 5 Although there is not sufficient space in this chapter to discuss content warnings or trigger warnings in detail, sometimes our research, like Jones's, may contain potentially "triggering" content and we may wish to alert audiences to this. For more on trigger/content warnings, see the following blog posts:

Barker, Meg John (2014) Trigger warning: Trigger warnings. Open Democracy 15 July. Available at: <https://www.opendemocracy.net/transformation/meg-barker/trigger-warning-trigger-warnings-towards-different-approach>

OTW (2009) New Changes to the A03's "Archive Warning" system. Organization for Transformative Works. Available at: <http://www.transformativeworks.org/new-change-a03s-archive-warning-system>

Appendix

Selected ethics statements of publishers and professional networks

Some of the ethics statements of professional networks and publishers of relevance to fan studies scholars include:

- American Sociological Association: <http://www.asanet.org/membership/code-ethics>
- Association for Research Ethics: <http://arec.org.uk/>
- Association of Internet Researchers: <http://aoir.org/ethics/>
- Australian Sociological Association: <https://www.tasa.org.au/about-tasa/ethical-guidelines/>
- British Sociological Association: <http://www.britisoc.co.uk/equality/>
- International Communication Association: http://www.icahdq.org/about_ica/ethics.asp
- Media Communication and Cultural Studies Association (MeCCSA): <http://www.meccsa.org.uk/resources/meccsa-statement-of-research-ethics-guidelines/>
- Research Councils UK: <http://www.rcuk.ac.uk/publications/researchers/grc/>
- Transformative Works and Cultures: <http://www.transformativeworks.org/twac/twc-citation/>

Sheffield Hallam University Ethics Form

Available at: <https://www.shu.ac.uk/research/ethics-integrity-and-practice/research-ethics-approval-procedures>

Association of Internet Researchers' Ethical Guidelines

The full documents can be accessed at: <http://aoir.org/ethics/>

Some of the key questions for researchers listed in the 2012 edition include:

- How is the context defined and conceptualized?
- How is the context being accessed?
- Who is involved in the study?
- What is the primary object of study?
- How are data being managed, stored, and represented?
- How are texts/persons/data being studied?
- How are findings presented?
- What are the potential harms or risks associated with this study?
- What are potential benefits associated with this study?
- How are we recognizing the autonomy of others and acknowledging that they are of equal worth to ourselves and should be treated so?
- What particular issues might arise around the issue of minors or vulnerable persons?

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Part II

Fan Practices

Chapter 9

Make Space for Us! Fandom in the Real World

Lynn Zubernis and Katherine Larsen

This chapter discusses real-world fan spaces, focusing on fan conventions and fan pilgrimage sites. We argue that the rise of media and fan-induced tourism and fan conventions (whether multi-fandom conventions, such as the proliferating Comic Con events or single fandom conventions such as those staged by Creation Entertainment), is evidence of a growing desire for “behind the scenes” experiences and intimate interactions with both objects of fandom and other fans that cannot be achieved online. While fan conventions began long before fandom moved online, we suggest that the more “virtual” fandom becomes, the more meaningful experiences in these physical spaces are.

The recent 2016 Fan Studies Network Conference yielded a rich discussion about the current state of fandom, including the themes of “space” and “place” as they impact fan identity and practices (Lamerichs 2015). Specifically, fan scholars are calling for more study of analogue practices of performing fandom after several decades of focus on digital and online practices. Fan studies has concentrated more on online communities, which has downplayed the importance of traditional spaces in which fans interact face-to-face. In contrast, mainstream media has been much more interested in the fan convention experience. Morgan Spurlock’s documentary *Comic-Con Episode IV: A Fan’s Hope* (2012) is one of several films that have recently tried to capture the convention experience with varying degrees of success. While academic work on fan conventions has been done (Gunnels 2009; Lamerichs 2011; Duffett 2012; Zubernis and Larsen 2012; Booth and Kelly 2013; Booth 2016), it remains an under-theorized aspect of fan culture.

The work on fan pilgrimages and media tourism is more extensive, variously discussing the religious elements of such undertakings, and the liminal nature of any act of tourism (Schechner and Turner 1988). Much attention has been paid to fan tourism during which media tourists have to negotiate not only the dissonance between their everyday lives and the unfamiliar destination but often also the dissonance between the real place they are visiting and the fictional place it evokes (Brooker 2005, 2007b; Couldry 2007), and media tourism as a way of making meaning and establishing identity (Kruse 2005; McCarron 2006; Mills 2008; Light 2009). In this chapter, we examine the ways in which real-world fan spaces function both as liminal spaces and as sites of performance, play, veneration, and community. We argue that these spaces allow for the type of intimate contact that encourages a lived dialogue between fans and the objects of their fandom,

affording fans a way to connect to their objects of fandom in a deeply meaningful way not available online. However, these activities are not without their complications.

When fans love a movie, book, or television show, they often want to take an active role in connecting with that world and the characters (or actors) in it. This happens in many ways online—by writing fanfiction, making fanvids or creating fanart, ultimately bringing the characters into their own world and making them seem more real by fleshing out backstories and providing nuance. Jenkins (1992) compares this to *The Velveteen Rabbit* where love makes an object ‘real,’ and the fan thus enters into a more intimate relationship with the fictional world and its characters. With such passionate involvement, the fan comes to see the characters and the world as much more concretely ‘real’ in the sense Jenkins refers to, intensifying the identification between fans and characters. Fan tourism takes this relationship one step further by allowing fans a lived, tactile, and often deeply moving experience in the physical world rather than in the imaginary, thus strengthening the connection with the story, the characters, and the fictional world. In contrast, attendance at fan conventions can connect the fan to the actors portraying those characters, while also connecting fans to each other.

Community and Identity at Fan Conventions

It has become a truism that fandom, whether performed online or in person, fosters a sense of community. After all, we define ourselves through our social relationships and affiliations. Social identity theory holds that people use participation in social groups to maintain their personal and collective identities. The value of belonging to the group and the emotional attachment felt also contribute to identity (Tajfel 1981). Identifying with a group brings positive feelings of self-worth, and can be a protective factor against depression and feelings of estrangement (Branscombe and Wann 1991; Wann 2006). It has often been suggested that, because so many of us are now living far from family, identification with a group can be a replacement for some of that missing sense of community formerly afforded by rootedness in a physical, analog community. (Hills (2013) takes exception to this formulation of fandom as a compensation for loss, as discussed later in the chapter.)

In addition to providing a sense of community, fandom has long been recognized as part of a person’s self-concept. Fans are often stereotyped as *too* invested in whatever it is they love, but few fans would argue with the idea that they are passionate. The way in which a fan identifies with a show, film, band, character, or actor affects levels of investment and how integral the fan identity is to the person’s self-concept (Wann 2006; Keaton, Shaughan, and Gearhart 2014). These processes of identity formation, categorization of self, and level of involvement impact behavior. Earlier research looked at identity negotiated in terms of a media text, with the text being a component of self (Sandvoss 2005). While this is certainly true, fans also explore identity and establish community in physical spaces through face-to-face interaction. Whenever fans meet up in groups, fans enact their individual self-identities within the particular community, in what Sandvoss calls the “ambiguity of identity construction between self and community in fandom” (64).

There is increasing recognition that fandom is performed differently on different platforms, whether online or in-person (see Freund’s Chapter 13 in this volume). In all cases, the platform largely determines the level of intimacy possible. One of the similarities, however, no matter where or how fandom is performed, is the tendency for fans to consider other like-minded fans as ‘family.’ Online communities facilitate and in some cases initially create these bonds; face-to-face interaction deepens and sustains them. Camille Bacon-Smith recognized the power of in-person interaction to build a sense of family and community early on in fan studies as enriching fans’ existing families or creating familial bonds when none existed (Bacon-Smith 1992).

Conventions, in a sense, act as annual extended family reunions. When fans, who may have only interacted with each other online or who may be introducing themselves to each other for the first time, meet at conventions they often greet each other with hugs and a great deal of emotion, instead of the more formal greetings of strangers.

Early research missed the sense of community and belonging that often accompanies participation in a fandom, concentrating instead on the fan's affective investment in their fannish objects. Horton and Wohl's (1956) study, which coined the pejorative term "parasocial relationship," focused on the one-way adoration inherent in a celebrity/fan interaction. The fan feels a great deal for the celebrity, who feels nothing (and in fact does not even know) the fan. Tomer (2001), in a more recent study, agreed, saying that fans feel like they know their favorite television performers intimately, but described this as a "spurious sort of companionship" (207) which pales in comparison to interactions with real people. These studies missed the fact that the important relationships in fandom are not necessarily the ones between fans and celebrities; instead, strong relationships between fans are formed via a shared fandom. Nancy Baym (2015) has written of the sense of shared space, rituals, and social support networks that create a sense of community online; these attributes also occur when fans come together in the physically shared space of a convention. Convention culture has its own rituals, from lining up outside Hall H at Comic Con to the tradition of an irreverent and no-holds-barred karaoke party on Friday nights at Creation conventions. Support networks at conventions are both informal, as groups of fans meet up and help each other navigate the convention expectations, and more formal, in organized support groups such as the "You Are Not Alone" booths at *Supernatural* conventions.

Convention Space as Liminal Space

In its original formulation the concept of liminality (originated by Arnold van Gennep and popularized by Victor Turner who applied it more broadly to ritual and performance) referred to rites of passage in which the (worthy) participant left one world behind in order to enter a liminal state in which he undergoes a change before being reincorporated into the world as something different.

(Larsen 2015, 39)

We will come back to the idea of worthiness later. What is important to note here, however, is that there are several incarnations of this type of liminal space that exist at fan conventions, often occurring at the same time and sometimes working at odds with each other.

Conventions can be viewed as liminal spaces in the sense that they take place on the border between fans and fannish objects. Fans go to conventions to see the people associated with their fandoms, which in most cases means the actors who portray the characters they love. Therefore, the liminal space is not used to bring the real and fictional world together, but to bridge the gap between the fan and the object of fandom.

Fans are offered opportunities to meet with actors and to interact with them—up close and personal. Of course what seems like intimacy is really a staged backstage event (Goffman 1959) in which fans simultaneously feel closer to the actors via physical contact at photo ops (they get to hug, touch, and even direct the actors to pose in various ways) and chats on autograph lines. However brief these opportunities are, they are treasured by the fans and are a big part of the con experience.

At the same time that this feeling of intimacy and connectedness is offered, it is also being undermined, hearkening back to the idea of a "parasocial relationship." The barriers between fans and actors are very real and are everywhere in evidence. At some conventions, actors are ushered

through hotels or convention centers via back channels, rarely if ever appearing in the same spaces as fans under any but the most managed conditions. At others, actors move through the same hallways but usually with a security person ensuring some boundary remains. Handlers protect the actors from the very fans they will be hugging later in the day in photo ops. Proximity is always underscored by separation. At conventions, the perception is that fans move from the mediated world of the mass audience to the more intimate relationship afforded audiences in close proximity to performers (Zubernis and Larsen 2012). In fact, this relationship is not truly unmediated or without boundaries but fans do share physical space and two-way communication with celebrities for a period of time. Duchesne (2010) views conventions as a space where fans and celebrities merge temporarily, for purposes which are advantageous for both. The liminality of this space is unstable, with fleeting micro-mergers which occur and recede throughout the convention experience.

The idea that entering into liminal space changes something significant for the traveler can clearly be seen at conventions for the television show *Supernatural*. Creation Entertainment has been organizing conventions for this show for over a decade, and thus the actors and fans have become comfortable with interaction. This perceived familiarity has translated into fans' desire to share with the actors their 'life story,' which often includes challenges faced and overcome. While these interactions customarily take place within the bounded stages of photo ops or autograph lines, nevertheless fans find the brief communication powerful enough to change them, returning them into the world with increased motivation to continue their personal struggle. In 2016, this became a common enough occurrence that Creation Entertainment began staffing autograph lines and photo ops at *Supernatural* conventions with volunteers trained in mental health support, so that the emotional reaction to such a change can be managed and the fan can be supported as they return from the liminal space.

Importantly, as previously noted, the convention experience is not solely about interacting with celebrities. Fans also come together to meet up with other fans, and to enter into a temporary space with different norms for behavior and self-expression; a place that fans often describe as somewhere they can be themselves. The circumscribed space of conventions has been described as a sort of "magic circle," within which fans all understand and share the event's parameters and norms (Huizinga 1955). Fans embrace their fannish identities more freely within the space of a convention, wearing tee shirts, buttons, jewelry, and other identifying objects that mark them as fans (see Figure 9.1). At the same time, while convention goers may perceive the convention as a safe space cut off from the rest of the world, in reality, the fans are under the constant scrutiny of both their fellow con goers and non-fans who are physically sharing the space. In addition they are also keenly aware that their actions may be viewed, for better or worse, by the media and on various internet platforms where photos, videos, and comments are invariably posted.

Cosplay/Performance

The idea of performance in liminal spaces is part of much discussion of fandom. Fandom, contend Jen Gunnels and M. Flourish Klink (2010), is a performed set of practices, something that fans *do*, making performance studies a relevant lens for examining fandom and embodied experience a recommendation for fandom research. Cosplay and activities such as Live Action Role Playing (LARPing) have thus been studied from a performance studies perspective (Gunnels 2009).

Performance, according to Goffman, is an expression of self (Goffman 1959). Fandom can be considered a type of performance, since fans actively perform their identities in a variety of ways. Within the realm of the things we love and in interaction with others in the community, fans



Figure 9.1 Carol Datura Riot and Jenn Watchertonks as Frozen Captain America and Winter Soldier, Wizard World Philadelphia 2015

Source: Courtesy of Hansi Oppenheimer.

explore, perform, and revise identities. The knowledge, behaviors, emotional investment, and creative production that is shared with the fandom community reinforce fans' social identity, and self-concept. This is true of online fan communities, where fans often use avatars and anonymity to perform various identities, but it is equally true of the physical spaces in which fans come together.

Convention space, as we have discussed, is often a transitional space where fans experiment with and perform their identities. Convention space has been viewed as carnival space (Freund 2007; Booth 2016; see Bakhtin [1965] 2009), a transitional space where a temporary transgression of gender, sexual, racial, and ethnic norms is allowed and where boundaries between the self and the world are negotiated and reconstructed. Bakhtin's idea of carnival emphasized a liminal space which brought diverse people together and encouraged open and creative expression within that space, even of behavior and ideas which would be censored in the broader culture.

This happens most obviously through cosplay, as fans transgress the boundary between the real world and the fictional world and find pleasure in straddling these two worlds to explore aspects of identity (Lotecki 2012; Leng 2013). To cosplay, fans construct costumes and props inspired by fictional characters and embody those characters in real-world spaces (Scott 2015). Cosplayers use the identity they construct to negotiate between reality and fiction, as a way of joining with and creating a dialogue with a favorite character. Fans enact multiple interpretations of a text, experimenting with whom they can be within the convention space. Cosplay, and perhaps most especially the practice of crossplay (the practice of cosplaying a character of a different gender), with its purposeful transgression of social norms, exemplifies the practice of a carnivalesque masquerade. While there are certainly times when such norm transgressions result in harassment or censure (particularly when fans cosplay out of body type, race, or gender), nevertheless the convention space is more accepting than society in general of such transgressions (see Figure 9.2).

Cosplay itself is a liminal performance, blurring the boundary between self and fictional character in a playful manner to negotiate and renegotiate identity. Ellen Kirkpatrick (2015) described



Figure 9.2 Carol Datura Riot, Jenn Watcherton and Tea-berry Blue as the Howling Commandos at New York Comic Con 2015

Source: Courtesy of Hansi Oppenheimer.

cosplay as exemplifying a moment of embodied translation, during which the fan transfers the character from a limitless fictional landscape to the fan's delimited physical one. Like many online fan practices, cosplay allows fans to insert themselves within texts to perform various identities, within the liminal space between real and fictional. Putting on a costume, Kirkpatrick says, signifies a fan's desire to cross a border, which is always a move that is full of meaning.

The idea of performative identity assumes identity as fragmented and flexible, with multiple layers (see also Coppa's Chapter 12 in this volume); this means that cosplayers can both retain their own identity and intentionally negotiate a temporary identity, usually in a playful way (Lotecki 2012). Nevertheless, playful does not equate to frivolous, as the trying on of identities is an integral part of identity development. It is important to note that cosplay is not just about mimesis, but a transformative expression of a mediated identity with fans adding their own creative commentary (Duchesne 2010). In her essay on cosplaying, Shelby Fawn Morgan (2015) describes cosplay as more than just the embodying of her favorite characters; rather, the alternate identity allowed her to unearth authentic parts of herself which were not yet fully realized.

Conventions can be considered paratexts, which change expectations about or redefine the meaning of the primary text upon which they are based (e.g., a television show). Fan play and participation in interactions outside the text itself allow fans to immerse themselves in the fictional universe as they actively engage as performers themselves or with others performing (Lancaster 2001). Convention space can also be seen as play space, delineated either physically or psychologically or both. Rather than selecting characters to cosplay which are most like themselves, many cosplayers choose to perform a character unlike their own identity as a form of play and experimentation, an enactment of the psychological mechanism of attribute substitution (Gunnels and Cole 2010). In other words, we imagine ourselves into being through our interaction with the media texts we love (Lamerichs 2011).

Performance theorist Richard Schechner's well-known description of "not me ... not not me" (Schechner and Turner 1985) emphasizes that the liminality that occurs in a performance space is a transitional phenomenon. Schechner was trying to convey the shift in identity that can occur in convention space—that is, the fan is not exactly himself or herself (whether cosplaying or not), and yet still retains their sense of self and identity. This could apply to writing fanfiction about a character as well as portraying one, since the fan still has to have knowledge of the character and a relatively deep understanding in order to either write about them or embody them physically, with the same sort of in-between state existing (Coppa 2006). When the fan re-crosses that boundary back into everyday 'real life,' the experiences within the liminal space have impacted real-world identity.

Other embodied forms of participation in fandom, including convention attendance and fan tourism, can also be viewed through the lens of embodied performance. Fans who attend a convention but do not cosplay are nevertheless performing their identity as fans, often through wearing fan-identified jewelry, buttons, tattoos or tee shirts, or just by dint of being present at a fan convention. The difference may be that cosplayers and LARPer are consciously aware of themselves as performers, whereas fans who attend a convention or travel to a fan tourism site may not see themselves that way. Convention attendees who do not cosplay are nevertheless also immersed in the liminal space, since encountering a cosplayer is an opportunity for the fan to encounter a fictional character they love. Thus, spectators are also affected.

Performance can be formal, as in cosplay competitions, immersive (as in LARPing) or projective (as in fanfiction). In each case, the performance of an alternate identity is conducted in a perceived safe space, assumed to be without significant real-life consequences (Gunnels and Cole 2010). Similar to the idea of a sacred space, these playgrounds are separate from the 'real' or ordinary world, with different norms and rules for behavior. Within such a space, fans can experiment with alternative identities and ways of being, which can impact both the individuals and the fictional world itself through altered meaning making.

Kurt Lancaster (2001) has described fans as performing on the border between a fantasy world created by someone else and the reality of their own everyday lives. Booth and Kelly (2013) suggest that these liminal spaces are needed more than ever because traditional liminal rites of passage are no longer available to the majority of us. Instead, affective attachments to media texts, celebrities, and fictional worlds help fans negotiate identity, discover a sense of purpose, and form community bonds. While rites of passage are historically viewed as integral to adolescence and early adulthood, many fans retain these attachments and continue to value the community bonds formed, also retaining the identities negotiated within them.

Fan Tourism and Pilgrimage

Fandom, much like religion, involves an intensely affective experience. We don't experience the things we love—films, television shows, books, music—as just a text, but as a site of intense emotional engagement. They alternately bring us great joy and enrage us. They comfort us or they push us toward social change. They provide us with community but also offer us food for individual contemplation. Grossberg (1992) cited affective investment as an integral part of fandom, contending that "[f]ans actively constitute places and forms of authority (both for themselves and for others) through the mobilization and organization of affective investments" (59). This constitution of "places" is seen everywhere, but perhaps no more salient example exists than fan pilgrimage, which ranges from visiting sites associated with a particular celebrity (birthplaces, childhood homes, graves) to visiting real-world locations in which a favorite text is set (the Yorkshire moors; Prince Edward Island; Forks, WA.) or the locations where favorite films or

television series were filmed (New Zealand standing in for Middle Earth; Iceland and Northern Ireland standing in for parts of Westeros; Vancouver standing in for almost every other place (cf. Brooker 2007b)).

While fan pilgrimage often replicates many of the dynamics of conventions such as ritual, performance, and entrance into a liminal space, it is often a solitary undertaking. Where conventions are spaces of communal celebration, pilgrimage sites are often places for quiet reflection and solitary communing. An obvious exception to this would be the need to come together in real spaces following the loss of an object of fandom—whether real or fictional. Fans left tributes to Ianto Jones at the Cardiff waterfront following his death on *Torchwood* and marked the spot where Sherlock Holmes plummeted to his “death” outside St. Bart’s Hospital in *Sherlock*. Similarly the recent deaths of David Bowie and Prince prompted fans to come together to grieve at the mural of Bowie in Brixton (even though Bowie died in Manhattan) and outside Prince’s Minneapolis home. Even at these times, however, the space is shared with other fans but it is not necessarily a communal experience.

Roger Aden discusses the concept of symbolic pilgrimage that does not involve physical travel. Instead Aden contends that a viewer deeply immersed in a narrative (television series, books, films) makes an imaginative pilgrimage, leaving the familiar and entering the fictional world of the narrative. Will Brooker (2007a) suggests that all pilgrimage involves a degree of conceptual travel. It is through this imaginary travel, even when the fan is physically “on the spot,” that the pilgrim connects with the narrative. No place will look exactly as either the fan pictured it or the way in which it was pictured on film. Brontë fans who go to Northern England in search of the heather-covered moors traversed by Catherine and Heathcliff do not need to work too hard to put themselves in the fictional landscape of *Wuthering Heights*. Harry Potter fans who go to Oxford to see early filming locations have to work much harder to put themselves into Hogwarts. And the *Star Wars* fan who visits Tunisia may have nothing but his imagination to rely on in order to recreate Luke Skywalker’s home planet. In all cases imagination plays an integral part in the pilgrimage experience in ways that do not necessarily happen in fan conventions where both the objects of fandom and other fans are present. Light (2009) observes that “although it is frequently overlooked, the imagination plays a key role in the experience and performances of tourists” (247). The fan pilgrim must constantly compensate for the passage of time, changes to the physical landscape, and the lack of set dressing. The prevalence of images of real-world filming locations overlaid with a shot from the filmed text is a testament to the kind of cognitive dissonance the fan pilgrim is always negotiating.

Liminality

Conventions and associated activities such as cosplay are all ways of bringing an element of physicality to fandom, though actual immersion is sometimes difficult. At a *Supernatural* convention, for instance, interaction with the actors (as opposed to characters) and other fans prevents attendees from relating to the fictional world since the “behind the scenes” world is so much on display and the boundaries between the actors and their characters are reinforced everywhere by the convention organizers, by the actors, and by the fans themselves. People do not come out of photo ops excited by having just touched Sam Winchester and they do not walk away from the autograph table prizing Dean Winchester’s name emblazoned on their posters. In contrast, conventions such as Comic Con, with its ubiquitous cosplay, offers fans endless opportunities to pose with their favorite characters, though they are not portrayed by actors, but by fellow fans.

Sites where narratives are set, or where filming has taken place, present the fan with a different experience. Convention spaces, by their very nature are not “real”—they exist for a limited span

of time, rules change, and the very “unreality” of the interactions between fans and actors is one of their major selling points. By contrast, it is the tangible physicality of the pilgrimage site that allows fans to immerse themselves in the fictional world.

The liminality of the fan pilgrimage experience differs from the convention experience in another key aspect. Turner (1969) observes that “[i]n *rites de passage*, men are released from structure into *communitas* only to return to structure revitalized by their experience of *communitas*” (129, cited in Brooker 2007a, 159). And while this sense of *communitas* might be one of the most important aspects of the convention experience, it is *not* necessary for the pilgrimage experience. Indeed, there are times when the presence of others actually detracts from and impedes full immersion. Brooker (2007a) observes that “[t]he feeling of connection is not with other fans, but with the fiction” (160) and Cornel Sandvoss (2005) asserts that “the emotional significance of visiting fan places lies in the ability of fans to put themselves physically into the otherwise textual universe” (61, quoted in Brooker 2007a, 160). Visiting a place with others who do not have the same level of investment in the site may confuse and constrain the die-hard fan. This was observed first hand while taking a group of students who were not *Doctor Who* fans to Cardiff for a *Doctor Who* tour. This phenomenon proved confusing to the tour guide, who was accustomed to dealing with people with at least some investment in immersing themselves into the text. The students did not seek to place themselves into the action or strike poses similar to characters from the series, as was the wont of most tour goers the guide encountered. The guide continued to offer them opportunities to immerse themselves and was clearly frustrated and disappointed with their lack of desire to perform their fandom. However, the same students who did not respond in Cardiff were deeply moved by a visit to the Warner Brothers studios where the Harry Potter films were shot. They eagerly took every opportunity to immerse themselves, placing themselves “in the action” on the Hogwarts Express and in Diagon Alley. Indeed, even the few students who were not enthusiastic fans were able to immerse themselves in the studio tour in ways that they were not when going on a walking tour of Harry Potter London filming sites. In other words, they were more fully able to experience the sense of “homecoming” that Brooker (2007a) alludes to (162), the departure from their own familiar lives to a place that is strange but nevertheless familiar.¹

Performance

The idea of performance is also relevant to fan tourism. Duncan Light (2009), in his article on Dracula tourism in Romania, suggests that tourists bring their own ideas of what the place should be, “producing and reproducing those destinations” (241), echoing Aden and Brooker’s conclusions about the importance of imagination in creating place. If tourists are complicit in setting the stage for their pilgrimage (as Light contends), then they are also ready to perform on that stage. Indeed, Light contends that “[t]ourists do not simply encounter places, they also perform them (Sheller and Urry 2004): what a place is ‘like’ depends, in part, on the nature of the embodied practices—enacted by both tourists and local people—that take place there” (241).

Several practices are common to fan pilgrimage and constitute an integral part of the pilgrim’s “performance.” Inscribing one’s name at a tourism site is as old as tourism itself. Byron etched his name into a pillar of the temple of Poseidon in Greece and Charles Dickens etched his name on a window at Shakespeare’s birthplace in Stratford-upon-Avon. Similarly, we see Beatles’ fans at Abbey Road writing their names on the wall outside Abbey Road Studios and *Sherlock* fans at St. Barts Hospital writing their names in the dust on the windows and on the call box nearby (Figure 9.3).

This practice serves multiple purposes. It allows the fan to leave a bit of herself in the fictional world; leaving those inscriptions on the call box at St Barts requires a *performance of the belief* in



Figure 9.3 Leaving their mark at Abbey Road
 Source: Courtesy of Katherine Larsen.

the fictional world of *Sherlock* (as opposed to an actual belief in that world). It also allows fans to connect to the real-world objects of fandom via the performance itself. The object of fandom, most often absent or dead, is not there to see the performance and therefore its importance lies in the action itself rather than in who observes that action. (Though recording that action and sharing it with others later can increase the fan's social capital, as will be discussed later.)

Encountering the Sacred

There have been many studies suggesting significant parallels between fandom and religion in general (Jindra 1994, 2000; Frow 1998; Hills 2000, 2013; Blom 2014; Mullis 2015) and between religious pilgrimage and fan pilgrimage in particular (Margry 2008; Lockyer 2010; Bickerdike 2015). This move to correlate fandom with religion has also been questioned by Matt Hills (2013) who admits a type of neoreligiosity (Hills 2000) but stops short of an equivalent comparison, seeking to avoid “a functionalist or compensatory master-narrative of neoreligious fandom” (13) which is inevitably based on a sense of loss or lack. In this narrative, people turn to fandom to fill a void, to make up for the fragmented culture that has set us all adrift. Hills remains “wary of the discursive moves made in the name of ‘fandom = religion,’” (13) and rightly so since to engage in this narrative diminishes the fan and trivializes the object of fandom.

However, we argue that a more positive discussion can be started if we flip the equation: religion = fandom. This is not meant to take away from the value of religion, but instead to focus

on the ways in which religious practices, and particularly pilgrimage, align with our understanding of the affective power of imaginary worlds and arise, perhaps, from the same impetus—to create and refine narratives that help us to understand our place in the world, that provide guidelines for living our lives and connect us to something beyond ourselves and to connect to the “sacred.” Aden (1999) references Edith Turner’s formulation of the pilgrim’s journey as consisting of three phases: “(1) separation (the start of the journey); (2) “the liminal stage” (the journey itself, the sojourn at the shrine, and *the encounter with the sacred* [emphasis mine]); and (3) “reaggregation” (homecoming)” (152). If, as we have argued above, the fan pilgrim follows this pattern of separation, transition, and return, it seems plausible to also argue that during that transition, the fan too has an encounter with the sacred and that the “sacred” almost by definition must contain elements of myth and imagination.

Certainly not every fan tourist will have, or even seeks, this encounter with the sacred. Even the same fan visiting the same place on separate occasions may have radically different responses to the space. On a first visit to the Cavern Club in Liverpool Kathy happily went downstairs to read the walls signed by all the tourists who had come before her, to listen to the Beatles cover band providing a simulacrum of the Fab Four and to happily purchase Beatles swag. On a subsequent visit she proceeded down the stairs as before when a particularly meaningful song began to play. That song, in that place, at that moment stopped her in her tracks and sent her into a corner to cry uncontrollably for several minutes. The song (the “text”) encapsulated childhood, relationships, loss, resilience, in one powerfully emotional moment that transcended the Cavern Club or the Beatles.

A few moments of conversation or a hug from an actor at a convention can leave fans similarly emotional. The term “celebrity worship” is generally a pejorative one, but fans themselves often describe encounters with the objects of their fannishness at conventions in terms of “worship” (usually with tongue in cheek, minus the pathologizing). Stand outside the photo op room at a convention and the same sort of uncontrollable tears can be witnessed repeatedly, along with beaming smiles and exultant high fives.

Conclusion

Fans may desire souvenirs from both conventions and fan pilgrimage sites. In addition to being a tangible reminder of the experience, souvenirs are also needed to authenticate a visit to what is often a largely or wholly imaginary place both for the fan and for those fans who have not, or who have not yet, had the experience. However, whereas commodification is the basis of fan conventions—one pays for everything and everything has a price—this is not necessarily a part of fan tourism sites and may explicitly interfere with the experience (cf. Larsen 2015), since it presents yet another layer that must be stripped away before reaching the “authentic” (i.e., the fictional) space one has sought out. Even visits to such real places as birthplaces or former residences are necessarily separated from the reality of the fan (unless of course one is standing outside the current home of a living actor, singer, etc.) by time and require a significant imaginative leap in much the same way Brooker describes *Blade Runner* fans’ encounter with Los Angeles filming sites (Brooker 2005).

That difference aside, both convention attendees and fan pilgrims return not only “revitalized by their experiences of communitas” (Brooker 2007b, 159) but also with an enhanced status with reference to other fans. Mere attendance at a convention can often confer on the fan a “special” status which can then be parlayed into social capital in the recounting of the experience or the sharing of photos and videos. The fan who Periscopes bits of the convention in real-time is the fan everyone will follow on social media.

Similarly, cosplay allows the fan not only to explore alternative identities, but also affords the fan a measure of social capital while still at the convention. Cosplayers are often stopped by other

fans so that they can take pictures with them in much the same way fans want photos of themselves with celebrities. A particularly elaborate or well-executed costume will earn even more social capital.

Just as fans feel the need to leave something of themselves, they also feel the need to bring something tangible home to show others they have been to that place. A piece of the “true cross” might now be a selfie placing the fan momentarily in the text. It might be some small reminder that “I was there!”—a magnet, a keychain, a photo with an actor. The “merch room” is a traditional part of any convention space, offering tee shirts, mugs, posters, and replicas of objects from the media text itself that fans can take home, just as the shop of some popular sites of fan tourism sell souvenirs. One of the most prized possessions at any fan convention is the photo op, a photographic reminder proving that the fan was indeed “right there,” next to the actor or the character who is the object of their affection.

Both fan conventions and fan tourism involve travel, not just from place to place but from one understanding of self to another. Sometimes the tangible object brought back is not so much something to show others, but a reminder to self—something to remind themselves (the literal meaning of souvenir) of their “journey” and the ways in which all journeys invariably change us.

Note

- 1 This is an experience that Kathy can personally attest to. Having spent much of my adolescence reading the novels of Charles Dickens, my first thought on arriving in London for the first time as a 19-year old student was “Home!” It did not matter that it did not look like the Victorian city described by Dickens. It felt familiar, perhaps even more familiar than my own home did. In this case, the liminal space between reality and fiction becomes the habitus.

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Chapter 10

Nostalgia, Fandom and the Remediation of Children's Culture

Lincoln Geraghty

The remediation of classic and long-lost children's film, television, games, and toys highlights the increasing importance of nostalgia within contemporary popular culture. The proliferation of official and unofficial, corporate, and fan-produced websites and online databases allows access to media from a pre-internet era. Tied to this digital rebirth of children's media is a growing adult fan culture centered on the remembrance of childhood where memory forms the basis for active online communities that engage in the trading and (re)purchasing of new and old toys and games from their youth. Toy companies are keen to cash in on this lucrative trend in consumer and fan culture. For example, American corporations Hasbro and Mattel have rebranded and relaunched classic toy lines like Transformers, GI Joe, He-Man, and Barbie specifically to target older fans as well as entice younger markets—supporting this with a string of blockbuster live-action movies and a routine presence at fan mega events like the San Diego Comic Con (see Geraghty 2014). While convergence culture allows for the remediation of childhood media of yesteryear, it also allows adult fans to reconnect with their own youth and transform contemporary identities by including visible links with their past.

This nostalgia for old toy products has been seen by many as a sign of the entertainment industries diminished creativity and lack of originality. However, I would argue that such a return to the media texts of one's youth points to the importance of identity in an increasingly technological and interactive global society. For example, the new *LEGO Dimensions* video game and playsets, where you can build, play, and combine both physical and virtual sets from different media franchises, offer a tangible case study of how nostalgia and play merge with the remediation of childhood favorite media texts and licensed franchise characters. As such, nostalgia for childhood should be viewed as an integral part of keeping in touch with the fan self and as an anchor to a personal history which can be remade, recreated, and remolded at the touch of a button or the purchase of a new toy. Through an analysis of the global toy and multimedia company LEGO, its licensed products such as the *LEGO Dimensions* game, and the fans who continue to buy, collect, and play with LEGO, this chapter will consider the reconstruction of personal and public memories of childhood in the digital sphere and assess how fans literally play with nostalgia; transforming and constructing a new media identity within the wider fan community.

In many ways this moves the traditional focus away from child players to adult fans. For example, in a cybertextual study of his two sons playing *LEGO Racers 2* on the computer Seth Giddings

suggests that when they went from screen to real life—from racing LEGO cars in-game to building racing cars with real bricks—they were “*playing at playing a video game*” (2007, 45), merging a “virtual phenomenon into *actual* movement and dynamics” (2007, 40). *LEGO Dimensions* encourages a similar tactile engagement with LEGO pieces and minifigures but in its strategic use of well-established media texts and characters from different franchises the game asks for more from its players than simple movement. It relies on the intermedial memories formed when collecting, playing, and building the LEGO so that the game narrative makes sense. It asks the player to draw from their own memories and knowledge of characters in order to move the story on, to complete the levels, to finish the game. Furthermore, I argue that playing with and collecting LEGO not only prompt fans to be nostalgic for times past but, as a signifier of nostalgia itself, the toy encourages “nostalgia-play” (Harvey 2015, 148) for once-defunct media brands and franchises that are remade and rebooted for both old and new audiences.

Nostalgia in Popular Culture

Simon Reynolds argues in his book *Retromania*, “nostalgia is now thoroughly entwined with the consumer-entertainment complex: we feel pangs for the products of yesteryear, the novelties and distractions that filled up our youth” (2011, xxix). Toys, games, movies, and comics are part of an increasingly large market for nostalgic entertainment, where companies like Disney and Sony, LEGO and Hasbro return to old favorites so as to profit again from previously established franchises. Likewise, fans trade and repurchase new and old toys and games from their youth so as to become members of, and participate in, the hierarchical subcultures of collector communities. These activities have been seen by many critics as part of what epitomizes the “rejuvenile,” a new breed of adult described by Christopher Noxon (2006) as someone “who cultivates tastes and mind-sets traditionally associated with those younger than themselves” (4). Similarly, Gary Cross’s work *Men to Boys* (2008) argues that we are in an age personified by “boy-men” where traditional notions of maturity and masculinity are being transformed alongside an increasingly attractive return to the pleasures of youth. Both authors choose broad-ranging examples from popular culture to illustrate their points, and media is central to their analyses of when and where these cultural changes have occurred. Yet, of course, such discussion runs the risk common to the media coverage of fans; that they are people who haven’t grown up yet, more like children still playing with things that should have been thrown out years ago. However, Hollywood and the entertainment industries have not only responded to this shift in adult identification outlined by Noxon and Cross but they have actively encouraged people to want to reconnect with their youth and yet not feel juvenile when enjoying the latest superhero blockbuster or buying a toy action figure (Noxon 2006, 12–13).

Nostalgia has had much critical attention paid to it as a theoretical concept and as a way of understanding how we relate to time, place, and the media. Often seen as an inhibiting and emotional phenomenon that reacts against change and modernity, nostalgia not only represents a longing for the past, it is manifested as dissatisfaction for the present. Moreover, according to Susan Stewart (1993), nostalgia reconstructs the past through an ideological narrative: “the past it seeks has never existed except as narrative” (23). Henry Jenkins (2007) extends this by arguing that in order “for nostalgia to operate, we must in fact forget aspects of the actual past and substitute a sentimental myth about how things might have been” (157) or “objects we never possessed” (Jenkins 1998, 4). In relation to fandom, Justin Smith’s analysis of British cult cinema posits that nostalgia is “retrospective fantasy, the memory’s utopia” that is “forever-unobtainable” (2010, 218). However, this cannot be true since fans utilize media archives, YouTube, eBay, Tumblr, and other social media to discuss and share old and once-forgotten cult media texts all the time—it is

their very accessibility that drives the daily interactions of fan culture. Nothing is ever forgotten, even intentionally, because it always exists in the present—either through the remediation of film and television online or in high street stores that sell repackaged and relaunched merchandise to eager fans. If sentimentality is the threat to established fan cultures it is also the impetus for fans to take action when texts and objects are under threat of disappearing, being canceled, or taken off the shelves. Fans are always reassessing and re-evaluating texts from the past; they bring them into the present and reconstitute them as part of contemporary fan culture.

Take, for example, the UK website tv.cream.org, designed to archive and catalogue media ephemera from yesteryear and celebrate popular media history that is often ignored for its cheapness, tackiness, or simple poor quality. Started in 1997, the site attracts thousands of fans of UK television and popular culture. It has its own YouTube channel and also publishes books that list vintage objects and collectibles (see Berry 2007). A similar website, tv-ark.org.uk, serves as a repository of old television idents, formats, logos, commercials, news programs, genres, and TV presenters. These sites do not forget aspects of the past; they seek absolute accuracy and authenticity. As Paul Grainge notes in his Introduction to *Ephemeral Media*, the preponderance of such fleeting media texts underlies the relations between “stability and impermanence, the substantial and the evanescent, the monumental and the momentary” (2011, 13). Gathering together on one site suggests that audiences have developed a close affinity with the brief as well as the long-lasting. Those who surf the pages of these sites might feel a sense of nostalgia for media of the past but what they are viewing are unsentimentalized remediations of actual content—these websites act as digital museums. Websites and books that can be considered nostalgic are part of a renewed cultural interest in and recycling of media history that serve to keep the past very much in the minds of contemporary audiences. Popular books on television in the 1970s and 1980s by Viner (2009) and Bromley (2010), or books on toys from yesteryear by May (2009), Novick (2006), and Berry (2007) suggest that the histories of popular culture are being constantly rewritten and re-evaluated, and that there is an audience out there that wants to engage with and relive that history in some form or another. Tara Brabazon contends that popular culture and memory are linked: “Popular culture is a conduit for popular memory, moving words, ideas, ideologies and narratives through time ... Popular memory, by its very nature, is a fount of consensus and a building block of ‘the mainstream’” (2005, 67).

An article in the *USA Today* describes the results of a survey that revealed more than half of Americans polled missed leg warmers (DiBlasio 2013, 1A) and a LoveFilm poll was reported in *The I* (“Holding out”) as showing a massive surge in downloads of old 1980s and 1990s animated TV series, the top download was *Super Mario Bros. Super Show!* (1989–1991). For Paul Grainge, “As a cultural style, nostalgia has developed in accordance with a series of political, cultural, and material factors that have made ‘pastness’ an expedient and marketable mode” (2002, 58). In this regard, we might understand the nostalgia fans feel for relaunched toy lines, film franchises, or television series as being part of contemporary culture’s marketing and remediation of the past; not necessarily a longing for what historical texts may or may not get brought back but a re-examination of the media history archive. By extension, in the physical objects that fans collect, salvage, and reclaim from the past we can see how notions of nostalgia and memory are bound up in the creation of a contemporary fan identity rather than a recreation of past by substituting bits of history with myth or things that never existed. For Svetlana Boym, “Nostalgia is about the relationship between individual biography and the biography of groups or nations, between personal and collective memory” (2001, xvi). Therefore, collecting objects that form a visual and physical biography of the self is an act of improvement not loss; it is not about mourning the past but about creating a reflexive and tangible identity in the present: “Nostalgia is not always about the past; it can be retrospective but also prospective” (Boym 2001, xvi).

Again, for some, as contemporary culture recycles images and media texts from the past, nostalgia felt for them “intensifies a ‘superficial’ sense of history” (Grainge 2002, 28) and thus “the present is denied and the past takes on an authenticity of being, an authenticity which, ironically, it can achieve only through narrative” (Stewart 1993, 23). For Jerome de Groot (2009), “this packaging and commodifying of the past have been critiqued as the ‘nostalgia mode,’ where nostalgia without purpose becomes an empty trope within an overly mediated society”; yet, at the same time, the past has taken on a renewed importance as it relates to disputes over “authenticity, empathy, reality, [and] historical truth” (249). Within cultural studies, nostalgia has been reappraised, and recent work has sought to explore the more complex relationship between nostalgia and cultural memory: “[This work] seeks to rescue nostalgia and its potential from more pejorative, conservative and simplistic applications of the term, and to complicate the notion of nostalgia as being essentially inauthentic, ahistorical, sentimentalising, regressive and exploitative (particularly in commercial terms)” (Holdsworth 2011, 103). This work thus serves to contradict the views of Noxon and Cross about the profitability of targeting young men by selling them repackaged and rebranded items from their youth. Through an analysis of fan nostalgia for a commercial brand such as LEGO, and its related franchise commodities such as the *Dimensions* video game and playable accessories, I will also attempt to reclaim an understanding of nostalgia and how it operates within popular fan culture. In view of the fact that nostalgia “can only be properly conceptualized as a contradictory phenomenon ... it is not a singular or fixed condition” (Pickering and Keightley 2006, 937), this chapter seeks to reposition nostalgia from simply being a cultural “mode”—designed to sell things—to being an important part of modern fandom and a “tactic” for how fans interact with media texts and paratexts.

Debates surrounding nostalgia have taken on renewed significance since Boym reappraised its problematic and conservative readings in her work on former communist countries in Eastern Europe. Boym differentiates between “restorative” nostalgia and “reflective” nostalgia, where the former reconstructs “emblems and rituals of home and homeland in an attempt to conquer and spatialize them,” the latter “cherishes shattered fragments of memory and temporalizes space” (2001, 49). Thus nostalgia can be a more active agent, reflective and exerting a shaping influence on the past and present; bringing the two periods in an individual’s memory together, making a new and more fulfilling experience of history and the possibilities it holds for the future. Similarly, Paul Booth (2015a) argues in his analysis of pastiche and fan-produced texts that nostalgia is represented as more personal and affective, not necessarily specific to a historical moment or memory: “Each fan will have a different sense of nostalgia for a text guiding her affective work in the present” (19). In many ways, then, nostalgia is not about looking for something previously denied or non-existent from the past as argued by Stewart, Jenkins, and Smith. I would argue that it is about the tactical ways we remember and use memories to actively engage in the present.

In the examples of LEGO fandom discussed in this chapter, popular culture is made meaningful through memories; fan culture is not commodified but personalized. Elizabeth Wilson argues that “nostalgia has become memory” (2013, 42) and thus memory can counteract the problems associated with nostalgic recollections of an imagined and non-existent past. Memories are essential to the production of subjectivity, therefore the memories embedded within collecting and playing with toys from childhood are emblems of the self, markers of identity and symbolic of the cultural capital that fans accumulate in their life-long engagement with a media text. As those memories collect over time, they become a narrative of the self, told and retold as new memories are made and shared. Similarly, as Mieke Bal suggests, collecting is a form of narrative where “a subjectively focalised sequence of events is presented and communicated” through the acquisition, cataloguing, and reordering of objects (1994, 100). Therefore, nostalgia as fan memory is not so much about loss of the past but a tactic for dealing with the present and a celebration of historical

texts that no longer disappear thanks to their retelling through new media technologies and the spaces of fan interaction like the convention. Personal histories become embodied in the collected objects of popular culture, and archives devoted to their preservation are rebuilt through remediation.

LEGO and LEGO Fandom

The Danish toy company LEGO has been a perennial favorite with children since its mass marketing rebirth in the 1950s and 1960s. The attraction of being able to build almost anything a child can imagine from a pile of colorful interlocking bricks proved a valuable selling point for parents concerned that their children should be learning something as they played (see Cross 1997). However, following developments in the American toy industry in the 1970s and 1980s, where fantasy and action toys became central components of movie merchandise and licensing agreements, LEGO turned to creating its own ranges of themed building sets and minifigure characters where, before, children built what they wanted (limited only by their own imagination), they now followed plans and built within prescribed "systems": city, space, medieval, pirates, etc. (see Kline 1993). In 1999, LEGO decided to buy into the merchandising market starting with its range of very popular *Star Wars* themed sets tied into the release of the first prequel film, *The Phantom Menace* (Lipkowitz 2009, 29).

LEGO's shift to producing product tie-ins has been supported by the creation of online fan clubs aimed at both children and adults. One of them, the VIP Program, boasts a members' only website, special offers, and a points reward system, specifically targeting grown-ups and encouraging them to collect LEGO rather than play with it, display it rather than pack it away. This convergence of popular fandom, new media, nostalgia, and contemporary toy culture suggests that the lines between past and present, technology and culture, childhood and adulthood are increasingly porous. Memory is an important component of being a fan, and the remediation of childhood toys like LEGO through online communities helps to reconstruct memories of youth that are subsequently used to negotiate digital collaborative spaces shared by other fans. In these web spaces personal memories and histories of children's culture are constantly negotiated and reshaped, taking on new meanings (see van Dijck 2007). These negotiations impact on the construction of a fan's identity.

As a children's toy originally based on the physicality of construction, LEGO has similarly taken on a historical significance in contemporary media culture as it allows adult collectors/fans to reconnect with their past and define a fan identity through more ephemeral and digital interaction. Now that the LEGO "system" incorporates global franchises like *Star Wars*, it means collectors/fans of one brand can cross over to become collectors/fans of the other. The LEGO *Star Wars* universe develops a fandom of its own with the minifigure versions of Han Solo and Darth Vader becoming just as iconic and desirable among collectors as the "real" toy originals. For Robert Buerkle, the "celebratory humour" through which the *Star Wars* story and characters are retold and reimagined "reaffirms the saga's significance as a cultural touchstone" (2014, 146), just as relevant in today's mediascape as it was when it was first released in 1977. Therefore, LEGO's shift from educational children's toy to transmedia adult collectible may not just be part of the wider trend of "rejuvenilisation" described by Noxon above, nor about nostalgically repossessing objects never previously owned but is, more importantly, characteristic of contemporary convergence culture. It highlights the importance of nostalgia in the transformation of childhood media and toys and how they get remembered. Rather than staying stuck in the past or remaining unchanged, nostalgia acts to enhance the original potentials of those remediated texts and commodities (such as LEGO) and transforms their very nature as childhood objects for future use.

By 1968, the company had expanded considerably, from bricks, to “systems,” to the first LEGOLAND® opening in its hometown Billund, Denmark (Lipkowitz 2009, 20–21). The UK saw its own club start up in 1978, whose monthly magazine, *Bricks'n Pieces*, offered enthusiasts (kids and adults) deals, ideas, and blueprints to build new and exciting toys (22). In 1987, a similar magazine, *Brick Kicks*, became the official publication of the American LEGO Club (24). Club publications offered collectors of the various systems the chance to expand their collections (buy special offers) and also gave LEGO builders instructions to make their own scale models out of generic LEGO bricks. In a relatively short space of time LEGO became a global toy brand and with a diverse array of products it expanded its opportunities not to only attract young children to the fold but also teenagers and adults who enjoyed the thrill of planning, designing, and building practically anything—similar, in many ways, to model railway enthusiasts who could build their own sets and town plans out of the various products and accessories sold by companies such as Hornby. The longevity of both these brands allows for their multigenerational appeal; older generations pass on their affection for the toy to their children and their children's children, all the while still holding on to that original connection made with it (see Cross 2004). If LEGO is made timeless through cross-generational appeal, then Lipkowitz argues that the global reach of LEGO increased when the first website was launched in 1996 (2009, 29).

In a highly competitive market, where movie and franchise themed toys are saturating the market, the creation of LEGO.com, intended as both an ideas platform and a shop, can be seen as a strategic move to reassert a traditional toy brand that may have been waning in popularity. The use of the web, along with high street stores, meant as soon as new sets and themes were launched, they could be bought and shipped immediately. Tied in with LEGO's decision to make themed sets based on popular film franchises in 1999 and the growing popularity for LEGO theme parks in the UK and the USA, the website provided a virtual and omnipresent platform for the company advertising the “system” and the brand. As old media turned to new, the website negated reasons for having local fan clubs: LEGO.com could be the club for the whole world. Individual clubs merged under the banner of LEGO Club, with regional editions of the magazine being available in print then only online. By 2009, LEGO Club had three million members signed up through the website (Lipkowitz 2009, 182). Acting as the hub for members LEGO.com became the primary means to advertise and launch new products for the company to kids and their parents and a new conduit for lifelong adult fans of LEGO to communicate. Recognizing the communal aspect of the website, LEGO made it possible for fans to create their own homepages as part of the LEGO Network. By 2009, one million fans had created their My LEGO Network homepage. These fan-designed pages acted as a “one-stop starting place” for “information, games, and activities for LEGO fans” featuring “links to customer service, a company history and timeline, official press releases and sections for parents and educators” (184). Interaction was now an important part of the LEGO experience; originating as simple one-to-one interaction between child and toy in the 1950s and 1960s, the “play” experience had become all about interaction with other kids and collectors online and across the globe.

The shift from LEGO being all about playing with the product to LEGO connecting with the people who buy it highlights the concomitant shift in the make-up of its audience. The Network was a community of fans who used the site for chat, trade, and making new friends. Thus LEGO's new audience of older collectors is not only interested in the objects but also in the connections members can make with people who share their interests. Henry Jenkins argues that fans must translate their “viewing into some kind of cultural activity, by sharing feelings and thoughts about the program content with friends, by joining a ‘community’ of other fans who share common interests. For fans, consumption naturally sparks production” (2006b, 41). While LEGO is not a text to be “viewed” as such, it is a text that is played with and that play stimulates production either through fan websites or the creation of models and minifigures that build on what LEGO makes.

Henry Jenkins argues that “as fandom diversifies, it moves from cult status towards the cultural mainstream” (2002, 161), and we can see this happening with LEGO as it moves from children's toy to adult collectible and fan-made text.

Adult fans of LEGO (AFOLs), who have grown up with the toy and taken it from childhood play to pleasurable hobby and pastime, actively engage in community activities—both online and at conventions. Those who build scale models, entire outdoor cities, and imaginative pieces of art are called “Master Builders,” who are specially selected by LEGO to work in model shops and theme parks around the world (Lipkowitz 2009, 188). They are an interesting mix of professional and hobbyist, taking their love of the toy and literally building it into their lives as part-time employees of the company. The website, which services both adults and children, is a constant gallery for the Master Builders' work and designs. “Brick Artists,” who use the multicolored bricks in increasingly surreal and imaginative ways, transform the toy from a childhood plaything to a form of adult expression. In turn, these artifacts become cult signifiers of the toy's lifelong and cross-generational appeal; encouraging more people to join in, have fun, and create. The toy thus becomes less and less “just for kids” and more and more about ageless personal expression and communal activity. Subsequently, products like the toys, clubs, fan-made models, website, blogs, the personal homepages, and video games are important component texts of the whole LEGO universe that require study in and of themselves. They are “paratexts” (Gray 2010, 46) that signify fans' cultural and financial investment in the brand.

From Springfield to Hill Valley, via Oz: Playing with Nostalgia in *LEGO Dimensions*

In 1997, the first LEGO computer game was released, *LEGO Island*, closely followed by *LEGO Loco*, *LEGO Chess*, and *LEGO Creator*. These early games offered digital freedom for even more creativity as players could use virtual bricks and accessories to create almost any vehicle, building, or scenario they could imagine: for example, they could build their own island village with huts, people, and vegetation. Customization was the key to the increasing popularity of LEGO on PC and game consoles. Paralleling the shift the company made in the 1970s, when it created systems to frame its various building sets, LEGO introduced games that were based on certain themes or worlds: City, Knights' Kingdom, Racer, Bionicle, and Pirates. In 2005, LEGO released the first *Star Wars* tie-in game, *LEGO® Star Wars™: The Video Game*, closely followed by *LEGO® Star Wars™ II: The Original Trilogy* in 2006. As can be inferred by the titles, the first game was very much linked to the prequels that had started in 1999 with *The Phantom Menace* where players could interact with all manner of characters, aliens, and vehicles from all three films. The second game expanded the gameplay even more by giving gamers the opportunity to play through the original *Star Wars* saga as one of a number of famous characters. The success of these games—by 2009 the first had sold around 5.92 million copies across all platforms (Martell 2009, 95)—showed LEGO the potential and profit in making more tie-in games to promote alongside the licensed toys. Further titles based on established media franchises to date include: *Indiana Jones: The Original Adventures* and *Indiana Jones 2: The Adventure Continues*, *Batman: The Video Game*, *Batman 2: DC Super Heroes* and *Batman 3: Beyond Gotham*, *Harry Potter: Years 1–4* and *Harry Potter: Years 5–7*, *Pirates of the Caribbean*, *Jurassic World*, *Lord of the Rings* and *The Hobbit*, *Marvel: Super Heroes* and *Marvel: Avengers*, *Star Wars: The Complete Saga*, *Star Wars III: The Clone Wars* and *Star Wars: The Force Awakens*. One might also include *The Lego Movie* game in this list since the original film on which it is based has inspired several waves of toys and related merchandise, and many of its main characters—Benny, Bad Cop, Emmet, and Wyldstyle—appear in the cross-franchise *LEGO Dimensions*.

Clearly, part of the attraction in these games is that gameplay is tied directly to the overarching narrative of the original source text. So, for example, in the *Indiana Jones* games, gamers can play through scenes from all three films (latterly four films) and play as all the important and well-known characters to achieve the ultimate goal of either finding the Ark, destroying the Temple of Doom, or securing the Holy Grail. In addition to this narrative play gamers can also enjoy extra missions and tasks that are linked to the overall theme of the game/movie but are driven more by adventure than the limits of the original story. Across all LEGO games this adventurous play, or “free play” as it is called, allows for greater experimentation. This freedom is greatly enhanced by the fact that while you play the story, you collect money so that you can buy access to extra levels, new characters, and abilities. Once all levels and abilities are open, gamers can then create their own characters, My Own Creations (MOCs), and play as them within the story and “free play.” Narrative and digital play thus become more personalized with your own LEGO character (designed and named by you) engaging with the LEGO versions of Luke Skywalker, Captain Jack Sparrow, or Frodo Baggins. Referring specifically to *LEGO Star Wars*, Buerkle argues that the game becomes “a manner of retelling this familiar story” (2014, 143) within what Rick Altman calls a “constellated community” (1999, 162)—a dispersed group who do not necessarily know each other but bring a sense of fan community to their watching of a film: “Playing the game and recognizing its many narrative references validates one’s membership in the *Star Wars* fan community—ratifying group membership [through the production of shared memories, feelings and values]—and by extension, validates one’s claim to the franchise” (Buerkle 2014, 144). Further to this, I would stress that the MOC element of the games allows for the convergence of fan identity and fictional narrative, making the experience more individual, more real, and more affective.

The transference of characters and narrative across different media (film, children’s literature and comics to video game) is emblematic of what media scholars call transmediality or transmedia storytelling. Henry Jenkins (2006a) defines the latter as “stories that unfold across multiple media platforms, with each medium making distinctive contributions to our understanding of the world” (334). In the context of the LEGO games, each paratextual game version of the movie franchises adds another level of meaning and story to the original. With MOCs also part of this transmedia process, gamers can move the story from the real world (physical toy) to the fictional world (virtual avatar)—and back again—playing through the narrative in ways not achievable by simply watching and rewatching the film, or engaging with other paratexts such as reading the comic, building the toy, or even being one of the main characters in the game. As gamers play through the levels as their MOC, they can interact with original characters from the movies and literally place themselves on board the Death Star or in Middle Earth and take part in the related fictional universe. Dan Fleming recognizes this shift in toy culture stating that they “are not the only mediatory objects in our lives; not the only objects to function transitionally for us,” and arguing that technological objects like video consoles are not so much “toys for big boys and girls” but “they generate a safe feeling when we give ourselves over to them” (Fleming 1996, 195). Building on this, I would argue that the LEGO game versions of established franchise storyworlds are now as much part of the transmedia narrative as are the toys, merchandise, spin-off books, or other digital paratexts. Playing as MOCs (making and collecting, playing with and as story characters) brings that narrative to life for all fans, regardless of age or gender. Or, as Henry Jenkins writes, when fans embrace popular texts they “claim those works as their own, remaking them in their own image, forcing them to respond to their needs and gratify their desires” (2006b, 59).

LEGO Dimensions, released in 2015, was LEGO’s answer to the other successful “toys-to-life” franchises such as *Disney Infinity* and *Skylanders*. Featuring the same style of play as the previous LEGO games, where players control characters from famous franchises with the goal of completing levels based on movies and established storyworlds, *Dimensions* allows for more interaction as players can control which characters they choose by physically placing LEGO minifigures and

vehicles onto a game pad. Different puzzles can be solved and hidden levels revealed depending on which character or vehicle the player inserts into the game: "These toys tend to use near field communication (NFC) which communicates with an accompanying portal device that is used to 'transport' the physical toy's character and related player data into the game" (Hawley 2016, 1). *Dimensions* thus combines the physicality, materiality, and collectability synonymous with the LEGO toy brand with the expandability and freedom provided through the digital spaces of a video game.

At the time of writing, the game has its own starter pack (including the game pad portal which connects with the console through a USB), and you begin the story with Batman, Gandalf, and Wyldstyle teaming up to find the lost keystones and elements to defeat Lord Vortech (voiced by Gary Oldman). The story progresses through levels based on the different worlds from famous film, television, toy, comic, and video game franchises: *The Simpsons*, *Back to the Future*, *Jurassic World*, *The Wizard of Oz*, *Scooby-Doo!*, *The Lord of the Rings*, *The LEGO Movie*, *Ghostbusters*, *Doctor Who*, *LEGO Chima* and *Ninjago*, DC Comics, *Portal 2*, and *Midway Arcade*. Various Level, Team, and Fun packs available to buy, which include new minifigures and vehicles, add to the franchise mix either through new levels or new character abilities. Soon to be released Story packs, which expand the game through multiple new levels, include characters and a new game pad based on the films *Ghostbusters* (2016), *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them* (2016), and *The LEGO Batman Movie* (2017). For Matt Hills, "the transmedia storytelling of *LEGO Dimensions* amounts to a commercialized 'Alternate Universe' version of multiple franchises that are reimagined in LEGO brick form." Despite the ways in which you can play with and through different characters and levels, the game does not provide "brand 'authenticity'" because you are limited by the license agreements and ownership of various intellectual properties which prevent real "free play" and the transmedia potential for "what if" scenarios (2016, 26).

While I would agree that *Dimensions* is certainly limited by what intellectual property it can use, and that Warner Bros (who owns Traveller's Tales that make all the LEGO video games) dominates through the prominence of Batman as main character and availability of DC Comics Team and Fun packs, I would also argue that the agency of the player/collector/fan who chooses which packs to buy and insert into their version of the game does provide some pushback against the corporate nature of the branded universe. Fan choice based on their nostalgic memories felt for each franchise included in the game—and there seems to be an increasing field from which to choose—allows for more creative freedom than perhaps Hills's analysis credits. And of course, as with all LEGO sets and builds, you do not have to follow the instructions—you can choose to use the bricks to make something else. So, instead of putting the characters and vehicles together as the in-game instructions propose, you can choose to make what you want from the pieces, swap minifigures around the NFC toy tags (even create your own monstrous hybrid of the Doctor's body with Scooby-Doo's head), or even play without the figures and just use the tags (thus saving the minifigures for your own collection).

New Team and Fun packs released in the second year of *Dimensions* will expand the license agreements with more media franchises, past and present: *Adventure Time*, *Harry Potter*, *E.T.: The Extra Terrestrial*, *Mission: Impossible*, *Gremlins*, *The Goonies*, *The A-Team*, *Sonic the Hedgehog*, *Teen Titans Go!*, *Beetlejuice*, *Knight Rider*, *The Powerpuff Girls*, and *LEGO City Undercover*. It is clear that LEGO has signed up with multiple companies to form a cross-media and cross-generational appeal with gamers. A review in *Blocks* magazine, a fan-produced publication, says of the recent additions to *Dimensions*: "The likes of *Adventure Time*, *Harry Potter* and *Sonic the Hedgehog* will undoubtedly prove popular with both kids and older fans alike, but the second wave seems to be most predominantly going after the 'nostalgic parents' market, with properties like *The Goonies*, *The A-Team* and *E.T.*" (Wharfe 2016c, 8–9). Fan nostalgia is crucial here to the marketing appeal of the game as it enters its second year and second wave of licensed products. Where

the appeal of the game upon its initial release was in its bringing together of characters across media, albeit “severing symbolic connections to transmedia storytelling conceptualised as a coherent expansion of established IPs, and positioning itself as a licensed alternate universe or ‘AU’” (Hills 2016, 17), it would appear now that lesser franchises which encourage nostalgic appeal and fan memories are being incorporated into the brand. *The A-Team*, *Gremlins*, *The Goonies*, and *Knight Rider* certainly tie into the recent cultural nostalgia for the 1980s. But *Beetlejuice* and *Mission: Impossible* are more adult-orientated media texts which function as more transgressive elements to what is meant to be a children’s game.

The memories of LEGO that serve as models for future play allow for a transformation of object and transformation of identity. The physical things (e.g., toys) that we continue to hold dear from childhood, remediated, and recycled by the new technologies of modern culture, are evocative and thus serve to bring together ideas of thought and feeling. For Sherry Turkle (2007a), “evocative objects” act as “companions to our emotional lives” and “provocations to thought” (5). They mean something, as a link to the past and an object in the present, so “the meaning of such objects shifts with time, place, and differences among individuals” (2007b, 307). Playing with these objects (touching, holding, filming, remaking, displaying, and collecting) “engages the heart as well as the mind; it is a source of inner vitality” (309). There is an inherent conflict between how childhood texts are rebranded by producers (as suggested by Hills) and how fans choose to remember and negotiate those texts online. However, I would argue that *LEGO Dimensions* reconstructs personal and public memories of childhood texts in the digital sphere. Fans can collect and therefore use the LEGO products (mainly the minifigures) in transforming and constructing a new media identity—the playable minifigure becomes “a source of inner vitality”—within the wider LEGO collecting community and through video gaming.

The “toy-to-life” minifigures in these instances can be described as the physical manifestations of what John Fiske sees as the contradictory relationship between fan and producer (in this case LEGO and Warner Bros): “The reverence, even adoration, fans feel for their object of fandom sits surprisingly easily with the contradictory feeling that they also ‘possess’ that object, it is *their* popular cultural capital” (Fiske 1992, 40). Building on this, I would argue that their physicality and nature as objects of fan affection make them more than just possessions to be played with for the purposes of completing the game—they *are* part of the player’s collection and thus they *are* the fans that play them. For Janet Hoskins, “an object can thus become more than simply a ‘metaphor for the self.’ It becomes a pivot for reflexivity and introspection, a tool of autobiographic self-discovery, a way of knowing oneself through things” (1998, 198). Both objects of fan cultural capital and markers of fan identity, the “toy-to-play” minifigures are the internal made external: evidence of the link between “the ‘external’ world of objects and the environment, and the ‘internal’ world of our experience, feelings and identity” (Gauntlett 2007, 139). Furthermore, collecting and displaying these material “selves” (LEGO has released a storage box where you can keep your figures and vehicles when not using them for the game) appears to make the experience of playing with, and as, each minifigure more real.

Like “feelies”—artifacts and collectibles marketed as paratexts to the video game source text—the “toy-to-life” accessories used in *Dimensions* “serve as an extension of a game’s fictional world; like toys, they enable us to explore that world away from the game through acts of play and reappropriation” (Peters 2014, para. 1.2). Similarly, as discussed by Paul Booth in his study of paratextual board games, “the materiality of the game pieces... facilitates fan interaction with the game as a system while also externalizing the game as an additional episode within the media franchise” (Booth 2015b, 17). So, the “toy-to-life” minifigures are part of the extended franchises represented in the LEGO game, but as characters they also bring to life a sense of fan nostalgia and are used tactically to build the fan’s own collection as part of their subcultural identity.¹As mentioned earlier, you only need the toy tags to play the characters

in-game; the minifigures can be kept separate, played with in conjunction with other LEGO sets or added to the fan's own collection of characters.

Collecting the LEGO minifigures based on popular entertainment franchises enables fans to have a corporeal connection with a culture that is almost all now online, digital, and inherently ephemeral. As new texts are produced and new fandoms created, there is the potential for continual loss of old texts. Digital archives and fan sites allow for a certain level of preservation. New media platforms and sites like YouTube and TV Cream act as repositories for remediated content, but again these are ethereal in the sense that they appear on our screens but they cannot be extracted, manufactured, and put on our shelves as items for display. In many ways fandom is about the display of one's passion for a media text—in the costume or clothes one wears at a convention or the images and blogs posted online—and from this comes a sense of distinction as fans accrue a level of cultural capital that sets them apart with the associated fan community. Collecting LEGO “toy-to-life” minifigures, organizing them, and using them in *Dimensions* is then by its very nature about the process of distinction and accruing cultural capital. What you have in your collection identifies your level of fandom, and nostalgia is the transformative inspiration that puts this into motion when playing the game.

Conclusion

In LEGO we can see an example of where nostalgia and corporate needs, physical and virtual experiences come together. In bringing back popular cultures icons from the 1980s and reusing licensed characters from its toy range LEGO is nostalgically looking back to its own past and allowing adult fans to play with, and within, fictional universes they once inhabited as children. In an age where toys and video games are produced on a global scale and LEGO competes with other producers of children's entertainment, adult toy collecting and game play have become an increasingly large component of their marketing strategy. As a result, LEGO provides a link to the image of a childhood past that it was instrumental in creating. Moreover, *LEGO Dimensions*' joining together of virtual and physical spaces help to make players feel more connected to that past through physical objects—just as nostalgia is so often that sense of feeling reunited with the comfortable and the familiar. Thus nostalgia becomes a tactical way of engaging with media texts and paratexts, creating a fan identity and accumulating cultural capital.

The attempt to connect fans with nostalgic entertainment franchises creates a sense of brand loyalty. Michele White, in her study of eBay users, argues that brands have fans: “Brand community members tend to be active fans of particular companies, products, logos, virtual communities, and media texts” (2012, 55). In LEGO, there is clearly a brand which collectors can actively follow, including products they can collect and a virtual game playing platform with which they can engage. White goes on to argue that the internet has “methods to tap into and control members' attachments” (83), thus in *LEGO Dimensions* we see a game system designed so that players can add to their collection of LEGO minifigures and vehicles, but also increase their attachment to the brand through crossover play and downloading new material so as to unlock new levels. Robert Buerkle argues that “LEGO acts as a signifier for childhood and toy play” and that while it has some nostalgic value, the video games actually frame the franchises “in terms of toydom”—where varied franchise figures can be remade in the “iconic toy style” (2014, 148). However, while this is certainly the case in the video games, including *Dimensions*, there is something more going on than the simple reimagining of fan favorites as animated LEGO minifigures.

The expansive crossover potentials of *Dimensions* that sees Marty McFly, B.A. Baracus, Gizmo, and Peter Venkman combine in both physical brick and digital form, and played through various

familiar storyworlds from the movie screen, are imbued with nostalgia. Now playable, controllable, and physically collectible means that franchises from childhood are no longer gone, but remediated. Therefore, as I have argued throughout this chapter, nostalgia as fan memory is not about the past but is a tactical position through which to experience the present; it is a celebration of historical texts that no longer disappear thanks to their retelling through new media technologies and their collecting as the physical objects. Personal histories become embodied in the collected physical objects of *Dimensions*, and the virtual game itself is devoted to their preservation through digital remediation. So, LEGO is a signifier of nostalgia: for the LEGO brand of the past; for the moments during childhood when you were bought and played with LEGO; and, now, for the licensed film and media franchises you grew up with and that have since been remediated into their respective physical and digital LEGO storyworlds. For fans, LEGO represents a connection to childhood. Moreover, its remediation of popular film and media franchises through the *LEGO Dimensions* game means it has become a commercial brand with which fans can nostalgically identify in the present.

Note

- 1 For example, reviews of new Team and Fun packs in *Blocks* magazine not only discuss the playability of new characters brought to the *Dimensions* universe but they also emphasize whether or not fans should buy them as collectible items (particularly if they don't add anything to the actual gameplay). About the Superman & Aquaman Fun packs, Chris Wharfe says, "Unless you really want to play as either character, or need to complete your collection, wait for a discount" (2016b, 27) and of The Joker & Harley Quinn Team pack, Wharfe notices that "this version of Harley is also a pretty rare minifigure, last released in 2012" (2016a, 25). Rarity and exclusivity are also signaled by the fact that LEGO released a limited number of DC Comics Superheroes minifigures (Supergirl and Green Arrow) in polybags, only available to attendees at the E3 Expo and San Diego Comic Con.

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Chapter 11

Fan Fashion: Re-enacting *Hunger Games* through Clothing and Design

Nicolle Lamerichs

Fans and gamers do more than just couch-surf. Popular culture demands an increasing degree of participation via social media and platforms. Our current participatory culture motivates audiences to rework existing material into creative products of their own (Uricchio 2004; Jenkins 2006; Deuze 2007). Contemporary audiences are best characterized as “producers” (Bruns 2008) who both produce and consume media. Media are increasingly lived and re-enacted, rather than consumed, Deuze (2012) even argues.

Fan cultures are pivotal example of these emerging cultural dynamics. These active audiences engage with quality television programs from different countries, such as the United States or Japan. They form communities that have been theorized as “fandom,” which describes the social and creative communities around popular culture (Alvermann and Hagood 2000; Gray, Sandvoss, and Harrington 2007; Booth 2010; Stein and Busse 2012). Fans are characterized by their creativity, online and offline sociality, and their affect for the media text. Fan cultures are rich and thriving cultures, both online as well as offline, where different creative practices flourish that rewrite and subvert popular culture (Hills 2002; Lamerichs 2014). This chapter focuses on one aspect of fan practices, namely, fashion as a form of fan productivity and consumption.

The role of the body is crucial when expressing ourselves through media or participating in media content creation. However, researchers have rarely explored how embodiment shapes fan practices. For fans, the outward performance of fandom is fundamental. Dress functions as sub-cultural capital (Thornton 1995), and signifies a visual and social way of belonging. Clothing can signify fandom in many ways as it makes subcultures visible. In fandom, as in many music subcultures, fan fashion emerged in the context of costuming and appropriation. This DIY ethos of fans is still present, and the driving force behind practices such as cosplay, but in the past few years mainstream shops and catalogues have also started to sell geek clothing.

Fashion culture and geek culture have become more intimately connected in the past few years. This is evidenced in the work of Paul Booth (2015) who studied the playfulness of “digital cosplay”: a form of re-enactment which “appears to mimic fan practices by using a form of digital economy, enacting media play through both semantic pastiche and syntactic appropriation, and producing simultaneous uses of nostalgia and novelty as identifiable modes of user practice” (151). He studies the site Polyvore, where fans digitally create character outfits inspired by popular culture, but do not actually dress up in it, or embody it. He argues that: “These users enact

particular competencies that might be based more in fashion culture, constructing ‘looks’ and ‘outfits’ rather than ‘costumes’” (152).

I define three categories of fan fashion, which are crucial in this chapter: (1) as re-enactment or cosplay; (2) as pop-cultural apparel or casual clothing; and (3) as couture made by fans and inspired by fiction. I pay special attention to make-up as a way to embody, as well as commodify, existing stories. I argue that these different forms of fan fashion are not neutral expressions, but both highlight and subvert the values that are inherent in stories such as *The Hunger Games*. This complicated tension of both re-enacting and criticizing a deeply political and colonial universe such as *The Hunger Games* is central in this study.

First and foremost, fan fashion is perhaps most visible when we look at cosplay (or “costume play”). In this particular practice, fans construct and wear costumes that allow them to re-enact existing fictional characters or celebrities from popular culture (Lamerichs 2011). These outfits and subsequent performances are a physical manifestation of fans’ immersion into the fictional realms of television, games, and movies, among others. Cosplay can be understood as the culture of costuming that occurs beyond the institutional remit of the theatre.

Cosplay is commonly performed at fan conventions, which have thrived over the past few years. Large events draw countless visitors. San Diego Comic Con (2013) had 130,000+ visitors, many of whom attended in costume. The purpose of cosplay is to engage in identity play by dressing up as the look-a-like of existing fictional characters. Fans mimic the character not only through dress but also through the styling of wigs or hair, and make-up techniques. However, cosplay is not only an offline practice, but has also become connected to online media. Cosplaying props and costumes are not only sold but also performed online, through videos, photography, and in-character role-playing.

However, fan fashion is much broader than cosplay alone. Fan costumes also go hand-in-hand with other performances. Fan musicians often dress up authentically (Jenkins 1992, 250). *Harry Potter* fans have a long tradition of writing their own music related to the franchise, known as “wizard rock,” and wear outfits of witches and wizards (Williams 2014). Even wearing accessories, such as the house ties of Hogwarts, functions as subtle costuming which may not re-enact a specific character, but can remind us of a fictional universe, and suggest that we participate in it.

Over the past few years, fan clothing lines have become ever more professional, as demonstrated by the designs of Suckers Apparel, or Black Milk. The emerging phenomenon of fan fashion and streetwear is an example of how bodies, art, and fan identity interlace. There is a clear issue at stake here. Cosplay entered the creative industries as a form of precarious, fan-driven labor (Banks and Humphreys 2008). Fans are affected by the creative industries, and conversely, the professional field increasingly considers fan and geek culture a valuable market.

Finally, clothing lines and couture take inspiration from pop culture and cater to fans. Likewise, fan fashion shows (e.g., Her Universe) are becoming an important element of the convention landscape. In these shows, couture is emphasized as fans model in their own designs inspired by beloved fiction and characters.

Theoretically, fan fashion is exemplary of the changes in media culture where different technologies converge and content is “spread” (Jenkins, Ford, and Green 2012) across platforms. Fans move betwixt and between fictional, visual, and corporeal texts. One way to view these media relationships is through the concept of transmediality. While fan practices are an organic, bottom-up example of transmediality, the media industry itself also increasingly uses transmedia designs. Examples of these processes are social media strategies, extensive websites, and tie-in series (Ross 2008; Gillan 2010). In studies on transmediality, few scholars pay attention to the merchandise and fashion which also mediates these existing stories and characters.

Importantly, clothing is a universal marker of fandom. Fashion and clothing express fandom to both insiders and outsiders, and allow fans to visualize their affect for certain texts. Clothing

evokes our connection to a story, and can even be a way of engaging in storytelling by re-enacting a specific character. Paul Booth's study on digital cosplay (2015) also demonstrates how online pictures and collections of outfits can remind one of a fictional character or universe, without them even being worn by a real-life model. Clothing has a powerful function. It is enough to see a specific outfit or set of clothing to remind us that a specific character is being mediated.

In this chapter, I examine a broad range of clothing inspired by *The Hunger Games*. This includes officially released clothing and streetwear, as well as fan-driven creations that are sold on the craft platform Etsy, the auction site eBay, and platforms such as Redbubble where artists sell their own designs on shirts and other products. I explore fan fashion both through the lens of the creative industries as well as fandom itself, and argue that fan fashion is an emerging phenomenon which is partly driven by the creative industries as well as fans themselves. It allows fans to visually perform their identity to insiders and outsiders, while partly subverting the original *The Hunger Games* novels and the famous movie franchise. By focusing on one unique case, this study traces the role of fashion in fan culture as a way to mediate and embody existing stories.

Theorizing Embodiment and Fashion in Fandom

Fan fashion is a steadily growing phenomenon. Thus official and unofficial clothing is produced by or for fans. Within the creative industries, fan fashion is growing trend in need of analysis. Fan costumes entered the creative industries as a form of precarious, fan-driven labor (Banks and Humphreys 2008), but today fan clothing lines are becoming ever more professional, as demonstrated by the designs of Suckers Apparel, or Black Milk, and Hot Topic. Professional clothing lines and make-up lines cater to fans, but fans themselves are also creating original designs inspired by pop-culture. The Her Universe fashion show at San Diego Comic Con, for instance, showcases couture created by and for fans.

While fans themselves are clearly interested in fashion, few studies have been done on the connection between fashion, dress up, and fandom. That is striking, since fan costumes and embodiment have a long history and its predecessors include historical re-enactment (Kalshoven 2012), drag (Senelick 2002; see also Coppa's Chapter 12 in this volume) and gothic subcultures (Spooner 2004; Atkinson 2014).

Research on the role of the body in fandom is scarce, but much needed. The body can be used to signify fandom, for instance, through costumes, accessories or tattoos (Jones 2014). Embodying media is emblematic of our current consumer culture, where the body is part of a larger media network (Featherstone 2010). In other words, to fully understand the impact of media content, we need to see how our bodies are affected by these images and representations.

Fan culture and behavior, in other words, are deeply related to the body and representation. This has also been noted in a pivotal fan study by John Fiske. In his study "The Cultural Economy of Fandom" (1992), Fiske theorized in particular fandom as "textual productivity" that is characterized by the virtuosity and creativity of the audience rather than emotional or social investment. He also offers two other lenses through which we can analyze fandom: "semiotic productivity," which is integral to all audience behavior as a need to make sense of the text at all, and "enunciative productivity," which covers meanings that are shared and spoken and through which fans perform their identity to insiders and outsiders. According to Fiske, only textual productivity is specific to fandom, and this concept has received much attention in fan studies as a way to demarcate fans from other audience groups (Crawford 2012, 120–137; Hills 2013). This chapter can be read as an attempt to trace enunciative productivity. In other words, fashion and clothing functions as an outward expression of fandom for both insiders and outsiders.

There are three ways in which this chapter contributes to fan and media studies specifically. First, with a few exceptions (Winge 2006; Okabe 2012), phenomena such as fan costuming and clothing have hardly been studied. In media studies, fandom has primarily been studied as digital fandom and related to the emergence of online communities (Hellekson and Busse 2006; Booth 2010). I have, however, conducted several studies on fan costumes (e.g., Lamerichs 2013a, 2013b). The material dimensions of fandom have been studied, for instance, in relation to collecting practices (Geraghty 2014). More research needs to be done on how traditional spaces and material attributes allow for the performance of fan identity.

Second, this chapter draws new connections between popular culture and embodiment. Academic discourses on concepts such as the virtual give the impression that the body has become obsolete, transparent, or wired. The fan's body, however, is playful and present. In media theory, the body is often neglected, or discussed as an extension of our embodiment (McLuhan 2003) or a cyborg, enhanced by media technology (Haraway 1991). These theories neglect that the body is a medium in and of itself. Fashioning and embodying media are emblematic of our current consumer culture, where the body is part of a larger media network (Featherstone 2010).

Research on the role of the body in fandom is scarce, but necessary. The body can be used to signify fandom, for instance, through tattoos (Jones 2014). Central to this study is fandom as identity work and a narrative of the self (Hills 2014b) as much as a homage to popular culture. In a broad sense, this fashioning can also be a digital process. By customizing one's game character or avatar, gamers also engage in digital dress-up (Pearce 2006; Fron, Fullerton, Morie, and Pearce 2007; Wirman 2011).

Still, fan fashion is more than a form of play, and is not neutral. Like other forms of fashion, it is part of an economy and community. This clothing can be mass-produced by stores such as Hot Topic, or fans themselves create it and customize it. Even if the clothes are commercially produced, however, they cannot be seen as separate from fan expression. Fan fashion can be understood as a type of labor which is closely aligned with the creative industries as well as subcultures. With the growth of conventions and geek culture, the mainstreaming of fan fashion may be a growing trend.

The value of this study thus lies in its investigation of emerging subcultures, its discussion of the body in relation to different media, and its attention to developments in the creative industries. The social gain lies in the visibility and understanding of this subculture. Fan costumes, especially, are frequently misunderstood by outsiders, as well as fans. Especially costumed female fans are seen as attention seekers or inauthentic fans (Hernandez 2013). Understanding fan fashion and costuming is essential to avoid such gendered debates.

The Hunger Games

The universe of *The Hunger Games* is set in a dystopian future of North America, Panem. This country consists of the wealthy Capitol and 12 districts in varying states of poverty. Every year, children from the districts are selected to participate in a compulsory, annual, televised death match called The Hunger Games. When all the other children are annihilated, the victor is hailed a hero. The main character of the series is 16-year-old Katniss Everdeen, a girl from District 12, who volunteers for the 74th Hunger Games in place of her younger sister Primrose. The other candidate from District 12 is Peeta Mellark, the son of a baker. The two are trained for the games by Haymitch Abernathy, District 12's only living victor.

The Hunger Games is a young adult series with many political themes—colonialism, terrorism, and oppression. The series consists of three novels by Suzanne Collins, *The Hunger Games* (2008), *Catching Fire* (2009), and *Mockingjay* (2010). The novels have all been developed into films, with the film adaptation of *Mockingjay* split into two parts.

When examining fashion itself, it is important to understand first that it also has a unique role in the novels and movies. Fashion is key to showing the privilege of the Capitol and the poverty of the districts. This is even more notable in the films, which have been praised for their designs. The photography book by Tim Palen (2015) captures the details of these designs with close-ups of the make-up, wigs, and outfits. In the movies, design and color mediate the intentions of the characters and their cultural history. In an interview with *Vogue* (Creeden 2012), costume designer Judianna Makovsky discusses the blue and gray miners' clothing of District 12, for instance, "which was inspired by coal mining districts from the turn of the century to the 1950s."

Makovsky also explains how she draws from high fashion and architecture to portray the rich and privileged citizens of the Capitol. Their clothing also mediates their villainy:

These are people who like to watch children beat each other to death in an arena. So it has to be a sort of—not meanness—but we looked a lot at Schiaparelli. She has a sense of humor but the stuff is beautiful and striking. We looked a lot at Italian fascist architecture that is very imposing. We used a lot of black to break such bright colors. I just thought it would be funny if these people, who have such a vicious streak in them, are sort of covered in flowers and ruffles.

The chaperone of Katniss and Peeta, Effie Trinket, is seen as exemplary of this Capitol fashion. The citizens had to be powdered and eyebrowless. "It makes it high fashion, but also a little scary. And also beautiful, funnily enough."

The Hunger Games, then, is visually interesting and well developed as a story world. It is important to note that fashion in *The Hunger Games* is not neutral, but evokes powerful political and cultural messages. This is mediated in clothing and couture related to the series. Since make-up, and, more broadly speaking, color, are crucial to *The Hunger Games*, it is not surprising that companies and fans have launched make-up lines inspired by the films. Different districts have their own unique styles of clothing, wear different colors, and represent different aspects of North American history. For fans, wearing or re-enacting this fashion means appropriating and embodying the signs of their beloved story worlds.

Methodology

In this chapter, I explore the topic of fan fashion through various angles, often supported by traditional fieldwork and qualitative methods. I explore how fans mediate *The Hunger Games* in terms of embodiment and outward appearance. This is not limited to the direct re-enactment of characters and cosplay, but also includes streetwear, make-up, and other signifiers of fandom. I thus explore the visual culture of the fan fashion and its mediation at different online and offline sites through small-scale ethnography and close-reading.

This ethnography is not only characterized by its insider views, but also by its combination of online and offline data. Online spaces have specific implications for participation which require further unpacking. Online ethnographies, such as my own, have been explored under the headings of "virtual ethnography" (Hine 2000), "netnography" (Kozinets 2010) or "cyberethnography" (Ward 1999). Still, every concept has its own nuances and implications. I use the more neutral term "online ethnography" because I have drawn insights from all of these methods and do not want to enter ontological debates about the virtuality of the internet.

More importantly, I do not want to make online ethnography into something innately different from traditional ethnography. Although some would highlight the differences between internet spaces and traditional fields, I also want to be clear about the similarities. Annette Markham (1998) shows that, in online contexts, the body of the researcher facilitates social experiences.

Table 11.1 Online platforms studied for *The Hunger Games* fashion

Fashion item	Online platform
Official apparel and beauty products	Websites of companies such as Primark
Unofficial apparel & beauty products	Etsy, eBay, Redbubble
Fan costumes	Cosplay.com for photographs of outfits Etsy, eBay,
Couture	YouTube and fashion websites

The Internet cannot easily be separated from one's habits or home. Like any other ethnographic undertaking, it involves journeying toward a field and taking notes on it. Studying the web is a journey with real consequences for the researcher.

In terms of sampling, I had to restrict the fan products that I focused on. As a type of productive fandom, fan fashion depends on the circulation and fabrication of objects. These include full attire, props such as weapons, and gadgets; all these can be commercialized, circulated, sold, and given. The transmedia culture of fandom is staged across all of these objects, narratives, and performances. However, media fandom has often been perceived as a gift culture as opposed to the commercial transmedia designs of the industry itself (Jenkins 2006). Fans gift each other art works, stories, and input for free to create affective bonds and kinship (Scott 2009).

However, fan fashion also grants insight in fandom and play as they are staged as commodity cultures and gain an additional dimension of labor over leisure. That is to say, productive play in fandom does not necessarily mean gifting, but can also imply lucrative activities through which budding or professional artists can support themselves. This serious leisure does not necessarily imply a trade by which the artists can live but can also mean that they earn enough to compensate their expenses.

To see how objects in fan fashion circulate, I focus on different online examples, found through textual research. This allowed me to find different fan products and official products on a wide range of websites to give a detailed overview of *The Hunger Games* fashion. For official merchandise, I visited the websites of companies such as Primark and Claire's, which produced *The Hunger Games* products.

However, for fashion produced by and for fans, I focus on the following online retail sites: eBay (since 1995), Etsy (since 2005) and Redbubble. The first is an online auction site that is commonly used for e-commerce by setting particular prices; the second is a site for handmade items, vintage, and crafting. Redbubble, finally, is a platform where artists sell their own designs on different products, such as shirts. In these cases, I have looked for the most popular results in the relevant *The Hunger Games* categories (e.g., "clothing"), and explored the first 100 items and their related comments and context. The categories are also explained in more detail below when I describe the results. I searched by "best match" (eBay) and "relevance" (Etsy) rather than "most recent."

Finally, I paid attention to the media architecture of these three different platforms, as one is structured as an auction site with fan-driven and official merchandise, while the other two are better described as e-commercial art sites. I relied on the search results of July 20, 2016 to obtain this preliminary data and suggest that these sites could provide key data on cosplay when observed for a longer duration of time (Table 11.1).

Districts and Resistance in *The Hunger Games* Streetwear

Streetwear inspired by *The Hunger Games* has been sold in different shops. In general, many of the shops focused on the logo from the movies and novels itself, the Mockingjay symbol. With the release of several of the movies, Claire's launched jewelry lines with necklaces and pins that featured

the logo. Similarly, Primark has shirts which feature the logo as well (2016). Hot Topic's merchandise, inspired by the fourth movie, emphasizes the revolution and the districts themselves with printed shirts that feature texts such as "The revolution is about all of us" and "Revolution: the fire will burn forever."

Most official merchandise is based on the Districts rather than the Capitol, which allows fans to identify themselves with the marginalized groups depicted in the franchise. The merchandise of *The Hunger Games Exhibition*, for instance, features District 12 or 13 on baseball caps and belt buckles, or mediates the districts in a symbolic way. The Mockingjay may be placed on it as the logo of *The Hunger Games*, and a symbol of resistance. Equally interesting is some of their merchandise, such as a tote bag, which features the logo of Peeta's Bakery, allowing fans to express their love for Peeta as a character. More general items feature arrows or fire, signifying the importance of Katniss. By wearing this apparel, fans can relate to the books in general, or to the districts, but cannot side with the Capitol or lesser-known districts.

On a personal note, the lack of Capitol-related merchandise was obvious to me, since many of my favorite characters are in fact Capitol citizens, such as Effie Trinket and President Snow. While their political motivations are appalling, their culture and mannerisms fascinate me, and I expected at least to find more t-shirts saying "May the odds be ever in your favor." The lack of representation of this side of the story also strikes me as a peculiar for another reason: the fashion of the capitol is visually inspiring, and mediating it in streetwear could have resulted in classy and colorful designs.

The lack of representation of certain characters in the series, or its villains, can be contrasted to the streetwear of *Harry Potter*. For example, the collection at Primark from 2016 features shirts inspired by the different houses and characters in *Harry Potter*, including the Marauders. In 2015, they also released a shirt inspired by the fictional magazine *The Quibler* which included the text "how to identify a mudblood." Despite this diversity, though, true villainy is also not represented in official *Harry Potter* streetwear, where shirts portraying Voldemort or the death eaters also seem absent.

However, a wealth of unofficial *The Hunger Games* streetwear is also being produced by fans. The top categories on Etsy (July 20, 2016) feature 1,096 jewelry items, 421 accessories, and 382 clothing designs. As mentioned in the methodology section, I examined the first 100 most popular results of each of these categories. The jewelry section features 36 items which star Katniss' crossbow or arrows and symbolize her (36 percent). Some 28 items star the Mockingjay symbol, and a handful of items feature lines such as "always," "girl on fire," or "may the odds be ever in your favor." In general, there are few items inspired by jewelry which is featured in the films, other than the Mockingjay pin, which is amply featured in this category (Table 11.2). In other words, few items truly mediate the films or have a close diegetic relationship with the costumes and accessories featured in the film itself. In this category, there is little evidence of the importance of replicas for fan culture (Hills 2014a).

Streetwear can be found at Etsy, eBay, and Redbubble, which I will briefly compare for the purpose of this study. On Etsy and eBay, the first 100 items in the categories at both sites heavily

Table 11.2 Overview of official *The Hunger Games* streetwear (2016) examined for this study

Source	Item of streetwear
Primark	Shirts with Mockingjay logo
Hot Topic	Shirts, fleece, Mockingjay pin
<i>The Hunger Games</i> Exhibition	Diverse apparel including baseball caps, leggings, belts and nightwear
Claire's	Pins, necklaces and other jewelry with Mockingjay logo

feature replicas and fan-made pins or jewelry. The crossbow and arrows, in particular, inspire many of the unofficial designs. Like the official streetwear, most items ignore the Capitol. There are, however, some items which echo Effie Trinket or other characters, signifying their importance to fandom. In general though, similar patterns emerge as in the official merchandise, with more attention to replicas, which I will discuss in a separate section on cosplay.

Streetwear, in other words, is important to *The Hunger Games* fandom and sold at different stores. Hoodies and shirts which feature the Mockingjay are immensely popular. Because the logo of *The Hunger Games* is so integral to the fandom and its franchise, this is printed en masse by fans and official companies. Other shirts echo characters and sentiments through printed shirts with quotes or images of characters. Sites such as Redbubble, however, where fans can upload their own designs, are more diverse. The first 100 results of this site show one design with a Capitol logo, various shirts inspired by the different districts, and 13 shirts with quotes from the books. A few shirts contain references to Peeta such as a print “the boy with the bread” or to Katniss such as “run, fire girl.” These shirts are more fannish, and seem to cater more to insiders rather than outsiders. Only an insider audience would recognize specific terminology or fan nicknames after all. Some shirts on Redbubble contain general remarks about fandom itself, such as “he may be fictional but my love is real.” A few shirts are cross-overs, including a shirt spelling “keep calm and Finnick on” or “adventure games,” starring Katniss and Peeta drawn in the style of the cartoon *Adventure Time*. These cross-overs of popular texts are quite common in fandom (e.g., in fanfiction) but are also a genre within fan fashion. These shirts, like the previous examples, cater perhaps more to a fan than an outsider.

Of the three platforms, then, Redbubble seems to contain the most appropriations and transformations. Its users not only use official signs (e.g., the Mockingjay logo), but also design shirts which reflect on fan culture itself.

Glamorizing the Capitol through Make-up

Beauty products made by and for fans are also increasingly important as a form of merchandise. With the release of the second movie, CoverGirl launched a licensed makeup line, the “Capitol Collection.” Each District is represented by different products and colors, and features a model whose look girls can imitate. District 12 features a model who looks like Katniss actress Jennifer Lawrence, with a similar braid and clothing, and who wears fierce eyeshadow in orange and yellow. She literally is the girl on fire. District 1 portrays an Effie Trinket-like model with bright red lipstick.

As the website of CoverGirl explains: “The Hunger Games for CoverGirl—Inspired by the popular young adult science fiction series, ‘The Hunger Games,’ CoverGirl has created a special line of makeup evoking the districts of the world. The line includes twelve unique beauty looks ranging from themes like Power and Fishing” (“CoverGirl gets inspired by The Hunger Games for ‘Capitol Beauty’ Collection,” 2013).

In *The Guardian*, Heather Long (2013) criticizes the make-up line:

The capitol loves the superficial: flamboyant hair, makeup, clothes, lavish banquets, etc. The people who live there are so blinded by their lifestyle that they don't fully grasp that they're putting on “games” where children are killing each other. In fact, they're cheering it on like most people do sports teams. They make bets on who will die and laugh about it. That's what CoverGirl is worshipping. It's as if no one read the books or even saw the first movie.

She continues to state that the message that girls should look pretty and wear make-up is at odds with the movies as well, since Katniss herself is a very natural and down-to-earth protagonist.

The beauty industry, then, may sometimes misinterpret existing stories and franchises. Increasingly, fans also create and sell their own beauty products which may adhere to a different logic.

I examined the first 100 items in the “bath and beauty” category on Etsy, which include diverse products such as mascara, perfumes, and hair accessories. The products are very diverse, and therefore hard to categorize. Some of the most notable products are an Effie Trinket-inspired mascara “that is mahogany,” a “bright and bubbly” nail polish inspired by Effie Trinket by FanChromaticNails, a fierce, glittery nail polish inspired by *Catching Fire*, and Peeta-inspired lotion, bathing salts, and shower gels.

These fan products can be contrasted to the licensed “Capitol” make-up lines. They are more diverse and they pay tribute to the characters, rather than the politics of *The Hunger Games*. The “Capitol Collection” attempts to include all districts, but ends up glamorizing and misrepresenting them. This is less the case with the make-up found on Etsy, where fans more generally refer to characters or motives in the story, such as fire. Still, a similar criticism could apply here. Characters such as Effie are glorified even though they send children out to die.

Make-up, even more than streetwear, raises the question of what aspects of the story are mediated, and whether that is acceptable. Katniss hardly wears any make-up, while Effie and the Capitol citizens are defined particularly by their outrageous make-up, eyebrows, and eyelashes. Wearing make-up, in *The Hunger Games* universe, equals adhering to the logic of the Capitol. This theme is even featured in the third movie, when Katniss is shown wearing make-up for the recruitment videos shown to the Capitol. She is visibly uncomfortable wearing the make-up, and feels less like herself.

Thus, in this case study, make-up is not neutral. It raises critical questions in terms of embodiment, since it is thematically connected to colonialism, spectacle, and death. However, it is important to remember that *The Hunger Games* is a complex political story. The Capitol citizens are not always wrong and the districts not always right. It is a story in which some characters, such as Effie, also redeem themselves, while others, such as Coin, are darker than they first seemed.

However, for fans, these themes may not be as relevant as for critics. They probably do not interpret wearing make-up as a political act, in light of *The Hunger Games*. Speaking as an active fan, who also buys these products herself, I think that the joy of buying these beauty products is closely connected to our favorite characters and the story itself.

Re-enacting *The Hunger Games* in Cosplay and Replicas

The Hunger Games inspires many fan costumers. To explore what type of characters the fans re-enact, I examined the first 100 best results on Cosplay.com. Most fans re-enact Katniss Everdeen in different outfits or Effie Trinket. One user, donttouchmymilk, has recreated Effie Trinket’s butterfly dress from the film *Catching Fire*. She writes:

This costume was a pretty big project with a lot of twists and turns, but it was a hell of a lot of fun to make and wear. There are over 560 feather or paper wings on this dress, over half of which were individually cut out (SO MUCH CUTTING). (donttouchmymilk, 08–16–2014)

At cosplay.com, fans often write how they produced the outfit as background information and to help other cosplayers. Effie Trinket cosplayer Adestra writes:

made the pattern from scratch. It took me ages to find a fabric I was happy with, after I found out, the original was sold out everywhere. The wig is made out of two, cutting one and adding the self made curls to the other. Adding a lot of spray to keep it in place. :) Shoes were white to start with. I painted them black and added the gold finish. (10–22–2014)

While some fans elaborate on the crafting of the outfit, others also explain their choice. User Lady Skywalker portrays the tribute Fox Face and writes: “I only made the jacket. It was pretty much thrown together for this group. Really, the trip was all about being on the filming location of the arena in *The Hunger Games*! I’ll probably remake the jacket to be better for another trip, though” (11–05–2012). Her outfit was part of a group cosplay, and she also admits that her motivation was partly media tourism. Visiting the film location, and shooting there with friends, was a main motivation for her to cosplay Fox Face. In this sense, she is less character-driven than some of the other costumers, and has a more social motivation to create and wear a Fox Face costume.

The importance of replicas and fan costumes is also apparent in the content analysis of items on Etsy and eBay. As I already noted, the articles featured on both sites are highly diverse. In terms of jewelry, for instance, both sites feature ample amounts of official and unofficial Mockingjay pins. Other replicas are surprisingly lacking at Etsy in the “jewelry” category.

This lack of replicas stands in stark contrast with the Etsy categories “accessories” and “clothing.” In the category “accessories,” fans sell their own designs. Some of these are based on Katniss’s scarf in the movies (24 percent). Effie Trinket’s flowers and head pieces are reflected in three items, and there are also several cowls and other pieces inspired by the mining district. Other items include scarves with arrows printed on them, buttons inspired by *The Hunger Games*, and more general designs.

In the “clothing” category, 19 designs of Katniss’s scarf are sold (19 percent). Other items include printed shirts or dresses with lines or the book covers printed on them. Few items are truly full-fledged fan costumes. Several fans specialized in recreating several of the dresses that Katniss wears, but these are hardly the top categories. A Peeta costume is also featured, but none of Effie Trinket’s outfits show up in the top categories.

In general, the “accessories” and “clothing” categories are more related to cosplay than the “jewelry” category and reflect an interest in dress-up and re-enactment. However, there are also many printed shirts and other items that can be worn in daily life.

A preliminary analysis of eBay reveals similar patterns. The first 100 most popular items in the category “jewelry and watches” feature 68 percent Mockingjay pins, including necklaces and earrings with this symbol. Only 13 percent feature an arrow (e.g., Katniss’s arrow in a small bottle on a necklace) or an allusion to the crossbow. The other items are diverse, and feature necklaces which say “Peeta” for the fans, or include replicas of items from the movies such as the “Catching Fire Finnick’s Shell Necklace Pendant” sold by one user.

In the clothing category, 48 percent of the most popular results includes costumes. This includes full attires of the training outfits, as well as replicas of the training shirt which Katniss wears in the films and the battle armor from the fourth movie. The outfits all relate to Katniss and Peeta, and District 12, while other characters are not represented. Several users also sell Katniss wigs or replicas of the gloves that she wears. These props remind us of iconic looks of Katniss—her hairdo and her most famous outfits. Overall, the site sells both specific props as well as full outfits which help cosplayers complete their look and performance.

Couture

Over the past few years, fans have actively connected costuming and couture. This trend is also evident in the creative industries themselves, for example, in the fashion initiatives that are launched in relation to movies. For the recent *Star Wars* movie (2015), a fashion show was for instance held by Canadian designers during the Toronto fashion week. These types of initiatives are becoming more common.

An important step for the visibility of couture within fandom itself is the Her Universe Fashion Show (hosted since 2014) at San Diego Comic Con. They self-describe as “the ultimate runway for

fangirl fashion” (Her Universe, 2016). “The ultimate prize? The chance to win the opportunity to design a fashion collection with ground-breaking fangirl fashion company and lifestyle brand, Her Universe, to be sold exclusively at leading pop culture retailer, Hot Topic.” In this fashion show, a broad range of designs have been shown in the past years which included *Star Wars* and *Doctor Who* dresses, but also fashion inspired by *The Hunger Games*.

In 2014, Lauren Bregman participated in the Her Universe fashion show at San Diego Comic Con in her Effie Trinket outfit. Her dress is inspired by Effie Trinket’s popular butterfly dress but is longer, with a high slit. The site of Her Universe (04–08–2016) features a biography of the designer:

An award-winning designer from the renowned Castle Corsetry, Lauren Bregman has been a corset and costume designer for the past decade. After graduating from the Fashion Institute of Design and Merchandising and training at Farthingales Corsets, Lauren broke through as a designer for the famous Trashy Lingerie. There, she created couture orders for superstars such as Kim Kardashian, Holly Madison, and Rose McGowan.

In the case of *The Hunger Games*, fashion projects were also launched. To celebrate the launch of *Catching Fire*, Net-a-Porter released a clothing line of *The Hunger Games* items, in collaboration with the film’s costume designer, Trish Summerville. This collection starred 19 ready-to-wear pieces as well as jewelry and leather goods. For these fashion items, prices started at £40 for a T-shirt. The different dresses, leather trousers and other items are clearly inspired by the Capitol, District 12 and the looks of the tributes in the arena. Overall, the items mediate the style of the films, but are still wearable in daily life.

The fact that the collection has been toned down also raised criticism in fandom. Writing for the geeky news blog *The Mary Sue*, journalist Rebecca Pahle is critical of the collection:

But my own personal opinion, speaking as a Fashion Expert (by which I mean ‘someone who wears clothes that have some sort of fashion to them’), is that these clothes are *far* too normal. What the hell?! I’d actually wear some of them if I had the money! And sure, technically they’re inspired by the films as a whole, not just the Capitol. But it’s called Capitol Couture and there’s *no neon*! I am disappointed [*sic*]. (Pahle 2013)

Overall, the fashionable style of the Capitol and the down-to-earth districts has inspired different designers and fans. It is interesting to see that fan couture is emerging more and more as a phenomenon in relation to different franchises. Still, it also raises questions. Can these designs truly mediate the story world? Should this fashion be akin to the original creation (similar to fan costumes) or should it be toned down to appeal to a wider audience, and to match the current fashion trends? Fan couture raises these and more questions, but will undoubtedly remain a trend to watch out for the coming years.

Conclusion

Fan fashion is an important and growing phenomenon. In this chapter, I particularly focused on fashion inspired by *The Hunger Games*. This included small-scale ethnography on different platforms of both official and unofficial apparel inspired by the novels and films. By looking at other fandoms and franchises, we might be able to gather more insights into the growing trend of fan fashion.

The mediation of fan fashion is complex. What we see is that fans embody characters and signs to visualize their fandom, in order to identify more closely with a series. Similar to Paul Booth's study on digital cosplay (2015), I find that this mediation is always a tension between fidelity and transformation. I would argue, however, that *The Hunger Games* fans adopt rather than subvert or transgress the imagery of the universe. This could be related to how mainstream the fandom is and the related practices. "As fandom moves into a more mainstream identity, such disruptive play also changes from transgressive to pastiche," Paul Booth explains (2015, p. 163).

Though the fan expressions may be closely related to the source text, this does not mean that the fan fashion itself is neutral. In the deeply political world of *The Hunger Games*, drawing inspiration from characters can raise questions. What does it mean to portray young children who die? Should we glorify the values of the Capitol through make-up? Is the Mockingjay symbol understood only as a symbol of fandom, or as a symbol of resistance by *The Hunger Games* readers and viewers? Since I only examined *The Hunger Games* fandom online, through netnography, I cannot answer these questions at length.

More qualitative studies on fan fashion are needed to unearth how fashion, including apparel and beauty products, is understood by fans. While it is undoubtedly an expression of fandom, which solidifies fan identity, it is difficult to say whether a more political and subversive identity play is also at hand. While it may not be inherently subversive to fans, fashion is an important way to mediate favorite stories and characters, to connect with other fans, and to perform one's fan identity through clothing.

The sheer popularity of fan fashion, and the dedication with which fans create their own fashion, can be considered an important trend in its own right. Based on this study, I can conclude that fashion is an important and diverse way for fans to express their identity, and to embody the fiction that they love. The case study proves the widespread interest in fan fashion, and the desire to remediate fiction. The fans hardly critique the source text, but this might be for a reason. As fan fashion becomes normalized, the more subversive aspects of fandom might fade.

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Chapter 12

Slash/Drag: Appropriation and Visibility in the Age of *Hamilton*

Francesca Coppa

when bucky barnes comes out with dark eyes and no memory, i think of myself. of how certain words make me fall back into the places i never want to return to. of how i can't erase everything that's been taught to me by the people who hurt me, but i'm trying. that love, above everything, helps me ground myself to the present so i'm not sent tumbling.

(Inkskinned, on Tumblr)

Why slash? The question has been asked again and again, by journalists in sensation pieces, by scholars in academic articles, and by fans themselves in essays and convention panels and blog posts: why have women created this enormous archive of romantic and erotic stories between male characters from television and film? Why Kirk/Spock? Why Holmes/Watson (retroactively dubbed “Johnlock” in the age of portmanteau pairing names)? Why do we ship Dean/Castiel on *Supernatural*? The phenomenon of slash is already well represented, not to say over-represented, in the scholarly literature, but that may be because it doesn't look quite like anything else, certainly not like anything else in the literary world.

But I have previously argued that fan fiction, with its focus on bodies, isn't a literary form at all—or rather, that because it uses the evoked bodies and voices of mass media characters to tell new stories, it is more a kind of theatre than a kind of literature (Coppa [2006] 2014). This is, if anything, even more true of slash, where the beautiful male bodies of the central characters—what Joanna Russ ([1985] 2014) calls “the passive, acted-upon glories of male flesh”—tend to be front and center. In slash, the reader is even more aware that these famous characters are performing in scripts that are (1) different from the usual mass media fare; and (2) of a woman's devising. Slash narratives offer us the chance both to watch and to identify with these men—or in Constance Penley's (1992) formulation, both to *be* and to *have* them (488).¹ There are endless transmedia adaptations of characters like Sherlock Holmes or Batman, so it is clearly not appropriation that's the issue: it is the appropriation by the *other*—by women, in this case.

One could argue then that it is our awareness of this appropriative doubleness—of the familiar characters acting in an unfamiliar script, of the female storyteller animating the male characters—that boots slash out of “literature,” with its illusions of psychological coherence (see Edwards's Chapter 3 in this volume), and puts it instead into the category of performance, itself so often associated with the fake, the female, the forged, the queer. My argument in this chapter is that it

might be useful to compare slash to other forms of appropriative performance; drag comes powerfully to mind and, more recently, the musical *Hamilton*. These are forms where it's important to see the bothness, the overlaid and blurred realities: male body/Liza Minnelli; person of color/George Washington.

These examples are transvestite in the literal sense of people wearing the “wrong” (new, previously forbidden) clothes and taking on the “wrong” (new, previously incredible) roles. They are embodied im-personations that transgress and disrupt conventional categories, and maybe even the idea of categories (Garber 1992; Willis 2016; see also Zubernis and Larsen's discussion of cosplay as embodied translations in Chapter 9 in this volume). To see slash as a similar mode of performance—one in which a female writer animates not just one, but two deliberately contrasted and symbolically overdetermined male protagonists—is to understand slash as what Garber (1992) calls an *enabling fantasy* (6) and what David Halperin (2012) terms a *proxy identity*; that is, a performative intervention that—like drag, like *Hamilton*—enables something to be said that could not otherwise be said.

“We're Not Gay; We Just Love Each Other”

I first began thinking about the connections between slash and drag when a new generation of fans began to question whether slash was appropriative not just of male mass media characters, which it certainly is, but also of some kind of “real” gay male experience. Fandom—itself a queer female space across which women of many different sexualities engage, and thus a place of queer and queer-sympathetic sensibility (Lothian, Busse, and Reid 2007)—began a process of introspection and soul searching. Was the old formulation of WNGWJLEO (“We're Not Gay; We Just Love Each Other”), indicative of residual, unexamined homophobia among slash writers? (Why such emphasis on Not-Gayness?) Did slashers in some sense *owe* it to real gay men to create fictional male protagonists in some kind of realist gay context? (So, e.g., should male slash protagonists always wear condoms in educational solidarity against AIDS?)

The idea that the male protagonists of slash fiction—the “men” implied in the title of Green, Jenkins and Jenkins's “Normal Female Interest in Men Bonking” (1998)—were *bonking* but not actually *gay* was articulated almost from the first, both among slash writers themselves and in the earliest academic articles. Lamb and Veith ([1986] 2014) state definitively that Kirk/Spock stories “are not about two gay males and should not be categorized as examples of homosexual literature—either male or female” (112), and Joanna Russ ([1985] 2014) agrees, though partly because the early Kirk/Spock stories she was writing about showed “no homosexual subculture presented, no awareness of being derogated, no friends or family, absolutely no gay politics, and so on” (95). However, a sense of—if not homosexual, definitely queer—identity, community, and politics does today commonly circulate in slash stories set in worlds connected to our own (not all are), not only because gay culture is more visible and mainstream, but also because it is now almost impossible to imagine a contemporary character who wouldn't at least *consider* the question of whether loving another man, even *just this one*, makes them gay or not. (For more on the changing depictions of sexuality in slash, see Busse and Lothian (2017).) Moreover, the discovery that one is not strictly heterosexual is itself a more common experience, though one is still underrepresented in mainstream media, and female fans who have themselves come out along a spectrum of queerness (including bi, trans, and an array of asexual sexualities) may wish to see male slash protagonists as representative *as well as* metaphorical; this is yet another kind of bothness that slash now provides. So the BBC's *Sherlock*, who claims that sex is “not my area,” has been adopted by the asexual community (Coppa 2012) and Marvel's *Captain America*, who canonically seems to have

both a girlfriend and a boyfriend, has been championed as the bisexual hero America deserves. (As the t-shirts read, coyly, “It’s Stars *and* Stripes.”)

So various kinds of queerness circulate in and around slash fiction, but despite its focus on male/male love and sex, slash can’t and shouldn’t be reduced to “gay fiction” any more than drag should be seen as “women’s theatre.” Many people refer to slash in a casual, offhand way as “gay porn”; however, asked the question more seriously, many if not most fans would deny that slash is either “gay” (if gay = male) or “porn.” After all, there is no shortage of actual, uncontroversially labeled gay porn, so there must be some reason for the enormous production of slash on top of this. Even stories that cut right to the steamy stuff work to supplement larger narratives: we care about these characters having sex because of our engagement with the transmedia and fanmedia storyworlds from which they came. Bodies in slash are never “just” bodies, by which I mean distanced aesthetic objects that lack history, personality, idiosyncrasy; rather, they have complex backstories and known, elaborately articulated identities. The whole point of slash is that we are imagining the sexual lives of characters that we care about.

I sometimes tell my students that if the crime of male-oriented pornography is objectification, the crime of slash fiction is *subjectification*: the erasing of differences between the self and the fictional character to the point where a fan can feel a profound identification with someone who is really quite objectively different (e.g., Jedi Master Obi-Wan Kenobi, hockey player Jonathan Toews, Chicago police detective Ray Kowalski; fan favorites all) or that she wouldn’t like or support (e.g., Loki of Asgard, villain of *The Avengers*). Fandom loves Loki. I, too, love Loki. I plead guilty to the crime of subjectifying Loki, though I defend myself and other Loki-lovers (substitute Edward Cullen, Spike from *Buffy*, Heathcliff from *Wuthering Heights*, etc.) by saying—look, we *know* that he is, in Eddie Izzard’s phrase, a mass-murdering fuckhead. We’re not really going to marry him or anything. That’s why it’s a *fantasy*; we *know*, thanks.²

And fantasy is a complicated thing. Joanna Russ ([1985] 2014) asserts that the fantasies of slash fiction are not “simply an attenuated version of reality,” but actually *unreal*, emphatically adding, “By ‘unreal’ I don’t mean simply glamorized or idealized *but totally unlike reality*” (87). Russ compellingly argues that these fantasies clearly do not mean what they might seem to: many slash fans love hurt/comfort (the trope wherein “battering, mutilation, and torture” leads to sexualized nurturance), but “what the writers obviously want is not twenty-four-hour-a-day nurse duty or people really bleeding and dying in their arms, but the sexual turn-on that the fantasy of touching and holding the lover gives them” (93). Similarly, Russ discusses the rape fantasies that “have bedeviled the women’s movement ... as if they were a literal representation of what women want, when they are quite obviously nothing of the kind” (93). Other recurring motifs include the almost-programmatic switching up of sexual roles, what Deborah Kaplan (2012) describes as “the modern slash fan fiction convention that ... both partners must take turns topping in bed” (126), and the romantic ideal of living with one’s beloved in near-isolation, when in real life, most couples get cranky over a long weekend. And that’s not even getting into some of slash’s more science-fictional tropes: soulbonds and telepathy, interspecies relationships; male pregnancy. But that is the slippery nature of fantasy: what you see is not what you get; what you write may not be what you want.

Red Rover, Red Rover, Send Judy Back Over

So if slash is a complex fantasy of and for women—“Pornography by Women for Women, with Love,” in Joanna Russ’s famous formulation—that appropriates and rescripts male mass media characters and the overdetermined tropes of performed masculinity, the reverse is true of drag. In drag, gay men cite aspects of a performed pop-cultural femininity to express things that were, and

perhaps still are, otherwise both unsayable and unhearable; consider, for instance, the vast complexity of meanings that swirl around Judy Garland. Commercial efforts like *Ru Paul's Drag Race* aside, drag is typically not performed for outsiders; it is a subcultural form made by and for its audience, with love. Nor is drag typically made with the female spectator in mind, just as slash fiction is not typically written with consciousness of a male readership; while there have always been some men (typically gay or trans) in slash fandom, for most of its fifty-year history one could refer with near certainty to a default she.

Drag itself may be becoming controversial in some quarters as cultural appropriation (Lison 2015) but as someone who came up in the queer theory 1990s, I confess I find this baffling. It never occurred to me to think that drag performance either represented or mocked female experience; in fact, I found it liberating to watch someone else pick up all that patriarchal feminine baggage—and put it down again. As RuPaul declares, “Identity is a hoax, people! Don’t take it too seriously!” (Morris and Wortham 2016). Drag denaturalizes femininity and shows it to be performative; as the old feminist sawhorse goes, the best drag queens of all time were Mae West and Marilyn Monroe (Goldie 2002, 130). Equally liberating is the story that Marilyn could, at will, drop the act and become invisible and unnoticed; unmarked; that she could walk the streets like a person, free.

In his book *How to Be Gay*, David Halperin (2012) discusses the ongoing centrality of certain female characters to the gay male cultural experience³ and takes as his project an explanation of why gay men choose those particular avatars and what they make of them. Halperin argues that gay men use these female characters to articulate a *gay male subjectivity* which precedes and may in important ways be separate from a gay male sexual *identity* (or to put it another way, a boy may love show tunes before he loves men, or without ever loving men). The gay male appropriation of and performance of femininity effectively mirror—in the sense both of “reflect” and “reverse”—slash fiction’s preoccupations with and appropriations of certain (often hyper-performatively) male characters in service of a female sensibility; in both cases, appropriation becomes a way of saying something that could not otherwise easily be said. Halperin asks us to consider Bette Davis’s famous exclamation, “What a dump!” from the film noir, *Beyond the Forest* (1949). Davis’s inimitable (read: imitable to the point of demanding imitation) delivery has been picked up and repeated as a piece of camp performance, and re-re-rehearsed by the monstrously fabulous Martha in Edward Albee’s *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*, itself a queer classic. But why “What a dump!”? What does it mean?

In Halperin’s (2012) view, Davis’s line does a lot of cultural heavy lifting, expressing, “a certain specific attitude, a characteristic posture *that would otherwise have been hard to capture* in just three little words” (emphasis mine); that is, “a combination of vulgarity and hauteur, disdainful superiority, withering aesthetic judgment, upper-class wannabe pretentiousness, and prissy, feminine dismissal of the self-less, sincere, manly values of middle-class respectability” (24). “What a dump!” is thus a kind of shorthand, an economical summation of a complex stance. Halperin concludes that the line, “wrenched out of its original context and reappropriated,” provided gay men “with some elements of an alternative, collective stance,” and could thus be used by gay men *as a group* to elaborate “a dissident, oppositional way of being and feeling” (24). Gay men have adopted Bette Davis’s language and stance to stake out a position not otherwise accessible; Bette Davis provides a pose, a role, open to anyone who can take it on. This is the power of performance and of cultural quotation.

“It’s Life, Jim, but Not as We Know It”

Compare this example of how gay men have “selectively appropriated, recoded, and circulated certain bits” of mainstream culture (Halperin 2012, 12), thus forcing them to serve as vehicles of queer meaning, to media fandom’s various cultural and artistic practices. Against “What a dump!”

I'll see you and raise you, "Fascinating," a word that should immediately conjure up the arch of Mr. Spock's eyebrow. Spock is precisely the kind of performative masculine figure that obsesses slash fans, not least because his status as a man is constantly questioned within the *Star Trek* text. Spock is othered, alien, of a foreign and thus mysterious biology that leaves him open to rude questions and snide remarks; Spock is also psychologically and emotionally suspect, routinely scrutinized and judged as having failed to perform his feelings appropriately. I have previously argued (Coppa 2008) that Spock carries within him the shadow of a displaced woman: Number One, *Star Trek's* original first officer, as played by Majel Barrett (later Roddenberry). Like Spock, Number One was aloof, unemotional, and tactically brilliant, but the character was disliked by test audiences, and Spock was moved into her role.

What, then, to make of that oh-so-dry, "Fascinating"? It is an expression of wonder, but also the comment of an alien encountering a foreign culture. I think a woman engineer could explain it; I think female coders or computer scientists would know. Women know what it is like to be strangers in a land that sees us as foreign and treats us as different and lesser, that polices our emotions (*silly, bitchy, irrational, hysterical*) and then claims we are hard and unfeeling (in 2016, it was asked of Hillary Clinton,⁴ as it was of Spock, "Is she even *human*?") It's no accident that Spock's home planet of Vulcan is the imaginative center of so much fan fiction. Vulcans, as all good Trekkies know, dispensed with the cruder animal instincts centuries ago; they are civilized as humanity is not, though humans will insist on complimenting Vulcans on their "humanity."

KIRK: I suspect you're becoming more and more human all the time.

SPOCK: Captain, I see no reason to stand here and be insulted.

(*Star Trek* 1967)

Number One was also subjected to these kinds of patronizing compliments: assured by her captain that she wasn't sexually distracting like the other female officers were. You're not like those other girls, Number One. You're really almost human, Spock—and, refreshingly, both characters understand these compliments to be insults.

Italian Widows and Action Heroes

Now despite the line of argument I have just taken, I don't actually want to argue that Spock is *literally* female⁵ any more than David Halperin thinks that Joan Crawford is "really" a man in a dress. In fact, Halperin (2012) insists that Crawford and other female icons *cannot* be reduced to gay men in disguise; rather, Crawford "makes available to gay men an emotional situation that they can explore, so as to gain a perspective on aspects of their own predicament. She enables them to try on, to try out, to compare, and to criticize certain ways of being and feeling" (290).

In the case of gay men, this involves trying on performative gestures that have been historically coded as female: Halperin (2012) gives the example of the Italian Widows, a group of gay men of Mediterranean descent who dress in the black frocks and veils donned by Italian peasant women upon the death of their husbands (179). On the one hand, the Italian Widows are appropriating costume and behaviors across class and gender, enacting, as Halperin admits, a parody of a certain kind of womanhood; on the other hand, the Italian Widows have all lost lovers and friends to AIDS. Mainstream culture gives men no script for grieving; the performance of grief is coded female, from ancient Greece to Jackie Kennedy. Gay male grief tends to be consigned to, in Halperin's words, "the incongruous, the excessive, the melodramatic, the hysterical, the inauthentic" (180)—they are, in other words, judged for their inappropriate

feelings. But through drag, by appropriating aspects of the iconic performance of grief by women, the Italian Widows make their own grief expressible; hearable.

In slash, the “trying on” of ways of being and feeling involves the appropriation of some behaviors that have been culturally coded as male. Women who slash are appropriating and remixing male performances to create behavioral scripts for themselves that the culture has not otherwise provided. Gay men have been drawn to the behavior of glamor queens, divas, and women who are actively *performing* their gender. Similarly, slash fans tend to be drawn to characters who can be seen to be actively *performing* their masculinity, and so have behaviors, roles, lines, props that can easily be redeployed.

Slash features some of the most overdetermined male characters in the history of mass media. These “men” are not like our brothers and sons and fathers and husbands; they are Spock and Loki, Captain America and Tony Stark, Constable Benton Fraser and Lieutenant Colonel John Sheppard, Detectives Starsky and Hutch, pop stars Justin Timberlake and Harry Styles; the inimitable (read: imitable to the point of demanding imitation) Sherlock Holmes.⁶ They are aliens and werewolves and cyborgs and wizards and rock stars; they are new men and chemically enhanced men and military men with ridiculously big guns: a collection of phallic props (pointy ears, pipes, metal arms, wands, microphones) like you’ve never seen; an archive of performative masculine behaviors; men in/as uniforms and costumes. If divas wear stilettos and enormous hairdos and dresses with plunging necklines and have red, red lips, fandom’s beloved male characters grab each other by the lapels and shove each other into walls; they explore strange new worlds, slay dragons and fake their own deaths; they risk hell and earth to save us; they are action heroes! That is how we know they are men, for as John Berger (1972) noted: *men act* and *women appear* (47). These men are acting; they are, to paraphrase performance theorist Richard Schechner, showing us the doing of *action!*

Which is, of course, already suspect, feminine, and queer, which is part of why we like them. The rehearsed, performed nature of *acting* disqualifies it as real (manly) *action*; acting is faked action, forged, scripted action. Theatre is for sissies and girls, unlike unrepeatable “unique events” like wars or sports matches, in which the doing of action has the potential to alter the outcome: that is, to produce winners and losers. The observable performance of masculinity undercuts masculinity more than the visible performance of femininity humiliates women, because women are fake anyway—it’s understood, despite or perhaps because of the extolling of “natural” womanhood, that no woman is “really” authentic. But the profession of acting puts male actors into a historically female cultural position; subjecting them to the gaze of others and de-naturalizing their behaviors. All acting is, in that way, always already feminized.

But beyond this extra-textual problem of performance itself, the male characters that fandom is drawn to tend to be conflicted and divided subjects within the text; they have a visible *bothness* that makes *thematic and central to their stories* the idea of personhood as performance. Mr. Spock is half-human, half-Vulcan; Holmes is a mind visibly struggling with a burdensome body (Coppa 2012). Werewolves and vampires are divided souls by nature; celebrities struggle with negotiating their public performances and private selves. While a divided self has certainly been in the superhero DNA from the beginning, the strains of masculine performativity have only gotten more virulent. Tony Stark literally puts on *another body as a suit* when he needs to give a different kind of masculine performance than that of his short, brainy self. Steve Rogers is two men in one; he’s a skinny kid from Brooklyn who can’t talk to women as well as the chemically enhanced Captain America who starts his career, anxiously enough, on the stage. Steve’s masculine performance is both unnatural and subject to scrutiny.

These are the kinds of characters that fandom is drawn to, and slash fandom doubles down: it wants them *in sets of two*, partnered and paired as two halves of a whole. Regardless of depth and complexity, a male character will be largely ignored by slash fandom if there’s no foil character available:

up until recently, this was the fate of James Bond, Spiderman, and The Doctor. It should also be noted that the need for pairs as well as for doubleness/performativity is often given as a reason why female characters are less slashed than male ones: with whom could one reasonably slash Princess Leia or Wonder Woman? Slash fiction is unusual for insisting on a kind of joint protagonist within a single text⁷: the pairing itself is the star. The foils make visible each other's qualities and characteristics: if one is blonde, the other will be dark; if they're sunny, their partner will be brooding; if they're cerebral, the partner will be physical: Kirk and Spock, Starsky and Hutch, Lex and Clark. They're both made whole by being brought together and are incomplete apart; this is sex in the Lawrencian sense, *calling, calling for the complement*. The pairing of characters who are themselves doubled and consciously performing—young Arthur leaning how to be king while young Merlin pretends to be his servant—further denaturalizes identity, and the repeated iterations of these characters across media and in fan fiction further increases the range of possibilities for role and being; this is theatre as a laboratory for the study of behavior.

Mommy Dearest, Meet Bucky Barnes

A character like Tony Stark or Bruce Wayne speaks, obviously, to boys who are getting mixed messages about what successful manhood looks like in the twenty-first century—it was hard enough in the old days to be Charles Atlas, but today you have to be Charles Atlas and Steve Jobs at the same time, which is a problem of time commitment just for a start. But these characters speak to women, too: differently. The doubled nature of the paired male characters taken up by slash fandom—these aliens, these costumed heroes, these men wearing man suits, men in male drag—make them appealing sites of identification for women, or *proxy identities*, to use Halperin's (2012) term; that is, they provide “a metaphor, an image, a role” (185). They are sites of complex *feeling*.

But what these characters are metaphors *for*, what they make us feel, is not simple, singular, or easily reducible. Halperin takes hundreds of pages even to begin to excavate the complicated web of meanings around Joan Crawford; I am not going to be able to unpack any of these iconic male characters in a few paragraphs, and it is also the nature of fandom to build multiple and contradictory meanings around fan favorites (and to get into heated arguments over them). At the same time, there are certainly broad areas of consensus and (nonexclusive) readings that one can make; Venn diagrams of the issues and emotions these characters represent. So one of the many things Joan Crawford gives gay men, culturally, is the spectacle of a woman “losing it” (Halperin 2012, 250), going past the breaking point and out of emotional control, venting her histrionic rage and utter powerlessness (“Get out before I kill you,” Crawford tells her daughter in *Mildred Pierce*; “Don't fuck with me, fellas!” Faye Dunaway as Crawford screams in *Mommy Dearest*, something you don't have to shout when people aren't actually fucking with you), excavating a pain that mainstream culture refuses to take seriously. In diametrical opposition, a character like Bucky Barnes a.k.a. the Winter Soldier gives women a symbol of containment: straitjacketed, controlled, and masked to the point where only his eyes are visible; abused but yet terrifically menacing. Crawford in her “Mommy Dearest” persona—tight headband, face cream, and red lipstick (Figure 12.1)—is one kind of icon; the Winter Soldier with his smeared camouflage makeup, haunted eyes, and face mask (Figure 12.2), is another. This is the modern epic theatre; this is kabuki.

Slash fandom has made meaning from and around Bucky Barnes in his Winter Soldier drag (Figure 12.2). While the character of Bucky was introduced in the first Captain America film as a charming but rather generic G.I., fans mostly were not interested until he re-appeared in the highly theatrical guise of the Winter Soldier, having been captured by the enemy, brainwashed, given a bionic arm, and forced to be an assassin against his will. Thus begins a particular, inimitable



Figure 12.1 Joan Crawford (Faye Dunaway) in *Mommy Dearest*
Source: Courtesy of Francesca Coppa.



Figure 12.2 Bucky Barnes (Sebastian Stan) in *Captain America: Winter Soldier*
Source: Courtesy of Francesca Coppa.

(read: wildly imitated; see Figure 12.3 and also Figures 9.1 and 9.2 earlier in this volume for different interpretations of Bucky/The Winter Soldier) performance in which the Winter Soldier is both an unstoppable threat and yet visibly suffering: simultaneously terrifying and terrorized.

If the Italian Widows make gay male grief visible, I would argue that doubled self of Bucky Barnes and the Winter Soldier stages a new and complex relationship between violence and loss



Figure 12.3 Cosplay as Bucky
Source: Courtesy of Francesca Coppa.

of autonomy, a subject that strikes a particular chord with women. Bucky's loss of agency is at the center of the Captain America movies. He is a man who has had the control of his own body taken from him and his will subjugated; a man whose agency—and this is the very plot of the movie—we wish to see restored to him. But he is also a man whom we come to fear and respect because he himself seems to fear nothing: as the Winter Soldier, he is beyond fear, and he presents as calm, competent, and dangerous. Moreover, the violence done to the Winter Soldier is treated as though it *matters*.

In “The Rape of James Bond,” Sophia McDougall discusses the absence of rape in the stories of male characters, many of whom would likely have been raped were their stories true: James Bond, routinely at the mercy of men who want to degrade him; Bruce Wayne, thrown into a foreign prison with a broken back. To this list we can easily add the Winter Soldier, brainwashed prisoner of war, whom we see strapped down and electroshocked. “So where are they, all the raped male characters?” McDougall (2013) asks. In slash fiction, certainly. But it is not simply that female fans see Bucky Barnes literally as a victim of violence and sexual assault, although many do. Rather, they are reading his entire performance and seeing him as *a site for exploring the feelings around the loss of autonomy in all its forms*. Gavia Baker-Whitelaw (2014), costume design critic and fandom journalist, offers a close reading of The Winter Soldier's costume; in particular, she focuses on how the costume showcases his lack of agency. It is “obviously not Bucky's choice,” he is being “dressed and undressed by other people,” and the leather straps across his chest evoke a strait-jacket. While he wears a mask, “a staple of superhero costuming,” here, too, the costume evokes restraint: the Winter Soldier's mask is essentially a muzzle, which both anonymizes and dehumanizes him. This is, of course, meant to be terrifying, like an attack dog, but Baker-Whitelaw finds the Winter Soldier's costuming more terrible than terrifying, “suffused with misery and horror.” Even the Winter Soldier's eye black is a kind of drag, doubled: simultaneously evoking war paint and mascara wrecked from crying.

Again, I do not mean this literally; I am not saying that the female spectator looks at the Winter Soldier and sees a girl,⁸ or herself, in the mirror. On the contrary, the character is a sexually desirable man whose body is parsed by fans in detail: thighs, pecs, shoulders, arms. But while we are all supposed to sympathize with the Winter Soldier by the end of the movie, women are likely to identify with him much more powerfully, because we rarely get to see *this* kind of story told on *that* sort of scale. Bucky's loss of agency is central and important and wrong, and the film deals with what happened to him differently than it would for a female character: he is not stereotyped by gender into cliché. Instead he is powerful and sad and dangerous all at once.

So it should maybe not be surprising that women take characters like this as proxy identities. After all, the story of Bucky Barnes was the subject of a trilogy of movies that grossed over a trillion dollars and was seen by hundreds of millions of people, not relegated to the subplot of chick flick or low budget Lifetime movie.⁹ Not only that, but Bucky got to look cool and get the guy, too. The Captain America story was an epic romance (Cap Has Boy, Cap Loses Boy, Cap Gets Boy Back) with Cap on hand to perform intense levels of emotional investment. (This investment was visible enough that the hashtag, #GiveCaptainAmericaABoyfriend, went viral shortly after *Captain America: Civil War* came out.) And, as discussed earlier, Cap brings his own brand of performative masculinity to the table, offering women a different set of emotional situations to explore. Small and weak, Steve Rogers could easily have been a girl, or queer, or trans; like so many slashed men, he is particularly embodied and defined by the state of his body. He stands up to power despite his initial powerlessness. He is almost always written as creature of the socialist 1930s and thus as sharing fandom's typically progressive politics. He is a man out of time and thus unusually attuned to issues of social justice. He was created to punch Hitler; recent fan art depicts him punching Donald Trump. All of these and more are entry points for women. If, as a recent study claims, girls and women experience three primary causes of anger that are not the same in men—feelings of powerlessness, injustice, and other people's irresponsibility (Thomas 2005)—one could see why Cap and Bucky's story is such a powerful vehicle for women. Powerless, injustice, and other people's irresponsibility are what it's *about*.

A Brief Note on the Power of the “Healing Cock”

It is important to note that other slash pairings bring different collections of themes and offer different points of identification to women. While slashing is itself a definitive activity—by which I mean that slash fans are fans of *slash* itself, and tend to slash more than one pairing over their fannish lives—not all slash pairings are alike or tell the same story or can be *used* to tell the same sort of story. Non-fans may see simply one romance after another, one sexually explicit scene after another, but slash fans make distinctions. *Canon matters* and fans make choices.

As I noted above, the bodies of male slash protagonists are not just bodies, they are often bodies with *particular narrative histories* that suggest broad collections of themes with which women identify—Spock's alienation, emotional repression, and lack of identification with the dominant culture; Sherlock's asociality and asexuality as related to his difficult genius; Fox Mulder's obsessive search for the truth and distrust of authority; Lex Luther's domination and manipulation by his father; Dean Winchester's isolation, devotion to his family and propensity to self-sacrifice; these and much, much more. While the sex scenes that occur in a story are clearly addressed to the reader's sexual desires to the extent to which she finds them arousing even to the point of orgasm, not all slash provokes masturbation and the desire that the sex scenes fulfill are not only, or entirely, sexual; not for nothing do fans joke among themselves about the power of Such and Such Character's “healing cock.” A “healing cock” is a jokey way of referring to something pervasive in slash: that a character's issues often seem to be resolved through love and sex with the foil

character. Sex in a slash story is the physical embodiment of what is actually at stake, namely the relationship, the emotional connection between characters and what that accomplishes. Sex signals that the needs of the character have been met; that is to say, it is the *climax*, and a climax that involves addressing needs that are complex, character-specific, and difficult enough to articulate that they are best articulated on and through the bodies of epic characters like Mr. Spock or Captain America.

On Realism and Visibility

In slash, women use these hyper-performative male characters to explore feelings and create meanings that are not easy to express otherwise; in drag, gay men appropriate iconic femininity to similar purpose. In both cases, this not simply a matter of making do¹⁰: that is, neither slash nor drag exist merely because other representations are lacking. In fact, Halperin's *How To Be Gay* was provoked in part by something he learned while teaching a survey of gay literature: his gay male students preferred work that did *not* explicitly figure them. Halperin (2012) had "assumed that what gay men wanted above all was the one thing that had always been denied them—namely, an opportunity to affirm their identity as gay men by seeing themselves literally represented" (109). In fact, he found that his students preferred "appropriating and queering works of mainstream heterosexual culture" and that "they discovered more queer possibilities in adapting and remaking non-gay material, and thus more uses for it, than they found in good gay writing" (110).

Works that allowed gay men to be invisible were preferred to those where they were explicitly represented. "Non-gay cultural forms offer gay men a way of escaping from their particular, personal queerness into total, global queerness," Halperin (2012) writes. "In the place of an identity, they promise a world" (112). I would argue that slash offers something similar—that queer female space, as well as the ability to escape the outline of the identity that you are forced to carry every day—and that for gay men and slash fans both, the suggestion that you would restrict your *identification* to those characters with whom you share an *identity* feels limiting. Halperin cites D.A. Miller's (1998) analysis of the Broadway musical—which, like drag, continues to be a meaningful site of gay culture even in our era of gay normativity. Musical theatre is a form that is neither *realist* (singing! dancing! jazz hands!) nor particularly good at *representing* gay men; moreover, putting explicit gay themes or characters into the Broadway musical does not actually make it any more gay; in fact, "when the musical attempts to achieve gayness through its explicit representation of homosexual subjects, the musical ceases to provide much of what gay men want." (Miller himself prefers *South Pacific* or *Gypsy* to *La Cage aux Folles* or *Rent*.)

Barry Adam (2009) claims that musical theatre speaks to gay men's "sense of difference, desire to escape, and will to imagine alternatives" (305). Science fiction and fantasy—the literature of *what if?*—fulfills a similar role for fans in general and for slash fans in particular, which is why so many slash protagonists are drawn from imaginary and magical worlds. And just as gay men do not want to be restricted only to musicals that depict them—and why *would* you when you have Auntie Mame or Mama Rose?—slash fans are similarly desirous of losing themselves in the worlds of science fiction and fantasy: or rather, of experiencing the pleasure of *finding themselves* there, just as gay men have found themselves in the rush of feeling that comes with song. Not *literally*, that is, *representationally*, but *emotionally*, *somatically*, in terms of desire and identification, we find ourselves. And this is its own kind of liberation, because, as Halperin (2012) notes, losing yourself "exempts you from having to have an identity at all. You lose yourself and gain a world" (113). A slash fan might amend this to say, "You lose yourself and gain a *universe*."

What I am talking about is the pleasure of *invisibility*, particularly when it coincides with the power of *authorship*. I got here by way of the Broadway musical, and gay men's identification with the great dames of the theatre (and the drag versions thereof), but I could as well have got here through feminist film and performance criticism, which has long been suspicious of the value of "visibility" and of visible "representation," particularly when such representations are confused for political realities; that is, when visibility is assumed to lead to political power.

In *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance*, Peggy Phelan (2003) worries about the rise of an identity politics which, championing the politics of visibility, unites left and right in the belief that "greater visibility of the hitherto under-represented leads to enhanced political power," an idea that has only grown more powerful since that book was written (2). Yet, as Phelan points out, we may have forgotten the lesson of feminist film criticism, that, "There is real power in remaining unmarked, and there are serious limitations to visual representation as a political goal" (6).

"Visibility is a trap," Phelan (2003) concludes, referencing Lacan (1978, 93): "it summons surveillance and the law, it provokes voyeurism, fetishism, the colonialist/imperial appetite for possession"—and fans on the ground know this and talk about it in very nearly this language. Again, this is not to say that fans—or gay men, for that matter—do not want or deserve good representations: female fandom, slash fandom included, championed *Mad Max: Fury Road*, Marvel's *Jessica Jones*, and the new, gender-swapped *Ghostbusters*, all of which have multiple and complex female characters. Rather, I am arguing that representation does not substitute for the pleasure or power of invisibility; for, as even the most famously visible actors say, "But what I really want is to *direct*."

That is because to direct, to be behind the camera, as any film class can tell you and anyone who has read Laura Mulvey knows, is to be in the catbird seat; the subject of the gaze, not the object. Women know all too well that to be the object of the gaze is the opposite of empowerment, or as Phelan (2003) cracks, "If representational visibility equals power, then almost-naked young white women should be running Western culture" (10). Slash fiction gives us a reverse performance culture where the bodies—the storytelling medium—are male, and the writers and directors of the action are women. The male characters are visible—often naked, in fact—while the female community that produces the work is unseen and yet everywhere. And, as Phelan (2003) observes,

The power of the "unseen" community lies in its ability to cohere outside the system of observation which seeks to patrol it. So the "in-jokes," the "secret" codes, the iconography of dress, movement, and speech ... can create another expressive language which cannot be translated by those who are not familiar with the meanings of this intimate tongue. (97)

This description echoes studies of subculture and many ethnographic studies of fandom. Phelan's discussion of the "active vanishing" of the Guerilla Girls, female artists who by not being visible (they wear gorilla masks) reject their own commodification (19) reminds me of fandom's culture of pseudonyms and icons, the masks that we put on to hide from the scrutiny of the outside world (like the masked superheroes we so often write about).

That said, it is not easy to escape the traditional politics of visibility. Phelan acknowledges that the kind of active disappearance she discusses was mostly possible for white middle- and upper-class women, though increasing political power for people of color has enabled them to stage more vanishing acts and appropriative performances. People of color, like women, have good reason to doubt the effectiveness of *representation* per se, especially without authorship. With race, as in gender and sexual orientation, visibility can be a trap.

The World Turned Upside Down

Which brings me, here at the end, to *Hamilton*. Lin-Manuel Miranda's *Hamilton: An American Musical* has been embraced fervently by media fandom, which understood it—instantly and better than many critics, in my opinion—as a transformative fanwork of the kind they themselves make and love. Like slash, like drag, *Hamilton* appropriates famous characters to tell a story it would be difficult to tell otherwise and articulates the subjectivity of people of color (see also Hills's Chapter 30 in this volume).

Miranda's transformation of Ron Chernow's biography into a thru-sung, hip-hop musical in which the roles of the founders and their families are performed by a diverse array of nonwhite actors has grabbed the world by the ear. Leslie Odom Jr., who won the Tony for playing Aaron Burr, has spoken of what attracted him to the show:

As a black actor, I can just tell you that I saw the potential to turn what is expected of us so often on its head. We're often times asked to stop the show, or to make 'em laugh, but we're very rarely asked for vulnerability, very rarely asked for complication.

The role of Burr requires all those things. "There is a chance that this is the greatest role I might ever have in my life," Odom said (Paulson 2016).

But what does it mean that this black actor has found the role of his life playing *Aaron Burr*, of all people? Black activist and writer Ishmael Reed was horrified, asking, "Can you imagine Jewish actors in Berlin's theatres taking roles of Goering? Goebbels? Eichmann? Hitler?" (Reed 2015). For Reed, to have black actors playing characters who were slaveholders is an act of ongoing oppression. Reed's argument echoes playwright August Wilson's 1997 condemnation (Grimes 1997; Saltzman and Plett 1997) of colorblind casting as imperialist and assimilationist. In a debate with theatre critic Robert Brustein, Wilson argued that colorblind casting forced oppressed people to ventriloquize and universalize the dominant culture. As Angela Pao (2011) elucidates, "Wilson saw a person of color performing a role written for a white character" as "engaging in a form of passing on stage, which entails all the associated psychological damage of attempting to pass in society" (43). In other words, Wilson thought such starring roles would actually make blackness more invisible and marginalized.¹¹

That might be true when a black actor plays a Shakespearean king, or Willy Loman, but is it true of *Hamilton*, a play written by a person of color in a black idiom specifically for other people of color to perform? Richard III's words are Shakespeare's, but Alexander Hamilton's words are Lin-Manuel Miranda's; the historical Hamilton was white, but Miranda's Alexander speaks in a language more Grandmaster Flash than the King's English. The musical is characterized by appropriative doubleness; *Hamilton*'s "The World Turned Up Side Down" evokes both the old English ballad and a lyric from Mary K. Blige (Wickman 2015). Here, as with slash, as with drag, *authorship* matters. The female-authored Bucky Barnes, the gay male performance of Joan Crawford, Miranda's Alexander Hamilton—these characters are made *from and for* particular communities in a way that is not necessarily true of a color-blind Shakespeare. Here, gender matters, sexuality matters, and color matters: the doubleness—female/Bucky Barnes, male/Joan Crawford; person of color/Alexander Hamilton—is crucial to understanding the art. *Hamilton* could not have been put on with an all-white cast without it being seen by many as exactly the celebration of the oppressor's history that August Wilson feared.

I'm Looking Through You / Look Around, Look Around

But *Hamilton* isn't being performed with a white cast, and even if it someday were to be, that white cast would be *doing a play about characters of color* and would thus have to adapt itself to *their* idiom, *their* language and gestures.¹² I find myself baffled that so many critics seem to be looking *through* the show—through the bodies, rapped lyrics and hip-hop music; that is, through the cast, book, and score that the show is *actually made of*—to Chernow's narrative of the (white) founding fathers, as if it hadn't been transformed utterly in the making. Lyra Monteiro (2016) launched a wave of criticism with her essay "Race-Conscious Casting and the Erasure of the Black Past," which argues that *Hamilton* fails to represent historical people of color in its story of the American Revolution. "This is white history," she told *Slate*. "And no amount of casting people of color disguises the fact that they're erasing people of color from the actual narrative" (Onion 2016)—as if the actual narrative of theatre is something separate, extractable, from body or movement or rhetoric or music. Annette Gordon-Reed (2016) agrees, asking "How could a work that so unabashedly celebrates the founding fathers, and has no storyline for black characters, not take some hits from academic historians who have spent the past several decades arguing against unrealistically heroic portrayals of the founders and arguing for including people of color in the story of America's creation?" Fair enough; as history, *Hamilton* makes great musical theatre.

But when Gordon-Reed talks of feeling "discomfited" at hearing the Schuyler Sisters proclaim "how 'lucky' they were 'to be alive' during a time of African chattel slavery," there is a serious disconnect between her reading of the play and mine. Because I don't think *Hamilton* is actually about the founding fathers any more than I think that drag is about women and slash is about men. In fact, I think it's about the least interesting take you could have on it, like it's fifth grade social studies. *Hamilton* is doing something far more interesting: appropriating history to tell a story about contemporary multicultural America; more specifically, it situates the story of an individual within the context of a massive shift of structural political power. One of the explicit questions of the 2016 US Election was whether or not white people still have the numbers to determine America's political future. (Spoiler alert: they do.) But *Hamilton* optimistically raised the question. The actual lyric Gordon-Reed alludes to in "The Schuyler Sisters" is "Look around, look around: how lucky we are to be alive right now,"—and now is *right now*; today. "Look around, look around: the revolution's happening in New York," and indeed, by adopting the conceit of the "founders," Miranda tells what might otherwise be seen as a very controversial story about the ways in which power can be and has been transferred in America. Violently, as in the case of the Revolutionary War, during which Miranda's cast take up arms against their oppressors; note how Miranda is performing a story which the audience roots for a cast of *armed black men*. Nonviolently, as in the case of George Washington, who is lauded in the play for knowing when and how to transfer power to others without violence breaking out, which was the real American revolution.

Hamilton also articulates what power means in a way we don't often get in mainstream works; it means a *fist*; it means *they will kill you*. When King George sings, sweetly, "I will kill your friends and family to remind you of my love," he is singing a song familiar to people of color as well as to women; this is the voice of aristocracy, white supremacy, patriarchy, which wants you to *love it* even as it's punching you in the face.¹³ *Hamilton's* whole world is imbued with the concerns of people of color, just as in *slash*, the entire sensibility is female; in both cases, white male characters are just the medium. Or to put it another way: *Hamilton* is about the founders like *Watership Down* is about rabbits, or *Animal Farm* is about pigs. If you think the show is first and foremost about Alexander Hamilton in the context of eighteenth-century American history, you're missing it.

***Hamilton* In/As Fandom**

That said, Miranda is obviously a fan of the historical Alexander Hamilton just as slash writers are fans of Captain America and gay men are fans of Joan Crawford. And like a fan, Miranda identifies with his chosen character and uses him to tell a story that might otherwise be untellable or unhearable: a story that, as Odom Jr. says, lets people of color be vulnerable and complicated; that gives us characters who are political geniuses and devoted fathers even as they fall into sexual scandals and engage in acts of pointless violence that may seem culturally alien to us. Miranda does not put a character of color into the historical narrative as a point of black identification; rather, he transforms *all the founders* into people of color in word, gesture, rhythm, music, and idiom, thereby making a magnificent and greedy land grab for all of American history, just as slashers want to occupy and queer every corner of the Marvel Universe and gay men want to sing every note of Rogers and Hammerstein.

Fandom immediately hooked into the transformative aspects of *Hamilton*, recognizing Miranda as a fellow traveler and his work as fan work.¹⁴ Fan journalist Aja Romano (2016) responded to critics with an article in *Vox*: “Hamilton is fanfic, and its historical critics are totally missing the point.” Romano argues that *Hamilton* is a modern-day, racebent crossover, that is, “an alternative version of American history and a modern political AU in which none of the Founding Fathers are white and everything happens in a blurred temporality that could be modern day America.” The crossover is three-fold—*American history* x *musical theatre* x *hip hop*—and Romano cites Miranda’s casting notes as evidence: for Hamilton he wanted “Eminem meets Sweeney Todd;” for George Washington, “John Legend meets Mufasa.”

Romano (2016) describes Miranda as having “immediately recognized a fellow hip-hop artist in Hamilton,” a claim that might be strange to anyone outside of fandom, but makes perfect sense in a context in which women see themselves reflected in Severus Snape. To say that Hamilton “had all the earmarks of a Tupac or a Biggie Smalls: innate intellect, brashness, unrelenting ambition, and a grand tendency to start drama,” is to showcase a particular reading strategy; the same one that makes gay men think they have something in common with Judy Garland. It also shows the value of appropriation and cross-identification; by choosing Hamilton as his proxy identity, Miranda was able to say things on the Broadway stage that had been unsayable, unhearable. To underline the point: “Holler If Ya Hear Me,” the 2014 musical that was actually *about* Tupac Shakur, ran for six weeks and closed after 55 performances. Critics found its theme, stopping the cycle of gun violence in black communities, generic. Broadway audiences weren’t interested in a hip-hop musical. Oh, and the main character got shot. Who would want to see that?

Conclusion

Slash fiction is an appropriative art, a reading strategy, a disappearing act, an erotic pleasure. Slashers take stories that were never intended for them and remake them, forcing them to carry their meanings and address their concerns, brazenly bending them to their desires. Brazenness is a characteristic of appropriative performance, which depends on the audience’s recognizing the conscious, deliberate audacity of taking Spock or Marilyn or Thomas Jefferson as a proxy identity, of deliberately putting on clothes that were not cut for you. In each of these forms, the doubleness, the drag, is key; the sense of subversion and the explosion of possibility that comes from imagining one’s own identity as complex and variable and infinitely multiple, and thus expanding the range of one’s potential roles on the stage and in the world.

Notes

- 1 Penley (1992) writes, “[In] the fantasy one can *be* Kirk or Spock (a possible phallic identification) and also still *have* (as sexual objects) either or both of them.”
- 2 The fact that we know that we are fantasizing does not mean that fandom cannot be disappointed when subjection suddenly becomes impossible. Hockey fandom was shocked when Chicago Blackhawk Patrick Kane was accused of rape, with many fans announcing that they would no longer write him as a character.
- 3 While drag has a somewhat different cultural meaning and role within lesbian history, there is clearly an analogous lesbian subjectivity being expressed through “the spectacle of dykes on bikes” and “the outrageous performances of the drag king” (Halberstam 1998, xi).
- 4 In the 2016 presidential debates, Hillary Clinton was accused both of smiling too much and not enough; like Spock, she has been compared to both robot and demon. President Obama is also a known fan of Vulcan in general and Spock in particular; as a black man, he, too, has to police his emotions in a way that straight white men do not.
- 5 Lamb and Veith (2014 [1986]) list Kirk and Spock’s stereotypically masculine qualities as well as their stereotypically feminine ones. Spock is stronger and more powerful but also sexually controlled and othered; Kirk is sensuous and intuitive but also the undisputed leader and sexually ready, etc.
- 6 As Raymond Chandler (1950) famously noted, “Sherlock Holmes after all is mostly an attitude and a few dozen lines of unforgettable dialogue” (5).
- 7 There is very little in the way of crossover slash; slash typically interprets relationships rather than creates them. Exceptions include: (1) crossover slash written as a challenge or dare; (2) slash featuring other characters played by the actors who portray a beloved slash pairing (even if those characters have never met in any canon); and (3) slash of characters who are plausibly part of a larger ur-text or universe.
- 8 Though she might: a popular fan vid featuring The Winter Soldier is Talitha’s “Problem,” which shows Bucky Barnes causing widespread mayhem and wryly asserts, “That girl is a goddamned problem.” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ompNaro0cs8>
- 9 Marvel’s *Jessica Jones*, probably The Winter Soldier’s closest cognate when it comes to dangerous super-heroes who’ve had their will forced by a villain, is on Netflix. We still have no Black Widow movie.
- 10 Penley (1991) again: “[S]lash fans do more than ‘make do’; they make” (140).
- 11 Kristen J. Warner (2015) has made similar arguments about colorblind casting on TV.
- 12 In the short film *Fan Friction* (2015, directed by Ashly Burch), we cut between two male actors acting out a slashy scene and two women writers collaborating over a laptop; it is obvious that the performers are being scripted by women even before we see the women typing.
- 13 *Hamilton* became a site of argument almost immediately after Donald Trump’s election, with the cast making a direct appeal on behalf of diversity to VP Mike Pence, and Trump condemning the musical via Twitter. Audience reaction to King George’s songs with Pence in the audience literally stopped the show.
- 14 Fans also make various transformative fanworks about *Hamilton*, including slash featuring Hamilton/John Laurens. Miranda for his part seems delighted with fandom, showcasing fanworks on social media and making an effort to speak in contemporary fannish lingo.

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Chapter 13

“Becoming a Part of the Storytelling”: Fan Vidding Practices and Histories

Katharina Freund

Vidding is like dancing: rising chords light the vid like a rising sun, beats are hit with impact. Instruments are visualized: a long bowing violin is a billowing cloak, a honky-tonk piano is a chattering mouth, a rock guitar is a howling wolf... I guess. Except not really. I'm really much better at saying things in vids than in text.

Vidding is hard. And most of us are insane, and we share the pain.

A lot of vidding is political ... It's a way of interacting with the text, of becoming a part of the storytelling rather than sitting passively as the audience.

Vidding is a very personal thing.

Quotes from questionnaire respondents

The practice of fan vidding is a creative response to media and fannish texts, where film and television texts are edited and set to music. A type of visual fanfiction, fan vids shift the focus of cult and genre television shows on to elements the editors (known as vidders) find more interesting. As seen in the above quotes, these changes can be political, aesthetic, personal, or just for fun. Vids are today shared online using social media spaces like Tumblr, Twitter, YouTube, Vimeo, and (previously) LiveJournal, and sometimes to large audiences at face-to-face fan conventions. Fandom also includes other practices such as fanfiction, costume play (cosplay), fan conventions, and fan art, which vidders often also participate in (discussed elsewhere in this volume; see chapters by Hellekson; Lamerichs; Zubernis and Larson; and Seymour).

This chapter analyzes vidding as a form of fannish engagement and media literacy, and investigates the interplay of music and televisual footage. It explores the histories of vidding practices, and the development of vidding communities both face-to-face and online, from the earliest slide-show and VCR vids, through the advent of early digital vidding and the growth of online communities. The chapter engages with theories of online community to discuss how social media platforms have impacted vidding communities and practices.

This study of fannish vidding cultures is situated in the narratives and personal experiences of its participants through qualitative data. This research is primarily the result of an ethnographic study conducted both online and face-to-face with vidders from 2009–2012. Interviews, participant observation, and questionnaires were conducted at vidding conventions in the United States and the United Kingdom, as well as online in the vidding community spaces on LiveJournal.

Additional online research was conducted in 2015–2016 to engage with the contemporary online spaces, as vidding communities have mostly migrated to Tumblr in the intervening years. This qualitative approach allows for rich and contextual detail, and helps to showcase diverse experiences of vidders within a larger community. It is by its nature limited to those specific participants willing to share their stories, but this is also its strength: “Ethnography is a way of seeing through a participants’ eyes: a grounded approach that aims for a deep understanding of the cultural foundations of the group” (Hine 2000, 21). I have sought to allow the vidders to speak for themselves as much as possible (see Deller’s Chapter 8 in this volume).

Media fan communities exist in many parts of the globe and in many languages, though the majority of vidders who participated in this research identified as female, white, and heterosexual and were mostly from Western, generally English-speaking countries (primarily, the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia, Canada, and France). All vidders are identified by fannish name, pseudonym, or real name according to their preference.

The practice of vidding is at the crux of the contested ground of popular culture (Fiske 1992). As they re-interpret and alter television narratives to suit their interests by intervening in the text, vidders provide a new lens on to discussions of both active, fan audiences and digital creators of user-generated content.

Vids as Fannish Engagement

The vidders interviewed in this project saw themselves as both audience and creator: they not only view and discuss their favorite media texts, but re-edit them to create new stories from the existing material. Many vidders and vid-fans explained that they were trying to showcase their particular interpretation of a show or film through their editing and song choice. According to one questionnaire respondent:

A lot of vidding is political; if you’re watching a story where the character you most relate to is marginalized, barely shown, barely given lines, how freeing is it to create a piece of art that showcases them so that others can see them as you do? How exciting is it to reframe friendships or relationships, to show parallels between characters, to explore the visual source of a media that you love on its own terms? It’s a way of interacting with the text, of becoming a part of the story-telling rather than sitting passively as the audience.

This correlates with Jenkins’s assertion in *Textual Poachers* (1992) that fan audiences not only freely interpreted meaning from media texts, but also created their own meanings in fanfiction, art, and vids. The fannish position towards the text was one of both adoration and frustration: fans do not own the text and have no real effect on its outcomes, and thus create their own interpretations and meanings in the form of fanworks (Jenkins 1992). More recently, Jenkins has commented that despite the complications of new media technologies on reception theory and the new affordances of Web 2.0, “It’s important to hold on to some distinction between the authority granted a textual producer and the tentativeness with which fan interpretation or fan fiction is greeted” (Jenkins and Hills 2001).

More recent literature about audience engagement in Web 2.0 tends to paint media *audiences* now as new media *users* (Wood and Taylor 2008). With the focus of new media scholarship on interactivity using digital tools such as Photoshop or video editing software to make political remix or culture jamming, it is useful to recall that interactive engagements with the text are not, as we will see in the historical discussion of vidding practices below, a new or unique phenomena. Digital environments have instead, “fostered greater capacity and a greater interest by the audience

to change, alter and manipulate a text or textual narrative, to seek co-participation in authority, and to thus redefine the traditional author-text-audience relationship” (Cover 2006, 140). Cover continues:

It is my argument, here, that the rise of interactivity as a form of audience participation is by no means the *latest* trend in media history, nor something that *disrupts* a prior synergy between author-text-audience, but a strongly-held and culturally-based desire to participate in the creation and transformation of the text that has effectively been denied by previous technologies of media production and distribution. (2006, 144, emphasis in original)

Indeed, Cover specifically references early VCR-era vidving as an exceptional case where the audiences have always wanted to assert more control over media texts. Now, digital technologies are advanced enough to allow more people to do so more easily.

As they edit and reconstruct televisual and filmic sources at their pleasure, vidvers take a position of mastery over the text and become more than spectators: they are editors and creators of meaning themselves by making new texts of their own. The majority of vidvers I spoke with informed me they created vids primarily for themselves, or for other fans to enjoy. Consider the following questionnaire responses to “What do you think inspires vidvers to remake the source material?” Answers included:

A desire to tell their own story, to entertain.

Individual view of the source—we are all watching a different show, even if we’re watching the exact same thing—we don’t see the same thing. It’s about sharing your vision of that particular show.

It gives us the freedom to talk back and respond—to not just be passive receivers of art and culture.

SLASH [see Coppa’s Chapter 12 in this volume]. Or the awesome character that the writers killed off after five episodes. Or offensive shit in otherwise beloved shows ... Or inoffensive but bad writing: the creators fucked up and now it’s the vidvers’ job to fix it. ... And also SLASH.

These questionnaire respondents offer a variety of motivations for creating vids: passion about a television series and a desire to entertain, correcting storylines and characters, making political statements about representation of women, and also speaking back to the creators.

As Nightingale (1996) points out, televisual texts are extremely complex, with dialogue, cinematography, music, and sound effects. One might add to this the paratextual complexities of actors, advertising, hype, and interviews with creators (Gray 2010), as well as accepted fannish interpretations or deviations from the original texts, or the “fanon” (Goodman 2015). Thus, because of all of this semiotic excess of meaning, “there is always too much meaning on television to be controllable by the dominant ideology” (Fiske 1987, 91). Vidvers take advantage of this semiotic density and excess to manipulate the meanings of the source material to showcase their preferred interpretations. By re-organizing which scenes are included from the original text, vidvers can easily play up significant glances between characters to argue for a romantic connection where none exists in the “official” source (as will be seen in the example below).

In addition to the textual density of the original source, vids are intertextual by their very nature, as they combine at least one visual and one auditory source. It is the relationship between these two deliberately selected texts (music and video) that creates meaning in a vid. This intertextuality exists both in the minds of the author/vidder and in that of the audience, as they draw on genre knowledge, media literacy, style influences, and previous works as part of their interpretive process. Recognizing and understanding the sources and how they interact has been called the core pleasures of vidving (Jenkins 1992).

For example, meta-vids (vids that comment on fandom or vidding) are particularly dense intertextually. Lim's well-known meta-vid "Us" (discussed in detail by Lothian 2009) requires the viewer to follow a fannish stream of consciousness. A series of clips shows scenes from *Lost*, *Lord of the Rings*, *X-Men*, *Star Trek: The Next Generation*, *Boston Legal*, and *Stargate*, which do not seem connected unless the viewer knows the connections between the actors and the other texts they have appeared in. (For example, that Ian McKellan plays Gandalf and Magneto, and Patrick Stewart played Professor X and Captain Picard). This type of clever manipulation of the source material is often commented on by vidders, as evidenced in the following quotes from questionnaire respondents:

I like seeing what a good vidder can do with lousy source material—a stupid movie can be turned into a work of gorgeous genius given the right vidder and song. If there is something good hidden in a source, watching a vidder turn it into something better than the original is a huge joy.

I love meta-based vids, and the very best can open my eyes to a new character. For instance, I may see the show through the eyes of a character I dislike for the first time. That is amazing!

The quotes above exemplify how much knowledge is required of the original source, the fannish interpretations, and critical reception of a text before a vid can really "speak" to an audience member. Without all the relevant contextual information, vids can be nearly incomprehensible to outside viewers. Knowledge of common fan interpretations, in-jokes, and community norms is often needed in addition to familiarity with the song and visual text to understand the particular interpretation the vidder is putting forth to the viewer.

The art of vids, as indicated in the selected quotes above, is in how the elements are creatively combined in order to construct an alternative meaning to that of the original texts. As Manovich (2004) points out about DJs, "the true art is in the mix" (135). The first step in the editing process is to break down the original text into clips and organize them into themes or categories. Vidder Laura Shapiro, for instance, gave examples of creating a "happy" bin, an "action" bin, an "explosion" bin, or in a multi-source vid, bins for each individual source. Hills (2008) notes that breaking down the text into its component parts is a central practice of fandom: "fans watch for, recall and celebrate or critique what become defining moments within their beloved shows ... Fans' close readings also tend to *evaluatively break texts into pieces*—greatest bits, rubbish bits, embarrassing bits, scary bits ..." (2008, 35, emphasis in original). French vidder Buffynn explained: "When I edit I have five options of clips that I can use and I start to play with them and sometimes it doesn't work but you just create as you go along." A clip is chosen for the vid based on how well it works with the music, lighting, timing, or with the clips placed around it. Removed from their original place in the coherent whole of the visual text, the viewer must make sense of the clips in two contexts at once: recognizing the original scenes from which they were taken, and the new context into which it has been placed in the vid. The key element which works to connect the often disjointed visual cues is the musical choice.

Music and Meaning in Vids

Vidders are most commonly inspired to make a vid by music, as that piece of music evokes a favorite character, pairing, fandom, or theme from a television series or film, as these vidders shared in a group interview:

Jo: For me it starts with the music [*agreement*] I hear a song and I think that works for that character or that is that person.

BUFFYANN: It's basically like hearing a song that makes me think of this friend I had in high school and almost remembering it makes me think of this character, this could apply to that and suddenly it works in your head.

FIALKA: Yeah, you hear the song, you see the vid.

Jo: Yeah, like there's that Sarah McLachlan song and I just happened to be listening to it and there's that lyric "You beautiful fucked up man" and to me that was the Ninth Doctor [from *Doctor Who*] and so it went from there.

A certain piece of music will "sound like a fandom," Keerawa elaborated for me. For example, electronic music might lead them to think about a science fiction show, or country music would bring to mind the Western-inspired series *Firefly* (2002–2003). While it is nearly impossible to study in any scientific way, Juslin and Sloboda (2001) note the undeniable emotional role of music. Listeners are enculturated into specific musical traditions throughout their lives. Both listeners and composers are aware of these culturally specific musical associations, and of their effects (Levitin 2007). In this way,

Composers imbue music with emotion by knowing what our expectations are and then very deliberately controlling when those expectations will be met, and when they won't. The thrills, chills, and tears we experience from music are the result of having our expectations artfully manipulated by a skilled composer and the musicians who interpret that music. (Levitin 2007, 111)

It is this emotional role of music that vidders are able to draw on when creating their vids.

Gorbman (1987) discusses how film scores "function as connecting tissue" by connecting different shots. For example, music can provide temporal continuity to spatially discontinuous shots, and also help to maintain thematic, dramatic, rhythmic, and structural continuity (26). She suggests that film music functions in a similar way to captions on photos: "music, like the caption, anchors the image in meaning, throws a net around the floating visual signifier, assures the viewer of a safely channeled signified" (58). This is also the function of music in vidding. Unlike narrative film, vids generally lack diegetic sounds such as dialogue and sound effects. The music helps connect the string of different shots lined up by the vidder, and also helps the viewer interpret the shots, by drawing on the shared cultural codes of music interpretation. In this way, the semiotic density of the vid is channeled by the musical codes into coherent meaning.

Australian vidder Ash explained it plainly, "I am passionate about how important the music is to a video. I can't say it's everything, but it's pretty darn close." She continued:

Firstly the music sets the tone of the vid. It will determine how you actually edit it—whether you use short, fast cuts or long, slow clips with lots of cross-dissolves. It will influence whether you use lots of special effects, or keep it simple. The images should, in some way, correspond to the music ... The images also help the vidder show their own interpretation of a song.

She suggests that the song is given new possible meanings through its juxtaposition with the visual clips:

Sometimes it means changing the songwriter's meaning of the lyric to one of your own. I do this all the time. [From my vid] *Forever* there is a lyric "I can only give you everything I've got"—I'm sure the songwriter wasn't talking about selling his soul to the devil, but with the footage of Dean [from *Supernatural*] selling his soul it makes it clear to the viewer that that is the interpretation I am going for.

Ash suggests that there is almost a double revision created through vidding: both of the visual source, as it is creatively re-edited to suit the story the vidder wants to tell, and the musical source, which is given new meaning and context through its juxtaposition with the televisual source.

The vid “Summer Love” by Chicago-based vidder Talitha (2008) uses this double revision for humorous effect. Using the series *The O.C.* (2003–2007) as its source material, the vid uses a Justin Timberlake song that Talitha noted she found “a little creepy” in how the singer talks about the unnamed “girl” in the song. She thus used the song to play against the original lyrics by using it to make a slash vid, as seen in these screenshots from the vid, where the dorky character of Seth is positioned as the cool heartthrob Timberlake, and the new love interest Ryan is the “Girl” (Figure 13.1).

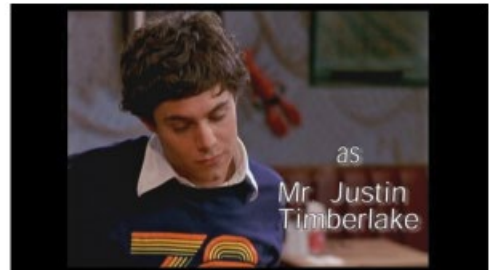
According to Talitha, this was part of her desire to re-draft both the series and the song in a way she preferred to the originals:

I guess my impulse is always to read against the text, and I am reading against the song as well. I wanted to poke fun at the song as well as the source, so that’s where I was going with the credits. I wanted to use the song that was directed at a girl, but be very explicit in redirecting it to a guy.

This new framing adds a great deal of humor as Seth’s awkward movements and attempts to be “cool” become almost a parody of the ultra-cool status of Timberlake, and the focus on the objectified “Girl” has been shifted to the overtly *not* feminine character of Ryan. While she enjoys the original texts of both the song and the series, Talitha recognizes the problematic nature of them. By reading against these texts through playful juxtaposition, she is able to comment on and share her slash interpretation with viewers.



Shot 1



Shot 2



Shot 3



Shot 4

Figure 13.1 The title credit shots from “Summer Love” by Talitha. (Some shots omitted for clarity.)
Source: Courtesy of Joan J. Barrios.

Similar to the soap opera readers discussed by Baym (2000), vidders are able to watch their favored texts in close and distant ways simultaneously. This combination of close readings (operating within the story's terms and allowing suspension of disbelief) and distant readings (stepping back to recognize it as constructed fiction) allows the vidder/viewer to be both drawn in to the narrative and also criticize it rationally. Vidders develop the strong emotional connections to a specific series, characters, or relationship, but also must be able to analyze the series as a piece of television, and analyze the technical and production aspects (such as lighting, camera movement, and framing) in order to craft their vids.

While the technology behind producing vids has changed significantly, this combination of close and distant reading and reinterpretation of sources has remained a core component of vid creation. As the practice has existed for more than thirty years, it also provides a fascinating glimpse into the historical development and adaptability of a community as it has moved from face-to-face to online.

Development and History of Vidving Practice

Vidving is thirty years old, and it's a different experience for the people who started in VCRs than it is for those that started in the post-Buffy era or within the past few years. It's all very distinct flows.

Questionnaire respondent

A complete history of vidving and fandom is impossible, as people leave over time and fannish names change, and many early VCR vids are difficult to obtain and often do not have credits. Nevertheless, I will attempt to present a history of vidving practices since their inception in the 1970s as told by participants in the community from this time. It is important to note, though, that this is the "official" history of vidving from the main, media fandom community. Many people approached me throughout my fieldwork to ensure I "got the story straight," and directed me to speak to specific individuals who were known for their narratives of the "early days" of vidving. Of course, this community is becoming increasingly fragmented as new members enter, community spaces change and erode, and remix videos and vid cultures explode on other platforms (most notably, YouTube). Indeed, most contemporary vidders have been members for five to ten years at the most, and are often not aware (or do not feel aligned) with the longer, official history of the practice.

The origins of vidving lie in broader media fandom, and the precursor of vidving is fanfiction, or narratives written by fans set in the story worlds of the television series or film. Fanfiction and vidving share many common themes, genres, and styles, and both are often created out of love for a specific text. During a focus group at a convention in the United Kingdom, one vidder explained that vids were a type of "visual fan fiction." The widely acknowledged antecedent of the vid was Kandy Fong's 1975 live "vid" using production stills from the original *Star Trek* series clicked through on a slide project, set to music. Fong travelled around conventions and fan clubs in the United States to perform her vids.

Eventually, Fong moved to using two slide projectors so she could cut between her slides more rapidly, incorporating her body as part of the filmmaking process. Later still, Fong began to videotape her results, partly because [Gene] Roddenberry [creator of *Star Trek*] wanted copies and partly because Fong herself became interested in creating records of fannish art. (Coppa 2008b, 3.3)

Few of these slideshow vids are now accessible, although Fong's very popular vid "Both Sides Now" (first shown in 1980 and taped in 1986) is often shown at conventions even today, and is probably the only slideshow vid that newer vidders are able to view as it has been made available online (Coppa 2007).

The earliest vids were inspired by Fong's live shows, with the first vidders making use of VCR technology to edit taped television footage. These vids were commonly set to popular soft rock or pop songs and used the popular fandoms from the time as their source material, including *Star Trek* (1966–1969), *Starsky and Hutch* (1975–1979), *The Man from U.N.C.L.E.* (1964–1968), and *Quantum Leap* (1989–1993). These vids were made primarily by collectives of vidders, due to the high cost of VCR editing decks at the time. New vidders were mentored into the practice in person, usually after encountering vids for the first time at conventions such as MediaWest and Escapade. Tapes were also traded by post, copied, and sent back to the creators (Jenkins 1992). According to the widely accepted history of the practice, early vids tended to focus on the slash aspects of a fandom, as the vid allowed the editor to curate and present the scenes that aligned with their vision for the story, to highlight the important moments between the pairing they love. Using the actual source material, vidders were now able to alter the footage to highlight the homoerotic elements of their favorite series and show it to others (Bacon-Smith 1992).

It was an extremely time-consuming and technical process to create vids using VCRs, with hundreds of tapes with footage from the series needed. Logbooks and stopwatches were used to catalogue the scenes on each tape to make it easier to find the footage once it was needed. According to VCR vidder Gywn, who now vids digitally:

It's so hard to explain to people just how difficult it was to vid back then ... And it could be really frustrating, because you'd have boxes and boxes of tapes that you'd be switching in and out, looking for the clip you needed. I mean, it's bad enough when you have to do it on a computer, but when you're swapping in and out two-hour tapes for eight hours a day, oh, God, it's maddening. And you have to sit there and fast-forward through the whole thing on scan.

The practice was, unlike contemporary digital vidding, an inherently social practice, with collectives of vidders working together to share experience, tapes, and technologies to create the vids. Gywn continued:

So when you're vidding with VCRs, basically someone would sit in front of the TV and the editing decks and push all the buttons, and we would all sit on the couch and give thumbs up or thumbs down to the clip choices, and stuff our faces full of junk food, drink copious amounts of soda ... It was a group activity, and we had these monthly bashes where we would do stuff other than vidding, just hang out ... We were all very close-knit.

The VCR vidders are highly regarded for their tenacity in creating vids using these methods, and the "good ol' days" are also romanticized through these narratives.

There is no better example of the challenges and community around VCR vidding than the 1990 vid "Pressure," made by Stirling Eidolan and the Odd Woman Out, who were members of the California Crew collective. These vidders filmed themselves creating a vid using footage from *Quantum Leap*, and in doing so created the first meta-vid in the fandom. In the vid, one vidder drives over to stay with the other two for the weekend, and together the women go through the process of timing the song with stopwatches and making notes, calculating the length of different clips so that they match the chosen piece of music (Figure 13.2).

Then, they scan through hours upon hours of videotape to find the images they want to match the music, working together to decide which shots to include (Figure 13.3).

All the frustrations, hard work, and fun of making a vid in this way are showcased through this video. It emphasizes the collaborative nature of early vidding by VCR, and the involvement of vidders as both creators and audience members: they are simultaneously observing the vid being made, and participating in its construction.



Figure 13.2 Analyzing and notating the timing of the song in “Pressure” (1990)
Source: Courtesy of Francesca Coppa.



Figure 13.3 The thumbs-up/thumbs-down method of clip selection
Source: Courtesy of Francesca Coppa.

Vids of this type were often made specifically for the audiences at fan conventions (in particular, slash fan conventions), where they would be aired in vid shows hosted by the convention or at unofficial room parties. Many of the elements of contemporary vidding aesthetics developed in the hotel rooms at conventions like *Escapade* and *MediaWest*, held in the United States since the 1980s–1990s (*MediaWest*Con* 2016; “*Escapade*,” *Fanlore* n.d.). Common practices like “concrit” (constructive criticism) and vid review shows began at these events, and since then an elaborate etiquette of the “right way” to give feedback has developed.

Due to the technical difficulty of making credits using VHS technology, most vids had no credits indicating who made them. VCR vidders Sandy and Rache indicated that this lack of titles meant that, “if you saw a vid you really liked, you often had no way of getting a copy.” Outside of



Figure 13.4 The Vividcon library as of 2009. Note the smaller boxes with DVDs on the right.
Source: Photo by the author. Courtesy of K. Freund.



Figure 13.5 A collection of vids on VHS has melted, destroying the contents
Source: Courtesy of Morgan Dawn.

these events, or tapes traded between fans by mail or through fanzine ads, vids were extremely hard to access. Very few VCR vids are available online. At Vividcon, the key vidding event in the United States, a large library of VHS tapes and DVDs has been available over the years so that the attendees are able to watch them (Figure 13.4).

After the preferred convention hotel removed the VCRs in the rooms in 2010, Vividcon attendees now bring their own VCRs and DVD players to the convention to connect to the televisions in the hotel rooms.

As fans move on from vidding, the early history of the practice is becoming ever more difficult to trace. Many fans have contributed to digitization and preservation efforts for older vids through the fan-run history wiki, Fanlore.org. In addition to recording the vidders' names and titles of vids, curators of the wiki capture the art on the packaging, reviews, and other information ("Reflected Images," Fanlore n.d.). It also notes the gradual disappearance of the physical artifacts of early vidding: this VHS tape has melted in the heat and become unwatchable (Figure 13.5).

Early Digital Vidding

By the late 1990s, VCR vidding was a well-established practice with an accepted aesthetic sense and its own discourses of analysis and criticism. The arrival of computer-aided digital editing was not greeted with relief but rather with apprehension. The first computer-edited vid is generally acknowledged to be T'Rhys' "In the Air Tonight" which premiered in 1994 ("In the Air Tonight," Fanlore n.d.). However, it was several more years before another digital vid was shown at a convention, at Escapade in 1998 at the startlingly low frame rate of fifteen frames per second.¹ Vidder Melina specifically remembers seeing this second digital vid at Escapade, and commented that "people just weren't ready for digital vids at that time." Melina herself began vidding on a computer herself the next year, and had the only computer vids at Escapade in 1999.

Fandom had been online for several years by the end of the twentieth century, and new fans were learning about the practice and watching vids online, without encountering them at conventions or through friends. When they began attending conventions, Sandy joked, "we thought of them as un-socialized, feral creatures of the night." These new fans were inspired as others had been in the past to create their own vids, but they turned to computer-based editing software, and the digital revolution began.

For several years, from the late 1990s to the early 2000s, there was a period where both digital and analogue vids were being shared, and digital vids were still not entirely welcome. Melina pointed out, "For a while, there was a feeling among new vidders, especially computer vidders, that you are not wanted." Sandy commented, "Doing things with computers that you couldn't do with a VCR was seen as flashy, and frequently unnecessarily flashy. Some of this I think was valid, but obviously lots of it was not."

Throughout the early 2000s, digital vidders became more and more socialized into the accepted aesthetics of vidding while the software became more accessible and easy to use. As vids were now shared online and more easily accessible, it became common for people to stumble across a vid on the internet without already being a member of the fandom. Face-to-face contact was no longer necessary. These new vidders taught themselves to vid, without being aware of the history or culture around VCR vids. More vidders with new interests, new fandoms, and from outside the United States and the UK began to join the practice.

Despite "little public fanfare," the arrival of YouTube in 2005 dramatically altered the landscape for sharing and streaming video online (Burgess and Green 2009, 1). Suddenly, watching streaming video online became a ubiquitous practice and user-generated content was readily available. Jenkins (2009) names vidding as one of the many antecedents of YouTube, and argues that the emergence of participatory cultures through the 1980s and 1990s "paved the way for the early embrace, quick adoption, and diverse use of such platforms" (109).

LiveJournal Communities

With the development of YouTube and other social media sites, vidding fandom moved from being primarily face-to-face and conducted through zines and mailing lists to an online affair. During the period around 2006–2012, the vidding community primarily interacted using the social network and blogging site LiveJournal.com (LJ), which combined individual blog-like pages, and also themed community sites. "... LJ was the central hub of fandom due to the ease combining community discussion with fanwork" (Romano 2012). LJ users make connections to other users' accounts by designating them as "friends," and to communities by joining them as members. New posts from friends and communities all appeared collated together in the "Friends List" (F-List), similar to the "News Feed" on Facebook. Users could articulate different levels of privacy for their account from public to private (where only approved users can see posts).

As with most social networks, one's experience on LJ was egocentric; that is, ordered around the self and one's own friends and interests. Hellekson and Busse (2006) note that this individualized experience of fan communities on LiveJournal led to problems of fragmentation: "As a result, it is easier to avoid stories, styles, or pairings that one does not like, but it is harder to get a comprehensive sense of a fandom and harder still to build a truly inclusive sense of community" (15). Vidders at this time strongly defined themselves as a community in opposition to those who used other online spaces, such as YouTube. Consider the following questionnaire responses:

YouTube quality is crap. *pukes* If a vid is posted on YT, I will most likely NOT watch it. I've made great friends online that I could never have met offline and those friendships mean the world to me.

Vidders who care about quality and learning and constantly getting better are the only people I care out. The 12-year-olds on YouTube are generally not in my orbit, and people who just throw crappy clips together and call it a vid or steal clips are not part of the vidding community I hang out in. I miss the days when it was smaller.

This combination of shared community spaces and individual pages was unique to LiveJournal at the time, and those vidders who primarily interacted through YouTube and other online spaces were marked as outsiders. Unfortunately, this communal space did not last.

Vidding Communities in Transition

In 2007, hundreds of LJ accounts were deleted or banned in an incident now known as "Strikethrough," where the new owners of the system (Six Apart) combed through and deleted accounts for "impermissible content" (Romano 2012). When a similar incident occurred only three months later ("Boldthrough"), many users chose not to return and rather migrated to the open-source equivalent known as Dreamwidth (DW), or to the fan-run Archive of Our Own (AO3), or to Tumblr, a recently launched microblogging and image-sharing platform ("Strikethrough and Boldthrough," Fanlore n.d.). Tumblr soon became "a hot spot for fandom," as it allowed users to easily share images, videos, and links with its "reblog" feature (Perez 2013, 149–151).

Despite these new online homes, this transition was incredibly disruptive for fans:

LiveJournal offers its userbase a unique community experience that many, many users have been openly missing for months—even as they continue to use alternatives like Tumblr and Dreamwidth. "I miss LJ" is a cry commonly heard throughout fandom. The feeling of community that many users

once prized about the site has faded ... But overwhelmingly within LiveJournal's fandom contingent resides an awareness that the golden age, or perhaps the illusion, of a single platform for every aspect of fannish life has come and gone. Once we've dispersed from LJ, the thinking goes, we can never truly go back. (Romano 2012)

The community has become increasingly fragmented in recent years, with fans dispersed across platforms like Dreamwidth, Tumblr, AO3, and still some on LiveJournal. Vidders sometimes post to multiple sites, but not always, and have changed names or refused to use certain platforms. Now, a coherent vidding community is nearly impossible to locate, and LiveJournal is now considered a "dead" social network by many vidders.

Bury (2016) argues that while fannish engagement may occur across a range of platforms and social media spaces, not all these spaces foster community development in the same way: "While the participants had a sense of community as members of listservs, Yahoo! Groups, and LiveJournal, the same was not true of Facebook, Twitter and Tumblr, even though they afforded a number of fannish pleasures" (2). In this "late second media age," the architecture of the sites commonly used by fans and vidders now does not enable community formation in the same way as LiveJournal (13). There is a relationship between the forms of online communities and the structure of the digital technology used to communicate in that community. The technological affordances, structures, and limitations of a system like LiveJournal have some influence over the development of the communities that use the system (Hutchby 2001). Users, though, can still customize the system to work for their purposes in different ways.

LiveJournal featured threaded discussion forums, allowing long form conversations to develop with clear indications of responses and comments in order. It also enabled community pages, where members could all post to a themed page and follow discussions there. Tumblr has far different affordances, with no community pages. As noted by Fanlore, the site is built on the concept of "reblogging," where posts can be shared with a comment added, and this can lead to many problematic etiquette issues ("Tumblr," Fanlore n.d.). Using hashtags to "tag" posts as belonging to a particular topic, rather than posting to a shared community on that topic, makes it difficult to narrow down or filter information to only those things shared by members of the in-group vidding community. This form of folksonomic organization allows users to define their own categories: "With folksonomies, users continually redefine the organization, creating original tags reused by other users to gradually create a new and relevant system" (Sarachan 2013, 140). While these tags are generated from within the community and build relevance over time, they can be inconsistent (Perez 2013). Hester, Jones et al. (2015) note that hashtags for pornography often include both information about the item (actor's names, descriptions of what is happening) and the viewer's response to it (#hot, #omg, #love). It is also common for vidders to avoid using the name of the series or the song used in the vid to make it more difficult for copyright owners to find their work and issue cease-and-desist letters (Freund 2014). This complexity of folksonomic tagging on Tumblr can lead to fanworks, fans, and communities being incredibly difficult to find or overlapping with other, non-related posts on Tumblr.

It has been suggested that these new fannish spaces have reduced the barriers to being a fan as participating has become easier and easier with the ability to 'like' or 'reblog' content with a click: "Ultimately, online activities—commenting on Dalek-shaped cookies on Facebook, making videos with friends, or writing online reviews—create more opportunities for viewers to participate" (Sarachan 2013, 144). Bury (2016) believes contemporary fandom is more the style of networked individualism, rather than community, with younger, newer fans finding new ways to "do" fandom differently with these social media platforms, just as they did in the early transitions away from face-to-face and towards online mailing lists in the early 2000s.

GIF Sets and the Tumblr Mashup

With the dissolution of LiveJournal as fandom's hub, and much fannish practice now occurring on Tumblr, it seems that the most ubiquitous forms of fannish practice now is the sharing of GIFs. According to Perez (2013), GIF, "short for graphics interchange format, is an image type that allows for multiple layers in one image. When combined and played at speed, the images appear to be moving" (149). These are around four-to-six seconds long loops of video without sound. In fannish spaces on Tumblr, GIFs are usually screenshots of favored scenes from a series, often displayed with subtitles to show dialogue and combined into sets to show multiple parts of a scene. Unlike vids, GIFs are easy to make, and shared widely without attribution through the ease of the "reblog" feature on Tumblr. They can be combined to create a new form of fanfic/vid known as "GIF Fic," which may focus on similar elements often found in vids. For example, the *SuperWhoLock* GIF Fics discussed by Perez (2013) and Booth (2015) create a cross-over narrative between the BBC's *Sherlock* and *Doctor Who*, and the CW's *Supernatural*. These GIF Fics exist in a liminal state between written and video fan works, but similarly reflect affective engagement with the source material they draw on (Booth 2015). While vidding practices become increasingly fragmented, Hester, Jones, and Taylor-Harman (2015) indicate that GIF Sets are a key new form of participatory practice in twenty-first-century fandoms: "Just as other fan activities like fan fiction and vidding work to create a sense of community in media fandom, GIFs can work to foster a sense of community" (362).

Without a centralized space to congregate, and with hashtags crossing over among different communities and fandoms, vidding is colliding with the other forms of remix videos (such as that on YouTube). New genres of remix, which appropriate copyrighted material in different ways, such as machinima (films made using video game engines), trailer mashups (creating parody movie trailers), political remix videos, and many more, are appearing all the time. Some of these remix videos looked just like vids made by vidders: new editors are cutting clips of television footage to music and posting it on YouTube and Tumblr, entirely unaware of the existence of a vidding community with a long history. These new vidders bring new aesthetic concerns, new backgrounds, and new interests into the practice. This change led to many traditional vidders working hard to preserve, document, and share the history of their style of vidding, according to Coppa (USCCinematicArts 2009): "[The popular conception is] that guys have been remixing mass media since 1994, or 1991 if you're talking about machinima, so we really want to say, no, women have been remixing mass media since 1975."

Around 2008, many prominent vidders such as Shapiro, and fan studies academics like Francesca Coppa, Rebecca Tushnet, and Tisha Turk, began to work to promote vidding as a fannish and remix art, in order to bring the practice out from the underground in order to reclaim early remix practices as a female, and fannish practice. This included lobbying the US Copyright Office for copyright exemptions for vidding so that they could legally copy DVDs in order to make vids (Freund 2014). The work of the fannish advocacy group the Organization for Transformative Works has helped to document, preserve, and share early fannish histories and host fan works, through sites such as Fanlore and the Archive of Our Own (AO3).

Well-known vidder Laura Shapiro explained:

It's important for me to continually hammer that this is not the vidding community, it is a vidding community.

Vidding started here [with VHS vids] and grows out from here but vidding also started a lot of other places in parallel evolution, maybe not at the same time, maybe later. But we can certainly take credit for, and pride in, where we've come from and embrace our roots and I think it's important, especially for newer vidders coming up, to see this early work and understand how this tradition started. [pause] But I feel it can be dangerous to create a canon of any sort.

Conclusion

An accepted canon is something that vidders often actively resist and subvert as they work to make meaning in their own ways from the sources and texts they consume. They seek to take a position of mastery, and re-craft the footage in new ways to tell stories they find more appealing and to “fix” the problematic aspects of the media they consume. They are not limited to singular texts, but range across television and film, popular music, fannish interpretations, and intertextual and paratextual references as part of an immersive mediascape. Drawing on the shared cultural codes of music and interpretation, vidders use their vids to showcase their individual experiences as part of this mediascape. This act of audience response through mashup, while associated with the new media age, is by no means some new phenomenon. Fong's slide deck proto-vids are widely acknowledged as the origin point for vidding, but there is no singular or linear tradition of vidding. It has always been under negotiation and development, developing along with fandoms. Vidders have been intervening and editing their favorite media texts to produce new stories with whatever technology has been available, from slide decks to VCRs, then to digital editing software and streaming video, and then to easily shared GIF sets. Vidding will continue to evolve in the future along with the interests of fandom and the affordances of new technologies.

Note

- 1 Any footage played at less than sixteen frames per second is perceived as disjointed to the human eye. Modern theatrical film is usually run at twenty-four frames per second (Bordwell and Thompson 2010, 9).

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Part III

Fandom and Cultural Studies

Chapter 14

“Angry False-Teeth-Chattering Mayhem”: Synecdochic Fandom, Representation and Performance in Mature Woman Fandom of British Professional Wrestling

Tom Phillips

From 1965 to 1988, professional wrestling was a popular mainstay on British television. ITV's *World of Sport* program would regularly attract viewers numbering in the millions, making Saturday afternoons synonymous with wrestling for much of the television audience. While popular British consumption of televised wrestling is not unheard of—the product of World Wrestling Entertainment (WWE, formerly known as WWF) has been a fixture of the subscription-based Sky Sports since 1989—what is notable about *World of Sport* is that it showcased *British* professional wrestling specifically. While *World of Sport* was canceled in 1985, wrestling remained a fixture on ITV until December 1988 when it was dropped and eventually replaced with the American product of World Championship Wrestling (WCW).

British wrestling has its roots as a technical, hard-hitting spectator sport that that would typically grace working-men's clubs and bingo halls. Labeled “all-in” wrestling, this predecessor to the more bombastic form of televised professional wrestling attempted to market itself as a legitimate, competitive sport, and “was certainly an attraction that catered, if not exclusively, then predominately, for the lower-middle and working classes” (Litherland 2014a, 142) While British wrestling would eventually come to resemble its American counterpart with the glitz, glamour, and excess of wrestlers such as Adrian Street, Big Daddy, and Giant Haystacks, it had qualities considered quintessentially British in nature, as Carrie Dunn (2013) reflects:

Imagine one of those typical shows, and you'll doubtless envisage those hulking giants rolling around the ring, with little old ladies queuing up to hurl shoes at the heels, the baddies, and kids screaming to cheer on the faces, the good guys, our heroes. It's a very peculiarly and particularly British leisure pursuit, coloured with the haze of nostalgia.

While Dunn depicts an evocative image of British wrestling and its audience, what is notable here is her invocation of a popular image of British wrestling fandom—the vociferous (and at times violent) mature woman fan.¹ This figure is a common component of contemporary reflections on the golden era of British wrestling. As Ruth Deller (2016) notes, fans are frequently stigmatized in media and popular culture, with Joli Jensen (1992) arguing that these representations fall into two

key categories: “the obsessed individual and the hysterical crowd . . . Fandom is seen as a psychological symptom of a presumed social dysfunction . . . Once fans are characterized as deviant, they can be treated as disreputable, even dangerous ‘others’” (9, cited in Deller 2016, 197). This is certainly the case for the mature woman fans of British wrestling. When musing on the potential of a return of British wrestling in 2015, *Guardian* writer Stuart Heritage (2015) noted his three (albeit comical) rules for how British wrestling ‘should’ be:

1. The wrestlers should be in their late 50s and look alarmingly close to death.
2. All wrestling should take place in a regional leisure center’s disused badminton court.
3. Every match should teeter permanently on the brink of being disrupted by an overzealous old lady climbing into the ring from the audience and angrily waving her umbrella about.

The framing of mature woman fans’ behavior is typical within both discussions of British professional wrestling, and considerations of mature woman fandom more generally. As Deller (2016) notes, “Accounts of fan excess persist when discussing older fans. While this excess is not seen as ‘harmful,’ the accounts often serve to humor these fans and present them as different from ‘ordinary’ people, or as immature women” (202–3). A 2012 episode of BBC series *Timeshift* (2002–) illustrates the manner in which mature woman fandom of British professional wrestling becomes used as an exemplar of the excess of mature woman fans, and wrestling fandom more generally. *Timeshift* is a documentary series which charts a range of Britain’s social and cultural history, and its episode *When Wrestling Was Golden: Grapples, Grunts, and Grannies* looked to explore the boom period of British wrestling, as the program description makes clear:

Timeshift turns back the clock to a time when villains wore silver capes, grannies swooned at the sight of bulky men in latex and the most masculine man in the country was called Shirley. In its heyday, British professional wrestling attracted huge TV audiences and made household names of generations of wrestlers from Mick McManus and Jackie ‘Mr TV’ Pallo to Giant Haystacks and Big Daddy. With contributions from inside the world of wrestling and surprising fans such as artist Peter Blake, this is an affectionate and lively portrait of a lost era of simpler pleasures, both in and out of the ring. (BBC 2012)

The episode description and title make clear from the outset that, in addition to the sport itself, *Timeshift’s* narrative of the ‘authentic’ British wrestling experience is apparently heavily concerned with fannish activity and the appeal of this cultural form to perhaps unexpected individuals such as grandmothers or artists. Strikingly, however, from a 60-minute documentary only approximately three minutes were dedicated to discussion of audience or fan behavior more generally, with the activity of mature woman fans covered in around 30 seconds. This is particularly remarkable given the way in which the mature woman fan is given prominence in the episode title: that somehow she is emblematic of an entire era and cultural practice, despite the fact that her contributions can be covered in a matter of seconds. This chapter looks to understand this particular phenomenon of representation more closely, considering how the mature woman fan of British wrestling comes to stand in for a larger image, in a conceptualization I term *synecdochic fandom*. The synecdochic fan symbolizes how, within a specific cultural context, a particular kind of fan becomes shorthand for all fan activity. Within this particular context, I look at how the image of the synecdochic fan is crafted through a heritage fantasy of what British wrestling supposedly *was*, a fantasy constructed through the memories of wrestlers and cultural commentators looking back on this time period.

Deller's research into mature woman fan activity of musicians such as Tom Jones, Donny Osmond, and Barry Manilow works to illustrate how mature woman fandom is depicted within press accounts, allowing for a discussion of common themes on the representation of older fans. Yet, where Deller frames newspaper reports as a way of conceptualizing humorous responses to mature fandom—that such practices may be seen as archaic in relation to the kinds of digital fan practices more commonly cited—here I look to how a particular kind of fan becomes symbolic of an entire fandom. As a result, through the case study of the mature woman fans of British professional wrestling, this chapter will detail how such fans are represented and made to exemplify whole fan cultures and texts. The chapter will then seek to reframe the fan practices of mature woman fans, arguing that through the systematic denigration of their fandom, their agency as fans is diminished, when in fact within discourses of wrestling fandom more broadly, the often physical and vociferous behavior of mature women is completely warranted and suitable. The chapter therefore works to highlight the processes that allow the synecdochic fan to be conceived, before then detailing why such an image can be considered an inaccurate construction.

The Female Wrestling Fan

In regards to sports more generally, the female fan is often a marginalized figure (see Chin's Chapter 15 in this volume for a discussion of cultural capital). Typically women are depicted as “inauthentic’ in their support and are assumed to have little sporting knowledge,” (Pope 2014, 254) unable to claim a fannish identity and instead painted pejoratively as ‘supporters’ (Pope and Williams 2011). Surveying scholarly literature of the activities of female sports fans, Larena Hoerber and Shannon Kerwin (2013) observed that the common narratives of female sports fans’ experiences worked to refigure popular definitions of what it meant to be a fan (as opposed to supporter); spoke of the female fan as being seen as an ‘outsider’ within fan groups; and observed patterns of marginalization between female fans themselves. This position is useful to initially understand, particularly when considering Henry Jenkins's (2005) oft-cited definition of wrestling as “masculine melodrama.” Although referring to serialized televised wrestling specifically, Jenkins's categorization outlines the masculine appeal of the sport,

[I]ts characteristic subject matter (the homosocial relations between men, the professional sphere rather than the domestic sphere, the focus on physical means to resolve conflicts) draw on generic traditions which critics have identified as characteristically masculine; its mode of presentation (its seriality, its appeal to viewer speculation and gossip) suggests genres often labelled feminine. These contradictions may reflect wrestling's uneasy status as masculine melodrama. (35)

Yet despite Jenkins noting the dualistic masculine/feminine nature of wrestling, female fans have here been similarly underrepresented within scholarship as in other sporting spheres. Indeed, Catherine Salmon and Susan Clerc (2005) argue that the term ‘masculine melodrama’ itself denies space for discussion of female wrestling fans. Salmon and Clerc themselves have explored female wrestling fans’ practices, looking particularly at slash (and real person slash) fiction writers, noting that “Any joy female fans derive is the result of their *unintended* interpretations and pleasure at watching big men in small trunks” (168, my emphasis). In short, they argue that while wrestling storylines typically cater for male audiences, women have to act as textual poachers in order to gain narrative satisfaction, in a similar vein to the gendered ways in which fanfiction traditionally tends to be theorized (Busse and Hellekson 2006).

Yet being (currently) the only major work which primarily examines women's fannish engagement with professional wrestling in a digital age, Salmon and Clerc's essay does become limiting, conforming to the notion that the female fan is frequently the one that is eroticized (Jenkins 1992, 15) and, while accurate to the fan cultures they examine, unfortunately reproduces a stereotype of women whose primary motive to attend sporting events is because of the attractiveness of the (male) sports stars (King 2002), conforming to characteristically 'feminine' practices of heterosexual desire. Perhaps unsurprisingly, this is a view that is also present in historical suppositions on the appeal of wrestling for women, something uncovered by Benjamin Litherland in his examination of British audience engagement with all-in wrestling. Identifying audience behavior between 1920–1955, Litherland draws upon fan correspondence with the Mass Observation's Worktown project—a social research initiative that took place over three years in the British town of Bolton, in order to detail the everyday lives and pleasures of ordinary working people. Using materials found in the Mass Observation Archive, Litherland reflects on the fan testimonials of women:

More generally, the display of men's bodies, half-naked, muscular and oiled, might have accounted for a report which suggested, not without some bemusement, that "a good proportion of those present included women". One respondent to the MO suggested she attended "to see real men". Another offered that "no other sport has such fine husky specimens of manhood as wrestling. I find it such a change to see real he-men after the spineless and insipid men one meets ordinarily." (Litherland 2014a, 139)

Chad Dell (2006) similarly notes how desire becomes important for female fans in the USA in his examination of historical issues of *Wrestling As You Like It* magazine (which commenced publication in 1948). Dell charts how within a year of the publication's launch, more sexually charged promotional images of male (and female) wrestlers would appear and that these images "emphasized the body's to-be-looked-at-ness, the body on display for the reader as an object, perhaps an object of desire, rather than a posed threat to an opposing wrestler" (58).

The emphasis on sexuality and desire in accounts of female wrestling fandom—while often accurate—do, however, tend to omit the mature woman fan. Given no agency over her sexuality which, as Deller (2016) notes in her research on mature woman music fans, is considered a non-serious threat (202), instead the mature woman is presented as a figure of fun. Yet accounts of desire comprise just one aspect of the appeal of wrestling for female fans. Dell (2006) in particular is fair in this regard, comprehensively outlining other female fan practices such as the production of newsletters and bulletins, writing fan letters to magazines, and—like the mature woman fans of British wrestling—physically engaging with wrestlers at live events. Indeed, Dell (2006) discusses a July 1949 issue of *Wrestling As You Like It* which lauded the fannish practices of "the fair sex," reading "as a veritable primer on 'appropriate' fan behaviour . . . : purchase merchandise, cheer and boo, seek autographs. As such, it acknowledges that the women in the crowd were 'getting it right,' acting appropriately as members of the wrestling audience" (52). Yet while the praise of female fan behavior is a positive occurrence in contrast to the negativity uncovered by Hoeber and Kerwin (2013), it is significant that it takes place within a wrestling-specific publication. In contrast, pejorative accounts of female wrestling fandom—and mature woman wrestling fandom in particular—are a recurring aspect of popular press coverage. For example, referencing a 1954 *TV Guide* article, Dell (2006) notes the way in which the article categorizes female fans, each modified by the qualifier 'supposedly normal':

... each category is suspect in one manner or another: *schoolgirls* are not yet adults, and thus not yet women; *maiden aunts* are not yet (and not likely to be) married, and thus are not 'truly' women; and *grandmothers* are elderly (and thus enfeebled), and presumably know better than to be attracted to

such indecorous entertainment. The category of *housewives* is the most threatening of the four; their marital status and occupation mark their participation as highly questionable, not to mention unnerving, given the context. Thus the collectivity of women being described is subtly disparaged from the start. (35–36, my emphasis)

Although some press outlets—such as *Ebony*, *Collier's*, *Cosmopolitan*, and *Business Week*—specifically noted the vast female interest in professional wrestling, Dell's analysis of the *TV Guide* article exemplifies the “less than celebratory” treatment of female wrestling fandom, which he argues was part of a larger discourse of female oppression:

While mainstream writers in the 1950s attempted to use references to cultural tastes as a method of disparaging and containing women's fandom, they also gave expression to it by their very reporting ... They are evidence of the real tension that existed in the postwar era over appropriate constructions of femininity, and serious attempts ... at containment. (36)

Dell considers the manner in which female wrestling fandom was framed along socio-cultural lines, arguing that a specifically American postwar concern over concepts of ‘femininity’ fueled discourse over women's behavior and tastes. While a just interpretation, this is not something which necessarily translates to how (mature) female fandom of wrestling has been framed within a British context, particularly as, although American and British professional wrestling are in lay terms ostensibly the same, they do have contrasting mores which make them distinct.

British Professional Wrestling

Litherland (2012) has usefully outlined the distinct differences between British and American wrestling in charting the move from the broadcast of *World of Sport* to WCW and WWF/WWE on British screens between 1986 and 1993, and Dan Glenday (2013) also provides a historical overview of the culturally embedded practices of wrestling in Britain and America (as well as Canada, Mexico, and Japan). However, many cultural commentators speak of the ‘Britishness’ of British wrestling without necessarily giving tangible justification. In contrast, Nicholas Porter (2017) gives an overview of how this ‘Britishness’ may be perceived:

Wrestling's mise-en-scène was starkly British – it drew on classic traditions of variety show performance and pantomime while echoing the communal appeal of popular sports like football. The settings were often town halls, the symbolic centres of British communities, where the sight of a wrestling ring and colourfully attired wrestlers was jarringly discordant with the bleakness of the building in which they were performing. (178)

The contrast of the bleak with the bombastic seems to typify considerations of British wrestling. Indeed, the same reading might also apply to the perceived audience: in addition to (as noted above) the appeal for the lower-middle and working classes, wrestler Mick McManus also claimed that the British Royal family were fans (cited in Garfield 1996).

The links to variety show and pantomime seem particularly important to the tradition of British wrestling. Kent Walton, commentator on *World of Sport*, noted that in addition to the distinctive combination of skill, speed, and stamina which typified British wrestling, elements of humor and showmanship were also important (Garfield 1996). Indeed, British wrestler William Regal (Regal and Chandler 2005), who had some limited exposure on *World of Sport* before reaching

great success in WCW and WWE, notes that British comedy and the British comic tradition (and the influence of British comedians in particular) had been very influential on his performativity:

I used to love watching stars like Bernard Manning, Frank Carson, Mick Miller and the Grumbleweeds ... Being a comedy fan is a big help if you're a wrestler. I've borrowed off all of them and am always throwing lines of theirs into the show. Les Dawson was a great face-puller, and it's no coincidence that my facial expressions are one of the things I'm best known for today.

Regal's invocation of popular British comedians from the 1970s hints at a distinct brand of expressive performativity which looks to communicate a narrative to the audience through every part of the body, and not just through the more explicit way in which the wrestling match itself is coded. Indeed, one can look at how British pantomime has been defined and can translate such definitions to British wrestling. For instance, Millie Taylor (2007) defines pantomime as:

... family entertainment with appeal for people of all ages ... Although the story is the pretext for everything ... the way the story is told is an equally important feature ... [The pantomime Dame] builds a relationship of complicity with the audience ... through comic interaction and asides that draw the audience into awareness of the frame of performance as well as involvement with the plot ... The performance is repeatedly exposed as constructed, fantastic and silly, even as some scenes are played with heightened realism to draw the audience into identification with the story, quest and hero. (13–14)

While wrestling's crafting of audience complicity will be discussed further below, the parallels between pantomime and wrestling as each "constructed, fantastic and silly," certainly stands out as particularly significant and culturally specific. The way in which Regal describes his use of facial expressions conforms to the role of the pantomime Dame, building complicity with the audience through comic asides.

British wrestling's cultural specificity is similarly evident upon examination of (British) press discussion of the pastime. Conducting a Nexis search for the term "British wrestling" and "fans," I gleaned 734 British-sourced articles from October 1991 to November 2015. Notably, all of these articles are post-1988—the date from which British wrestling no longer appeared on ITV. This allows the evaluation of these articles to provide a contrasting analysis to Dell's work, which is concerned with contemporaneous accounts of 1950s wrestling and fan activity. Instead, these articles—comprising news stories, reviews, editorials, interviews, and obituaries—offer a look back on the boom period of British wrestling, and capture memories, reflections, and interpretations of people removed from the immediate socio-cultural contexts that allowed British wrestling to become so popular and encourage particular kinds of fan activity.

Taking as my cue the stereotyped manner in which mature females have been discussed, I filtered the results by searching for terms such as "grandmother/s," "granny/ies," "elderly," "women," "ladies," "handbag," "crowd," and "audience." Qualitative examination of the resultant articles reveals a myriad of colorful accounts of mature female fan behaviors—either generalizations from journalists, or specific writers' memories:

My great grandmother ... had been banned from watching the wrestling [on television] after neighbours complained about the ferocious yelling that came through the dividing walls ... In Middlesbrough town hall on wrestling nights my gran ... and I did not stand out. The place was heaving with children and middle-aged and elderly ladies. (Pearson 2010)

Cue footage of empurpled Mabels swinging their handbags like medieval flails and Mrs Umbrage of 46 Hellinahandcart Avenue threatening to bring her best casserole dish down on Klondyke Kate's cranium. (Dempster 2012)

Saturday tea-time broadcasts from Croydon Town Hall that many of us grew up with, the ones in which elderly ladies would sit ringside and take out their frustrations on the competitors, beating them with their umbrellas, probably the only time in the entire farrago in which a blow was genuinely landed. (White 2013)

These more evocative narrative accounts are supported by the passing mention of mature women as variously: “women of pensionable age” (Wilson 2003); “encroaching spinster” (Smith 2005); “little old ladies” (Smith 2011); “bloodthirsty grannies” (Banks-Smith 1991); “irate grannies” (McKinlay 2012); “angry grandmother” (Aitch 2009); “apoplectic grandmothers” (Garfield 2001) and “general angry false-teeth-chattering mayhem” (Pearson 2005). The descriptive language used serves to highlight the way in which mature woman fandom is repeatedly framed and categorized in a pejorative manner.

For example, in considering the three accounts detailed above, first, Harry Pearson’s (2010) account equates the behavior of his great-grandmother with that of a child: she is scolded for being too loud while watching wrestling on television, and Pearson notes that the attendees for wrestling shows were principally middle-aged and elderly ladies and children. Pearson thus frames wrestling fans as childish and immature, and in noting that “it was men who took me to every sport I attended ... except the wrestling. I went to that with my granny and her friend Millie,” he feminizes the wrestling audience. Here then wrestling fandom supposedly takes place in a space populated by the immature and the unruly, outside of the norm of mature male (and masculine) spaces.

Immaturity, or an inability to control oneself, is pervasive in Sarah Dempster’s review of *When Wrestling Was Golden* which, like the documentary itself, gives a false impression of the extent to which footage of furious mature women attacking wrestlers may appear. Dempster’s foregrounding of such evocative imagery depicts an out-of-control-ness to the mature woman fans’ behavior. Here then, the dysfunctional, dangerous ‘others’ (Jensen 1992, 9) are on display, weaponizing objects representing their discarded domesticated femininity (handbags, umbrellas, casserole dishes) and embracing a combative spirit. Yet as noted above, the extent of such footage within the documentary is spurious, so once more the prominence of mature woman fan activity becomes a focal point. Characterized as “Mabels” or “Mrs Umbrage,” the mature woman fan is reduced to a stereotype; an out-of-control fighter who is so keen to resort to physical violence, she is willing to discard key objects from her home life (and not just a casserole dish—her *best* casserole dish).

In the final passage above, while similarly reflecting on the violent nature of mature women, Jim White’s editorial on the removal of Greco-Roman wrestling from the Olympic Games associates the predetermined nature of professional wrestling with athletic inauthenticity, claiming fans’ attacks on wrestlers are frequently the most authentic form of combat at wrestling shows. Such a comment ratifies the reflections by Pearson and Dempsey, positioning the mature woman as a dupe, taken in by a fake display, who is unable to differentiate fantasy from reality. Here, her belief in the fiction of professional wrestling leads her to become part of the show.

In the narratives of fans of musicians in her study, Deller (2016) notes that the stories “are usually presented as ‘feel-good’ accounts ... possibly because of the age of the fans, who are not seen as ‘vulnerable’ or ‘threatening’ in the way a group of teenagers might be” (200). And so it is for the mature woman fans of British wrestling, whose violent acts are disregarded as laughable because of the age and gender of the perpetrators.

The descriptions of the mature woman fan establishes a number of contradictory stereotypes, similar to those acknowledged by Dell: she is both a grandmother and a spinster; enfeebled yet out of control; little yet capable of great ferocity. Stripped of her identity, stripped of her agency, the mature woman fan is depicted as a contradictory figure of fun.

Within these newspaper accounts the mature woman fans of British professional wrestling are routinely infantilized, demonized, and patronized.

Synecdochic Fandom

In his research into the way mature female fans of American wrestling in the 1950s have been depicted, Chad Dell (1998, 2006) demonstrates that this marking of mature women as abnormal is not a practice exclusive to a British wrestling context. In line with the way in which the British fans are framed in newspaper reports, Dell's research demonstrates the view that mature woman fandom of wrestling is considered an inherently deviant practice. However, in a contrast to Dell's research, which examines contemporaneous accounts of mature woman behavior, the British newspaper clippings discussed here are (with one exception) all twenty-first-century reflections on the heyday of British wrestling—a look back on how the sport *used* to be. Yet this construction of British wrestling may not be entirely accurate, and indeed appears to be emblematic of a collective heritage fantasy whereby an assortment of memories becomes the dominant image of a cultural pastime.

While British wrestling in 2016 is a thriving, youthful enterprise—with successful companies such as Insane Championship Wrestling, Revolution Pro Wrestling, Progress Wrestling, and What Culture Pro Wrestling (among others) becoming internationally popular and recognized—the *World of Sport* era is frequently depicted in a pejorative manner. Heritage's 'rules' for British wrestling from *The Guardian* (2015)—that wrestlers should be old and out-of-shape, that production values should be poor, and that a vociferous mature woman fan should always be present—appear to be the norm for reflections on the “particularly British leisure pursuit” (Dunn 2013). The “haze of nostalgia” referenced by Dunn (2013) is frequently one of caricature, symbolized by humorous iconography. The continued framing of the mature woman fan of British professional wrestling as a key component of the sport itself sensationalizes fan activity, working towards a similar process of “enfreakment” observed by William Proctor (2016) of young female fans of One Direction, or the way in which young female fans of *Twilight* are belittled in the media “using Victorian era gendered words like ‘fever,’ ‘madness,’ ‘hysteria’ and ‘obsession’” (Click et al. 2010, 6).

Yet the continued prominence of mature woman fans in discourses around British wrestling also serves to discount the other pleasures which may be derived from the sport; that by continually stating vociferous mature female fans are essential to some kind of ‘authentic’ British wrestling experience, the sport becomes indelibly intertwined with a particular kind of fan and fan activity. While scholars like Dell (2006), Litherland (2014a), and Ford (2016) are able to talk in a more nuanced manner about the spectrum of wrestling's audiences, for more popular accounts, such as those seen in the newspaper reports above, the British wrestling fan *is* the mature woman. She is the only fan referenced, and so her behavior becomes representative of British wrestling fans as a whole. While not quite conforming to Proctor's (2016) moral dualisms of “good” (masculine) fandom and “bad” (feminine) idolatry (68), the supposedly bad feminine activity of the mature woman fan becomes shorthand for British wrestling fandom.

Garry Robson (2000) has similarly examined the way in which fandom of Millwall Football Club becomes mythic, and how the term “Millwall” becomes synecdochic for a particular brand of football fan activity within popular discourse (20–24). Millwall and its fans have traditionally been closely associated with English football hooliganism, and as a result, “Millwall” becomes a byword for “violent mob thuggery, unreconstructed masculinity, dark and impenetrable urban culture and working-class ‘fascism’” (19). In a similar vein, the mature female fan, through terms

such as “granny” or its resultant synonyms (and indeed, as Deller (2016) notes, there is frequently an assumption that mature women are grandmothers, despite no evidence (206)) the mature woman wrestling fan “functions as a condensed symbol, widely and indiscriminately used to express ideas and feelings about an entire sphere of activity and experience well beyond the compass of its original meaning” (Robson 2000, 19). As a result, the mature woman can be read as the synecdochic fan of British professional wrestling, embodying all fan behavior within popular discourse, and becoming representative of a particular cultural practice or social identity. Whether stereotyped or grounded in fact, the synecdochic fan becomes associated with a cultural text or practice, and becomes the focal point for memories and mythic representations of a fandom and fan culture.

Performative Fandom and Kayfabe

While it is evident that mature women *did* resort to physicality and vociferousness in their fannish practices, the emphasis solely on these practices discounts the other pleasures which may have been derived. Litherland’s (2014a) archival research uncovered a 1969 internal memo from the Independent Television Authority, where a controller exclaimed, “I’m at a complete loss to understand a person such as the pleasant, gentle elderly [woman] ... who claimed wrestling as her favourite TV entertainment! What frightful needs are satisfied there?” (Harrison 1969, cited in Litherland 2014a, 168). Dell (2006) attempts to consider the motivation behind the behavior of mature women at wrestling shows, and in a contrast to the way some newspaper coverage marks the women as dupes, Dell frames their activity as a conscious act of resistance:

Hatpin Mary and many female fans like her took the performance to new levels ... with the symbols of domesticated, civilized femininity: high heels, hat pins, hand bags and soft, white hands. It is though these women were gleefully throwing the emblems of femininity back into the face of a patriarchy that was temporarily suspended and momentarily vulnerable. Exacting payment, drawing blood, these female fans drew pleasure from the violent disorder and bodies out of control. (42)

Such a reading of the women’s behavior is significant, as it marks their actions as a transformative act which responded to the specific socio-cultural contexts of the time. This is a just interpretation, yet I argue that while resistance is certainly a by-product of the women’s activity, it undermines their engagement as simply wrestling fans—regardless of age or gender. Rather, the engagement of mature woman fans, while sensationalized, is *completely expected and normalized* for a wrestling audience. The fannish performances of the mature women knowingly mediate the real/fake binary that wrestling constructs in moments of expressive enunciative productivity (Fiske 1992) that would be considered normative and appropriate for other demographics within the wrestling audience.

As Sam Ford (2016) notes, “Time may pass, but cultural critics’ fascination with the ‘real/fake’ construct for discussing professional wrestling—and its fans—never loses favor” (33). Traditionally, wrestling fandom has been constructed along a binarized categorization, that fans are either “smarts” or “marks”: that respectively they are aware of the background machinations of the world of professional wrestling, or that they respond in the way intended by the people who write the storylines (McBride and Bird 2007, 169). As a result, to be a “smart” fan means that one is aware of the predetermined nature of wrestling, and that the wrestlers are performing a show, whereas the “mark” would consider professional wrestling to be a genuine athletic competition.

The kinds of activity enacted by the mature woman fans (or at least reported by others) would appear to denote them as marks. In opposition to contemporary smart behavior, where crowd favorites—regardless of their position as face or heel—may be cheered (Toepfer 2011, 137), the mature woman fans conform to the position expected of them: that they are supposed to hate the heels. As a result, the mature women would appear to fall for the fiction of wrestling. This fiction is known in wrestling parlance as “kayfabe.” Derived from carnival speak, to maintain kayfabe requires wrestlers to uphold the fiction of the competitive nature of the sport, adhere to storylines, and portray their professional persona as “genuine.” As Litherland (2014b) notes, the distinction between kayfabe and non-kayfabe exists “as a border for skirmishes in which smart fans ... attempt to stay ahead of narrative and promotional developments while promoters and wrestlers look for fresh ways to shock, trick or work their audience” (531). By physically and verbally lambasting villainous wrestlers, the mature women function as indicators that wrestling’s kayfabe has been successfully mediated.

As Ford (2016) notes, the perpetuation of kayfabe—while perhaps not as important within contemporary wrestling culture (Phillips 2014)—has been vital to the success of wrestling’s narrative mystique and continued economic viability:

Wrestling’s “business” was built on the idea that fans were being duped into believing the show was real ... Stories of fans who lose sight of the line between reality and fiction is a staple of wrestling lore and a favorite for performers who played heels (villains) to share when addressing a wider audience ... Such stories are—for wrestlers who primarily worked as heels—the clearest marker of being a great performer, proving they are masters at maintaining kayfabe and inciting emotions. (36–37)

Similar to how newspaper reports and reflections on the golden era of British wrestling preserve the lore of mature woman fan boisterousness, accounts from British wrestlers themselves add to the mythic representation. Mick McManus, for example, noted that: “At the ringside, the ladies would be running up ... I didn’t get too near the ropes, otherwise someone came up and banged you on the head with a shoe or a bag. If you get banged on the head with a high-heeled shoe ... it can give you a nasty lump” (McManus, cited in Garfield 1996). Jackie Pallo (in Potts 2005) similarly noted: “The blue-rinse brigade would come with a giant-sized jar of cold cream stuck in the corner of their handbags. Get hit on the nut with one of those, and you know all about it” (11). In the first instance, the myth of the mature woman fan therefore works as a way for wrestlers to preserve an element of mystique. That, as Ford notes above, fans being driven to the point of physically assaulting wrestlers marks the wrestlers’ success as performers and aptitude for crafting kayfabe, which becomes wrestling lore.

Yet while such accounts serve to laud the talents of particular performers, they can also again depict the mature woman fan as a dupe. That not only does she “believe the wrestling hero is *really* good and that the villain is *really* bad” (Stone and Oldenberg 1967, 526–7, emphasis in original), but that her steadfast belief in the heel’s villainy encourages her to lash out to the point of violence. Such a framing of the mature woman fan removes her agency as a fan, and places an element of determinism on wrestling fan practice which undermines fans’ ability to deconstruct the nuances of sports entertainment. In contrast, taking Dell’s view, we can begin to understand the knowing steps mature woman fans take in order to participate in wrestling’s performance and collaboratively maintain the façade of kayfabe.

It is important when making the distinction between smarts and marks to note that an embrace of kayfabe does not necessarily make a fan a mark. Indeed, part of the pleasure of being part of a wrestling audience is giving oneself the opportunity to be willingly “taken in.” The act of becoming knowingly emotionally invested in a fiction has been explored within literary theory, with David Novitz (1980) stating that giving in to fiction is a conscious act, noting “one can only

properly understand fiction if one is in a position to be appropriately moved by the fortunes or misfortunes of its characters ... the reader must take it as if there are certain people who occupy imaginary worlds” (279). Peter Lamarque (1981) talks about how emotions and response to fictions are governed by thought-contents rather than beliefs, which can be categorized as “a psychological attitude held in relation to a propositional content” (293–294). As a result, Peter McCormick (1985) argues that thought-contents are consciously used to make sense of fictions:

[W]e are not moved by something we know does not exist. What genuinely moves us rather are our actual thoughts about something that does not exist. The object of our feelings are not beliefs but thought-contents. We respond emotionally to thought-contents and not to beliefs at all. (378)

Considering this in relation to wrestling fandom, one can consider that smarts, despite their “insider” knowledge and awareness of the fiction of pro wrestling, still watch wrestling and derive a certain set of pleasures. Just because fans are aware of the veil of kayfabe does not mean they cannot enjoy the text. It is possible to argue, then, that even though a fan may exhibit signs of “markish” behavior and being duped by the text, they can cheer the heroes and boo the villains quite simply because that is the role expected of a wrestling audience. This act of audience performance, combining the attitudes of smart and mark, gives rise to the identity of the “smark”: “simultaneously heel and babyface, fan and performer, mark and smart in the same moment. Put succinctly, the smark is play, or rather playing with all of these identities within the space of professional wrestling” (Toepfer 2011, 58).

Dell (2006) uses the word “performance” (42) to describe mature woman fan activity, and within a Goffmanian sense of the word, it is possible to determine the extent to which wrestling audiences perform the role that is expected of them, allowing “smark and performer [to] enjoy an active, transformative relationship” (Warden 2013, 6). In her ethnographic work with professional wrestlers, performance studies scholar Sharon Mazer (1998) spent time in a US-based wrestling school, where she found that there was an emphasis on creating content for a knowingly engaged audience:

What [is taught], what the more experienced wrestlers come to reiterate, is how to stage a fight with force and conviction *for* and *with* an audience ... beyond learning strategies for winning a contest, they must also learn how to win an audience, how to convert spectators into fans. (83, emphasis in original)

What Mazer observed in her experience of kayfabe being planned, is that for many professional wrestlers there is a sense that their audience is very much part of the construction of that fictional world. So that when Jackie Pallo and Mick McManus reflect on the attacks suffered at the hands of mature woman fans, there is an understanding of the symbiosis at play. Ford (2007) has examined this symbiosis from fans’ perspectives in his ethnographic research interviewing fans at different live wrestling events:

For these fans, the price of admission was the chance to pay to become part of an acting experience, not as a spectator but as an active and vital part of the show ... Some of these fans seemed to explicitly believe that ... they could change the outcome of the event through their performances, by taking their performance in a way different than they were scripted to. (23–24)

Significantly, Ford frames audience behavior and response as similarly scripted as the wrestling taking place. Although he alludes to how fans may deviate from what is expected of them, it is important to note that there is something expected of them in the first place. Ford frames the live wrestling audience as more active than simply a “spectator,” and what he demonstrates here is that

the activity of all wrestling fans can be considered an essential aspect of a show's success. As part of this audienceship, the mature woman fan and her behavior can be understood as appropriately contributing to the atmosphere of the wrestling show, rather than being marked as deviant or improper as the above press accounts might suggest.

In her exploration of the passion work of wrestlers and fans in Sweden, Annette Hill (2015) conceptualizes wrestling antifandom as the knowing active dislike of a wrestler—"As one antifan said to a wrestler at an afterparty, 'Good match, love to hate you'" (176). Here Hill is drawing upon discourses of antifandom—those who actively register their disdain or indifference to a text (cf. Gray 2005; Alters 2007; Pinkowitz 2011; Chin 2013; Harman and Jones 2013; Giuffre 2014; see also Chapter 26 by Bethan Jones and Chapter 27 by Katie Wilsons in this volume)—to illustrate how wrestling audiences "love to hate" particular performers; enjoying the performance of negativity that comes with booing particular villains.

Yet the real/fake discourse of wrestling can complicate how fan behavior is framed. As Jonathan Gray (2005) notes, many fan and antifan behaviors and performances resemble, if not replicate, each other (845), and as such, one can easily conflate wrestling antifandom with the performed negativity (i.e., booing the heels) that is expected of wrestling fans. Performing negativity toward a villainous wrestler is precisely part of the performance of wrestling fandom, which just coincidentally happens to be vitriolic in a manner usually associated with antifans. In contrast, true wrestling antifandom would be embodied by fans willingly reacting *against* wrestling promoters' desired narratives. Just as Gray (2003) felt that effective studies of antifandom would consider the role of paratextual information, antifans are more likely to be smarks—those fans with more detailed background knowledge about kayfabe, booking decisions, and performers' lives beyond the text of the wrestling production itself. For example, Claire Warden details an instance of wrestling antifandom in her discussion of a match at WWE's *Wrestlemania XX*. Here a unique set of circumstances converged whereby wrestlers Brock Lesnar and Bill Goldberg were due to face off yet—unacknowledged by WWE programming but widely known online—each man would leave WWE following the match to pursue other ventures. What transpired did not follow the typical wrestling template: "To the visible agitation of both, their match was met with, not boos and cheers, but slow handclapping and chants of 'You sold out,' 'This match sucks,' and 'Goodbye'" (Warden 2013, 6). Jon Ezell (2017) refers to this kind of wrestling fan practice as a form of "hijacking," where an undesired audience response means that "the imaginary audience is not always the one that shows up" (15).

To draw a distinction between fans' performed negativity and true antifandom is to make clear that wrestling fans are attuned to the nature of kayfabe, wrestling as spectacle, and their role within that. Considering how the activity of mature woman fans is summarily framed, then, is to note that although their actions are sensationalized, as wrestling fans these actions are completely expected and normalized. As wrestling fans, these mature women are playing their role to perfection. Mazer (1998) notes that "what [fans] watch when they watch professional wrestling is not what they watch when they watch other sporting events and, consequently, that the question of real versus fake is not quite the point" (152). Considering this, the concepts of "real" and "fake" perhaps do not matter. The mature woman fan takes her place within this order and becomes part of the spectacle of wrestling instead.

Conclusion

The way mature woman fans of British wrestling are framed in popular accounts demonstrates how myths surrounding fan activity can be perpetuated. Sarah Dempster's review of *When Wrestling Was Golden*, for example, makes claims about the prominence of a particular kind of fan activity, when such activity itself is absent from the majority of the documentary, in addition to likely being isolated to a few (albeit memorable) instances within British wrestling folklore. Paul

Booth (2015) argues that in a digital landscape, “The *art* of the fan has been commoditized, and the *experience* of fandom, of tying one’s emotions to media texts, can be actively fostered by the media industries” (2, emphasis in original). Although referring to non-digital fan practices, the twenty-first-century reflections on British wrestling fandom speak to such processes of commoditization. The synecdochic fan is used to conceptualize an evocative image of fandom that can be used (in this case) to produce content that can be sold for the uses of humor, nostalgia, and curiosity.

The commodification of the synecdochic fan means that the contexts of fan cultures are often ignored, and dominant mythical images are perpetuated. As a result, we see fandom packaged in forms for (often) non-fans to consume, such as the *Crazy About One Direction* (Channel 4, 2013) television documentary, which Proctor (2016) argues features an “exploitative” look at teenage female fans of the boy band; or the *Sunday Times* bestseller *Running with the Firm* (2014), which sees author James Bannan go undercover as a football hooligan. These images promote singular readings of fannish activity, and ignore the spectrum of individuals and communities that can make up a fan culture. While the synecdochic fan of British wrestling is the mature woman, not only is she one of a number of demographic groups, often her behavior is completely unremarkable in the context of the fan culture.

While the parameters that typify the synecdochic fan of British wrestling are based on age and gender, other aspects of identity can be similarly commodified: class, sexuality, ethnicity, disability may all be used as stereotypical broad strokes. It is up to fan studies scholars to unpack such generalizations that make up the synecdochic fan, and give care and context to the individuals and their practices that make up fan cultures.

Note

- 1 Where possible, I use the term “mature woman fan” rather than “mature female fan” so as to minimize the connotations that *female* has to cis-centric and biologically deterministic accounts of femaleness. As such, in my use of the term “mature woman fan,” I understand “woman” to refer anyone who identifies or defines themselves as “woman.”

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Chapter 15

It's About Who You Know: Social Capital, Hierarchies and Fandom

Bertha Chin

Fans who are new to a particular fandom and interested in said fandom's collection of transformative works such as fanfiction, fan art, and fan meta (essays/commentary) are often directed to a comprehensive list archived to initiate new members into the fan community. This practice enables new fans to skip what is perceived by the fandom to be badly written or produced works straight to ones that are considered to be classics within the fandom. These lists also often feature fanfiction authors and artists who are well liked and have accumulated a substantial amount of reputation within the fandom, not merely for being great writers and artists, but at times, for being fan community leaders. This not only initiates the new fan, but the general public with a curious interest as well to the "best of" list for any fandom.

At the height of *The X-Files*' popularity in the late 1990s and early 2000s, for example, popular fanfiction authors from the fandom congregated in several communities based on Yahoo! Groups. The authors would use the space to share their works-in-progress or exclusive pieces of experimental fanfiction with other community members, making these communities extremely popular—as well as difficult to gain access to, as some fan community leaders controlled membership numbers in order to make the groups, and by extension, the discussions, more manageable for those who are already part of the community (especially since discussions and threads are usually delivered directly to members' emails). Likewise, the popularity of LiveJournal fan communities was also dependent on the efforts and reputation of big named fans, or as I have termed them elsewhere, "fan celebrities" (2010, 26), fans who are celebrated by others in their fandom for their various contributions, who often determine how the communities are run, the boundaries of these communities, as well as discussion themes and topics for community members.

However, fan discussion forums that populated Yahoo! Groups and communities on LiveJournal have faded from popularity in recent years as fans turn to social media platforms like Tumblr and Twitter, which are spaces that seemingly invite and encourage more democratic participation compared to those on LiveJournal. This does not mean that LiveJournal and Yahoo! Groups have completely faded from fans' consciousness; in fact many fans on Tumblr still nostalgically recall the control LiveJournal allows them, as individual posts can be locked and filtered to different groups of users, while communities can be locked and administrators can control membership numbers.

On a perfunctory level, fans' migration to social media platforms may signal a move toward "non-hierarchical, rhizomatic ... platforms" (Morimoto and Chin, 2017), which is certainly the case on a structural level (i.e., the ways these platforms function and operate) but dismissing it completely as such repudiates the importance fans still place on the notions of 'reputation' in their interaction with each other in their respective fandoms, especially when social media platforms now enable these fans to interact with celebrities and content producers, or The Powers That Be (TPTB) directly. The number of likes and reblogs or retweets on Tumblr and Twitter determine the popularity—and visibility—of posts. So, for instance, old controversial posts or tweets may be reblogged, reaching a new audience constantly, thereby resuscitating an old debate, fan meta, piece of fan art, or photo sets. On Twitter, fans proudly display the date and time a favorite celebrity replies, retweets, or likes their tweets on their profile header.

The accumulation of likes and retweets/reblogs builds on fans' reputations, elevating their status similar to those who have developed an exceptional reading of the characters or a favored pairing they are writing fanfiction about; those who have insider knowledge and access to the TPTB; and those who managed to attract the attention of the celebrity at the opportune timing and with a topic that warranted a personal response on social media. This chapter looks at how reputation and the accumulation of what is often termed as "capitals," a "set of actually usable resources and powers" (Bourdieu 1984, 114), popularized by the late French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, play a role in fans' daily interaction with each other, as well as with the media industry, despite the move toward presumably non-hierarchical platforms on social media. Furthermore, the status accumulated in one fan community on one specific platform is not necessarily transferable to another. This suggests that while notions of status and hierarchy are important for fans, it is crucial to remember that fandom is not homogeneous, and one observation of hierarchical relationship among fans is not representative of the entire fandom. Moreover, while the social media platforms may be rhizomatic in their structures and function, this chapter argues that social media in fandom is still driven by the notions of presence and influence, demonstrated through the number of likes, retweets, reblogs, and shares.

Pierre Bourdieu on Taste Distinctions

Pierre Bourdieu's work on taste and cultural distinction has been popular among many fan studies scholars, as one of the fundamental questions on the study of fans is how and why people or consumers become fans of a text or fan object. In his book *Understanding Fandom*, Mark Duffett (2013) highlights how Bourdieu's work on taste cultures enables fan studies scholars to look into reasons why people become fans, even if Bourdieu himself never necessarily attached the label "fandom" to the objects he was studying. In fact, Bourdieu (1984) talks about the "jazz-freak or cinema-buff who carries to the extreme, i.e. to absurdity[,] what is implied in the legitimate definition of cultivated contemplation, and replaces consumption of the work with the consumption of the circumstantial information"; suggesting that despite the persistent application of his theories to fan culture, he views popular culture as excessive and trivial (330).

However, Bourdieu's conception of taste, Duffett (2013) argues, "[helps] us understand the *social licensing* of particular fannish objects" (134, emphasis in original)—it not only determines fannish objects which are socially acceptable (in popular culture), but can potentially reveal fans' class positions through their investment in, and preference for, particular texts and objects. Duffett highlights an often-overlooked footnote in Bourdieu's work arguing that a cultural text, which is considered universally popular—commercially successful texts such as *Game of Thrones* and *Star Wars*—that is "enjoyed by all class fractions ... cannot lend itself to the game of taste and

is exempt from the process” (Duffett 2013, 132), thereby suggesting that it cannot tell us anything useful about the mechanisms and systems of cultural distinction.

As such, Duffett cautions against adapting Bourdieu’s work wholesale to fandom, noting that in using Bourdieu’s theoretical frameworks, we run into the danger of examining fandom as an “indirect cultural function of class distinctions” (131) whereby understanding fandom, specifically why fans develop affinities to certain texts, will enable us to understand class and taste distinctions, and vice versa.

While Bourdieu’s work might be instrumental in distinguishing class, it seems presumptuous to assume that his theoretical framework has been adapted indiscriminately to the study of fandom. Moreover, Duffett (2013) focused his arguments on the distinctions of taste in exploring fandom, when he himself also claimed that “the concept of taste as social classification has ... been subjected to considerable criticism,” and when applied to the current and varied perceptions of fandom—especially on the notion of why people become fans—may be too restrictive and generalized (132). Indeed, Bourdieu’s ideas of taste distinctions cannot be the only way we conceptualize fan narratives of how people become fans.

Matt Hills (2002) argued that fans often develop a particular set of justifications, accepted fandom-wide, to explain their love of specific texts so as to avoid appearing as irrational, especially to the broader public. Hills (2002) termed this the “discursive mantra ... a relatively stable discursive resource” that fans revert to, usually to highlight a text’s distinctive qualities (such as *Star Trek*’s progressive politics, for instance, or *The X-Files*’ flipped representations of gender roles) that make it invaluable and alluring (67). This does not mean that fans’ narratives are unreliable or contrived, however. Instead, Hills explains, they are “collectively negotiated ... in order to ward off that taint of irrationality, and in order to present a public and rationalized face to the world outside the fan culture” rather than a specific representation of their class or status (68). As such, these justifications also reveal something about fans’ affective relationships with their favorite texts and fandom.

In looking at how texts travel across national boundaries, Lori Morimoto and I (Chin and Morimoto 2013) argue that scholarly works that exclusively impose a transnational perspective to explain why people become fans of texts produced under different industrial conditions and texts of a different culture (and often language), restrict other readings and engagement such as those that include gender, ethnicity, and personal identification with characters, themes or interest in actors and content producers (see also Morimoto’s Chapter 16 in this volume). “Fans become fans not (necessarily) because of any cultural or national differences or similarities, but because of a moment of affinity between the fan and the ... object [of fandom]” (Chin and Morimoto 2013, 104–105). In short, notions of affect also come into play when fans engage with a text rather than a deliberate demonstration of taste, class, and national identity. Thus, while Bourdieu’s notions of taste distinctions might offer insights into why some texts are more popular than others, it also fundamentally cripples the way we understand how some fans take to texts, as Morimoto and I argue. Indeed, as Duffett (2013) similarly contends, “Bourdieu’s ideas presupposes that fans prioritize their interests *in a calculating and rational process*” (132, emphasis in original), but fans’ interest in texts may be completely affective as well as subjective.

That being said, Bourdieu’s theories on taste have not been rendered redundant. Duffett emphasizes the importance of taste distinctions to explore becoming-a-fan narratives, but does not go into details on how fan studies has adapted Bourdieu’s work on cultural processes, specifically on the accumulation of capitals exchanged within a system he identifies as the field of cultural production (Bourdieu 1993). As Matt Hills (2002) explained, “[Bourdieu’s] work on processes of cultural distinction offers a way for theorists to analyze how fan ‘status’ is built up” (46). Using Bourdieu’s concepts of cultural processes enables us to look at fan culture beyond merely as a fan community, but also as a socially hierarchical space where fans “[compete] over fan knowledge, access to the object of fandom, and status” (46).

Bourdieu's work on capitals is useful for fan studies scholars interested in looking at notions of hierarchy within fan communities, as it enables us to explore fans' notion of boundaries around what is considered inside and outside of fandom or within the constraints of their own fan communities. This also includes investigating notions of fan status and how this status is earned in fandom and, within the current context of the digital age and proliferation of social media platforms, how (new) popular fan spaces and the interactions within these platforms contribute to the accumulation of fan status.

Fandom as Social Hierarchy

Much scholarship in fan studies conceptualizes fandom as a gift culture. Writing about fan fiction, Abigail de Kosnik (2009) argues that "many scholars of fan studies claim that fan fiction is, and must remain, free—that is, 'free of charge,' but also 'free of the social controls that monetization would likely impose on it'—because it is inherently a gift culture" (122). While De Kosnik was speaking explicitly about fan fiction, fan scholars generally embrace this notion of fandom as a gift culture in view that fans are poaching characters which are commercial properties, and as such, ensuring it remains free keeps them off the media industry's radar and the risk of being prosecuted for unlawful use. This conceptualization of fandom as gift culture also construes fans as rebels who are resistant to how the media industry constructs their audiences as well as positioning fans as transformational, which prioritizes democratization of the text (as fans impose their own readings on the text via transformative works like fan fiction) as opposed to a more affirmational reading where the role of author or creator is comparatively more absolute (obsession_inc 2009).

Positioning fandom as a gift culture does not exonerate it from conflict or any form of hierarchy, however. Nor does positioning it as beautiful; even as Francesca Coppa (2014) argues reclaiming fandom as beautiful is increasingly important as it becomes more susceptible to being owned by the media industry. This is also exacerbated by how online spaces normally populated by fans are now equally proliferated by the industry trying to co-opt fans as well as monetize their practices and transformative works, creating official fan-friendly content for promotional use. At times, these activities also include curating fan-produced transformative works like fan art, which studios and networks then use to promote their official content, with fans expected to provide the labor for free. Suzanne Scott (2009) remarked that it gets increasingly difficult to separate gift and commodity cultures when "commodity culture begins selectively appropriating the gift economy's ethos for its own economic gain" (1.1).

The danger of positioning fandom as beautiful is that it presents an idealized version of fandom, even as Rebecca Tushnet (2014) observes, "fandom is made of people, and people are sometimes awful to each other," an observation which Coppa also acknowledges in her piece (2014, 22). But it is not merely about people being awful to each other. Misunderstandings can arise from differences in opinions (such as opinions in politics, which is particularly divisive within fandom in American-centric fan communities), or miscommunication in which differences in language and the usage of certain terminology may not necessarily translate across cultures.

Relegating fan conflict to merely people being awful to one another sounds condescending, and even if some conflicts do arise from pettiness or people simply being awful to one another, it disregards and minimizes the complexity of fan interactions and relationships. As Fiske (1992) writes, "Fans discriminate fiercely: the boundaries between the community of fans and the rest of the world are just as strongly marked and patrolled" (934–935). Fiske's declaration reflects what a lot of fan studies scholars assume about fandom—that fans discriminate on the basis of distinguishing between themselves and non-fans. However, this discrimination is also often

internalized in the way fans distinguish between themselves and what they constitute as the 'Other' fan—as slash or non-slash fan, as author or reader, as supporter or non-supporter of a particular pairing or character, as a fan or non-fan of an actor from a fan's favorite show, or even a fan community space, and the list goes on. Often, this differentiation also extends to access—to technology, ancillary content, and TPTB who are using the same social media platforms as the fans.

As social media proliferation becomes more pronounced, and celebrities are expected to be present across different platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, and Snapchat, fans' competitiveness for attention and acknowledgment from their favorite celebrities can become a matter of contention. In this case, acknowledgment, in the form of a reply, a like or a share/retweet on social media can elevate the status of the fan within their fan community. In some cases, fans who provide free labor (e.g., in the form of website or fan page maintenance) can gain access to the celebrity or producer. This also elevates the status of the fan in the community, and in order to maintain continued access, these fans often have to become gatekeepers between other fans and the celebrity or media producer. Conflict can also ensue from these fans' elevated status within fandom; thus, it is also important to reflect on how fans think about value (of their contribution, be it through providing free labor or through producing transformative works) and status accumulated in fandom, and, through this, how capitals—social and cultural—are acquired and exchanged.

Capitals are exchanged in a system Bourdieu identifies as a "field": "a social arena within which struggles or maneuvers take place over specific resources or stakes and access to them" (Jenkins 1992, 84). In this sense, we can also consider fandom as a field, whereby whom the fan knows, which community in fandom they are members of (e.g., which shipper group they support and are, thus, part of; which celebrity or content producer has responded to them on social media, or they provide labor for; which popular fanfiction author, fan artist, vidder they are friendly or on good terms with), and what they contribute or produce (fanfiction, fan art, fan meta, as well as labor in the form of building websites, maintaining fan pages, organizing live-tweet events and others) are exchanged to accumulate social and cultural capitals (this extends to access at conventions as well; see Chapter 9 by Zubernis and Larsen in this volume).

For, as Bourdieu (1993) argues:

The structure of the field, i.e. of the space of positions, is nothing other than the structure of the distribution of the capital of specific properties which governs success in the field and the winning of the external or specific profits (such as literary prestige) which are at stake in the field. (30)

In the digital era, with much of fandom taking place in exclusively online spaces such as Tumblr and Twitter, Matt Hills (2013) argues that we need to shift our conceptualization of Fiske's textual production—which Fiske (1992) defined as texts which fans produce and circulate among themselves, often produced to standards comparable to that of the official culture—to also include "online postings, reviews or commentaries [which have] themselves become textual in the sense of being digitally reproduced and reproducible" (136). This would also include tweets, Facebook as well as Tumblr posts that are reblogged, retweeted, and shared among fans.

Fans are also expected not to benefit financially from their cultural production, given that fan art and fanfiction that are produced do use licensed characters and 'worlds' that legally belong to multinational corporations like Disney and Warner Brothers. At the same time, the notion that fans are benefitting financially from their production of transformative works goes against the conceptualization of fandom as a gift culture. Constance Penley (1997) talks of the tension that exists between fanfiction authors and those who had become professional, published authors, commenting that some fans "are militant in their desire to maintain an unthreatening milieu in

which women who want to write can do so without fear of being held to external, professional standards of 'good writing'" (110). Some fans perceive fanfiction writing and fan space as safe and free from (hierarchical) pressures, and once fans turn to writing professionally, external standards are then imposed on what is often considered a hobby. This, of course, does not negate the standards that some fans also impose on their own writings; while not professional, these standards also require these writings to be edited and subscribe to community-agreed interpretations of the text.

Hills (2005) also problematized the application of Bourdieu's theory to what he identifies as contemporary fields in *The Pleasures of Horror*, suggesting ways of circumnavigating these difficulties, especially when Bourdieu's concentration was on the field of literary production. Hills argues that Bourdieu's tendencies to objectify the fields he observed creates an assumption that the fields "have an autonomy from surrounding fields, and that they therefore possess a logic of their own, acting as a game apart from other social and cultural terrains ... [But] exchanges between 'impure' fields, mediated via forces of journalism, capital and television, are increasingly becoming the norm" (168). As such, a contemporary field like television production, for instance, "may powerfully intersect with other fields, for example journalism, academic subcultural production, literary, ... film production, and fan subcultural production" (168). Similarly, it is a field of digital production, where content is produced in the form of videos, GIFs or photo sets, tweets and status updates, intersects with news, entertainment, PR, and increasingly with fan subcultural production too, as content producers turn to fans to source for promotional materials, or even to help develop content.

For instance, a popular fan artist, Lord Mesa (2016), recently revealed in an Instagram post that the producers of *Arrow* have commissioned his artwork to appear in gifts they were giving to the show's cast and crew to celebrate their 100th episode. Lord Mesa has been selling his fanart in fan conventions but credited *Arrow* star, Stephen Amell, and the show's writers for giving him greater exposure when they started sharing his art with fans online through their official social media profiles (Temple of Geek 2015)—a practice that Amell invites fans to participate in weekly. Amell has also gone on to commission Lord Mesa to provide artwork for a crowdfunding campaign he was part of, as well as creating artwork for wine labels for his wine company. In this case, the field of production intersects not merely with television, entertainment, and fandom, but also with the culinary arts, as media producers and celebrities are consistently turning to fans to provide a service or the creation of products that were originally based on licensed content. This certainly elevates Lord Mesa's reputation—his symbolic capital—within the *Arrow* fandom, just as recognition from the producers not only validates his artwork but also his interpretations of the text as he regularly produces art that also appeals to a particular shipper group.

In retrospect, Lord Mesa's position would speak to the concerns that scholars like Coppa (2014) as well as Scott (2008, 2009) were highlighting, that official culture, to borrow Fiske's term, is encroaching on fan culture. What was previously a domain for fans now represents opportunities to monetize fandom, or to further promote official content by creating fan-friendly materials. However, not all fans produce transformative works in hopes of them becoming known or validated by media producers. Fans also produce transformative works for the enjoyment of other fans, exchanged as gifts.

Fandom is also a site of struggles, with fans struggling to maintain the dominant reading that is recognized and acknowledged by producers: "[What] is at stake is the power to impose the dominant definition of the writer and therefore to delimit the population of those entitled to take part in the struggle to define the writer" (Bourdieu 1993, 42). We can see these struggles in fan debates on the canon and notions of 'fan pandering,' when media producers are accused of catering to specific readings of the text that abide to, and agree with, one specific group of fans rather than what presumably the majority wants. Struggles like these are prevalent in fandoms based around textual adaptations (like *Arrow* and *Game of Thrones*), whereby fans of the original source

text are adamant that fidelity to the original text be honored. The struggle can also entail which slash, subtextual readings, or a particular shipper grouping should be considered the dominant reading, or who gets to be the popular fan author, artist, vidder—in other words, the fan leader and by extension, the spokesperson for the fan community, or for the fandom itself. The leanings of the fan leader's 'politics' (their favorite character, shipper group, etc.) will also influence how the fandom is presented to other fans, media producers, or members of the public in general.

In this sense, Andrea MacDonald's treatise on fan hierarchies can be problematized. While MacDonald (1998) acknowledges that "fans may occupy multiple positions simultaneously, and thus fans' positions within fandom are determined by their position within all possible hierarchies" (138), she fails to acknowledge that these positions are constantly contested and never fixed. For example, a fan author who is celebrated among their social circle for an extraordinary depiction of Fox Mulder and Dana Scully's relationship in *The X-Files*, and their friendship with later additions John Doggett and Monica Reyes may not be celebrated in another circle of fans who reject the inclusion of Doggett and Reyes as canon. Therefore, the author's reputation and their position as a leader in one group of fans subscribing to one reading of the text are not transferable to another group who interpret the original text in a different way.

Therefore, it is difficult to determine fans' hierarchical position within *all* the possible hierarchies that exist within fandom, simply because it may be impossible to determine all the hierarchies, as well as to attain a complete picture of the various, intricate relationships between communities in fandom. Furthermore, while a fan may be celebrated for their contributions to fanfiction fandom, for instance, they may not be as popular within another group of fans who subscribe to a different interpretation of the text, not because the fan lacks the skills or dedication in producing a quality piece of fiction, but because the fan's interpretation of the text is deemed unacceptable by those vying for power and authority to represent fandom. Similarly, fans who do not read fanfiction will not appreciate the contributions of the fan author's textual productivity, but they may instead be consumers of fanart or prefer to celebrate their fan identity by attending fan conventions. Possession of fan cultural capital, in this case being able to produce high quality fictions or possessing the acute ability to read the original text and reinterpret it into works of 'art,' does not immediately bestow fan social capital or fan symbolic capital. Furthermore, designating a singular voice of authority for a fandom is too deterministic, at the same time disregarding the various struggles that occur within the field of restricted (fan) production on a regular basis.

Fan Capitals

Harker et al. (1990), quoted in Webb et al. (2002), state that, "capital acts as a social relation within a system of exchange" (22). The system of exchange is usually the field of cultural production, or in this chapter, a field of restricted (fan) production. Here, I am not merely talking about fan transformative works; rather I am expanding the field of fan production to include all manner of textual (and visual) productivity that fans produce, including tweets, status updates, and content for websites that promote a celebrity's work or crowdfunding campaign.

It is also important to note that fandom, as with other fields of cultural production exists within the notion of *illusio*:

the fact of being caught up in and by the game, of believing ... that playing is worth the effort ..., to participate, to admit that the game is worth playing and that the stakes created in and through the fact of playing are worth pursuing; it is to recognize the game and to recognize the stakes. (Webb et al. 2002, 26)

The fan social, cultural, and symbolic capital gained from the cultural game played by fans in fandom only applies within their fandom: a truth that is believed by those who are already invested in the field itself even if they may be disregarded by those on the outside, as is normally the case with fandom. This can also be alluded to the notion of the “magic circle,” which John Huizinga, as cited in Paul Booth (2010), hypothesized as “the temporary worlds within the ordinary world” (16).

Thus, within fandom, the reputations earned by fans will not be transferable to another fandom, or even to another community within the same fandom who may not subscribe to the same readings of the text (e.g., different shipper groups will have different Big Name Fans whose status are respected). That said, some fanfiction authors who have accumulated a reputation may go on to write for other fandoms, and as fans do cross over to other fandoms, their names may serve as guarantee of quality or familiarity for other fans who have crossed to other fandoms too. As Bourdieu (1993) comments:

The existence of the writer, as fact and as value, is inseparable from the existence of the ... field as an autonomous universe endowed with specific principles of evaluation of practices and works ... In fact, the invention of the writer, in the modern sense of the term, is inseparable from the progressive invention of a particular social game ... which is constituted as it establishes its autonomy, that is to say, its specific laws of functioning within the field of power. (162–163)

Within the context of fandom, then, the invention, development, and maintenance of the fan identity are inseparable from the invention of the social game in the various fields of fandom. Fiske (1992) views Bourdieu’s description of culture as a metaphor for an economy where people make investments—in education, in knowledge, in social networks, in other accepted institutions like art galleries and museums in order to accumulate capital. Fiske also points out two weaknesses in Bourdieu’s work: first, his emphasis on economics and class as major denominators of distinction and the absence of gender, race, and age as further axes of distinction; and, second, his failure to pay attention to the “culture of the subordinate” (32) which prevents consideration of “forms of *popular cultural capital* produced outside and often against cultural capital” (32, emphasis added).

“Popular cultural capital,” according to Fiske (1992), is used to present a dichotomy against official cultural capital (high culture). With few exceptions within fandom, popular cultural capital does not automatically convert into economic capital, unlike official cultural capital. It also does not provide upward class mobility, as suggested by Bourdieu. Rather “its dividends lie in the pleasures and esteem of one’s peers in a community of taste rather than those of one’s social betters” (Fiske 1992), allowing fans with possession of “popular cultural capital” to build on the fan’s social capital (the fan’s social network: who they know, which communities they belong to) and symbolic capital (the fan’s reputation and prestige within their fandom); just as the reverse could occur.

Sarah Thornton (1995) took a different approach in *Club Cultures* by coining the term “subcultural capital”:

[S]ubcultural capital confers status on its owner in the eyes of the relevant beholder. ... [It] can be objectified or embodied. Just as books and paintings display cultural capital in the family home, so subcultural capital is objectified in the form of fashionable haircuts and well-assembled record collections (full of well-chosen, limited edition “white label” twelve inches and the like). (11)

Subcultural capital, unlike most of Fiske’s popular cultural capital, is transferable to economic capital through the notion of ‘hipness,’ although it may not be with the same amount of ease or financial reward as official cultural capital:

DJs, club organizers, clothes designers, music and style journalists and various record industry professionals all make a living from their subcultural capital. Moreover within club cultures, people in these professions often enjoy a lot of respect not only because of their high volume of subcultural capital, but also from their role in defining and creating it. (Thornton 1995, 12)

In media fandom, by comparison, a fan artist like Lord Mesa enjoys respect and recognition from the media producers, going on to showcase and sell his art at various fan conventions. By only making his work available in specific conventions, it retains the exclusivity that is further emphasized by the fact that the producers and cast members also commission his work for official content.

Sandvoss (2005) argues that, “through subcultural capital ... discrimination and power relations are maintained and reconstituted in fandom,” sites where new cultural hierarchies are formed as consumption practices now act as signifiers of distinction (40). Thus, “variations in fan practices – rather than objects of fandom – are increasingly indicative of social and cultural differences” (38). It is also important to note, however, that these differences in consumption choices are only noticeable to, and by, fans. After all, it is fans who are already embedded within the culture who are able to recognize the subtle—or hierarchical—differences between, for example, having a season ticket or a non-season ticket; or behaving appropriately or inappropriately while at a theatre performance. However, Sandvoss’s model appears to be too dependent on fan consumption choices and practices, disregarding the distinctions that may be created through fan production, even down to the choice of place where fans post their fanfiction or meta, or whether they prefer to be tweeting or reblogging posts on Tumblr, and the social distinctions that reflect fan positions within their fandom.

Objectifying “subcultural capital” within fandom may not be as obvious as Thornton (1995) specified within the club cultures she examined. In the clubbing cultures that Thornton analyzed, identities are performed through dress, style, speech, and collection of the ‘correct’ records—the subcultural capital in this sense is much more visible compared to the expression of fan identity through other practices. For fans who participate in “textual productivity” (Fiske 1992, 37), fan cultural capital is presented in the form of the written word: “high quality” fanfiction that adheres to the canon, or one that presents a unique understanding of the characters, “bringing them to life” in the readers’ eyes; knowledge about the show, access to spoilers, contact with TPTB, and sometimes the network. In the context of online fandom, this could also include knowledge of technology and how to make use of the software and programs available on the internet, assuming that the fan is not limited by time or access to the technology. And in the age of social media, this now includes being able to tweet compelling content (or most times, just at the right moment) that will capture the attention of the producer or celebrity that will warrant a like, retweet, or response that will then elevate the status of the fan in the eyes of others who share and use that social media space.

Possession of these fan cultural capitals adds to the accumulation of fan symbolic capital—recognition and reputation—that enables specific fans to become leaders or earn celebrity status among their fan audience. Andrea MacDonald (1998) identified these fans with a wealth of fan symbolic capital as those on the top level of fan hierarchies, allowing them to act as the spokesperson of a fan group: “Outsiders to fan discourse (such as journalists and academics) will usually be directed either by fans or by production people to fans who have achieved a certain level of recognition or authority ... Only authorities are able to speak uncontested to outsiders such as journalists” (138–139). It is also important to note, however, that this position is never permanent and frequently contested, whether it be by another fan from within the community, or from another group of fans.

At the same time, the symbolic capital, both fan and general, that may have been gained from the possession of “group-sanctioned” or “lifestyle-conditioned” subcultural capital is like non-transferable (or even non-refundable) plane tickets. For example, it may take the fan to the top position of their fandom (as celebrated fanfiction author, artist, vidder, or tweeter extraordinaire who is able to gain the attention of celebrities or media producers) but their fan symbolic capital is not necessarily applicable in another fandom or in their everyday lives. In other words, their achievements are contained within the *illusio* of their fandom. Bourdieu (1984) has claimed:

To be able to play the games of culture with the playful seriousness which Plato demanded, a seriousness without the ‘spirit of seriousness,’ one has to belong to the ranks of those who have been able, not necessarily to make their whole existence a sort of children’s game, as artists do, but at least to maintain for a long time, sometimes a whole life-time, a child’s relation to the world ... This is why the logic of the game has already assigned them roles – eccentric or boor – which they will play despite themselves in the eyes of those who know how to stay within the bounds of the intellectual illusion and who cannot see them any other way. (54)

In *Fan Cultures*, Hills (2002) offered a problematization of both Bourdieu’s work and the reworkings of cultural capital through Fiske’s and Thornton’s work on fandom and club cultures respectively by pointing out the moral dualism that is seemingly present in their works. Bourdieu’s four major categorizations of cultural groups—the dominant bourgeoisie, the dominated bourgeoisie, the petit bourgeoisie, and the working class—assumes that cultural capital remains fixed and legitimate instead of taking into account that at any single moment, it can fragment, and become inconsistent or struggled over with another:

Our objects of cultural knowledge and education are various and are themselves caught up in networks of value which may vary between communities and subcultures as well as across class distinctions. Such a fixed model also neglects the possibility that struggles over legitimacy of ‘cultural capital’ may occur both between and within class fractions, communities and subcultures. (48–49)

Applying Bourdieu’s theory as such assumes the treatment of popular culture, and by extension, media fandom, as a ‘scandalous category’ that violates the assumed (and accepted) cultural hierarchies. Jenkins’s work also poses a dualism whereby fan appropriations of popular texts disrupt the ‘natural’ cultural capital decided by gatekeepers or ruling classes (i.e., media producers). Non-fans are posited against fans, who are imagined to be dangerous and deviant as they oppose the ruling classes by inserting their own (often considered to be scandalous) interpretations to popular texts.

Fiske’s popular cultural capital acts in a similar fashion by creating binary oppositions between the popular versus the official, “a moral dualism desperately seeking some kind of stable theoretical distinction between ‘good’ popular culture and ‘bad’ high culture, but unable to alight on anything substantial enough to divert attention from its incessant splitting of terms, cultures and experiences” (Hills 2002, 51–52). By creating divisions between popular and official culture, Fiske builds on the binary set up by Jenkins (1992) between fans and non-fans. This binary exists too, as some fan studies scholars insist on the ‘purity’ of fandom and fan practices, whereby they cannot—and should not—be polluted by official culture coming into online spaces like Tumblr, and offering fans access to official fan-friendly content. This is not to say that the industry’s attempts at monetization and creating an industry-acceptable form of fan identity are not problematic, but I want to suggest that we should allow for the complexity of the fan identity (as well as fan agency) to come into play more explicitly. In that some fans may want to engage with media producers and celebrities in comic conventions or through

crowdfunding campaigns, but that does not mean that they stop engaging critically with the text, or that they stop producing content for the pleasure of other fans only.

Thornton (1995) too faced a similar dilemma with the moral dualism in her work. While she criticized previous subcultural works' reliance on binary oppositions, she also "constructs a 'good' and authentic in-group and a 'bad' and deficient out-group which lacks taste and knowledge" (Hills 2002, 53) within the club subculture she was studying. Hills (2002) also criticizes the over-emphasis on cultural capital by academics who had applied Bourdieu's theories in their work. Social and symbolic capital, along with their relationship with one another and to cultural capital, was often neglected. While many scholars, such as Hills himself, have gone on to explore the intricate relationship between social, symbolic, and cultural capitals, he also reminds us that "fan social capital cannot be entirely divorced from fan cultural capital, since it is likely that fans with a very high fan cultural capital will become the 'executive fans,' and will therefore possess high level of fan social capital" (Hills 2002, 57). Often, these fans go on to become media practitioners themselves, as exemplified by media producers like Russell T. Davies who rejuvenated the British sci-fi series, *Doctor Who* (Hills 2010).

Possession of fan social capital also ensures fan position within the fandom. Knowing the 'right' group of fans, associating with highly respected fan communities adds to the fan social capital. For readers who become friends with authors, artists, or vidders, and belong to the same community as they do, it is possible to read a newly written fanfiction, or preview a newly drawn fanart or see a new fanvid before it is 'officially' released, as fans often become test audiences as well as editors (beta readers), researchers, and critics for these fan producers. As part of the inner circle of a popular and celebrated fan producer, they might attain the opportunity of having their name mentioned in a fanfiction, have a piece of art or video dedicated to them, and specially created for them on special occasions such as birthdays, thereby building on their fan social capital as well as determining their fan symbolic capital.

For a new author, for instance, to be associated with the majority-sanctioned communities can help establish their reputation. At times, a popular author/fan celebrity would also mentor the new author, and once established as highly recommended as well as warmly received by the veteran author's fans, can add to the fan symbolic capital based on reputation. "In its apparently variant forms, then, symbolic capital is both a form of recognition (fame, accumulated prestige) and the specific 'legitimation' of other conjunctions of capitals" (Hills 2002, 57). The combination of fan social and cultural capital contributes to the possession of fan symbolic capital, which will determine their status and hierarchical position within the fandom.

In the social media context, where a lot of fan interactions now take place, it is also vital to take into account what Robert van Krieken (2012) identifies as "attention capital," whereby "the secret of the nature of celebrity is primarily a matter of the accumulation and distribution of attention" (56). Chris Rojek (2016) extends this argument by saying that "the accent [of attention capital] is upon the pronunciation of personality in order to achieve the status of a noteworthy person in the sight of others. Social impact is therefore an extension of personality because it rests upon performance" (59). Translated to fandom in social media, the performance of the fan (via tweeting and perhaps even behaving 'appropriately') will attract the attention of the celebrity or the media producer, thus gaining the fans status and recognition, in both the eyes of the producers/celebrities and other fans.

In other words, capitals govern the success of the players or agents within a given field. And a field of production is made up of the strategies employed by these players in order for them to accumulate and increase their capitals. Within the restricted field of fan production, the accumulation of fan symbolic capital becomes the aim in order for fans to develop their own criteria for evaluating, as well as managing, their products (fanfiction and other creative works), maintaining a level of autonomy from the field of large-scale productions (the media industry, or those who

work for the official media industry who try to capitalize off fans). This is not limited to fan transformative production like fanfiction, but also extends to the accumulation of reputation via access to, and attention from, media producers and celebrities (especially via social media platforms). If fans can build their reputation by giving their favorite characters more ‘screen time,’ transport them to another universe, kill or make them fall in love autonomously from the plots unfolding (or that have unfolded) on their television; they can simultaneously gain symbolic capital to capture the attention of celebrities and TPTB on social media.

Conclusion

Hills (2002), citing Gershuny, reminds us that “the central concept employed in Bourdieu’s model is a metaphor” (46). This counters the way in which Duffett talks about Bourdieu, whereby it is assumed the work is adopted wholesale into fandom without context. Indeed, as Richard Jenkins (1992) has also noted, Bourdieu’s treatise on the social, cultural, and symbolic capitals is conducted in the milieu of French bourgeois society, an observation that may not necessarily be directly transferable to British, or American, or even contemporary, multicultural society. Or indeed, one in the twenty-first century where technological developments such as mobile and social media technologies have permeated almost every aspect of everyday lives, and, as such, bring notions of hierarchies in fandom to the forefront.

Applying Bourdieu’s theories to the specificity of fandom requires the appropriation of social, cultural, and symbolic capitals into the framework of fandom; where fandom would have to exist as a social and cultural field, “a separate social universe having its own laws of functioning independent of those of politics and the economy” (Bourdieu 1993, 162). And at a time when the media industry is paying close attention to fans, constantly finding ways to monetize their practices and contributions, as well as interacting with fans directly on various social media platforms, fans’ conceptualization of status and hierarchy within fandom becomes even more important.

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Chapter 16

Ontological Security and the Politics of Transcultural Fandom

Lori Morimoto

The next day, Leslie met us on the Caesars ground floor to take us up to his suite. As usual, he poured on the charm: doting, droll, sweet as a cinnamon roll. But when he realized he was being pursued down a remote corridor by one of his myriad Japanese groupies (Leslie was elected Best Actor 10 years in a row by Japan's 17,000-member Cinecity fan club), he spun around and shouted, in English, "Go away! Get the hell out of here!" The young woman receded; I like to think it was exactly what she wanted. Anyone can get a star's autograph. But to receive a flash of his rage – private Leslie ad-libbing the movie Leslie – is a compliment masquerading as an insult.

(Richard Corliss, "Days of Being Leslie")

On its surface, this early 2000s encounter between the late Hong Kong superstar Leslie Cheung, American film critic Richard Corliss, and an anonymous Japanese fan appears to be nothing so much as a clash of nationalities. But as salient as national identity is in understanding the conflict that occurs here, equally relevant are the extra-national identities of each—star, journalist, fan; men, woman—that inflect it. Cheung, having assumed the persona of a transnationally mobile Asian film star for his interview with Corliss, seems here to react less to the fan herself than to her embodiment of a female-figured, disparaged mode of fandom that prizes intimacy with celebrities. In this moment, he is caught in a global cinephilic calculus that equates unapproachability with exclusivity and seriousness. Understood in this way, it is not so surprising that he lashes out defensively at his fan, who might unwittingly be undercutting his efforts at courting the favor of a Western journalist. Corliss, as Cheung's doggedly admiring American interlocutor, rationalizes the outburst as an example of the star's idiosyncratic professionalism. He reads this anonymous "Japanese groupie" through his own cinephilic cultural lens and personal affection for Cheung. Unable to reconcile the earnest fan with his own perception of Cheung's ingratiating star persona, Corliss erases her altogether in a whiff of wishful thinking.

But what of the fan? Her discursive disappearance notwithstanding, the sense that she has been at best misunderstood, and at worst somehow wronged, haunts the sympathetic reader. Cheung's pan-Asian stardom, to which he points with no little pride throughout Corliss's profile, was in fact dependent on the passion of such fans, and his reaction to her apparent transgression belies his own role in the cultivation of affective star-fan relationships. But what I am particularly interested in here is the politics of this woman's pursuit of Cheung down a lonely Las Vegas corridor, a seemingly

simple act overlaying a framework of transnational mobility, consumption, and affective pleasure that, in this case, ultimately collapses in her fundamental misreading of cultural cues. The moment of Cheung's rejection of his Japanese fan is one in which external cultures collide with a fan subjectivity predicated on feelings of intimacy with, and ownership of, the star (persona); a clash of deeply felt internal imaginings and external realities that, I would argue, constitutes the fundamental problematic of transcultural fan studies. Andy Ruddock (2007) has suggested that "the politics of fan research involves asking how rich an interaction the fan has with the cultural world" (89), pointing to scholarship that articulates fan studies and object relations theory as a means of understanding how fans "find security in a changing world through external objects whose familiarity creates feelings of comfort and power" (89). Understood in this way, we might think of the central question of transcultural fan studies as what happens when these external objects, made familiar through activities and patterns of consumption that give fans affective ownership of them, provoke the very instabilities and discomfort they are intended to assuage.

Below, I discuss how current fan studies applications of object relations theory might act as an entry point for better understanding power asymmetries and conflicts within transcultural fandoms. From here I will look at three instances of cultural disjuncture that illustrate how such theory illuminates the political implications of transcultural fandom. The first examines responses by Japanese women fans of Hong Kong star Aaron Kwok to his clumsy attempts to interpellate them *as* Japanese during his 1997 Tokyo concert, all of which occurred within a complex web of asymmetrical postcolonial and industrial power relations. The second looks at responses to the intersection of socially and industrially devalued women readers and writers of English language slash fanfiction based on the television shows *Sherlock and Hannibal*, and the culturally influential men who write and produce them. Finally, the third considers fandom itself as a hegemonic subculture that at once fosters and disrupts the ontological security of racially marginalized African American women fans. None of these case studies is intended to represent 'fandom' writ large; rather, they are intended to illustrate how attention to fans' sense of ontological security and, in particular, its disruption might enable us to better theorize a politics of transcultural fan studies.

Ontological In/security and Transcultural Fandom

The frequent transnational backdrop of transcultural fandom has both informed and threatened to overwhelm its analysis. As Matt Hills (2002b) has argued in the context of Western anime fandom, scholarship of transnationally located transcultural fandom historically has been "set against familiar narratives of transcultural misrecognition, transnational Othering and the nation as iconically imaged 'imagined community'" (2). Yet, as Sandra Annett (2014) argues:

Though there is often slippage between 'nation' and 'culture', these two things are not necessarily the same. We may speak, for instance, of youth culture as a formation that is nationally inflected, but primarily determined by a non-national category: age. Or, we may speak of women's culture, or of a series of women's cultures, as groups with different orientations and contexts that remain linked by discourses of gender and femininity. We may also speak of a fan culture in this light, as something that exists differently in different nations, but has similarities based on consumption of the same texts, overlapping forms of interpretation, and so on. (9)

To be sure, there is no small merit in what Koichi Iwabuchi (2010) defines as "critical" (88) transcultural fan studies, attuned to the "wider sociohistorical process of uneven globalization" (95) as it plays out within fandoms. Indeed, particularly set against the counter/hegemonic

push-and-pull that characterizes transnational media production and consumption in late capitalism, this focus is a critical facet of transcultural fan studies research writ large.

Yet in the same way that any understanding of the implications of media globalization for locally situated communities and individuals must be sensitive to both the “range of political and economic forces” at work, and “distinct reception communities, in addition to subject positions tied to gender, ethnicity, class, religion ... [and] sexual orientation” (Murphy and Kraidy 2003, 7), not to mention race, so too must transcultural fan studies be attuned to the specific cultural contexts of intersecting media and fan cultures. That is, a political transcultural fan studies cannot solely be concerned with the “serious consideration of the sociohistorical contexts in which people passionately consume/appropriate media texts” (Iwabuchi 2010, 88), but must equally explore how competing forces of globalization intersect and clash with that intensely affective passion that fuels media fandom.

It is here that object relations theory and, in particular, ontological in/security might inform a politics of transcultural fan studies. A substantially less trauma-oriented alternative to Freudian and Lacanian theories of infantile separation from the mother, British pediatric analyst D.W. Winnicott’s (2005 [1971]) notion of object relations proposed that a child’s attainment of autonomy from the mother takes place through experiential play with toys, blankets, etc. – “transitional object[s]” (5). These enable children to enter into what Winnicott terms a “potential space” (54–55) between internal and external worlds where the object is internalized sufficiently to imaginatively create (i.e. imbue with meaning) and manipulate it. Within media fan studies (Silverstone 1993; Hills 2002a; Sandvoss 2005), media itself has been posited as a secondary transitional object that, through fannish play, “enters a *cultural repertoire which ‘holds’ the interest of the fan and constitutes the subject’s symbolic project of self*” (Hills 2002a, 109, emphasis in original) within a “personalized third space” (79) of object-centered fan play. Rebecca Williams (2014), building on sociologist Anthony Giddens’s work on ontological security, argues that we might consider

[Such] fan-object interactions as ‘fan pure relationships’. Indeed, ‘a pure relationship is one in which external criteria have become dissolved: the relationship exists solely for whatever rewards that relationship can deliver’ (Giddens 1991, 6) and these rewards are: (1) the reflection of a desirable and appropriate self-identity and self-narrative; (2) a sense of ontological security or ‘trust’. (20)

That is, as secondary transitional objects, regardless of origin, within that third space between external media and internal subjectivity, media of all kinds may “become a source of comfort and pleasure for fans” (Williams 2014, 22).

Understood in this way, such a theoretical lens might enable us to better recognize the dilemma, even trauma, experienced by the anonymous fan at the beginning of this chapter. Within this framework, Cheung would have been someone who, to that point, had existed for this fan primarily in that third space between his various star personae as inhabited onscreen, offscreen, in media discourse, and possibly even in the controlled environment of formal fan meetings, and her own lived experience. She would have ‘known’ him (as constituted through these varied personae) through the lens of her own multiple subjectivities, and within the confines of this third space, he would have been perfectly understood, even a source of stability and pleasure for her. While there is no way of knowing with any certainty exactly how she imagined Cheung, it seems safe to say that her subjective perception of ‘knowing’ him might have enabled her to believe him approachable—a misperception that was quickly and traumatically contradicted in his actual reaction to her misunderstanding of cultural cues.

Williams (2014) argues that “a fan pure relationship may only be sustained while it offers ontological security and a sense of trust in the other party” (26); so what happens when this sense of trust and security in her own understanding of, and relationship to, Cheung is destabilized by such a fundamental rejection of her subjective fan experience of him? If “trauma can be

understood as an instance that, when experienced, creates radical ontological *insecurity* – calling into question the Self as it is conceived and conceptualized” (Innes and Steele 2014,17, emphasis added) through media fandom, then I would suggest it is in fans’ attempts to re-establish ontological security following traumatic transcultural clash where we might locate a politics of transcultural fandom. Did this fan cease to be a Leslie Cheung fan on the basis of this encounter, rejecting him and possibly even resorting to one or more cultural stereotypes (of celebrity arrogance, of uncouth ‘Chineseness,’ etc.) to both explain his behavior and distance herself from her emotional investment in him? Did she use this opportunity to consider his perspective on the encounter, rewriting her subjective understanding of Cheung along more compassionate lines in order to absorb the trauma and keep her fandom intact? Both responses, and others, are entirely plausible and are, I would argue, object examples of the limitations of a politics of transcultural fan studies grounded in good/bad binaries of un/acceptably heightened transnational awareness.

Insofar as trauma can be said to provoke, even necessitate, the reconsideration of an individual’s experience of the external world in order to re-establish ontological security, I want to suggest that cross-cultural conflict that occurs within the “contact zones” of transcultural fandom, “where cultures meet, clash and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power” (Pratt 1991, 34) is where a politics of transcultural fan studies begins. Indeed, the generalizability of responses to such conflict (engagement [criticism/accommodation], rationalization, distancing) suggests that what is of importance here is not whether or not it occurs, but what happens when it does. Discussing object relations theory as a lens for understanding cultural experience, Annette Kuhn (2013) writes, “Winnicott’s ideas are not the kind which lend themselves to being ‘applied’ in an after-the-fact manner. What they do, rather, is offer fresh ways of thinking about one’s current concerns – issues and questions that one is already thinking about or working on” (2). Similarly, in what follows, I approach both object relations theory and Giddens’s notion of ontological security less as a strict theoretical framework than as a heuristic device intended to foreground the very real consequences of the transcultural clash of fan subjectivities and ‘real-world’ conditions.

“I Never Imagined I Would See This Costume in Japan”

At the risk of belaboring this point, transcultural fandom is not always transnational. Where it is, as in the case of the 1990s Japanese fandom of Hong Kong star Aaron Kwok, national identities are always just one of multiple subjectivities fans bring to bear on transcultural encounters, regardless of how these encounters are imagined by their participants. Particularly in the case of ‘real-world’ fan-star interactions, such as autograph events or concerts, cultures of gender, fandom, and so on intersect with and inflect nation-centered subjectivities in ways that complicate straightforward geopolitical consideration. Japanese women’s fandom of Hong Kong stars was largely a phenomenon of the 1990s, widely reported in the mass media and a precursor of what was to come in the early Korean Wave of the 2000s. While specific numbers are all but impossible to ascertain, at its peak the fandom is thought to have numbered over 10,000 strong (Shinohara 1998a, 528). To be sure, this fandom was more subculture than full-fledged phenomenon, but its Asian (as opposed to Western and, in particular, American) orientation singled it out for both approbation and criticism by journalists and scholars alike during a period of outspoken East Asian regional optimism (Morimoto 2016). Aaron Kwok, as both actor and one of the “Four Heavenly Kings” of Canto-pop, was among the most popular of these stars in Japan, prompting concerts in Tokyo and several other Japanese cities in 1997 and, resulting from this, the production by fans of a commemorative *dōjinshi* (fanzine), where they recorded their impressions of his performances.

In the pre-internet days of the late 1980s and early 1990s, *dōjinshi* arguably were the most abundant and far-reaching form of women’s fan production in Japan, typically—but not

exclusively—centered on transformations of popular media texts in the form of ‘parody’ manga and short fiction. Other kinds of *fan dōjinshi* included those focused on tightly managed Japanese idols, whose depiction by fans drew from their ubiquity on television and in concerts, the mass media, and the occasional feature film. While the vast majority of Hong Kong star-centered *dōjinshi* were transformative works that cast favorite stars in reworked film narratives or even original stories, these often included sections where fans discussed stars more generally, reflecting on career, works, personal life, fan encounters, and so on in intensely subjective ways. In contrast to Japanese idol-centered *dōjinshi*, Hong Kong stars’ relative invisibility within the Japanese entertainment mainstream left considerable room for fan interpretation and imagining what these stars were ‘really’ like. As such, *dōjinshi* of Hong Kong stars were a space where these stars existed neither as Chinese nor Japanese, per se, but as an amalgam of both in a potential third space of perfect understanding, where fans could express and experience intimacy with them.

Notably, within this space, elements of Chinese and Japanese cultures were in near-perfect accord, facilitated in no small part by the “extensive expressiveness” of a Japanese written language that, as Laura Miller (2004) observes, “has four writing systems to exploit – Chinese characters, two syllabic scripts (*hiragana* and *katakana*) and the Roman alphabet” (230). This is particularly evident in fans’ use of Chinese (both Mandarin and Cantonese) vocabulary in their Japanese *dōjinshi* writings: 演唱會 [*yanchanghui*] for “concert,” 迷 [*mi*] for “fans,” and 電影 [*dianying*] for “films” (in Japanese, コンサート, ファン, and 映画, respectively), as well as local Cantonese nicknames for stars and Hong Kong place names. Due to their cross-culturally shared idiographic nature, such words were legible to Japanese fans familiar with the Chinese contexts of their fandom at the cognitive, or imaginative, level, regardless of any actual Chinese language ability. That is, *dōjinshi* readers could make sense of such vocabulary without ever being able to reproduce it vocally or within Chinese language conversation, contributing to a seamless merging of cultures within that third space of object-oriented fandom.

Thus, where we find disjuncture in *2.5-D Kwok Fu-sing First Japan Concert Tour*, the fan *dōjinshi* commemorating Aaron Kwok’s first Japanese concert tour, it is provoked less by the intersection of domestic and foreign cultures than the clash of this imagined third space of intimacy and understanding with that external ‘national’ identity through which Kwok attempted to tailor his performance to a specifically Japanese audience. One recurring theme in this *dōjinshi* is Kwok’s use of “Japanesque” (*2.5-D* 1997, 8) costuming and Japanese phrases; in performances of his song “Temptation of the Iron Mask” throughout his Japanese concert tour, Kwok reportedly wore a lamé “kabuki” costume and mixed snippets of the traditional Japanese song “Sakura” into his performance. In previous, non-Japanese concert performances, this song had seen Kwok try on a number of different performance personae—robot, goose-stepping militarist, futuristic cyborg—that effectively rendered his costuming little more than an empty signifier. Nonetheless, the overt inauthenticity of Kwok’s ‘Japanese’ costuming within the context of his Japanese concerts had the paradoxical effect of reminding fans of the cultural divide separating them from the Chinese star. Predictably, this resulted in fan responses ranging from appreciative to baffled:

That was something else. I wonder who thought it up?

It made a real impact, in several senses. But it was better than I had expected.

Why “sakura, sakura” – does it really fit in?

I never imagined I would see this costume in Japan.

I heard that Aaron himself really pushed for this outfit, but... a samurai??

I couldn’t help but laugh at the contrast between him waving the *koinobori* and singing “Listen to the Wind’s Song” (*duibuqi* [sorry], Aaron). (58, 60, 63–64)

As this last fan suggests, Kwok's attempts to tailor his performance to this audience through 'Japanese' costuming, music, and cultural accoutrement (*koinobori* are the tubular carp flags flown on Japan's Boy's Day) instead had the effect of foregrounding his understanding of Japan as an outsider, destabilizing any perceived closeness with him that fans might have felt (see Figure 16.1).

This was further exacerbated by Kwok's (mis)use of Japanese words and phrases in the real-world Japanese context in which they were uttered, provoking teasing (both good-natured



Figure 16.1 Aaron Kwok in Japanese kimono: "The Happiest Man in the World" from T-Factory 1997, 24

and not), puzzlement, and even sympathy. Throughout the concert tour, Kwok was reported to have engaged in repartee with the audience, using such simple words and phrases as “*tanoshii?*” (“having fun?”) and “*ai shiteiru!*” (“I love you!”) to communicate directly with fans. In some instances, however, misunderstandings and mispronunciations resulted in words that were either unintelligible, as in the case of “*koma*,” apparently referring to the teddy bears (*kuma*) thrown onstage by audience members, or just plain wrong. In one instance, repeated throughout his Japanese tour, Kwok asked the audience “*Ikete iru?*” meaning “sexy” or “cool.” This word typically is used as an exclamation of someone else’s sexiness; it makes little sense as a question, either in reference to oneself or others, and fans responded in the *dōjinshi* accordingly:

Nope, not sexy.

Yeah, after everything, I still can’t get that out of my mind.

I’d understand if he’d said “*ikite iru?*” [“are you alive?”] instead of “*ikete iru*” ... (63)

Further distancing Kwok, as a ‘knowable’ star, from his Japanese fans, his Japanese usage was recognized by some as an industrially formulaic means of manufacturing intimacy through appeal to what was perceived by Kwok and/or his handlers as national culture. As one fan observed of Kwok’s use of the phrase, “*ai shiteiru*,” “I knew it was coming. At least his was from the heart, as opposed to Leslie [Cheung’s] ‘*ai shitemasu*’” (66). In all, such commentary reflects the ways that Kwok’s well-intentioned use of Japanese language and cultural accoutrements disrupted the ontological security of fans’ imagined intimacy with him by foregrounding difference, opening the door to such reactions as (culture-based) criticism and even rejection of Kwok altogether as means of finding fans’ footing in an ontologically unstable moment.

For other fans, this instability was managed by rationalizing Kwok’s efforts to use Japanese as representing his dedication to his fans. Here, critique was focused more on fellow fans than Kwok himself: “In Osaka, the people shouting out corrections to mistaken words were too harsh. It was funny at first, but I started to feel sorry for him after a while” (66). Still others attempted to close the divide inadvertently created by Kwok by enfolding his use of Japanese, however haphazard, back into a fannish framework of appreciation for his efforts:

I’m really satisfied. Thank you so much for putting on such a great show for us Japanese. I cried when I heard Aaron say “*kansha shite imasu*” [I’m grateful]. That’s what I should be saying to Aaron.

The fact that he used even more Japanese than I had expected made me very happy.

I was in heaven just over Aaron coming to Japan and singing for us ... but I was really, really moved by his dedicated efforts to speak Japanese. (69–70)

This spectrum of responses, ranging from antagonistic to appreciative, could easily be explored through a morally dualistic (Hills 2002) framework centered on whether or not they reflect “the beginnings of a global perspective, and the awareness of alternative vantage points” (Jenkins 2004, 130) on the part of fans, and certainly this is one facet of a politics of transcultural fandom. Yet, as the above examples demonstrate, not only do fans reflect a generalizable gamut of reactions to Kwok’s clumsy attempts at localization, effectively nullifying a ‘whether or not’ framework, there is also no one set of power relations that defines this intersection of Hong Kong star and Japanese fans. We may (and should) understand it through the lens of Japanese (popular) cultural hegemony within postcolonial East Asia. But we might equally (or, I would argue, simultaneously) explore it through the lens of industrial regionalization and attempts to attract a heretofore

“bonus” (Shinohara 1998b) market of grassroots fans that, while not negating the postcolonial read, complicates it in ways that more closely reflect lived transcultural fandom (see also Pande’s Chapter 20 in this volume).

“When I’m Crying about Mark Gatiss Please Remind Me Bryan Fuller Exists”

A politics of transcultural fandom particularly benefits from being disarticulated from transnational fandom when conflict erupts over cultural differences *within* a shared national or language context. One fertile site of such conflict is the clash of women’s transformative fan culture with overwhelmingly male media production culture. Two contemporary Anglo-American television fandoms neatly illustrate both these conflicts and potential ways of overcoming them: the social media-centered fandoms of the BBC series *Sherlock* (2010–) and NBC’s *Hannibal* (2013–2015). The emotional resonance of both shows hinges on evolving and intensifying interpersonal relationships between the male protagonists of each, demonstrated in showcased moments of affection, admiration, anger, betrayal, despair, and even love. For fans who play in the online male slash sandboxes of English language Tumblr and Twitter, such moments are the evidential building blocks of ‘Johnlock’ (John/Sherlock) and ‘Hannigram’ (Hannibal/Will Graham) in both fan-fiction and fan “meta,” or analysis.

Within fan studies scholarship, English language slash fanfiction historically has been understood as a transformative practice, pairing two (or more) same-sex characters—with or without canonical sexual or romantic chemistry—in romantic/sexual relationships. More recently, however, some slash fans have turned their attention and desires to the realization of canonical same-sex relationships; a development that, while derided in some fan circles for being antithetical to the idea of slash fandom as necessarily transformative, often comes from a variety of concerns and/or desires of varying degrees of perceived importance. Arguably the most commonly cited, and fan-politically justifiable, reason for desiring canonical slash relationships is media “queerbaiting,” defined by Judith Fathalla (2015) as “a strategy by which writers and networks attempt to gain the attention of queer viewers via hints, jokes, gestures, and symbolism suggesting a queer relationship between two characters, and then emphatically denying and laughing off the possibility” (491); see also Bourdaa’s Chapter 24 in this volume. *Sherlock* (in addition to such American shows as *Teen Wolf* (2011–) and *Supernatural* (2005–)) is notorious among some fans for both perceived in-text (or subtextual) suggestions of same-sex attraction between its protagonists, as well as the vehemence with which its creators, Steven Moffat and Mark Gatiss, reject even the possibility of same. Indeed, when Gatiss (Morgan 2010), himself a gay writer and actor, cites Billy Wilder’s *The Private Life of Sherlock Holmes* (1970) as a “template of sorts” for *Sherlock*, observing that “the relationship between Sherlock and Watson is treated beautifully; Sherlock effectively falls in love with him in the film, but it’s so desperately unspoken” (n.p.), and then repeatedly and vociferously rejects the possibility of the show being anything but the most courtly of romances, some fans’ frustration is very nearly palpable.

Yet while the real-world consequences of queerbaiting are widely acknowledged within slash fandoms, similar complaints coming from outside openly LGBTQQA fandom often attract criticism for reflecting and even exemplifying fans’ desires to simply see favorite relationships realized in canon. Here, apolitical wish fulfillment is pitted against queer media representation in one of the many moral binaries that seem to shape online media fan discourse itself, a complex calculus in which legitimacy—both intra-fandom and outwardly directed—rests largely on the degree of sociopolitical seriousness found in fan practices and desires. Thus,

while it is politically defensible within fandoms to champion onscreen same-sex relationships if a fan meets the criteria for being sufficiently personally invested in such representation, the same championing minus that investment not infrequently is considered to be a kind of fan entitlement.

But what happens if we consider these desires not from the perspective of which is right or wrong, legitimate or illegitimate, but as possibly originating in analogous, albeit politically asymmetrical, fan investments in the canonical realization of same-sex relationships? In a Tumblr post entitled “Why the dismissal of women’s readings of Sherlock bothers me so much,” *Sherlock* fan 221beemine (2013) begins by describing her take on the ‘problem’ of women’s slash-centered readings of canonical text:

MALE SHOWRUNNERS AND ACTORS:	They’re just friends. Why are you reading sex into this?
FEMALE FANS:	They obviously want each other.
MALE SHOWRUNNERS AND ACTORS:	No, they don’t. You’re hysterical and oversexualized and deluded.
FEMALE FANS:	No, we’re not. It’s OBVIOUS they desire each other.
MALE SHOWRUNNERS AND ACTORS:	NO, THEY –
FEMALE FANS:	YES, THEY –

[*ad infinitum*]

In her analysis of this intractable conflict, 221beemine argues that women bring our own interpretations of the male gaze to bear on *Sherlock*, “a strikingly visual story that is all about looking,” which women watch through the lens of lived rape culture:

If a man stood right in my personal space and stared into my eyes I would know how to interpret that. If a man licked his lips while staring at my face I would know how to interpret that. If a man belittled and chased off my romantic partners I would know how to interpret that. If a man asked me to *reach into his jacket and pull out his phone* I would damn well know how to interpret *that*. Any time I have tried to brush aside suspicions under these circumstances, I was proved right that I should have trusted my instincts, and I wound up in dangerous situations (luckily, nothing terrible resulted thanks to my being able to escape, but the danger was real).

Here, 221beemine makes it clear that she intends this critique as one of many possible perspectives on canonical slash relationships, noting, “Not all women viewers see sexual tension [in *Sherlock*]. Not all male viewers don’t ... I don’t think the showrunners are sexist even if they exhibit sexist behavior occasionally. I don’t think their disagreement is meant to be hurtful. But it is what it is.” That is, throughout this post she seeks a resolution to a fan/producer impasse that is grounded in cultural difference, rather than oversimplified stereotypes of male sexism and female frivolity.

In another Tumblr post entitled “S3 characterization: boy, man,” *Sherlock* fan and fanfiction writer marsdaydream (2016) attempts the same, asking:

- If the creators are telling the truth, and they don’t intend a romantic endgame, where did they go astray?
- Why did romantic endgame theories explode after S3 in particular?

Like 221beemine, she arrives at the conclusion that the fundamental difference of opinion about the nature of Sherlock and John’s relationship comes down to differences in interpretative cultures.

Where 221beemine attributes this to gender cultural difference, marsdaydream posits that there may instead (or simultaneously) be a conflict of writer/viewer cultures:

A lot of Sherlock's behavior [in series 3] is very much like a kid dealing with the arrival of a new baby sibling. Will I be replaced? Will my favorite person still pay attention to me, and have time to play with me? If you think of Sherlock as a totally immature manchild, all of this behavior could just be ... immaturity. Extreme immaturity. It just doesn't seem plausible, because some of his behavior is borderline silly, even cartoonish.... Many of these immature incidents are played as gags: the napkin folding, the ideal man drawing ... He even calls himself a child twice ... Sherlock Holmes, actual child ... But if you watch ["The Sign of Three"] and think, *instead*, "Sherlock is desperately in love with John," instead of "Sherlock is basically a child," the whole thing becomes so much less silly. It's far more mature. And poignant. And resonant. It's so much *better*.

What both fans discern, then, is not a battle for the truth of the show's depiction of Sherlock and John's interpersonal relationship, so much as a transcultural clash between (some) women slash fans and *Sherlock's* male creators, occurring in the contact zones of increasingly visible and porous fan/creator cultures.

Indeed, Matt Hills's discussion of Moffat and Gatiss's own cultivated fanboy personae highlights the transcultural dimensions of this clash of fan/producer cultures. Hills (2012) observes that, in DVD commentary on the episode "A Study in Pink," Steven Moffat asserts that Holmes and Watson's "greatest friendship ever" is "right at the top level of the subtext" (37) of the show. Yet, Hills argues, this is a specifically gendered understanding of subtext, driven at least in part by Gatiss and Moffat's need to differentiate their own legitimized, self-proclaimed fandom of Sherlock Holmes canon (and adaptations) from that of "certain Sherlockian readings" in order to "discursively secure their status as professional, autonomous creatives" (37). The result is a show that "validates gendered fanboy knowledge, but at the expense of implicitly disciplining and devaluing fan passion/affect" (39; emphasis in the original), a gendered clash of (predominantly) female slash-centered interpretative culture and masculinist production culture, in which the latter is socially, culturally, and economically more advantaged than the former. As I argue in the previous section, it is at the point of transcultural clashes where we might locate the politics they produce, particularly as they destabilize the ontological security of, in this case, both fans and creators. Specifically, the ability of fans to directly contact and criticize media creators about their dissatisfaction with both story and creators themselves via social media weakens the creators' already tenuous claims to undisputed authorship (Williams 2014). Particularly where such interactions occur on Twitter, constrained by its 140-character limit and lending itself to spur-of-the-moment, unconsidered tweeting, the creators have attempted to regain ontological footing in ways that mirror such attempts by fans: withdrawing—often vocally—from Twitter altogether or setting their accounts to private, arguing with critical fans (as does Amanda Abbington, who plays Mary Watson in *Sherlock*), or refusing to engage with critical (or other) fans altogether (like Mark Gatiss, with very few exceptions).

At the same time, being "constantly dragged out to be laughed at" over "our apparent inability to differentiate between reality and fiction" (Jones 2014, n.p.) seems part and parcel of what makes women fans "hysterical" and "crazy" in both media creator and ancillary mass media discourse. If media fandom originates in love of a show, a character, a star, and can thus be assumed to be meaningful as imagined in the third space between a fan's own subjectivity and the external media object, then invalidation and even rejection by the official/legitimate creators of that media can be intensely destabilizing, leaving fans with little

recourse but to re-establish ontological equilibrium through the means at their disposal. Within Tumblr-based Johnlock fandom, reactions to ontological instability resulting from the clash of fan/creator cultures broadly mirror those of Kwok's fans: in addition to critique such as that above, some fans have chosen simply to ignore what Gatiss and Moffat have to say concerning the relationship between Sherlock and John, excising the creators' input from their interpretation of the show altogether, while others go so far as to excise the show itself from their *Sherlock* fandom, playing with its characters in fanfiction, fan art, and fanvids while no longer actively engaging with the series itself. Still others have departed *Sherlock* fandom, while some attempt to account for how BBC/British production culture might necessitate the kind of distancing *Sherlock's* creators engage in, in much the same way that some of Kwok's fans read his use of Japanese as simply part of the Hong Kong celebrity industrial complex. In one notable case, a subsection of Johnlock-centered slash fans has even created an elaborate theory called "The Johnlock Conspiracy" (known within the fandom as TJLC) that posits "endgame" Johnlock as a closely held production secret discernible only to fans with the analytical wherewithal to correctly decipher clues in the text of the show itself, in something of a "Great Game" of *Sherlock* fandom.

Each of these reactions constitutes a potential avenue for exploring the politics of transcultural fandom as it occurs outside the aegis of national cultures. If, for example, we consider 221beemine's argument—"I just want some acknowledgement – from the world at large – that women's perspective on human interactions is just as valid as men's and *doesn't come from wishful thinking*"—from the perspective of similar discounting of women's testimony on gendered confrontations with men, we might better be able to understand the vehemence of some women fans' frustrations over being disbelieved in even the most seemingly inconsequential areas of our lives. That is, what may be at stake here is not (only) a desire for a canonical same-sex relationship, but confirmation that what fans see onscreen is, in fact, there. Indeed, when the opposite has been the case, as when *Hannibal* ended not only with Hannibal Lecter being canonically "in love" with Will Graham, but Will seeming to accept this love as well (albeit in his own murderous way), these were precisely the terms through which Hannigram fan reaction was expressed. As one fan writes, the end of *Hannibal* was "confirmation that all of this gay, gay, totally gay love you're seeing onscreen is not in your head ... It's real and the show is real and we're confirming what you're seeing not just making your shippy dreams come true" (cloama Personal correspondence, October 2015. Quoted with permission.). Put even more succinctly on Twitter by another fan of both *Hannibal* and *Sherlock*, "When I'm crying about Mark Gatiss please remind me that Bryan Fuller exists and he is good and true and lovely" (agnesnutter 2016).

Certainly it may be nothing more than romantic fantasizing that drives some women fans' desires to see in-text same-sex relationships realized in the media they love, and questions of the need for 'serious' justification of such desires remain. But if we consider them as at least partly informed or even driven by, for example, the (fan) cultural experiences of women in a patriarchal world, and see creator resistance to them as equally culturally driven, we take a critical first step away from the moral dualism of right/wrong interpretation that seems to characterize clashes between fans and creators. This, of course, is not the only cultural intersection that might be in play: some fans, for example, have read conflict between *Sherlock's* male slash fans and its creators as a clash of British production/America-centric fan cultures (which, as it happens, is less of a clash in the context of *Hannibal*, with its American creator and largely Canadian/European cast and crew). Here too, however, a shift from moral dualisms of right/wrong, whether or not, to a framework of cultural clash enables us to make sense of sometimes seemingly irrational reactions to conflict, one that steers us away from dismissive or condescending discourse and toward a better understanding of where such reactions come from.

“Fandom Is Not Made for Me”

Media fandoms, and media fan studies, have a race problem; one that, in locating fandom-related conflict at the intersection of fan/non-fan cultures, obscures intra-fandom transcultural clashes. This is, I would argue, an effect of the ways “fans” and “fandom” are imagined in English language fandoms and fan scholarship (Morimoto and Chin 2017). Absent overt identity markers, scholars (myself included, as a white, American, middle-class, female fan/scholar) tend to talk about fans and fandom through the figure of a “generic’ or ‘normalized’ fan ... white, middle-class, male, heterosexual” (Gatson and Reid 2011, 4.1; see chapters in this volume by Phillips, Chin, Stanfill, Pande, and Seymour). This default fan is a feature of women-centered online fan cultures as well, with fangirls taking the place of fanboys in imagined communities of affect where, at their best, the values of “self-reflection, collective production, and acceptance of conflict” (Hellekson and Busse 2006, 9) predominate. In both scholarly and fan analyses of fandom, this results, as Rebecca Wanzo (2015) argues, in “race ... still frequently [being] treated as an add-on” (1.6), peripheral at best to the ‘real’ fans/fandom of normative discourse. By way of challenging this default, Wanzo exhorts scholars to “apply what I term an identity hermeneutics – interpretation by placing a particular identity at the center of the reading or interpretative practice” (1.6) as one means of making visible the specific experiences of those marginalized fans who are all too frequently left out of fan scholarship. It might be argued that this kind of singular focus on race and fan identity risks the (re) segregation of such work from mainstream fan studies and thus helps reinforce the hegemony of normative fan and fan studies discourse. Yet, while non-normative fans are fully a part of broader fan cultures (indeed, two of the four fans quoted in the previous section are African-American women), they bring subjectivities to their fandom that may make their experience of it qualitatively different from that of normative fans, setting the stage for potential transcultural friction.

Wanzo (2015) notes that African-American women’s experiences of media consumption are often characterized by “a kind of anxious waiting ... for a troubling representation to appear on screen” (2.1); this is equally true of some fans’ experiences of playing in the online fandom sandbox. As Tumblr user *stonecoldfemme* explains:

[M]arginalized fans will try and have discussions about the treatment or lack of characters who look like them, [and] fandom will immediately jump down our throats and say that WE are the problem, that WE are making fandom uncomfortable (for daring to speak up) and that WE should just be quiet and let everyone have fun. (*stonecoldfemme*, pers. comm., June 19, 2016. Quoted with permission.)

As described here, the cultural clash of African-American and normative white fans might be understood as ontologically destabilizing, challenging African-American fans’ sense of fandom belonging, on the one hand, and white fans’ heretofore unchallenged, normative understanding of fandom, on the other. If, as Wanzo argues, African-American women’s experiences of media consumption are broadly generalizable, then it may be unsurprising that fans’ reactions to this ontological destabilization are also generalizable along the same lines as reactions discussed in the previous two sections. The “Racefail Bingo” card created by LiveJournal user *dysprositos* (2009) in the wake of *RaceFail’09*, a months-long series of debates conducted primarily on LiveJournal and centering on race and fandom, identifies a number of these responses as generalizable normative fan reactions to the kinds of conflict *stonecoldfemme* describes above, including rationalization:

I’m one-sixteenth Cherokeee!/I have friends/relatives who are POC.

I don’t see race. (It wouldn’t matter if you didn’t keep bringing it up)

I marched in a civil rights parade/dated a POC/took a class once...

argumentation and criticism:

You're just looking for things to be offended by./Race-baiting!

Calling *this* 'racism' hurts the cause; it diminishes actual racism.

It's classism, not racism.

Talking about racism and race is 'bad tone'/racist/impolite.

If only you didn't do A, B, and C, and instead did X, Y, and Z, I'd listen to you.

and withdrawal from the conversation:

Why are you all soo mean?!/You're harshing my squee!

Of particular interest here is the extent to which normative fans' responses attempt to shift the conversation away from African-American fans' lived experiences of fandom racism altogether: as perceived by these fans, non-normative fans' criticisms either violate the (assumed, unwritten) rules and purpose of fandom, are frivolous because they're about fandom rather than 'real' racism, or are too personal to be given credibility. In this way, such fans effectively negate and even erase the concerns and criticisms of non-normative fans.

This is where we might turn to Wanzo's identity hermeneutics as a means of both centering African-American women's different experiences within discussion of normative fan culture, as well as foregrounding the implicit assumptions that construct one experience of fandom as normative. As a white fan-scholar, I draw here on interviews with several African-American women fans to discuss their experiences as fans within normative fan culture. Rather than representing all such fans' experiences, this discussion, as in the preceding section, is intended as one possible way of identifying and considering non-normative fans' experiences of conflict and clash as transcultural in nature.

As much as any normative fan, the African-American women I interviewed entered into fandom through their love of certain media. As Tumblr user imperatorkhaleesi (pers. comm., June 19, 2016. Quoted with permission) writes:

My first two fandoms were Harry Potter and Lord of the Rings ... I think, about Harry Potter, it was the first thing I'd ever read that I felt could happen to me in some way. The world felt so accessible, like it was somewhere I belonged ... Lord of the Rings, the thing I liked about it was the fantasy aspect, that aspect that was further reaching and spanning than Harry Potter. There were actual elves, and languages, and cultures, and it was also so detailed and interesting. LOTR was the first thing I ever read that had such detailed worldbuilding.... It blew my mind. And it made me want more.

Moreover, their early forays into fandom echo those of normative women fans in their emphasis on the appeal of community and creativity. Tumblr user cloama (pers. comm., August 26, 2016. Quoted with permission.) explains:

I've been aware of fandom since 2000 when I began watching *X-Files* and *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* with my older cousins. Internet searches about the show led me to message boards, fansites, and yahoo mailing groups. Being able to talk to other people about my favorite shows and books led to new friendships and expanded interests.

Similarly, according to imperatorkhaleesi, what appealed to her about fandom was

the communal aspect, at first. I was kind of a lonely kid; my family moved around a lot, and it's easy to make ""friends"", but I never felt like I fit in anywhere, because I was a gregarious kid, but I moved

to a racist neighborhood in South Jersey, and the kids down there bullied the confidence out of me ... Fandom when I was younger never made me feel like I had to stifle myself. Fandom accepted me whether I wanted to say something insightful, or just hang out and learn Elvish and read fic. I didn't feel like I had to perform some way of being; I could just enjoy the things I liked without feeling like a weirdo. (pers. comm., June 19, 2016. Quoted with permission.)

For *stonecoldfemme*, fandom originally was a means of getting some distance from overwhelming worries and difficulties:

Fandom came into my life when I was in a very bad place... so for the first few years, fandom was a way for me to escape all the things happening. I was able to connect with people and make friends that was very difficult for me to do in my everyday life. (*stonecoldfemme*, pers. comm., June 19, 2016. Quoted with permission.)

Ultimately, like many fans in “the kind of cult fan communities privileged in fan studies” (Wanzo 2015, 1.6), she began creating her own fanworks as well:

What I really loved was the idea that I could take a fully formed world and sort of add my two cents; that was appealing to 16-year-old me who loved reading and writing, but had no real concept of worldbuilding. The characters were already there, the plot fleshed out, not much worldbuilding to consider unless I wanted to write an extreme AU [alternative universe] (and even then, the framework was still in place). And I don't say this at all to make it seem like fanfiction is not “real writing” because of these things, only that it made the idea of trying my hand at writing less frightening.

Imperatorkhaleesi, too, writes fanfiction for a time, where her experience of conflict mirrors that of normative fans:

My first fic was an *Avatar The Last Airbender* AU (complete with a Mary Sue!), and the second was the *LOTR* one, both posted on FF.net. But I got a really disparaging comment on the *LOTR* one, and I lost the drive to post. I kept writing though. (Years later, I ended up rereading the comment, and looked past the aggressive tone. And some of the things mentioned were actually pretty useful. I ended up messaging the sender to thank them for the constructive parts, and they apologized for being so mean.) (pers. comm., June 19, 2016. Quoted with permission.)

All of which is to say, in many ways these women's experiences of online media fandom reflect those of normative fans. Their professed attraction to a community of the like-minded and the opportunity to engage meaningfully and playfully with favorite media texts echoes what fan studies historically has argued about women's fan cultures writ large, that they can be “important alternative social structures that [meet] the needs of their participants” (Coppa 2014, 78).

Yet while, as cloama observes, “enduring hostility and negative feeling is a constant of fandom” generally, African-American women's experiences of transcultural conflict within fandom are frequently of a magnitude greater than the kinds of conflicts—“flame war[s] or rivalry” (Coppa 2014, 78)—that fandom is said to encompass and accept. It is certainly true that “fandom is made of people, and people are sometimes awful to each other” (Tushnet 2014, 22), but what qualifies as ‘awful’ can be radically different depending on whose experiences are brought to the fore.

If, as I have suggested above, transcultural fandom is uniquely susceptible to the kinds of ontological instabilities provoked by cultural clash, for these African-American women such clashes

seem *endemic* to the experience of participating in normative online media fandoms. Specifically, where cultural clash is always a possibility within the contact zones of normative fandom, for African-American women, always existing “in opposition to normative fans” (Wanzo 2015, 2.2), normative fandom itself is an ontologically unstable site of “anxious waiting” for inevitable cultural clash. As *stonecoldfemme* writes of her more recent online media fandom experiences:

At least once a day I come across a post on my tumblr that tries to explain how black people didn't exist until slavery and so that's why there are no black people in this show, or this movie or that game. Or that having black people would be inaccurate, but this talking tree right here? That could totally be a thing. Everyone knows talking trees have been around way longer than black folks. (*stonecoldfemme*, pers. comm., June 19, 2016. Quoted with permission.)

Similarly, *imperatorkhaleesi* notes:

There are instances of generalized hostility [against African-American women in online fandom], but it tends to run as an undercurrent in the community, and it's propagated by microaggressions: the clear exclusion of characters of color, specifically black people and black women from fanworks of all styles, pages long meta explaining why black people, esp. women shouldn't be included in romantic pairings, using the lyrics of black female artists on gifsets that only feature white women, the insistence that racism and sexism only appears in the form of loud, virulent hate, as opposed to those subtle microaggressions. (pers. comm., June 19, 2016. Quoted with permission.)

Cloama, as well, says of fandom hostility, “It used to hurt me. When I wrote blog posts about the treatment of myself or other groups in fandom, I would be sure to write about how it hurt and affected my outlook ... [Fandom] is unaccepting but erasure is a big component of the behavior I've seen.” (pers. comm., August 26, 2016. Quoted with permission.)

As described by these women, participation in such ontologically destabilized spaces, where their racial identities subject them to at least the ever-present possibility, if not actuality, of transcultural conflict, can be intensely stressful. *Stonecoldfemme* explains that “finding out that many of [my fandom] friends were people who thought that I didn't deserve a voice in fandom was painful. I think I was hurt for a long [time] and tried to separate myself from fandom altogether” (*stonecoldfemme*, pers. comm., June 19, 2016. Quoted with permission.). For her part, *imperatorkhaleesi* says:

It mostly makes me angry. It makes me sad, too, and distraught, because fandom is supposed to be an inclusive space. Fandom, specifically femme-driven fandom has always sold itself as the place to go when mainstream cis straight white masculine-driven fandom violently excludes you. It hurts. But it makes me want to exist in and engage just to be spiteful. I like these things too; I deserve to be here too. (pers. comm., June 19, 2016. Quoted with permission.)

Women's fandom historically has been talked about both among fans and especially in scholarship as ‘resistant’—to heteronormative, masculinist fandom, to capitalist and patriarchal media industries—and the sense of being besieged by these is a familiar one to women fans generally. This is no less the case for my interviewees, but their experiences of such spaces are doubly fraught, intersectional in ways that normative fans seldom, if ever, experience.

But while some non-normative fans understandably choose to withdraw from fandom altogether, others' responses to racialized transcultural conflict within online fandoms reflect those of other fans faced with ontological destabilization. Where *imperatorkhaleesi* expresses a desire to remain within fandom partly to engage in discussion and critique of those issues at the heart of racialized transcultural conflict, *stonecoldfemme* distances herself from the fray: “Thankfully,

I fell into the Sherlock fandom, and even though 99% of the people in it were awful, I made a tumblr and was able to find a handful of like-minded people. It was the first time in a long while that I found myself eager to engage with fandom again” (stonecoldfemme, pers. comm., June 19, 2016. Quoted with permission.).

Similarly, cloama writes, “I’ve adapted and found other fans like myself and we keep each other grounded, offering support when needed” (pers. comm., August 26, 2016. Quoted with permission.). Still others, however temporarily, “choose Black joy,” where enjoyment of popular culture may not constitute “taking a stand against white cisheteropatriarchy and the police state,” but is experienced within the context of a culture where, as Lauren Bullock (2016) writes, “Tomorrow, yes, I may find myself in a space for rage or grief or fear ... today, today I choose the Blackest joy I can muster while I am still here to do it. Because that matters, too.”

Nor are such experiences necessarily limited to African-American fans. Conflict in transcultural fandom arises where cultural environment and cultural identity are at odds, frequently where dominant and marginalized cultures clash. Where such marginalized cultures are differently racialized, we can discern experiences that are analogous to those of the above-cited African-American women. Indian scholar-fan Rukmini Pande (2016; see her Chapter 20 in this volume) describes her early fandom experiences in much the same way as the African-American fans quoted above:

Online media fandom communities gave me a way of interacting on the Internet that in the 2000s as a young girl from a small town in India, felt almost revolutionary. It was in these spaces that I could geek out with “fellow fans” and not be particularly judged about my Western pop cultural obsessions. My introduction to fanfiction was similarly eye-opening, as I could interrogate my own notions of sexuality that weren’t really the topic of discussion in my home. (pers. comm., July 11, 2016. Quoted with permission, n.p.)

Notably, Pande observes an alternative axis of transcultural conflict in her own experience of online fandom, namely fandom of Western media in a non-Western environment. Particularly as a non-Westerner all but excluded from cultural representation in Western media (stereotypically “Indian” characters such as Raj Koothrappali in the unequivocally normative television show, *The Big Bang Theory* (2007–), notwithstanding), Pande notes that:

I didn’t feel the need to bring my own particularly “Indian” forms of fandom into these spaces as my engagement with them was on different terms ... I “passed”. As someone fluent in the “language” of media fandom, both in terms of English and in terms of popular culture knowledge, there was no reason for me to ‘other’ myself, though of course this was not how I framed it to myself. There was simply no need for me to identify myself as anyone but a “fangirl.” (pers. comm., July 11, 2016. Quoted with permission.)

Yet, when she sees, “for the first time, non-white fans unapologetically boosting characters and stories that were important to them,” Pande too chooses to engage, both in fandom and fan scholarship: “Ever since I’ve started being vocal about who I am and how that affects me in these spaces I’ve realized that there’s a price to pay for that vocality but I don’t think I’d take it back. It isn’t always the most comfortable but at least it’s honest” (pers. comm., July 11, 2016. Quoted with permission.). This is analogous to cloama’s frustrations with the “repetitive erasure of non-white characters, female characters and those who are both” within fandom itself, to which she responds by “speaking out about the ways the prejudices in the world translate into common practice within fandom” (pers. comm., August 26, 2016. Quoted with permission.). As a response to the ontological destabilization provoked by transcultural conflict within the contact zones of online media fandom, this choice to remain within normative fandoms might perhaps be met by a

willingness to listen and learn, rather than deflect and defend, on the part of normative fans. Both normative and non-normative responses to the ontological instabilities produced through contentious transcultural encounters leave open the possibility that their recognition *as* transcultural may be the beginning point of productive engagement. It is in such possibilities, never guaranteed but always potential, that I would locate the critical importance of a politics of transcultural fan studies.

Conclusion

Research of the politics of transcultural fandom historically has approached it symptomatically, extrapolating from observed phenomena its potential, or lack thereof, to alter fans' understandings of other cultures in ways that reflect resistance/acquiescence to hegemonic media globalization. In arguing that such symptoms are always and concurrently observable in moments of conflict within the contact zones of transcultural fandom writ large, I have argued here that any such politics must in fact begin by understanding the origins of such conflict. Assuming, as foregrounded in Winnicottian object relations theory, that media fandom holds deeply subjective and affective meaning for fans, this approach asks: What happens when external phenomena destabilize the ontological security such meanings reinforce and sustain? What happens when a star with whom I feel an affinity, however imagined, rejects me? What happens when I learn that the creators of a uniquely meaningful (to me) media text categorically reject the meanings I imbue it with? What happens when the safe havens of feminist fan communities turn out to be unsafe for me; when, as cloama (2015) posts on Tumblr, "fandom is not made for me"? Such conflicts, and myriad others, are what provoke the variety of reactions we observe in transcultural fan studies. As such, it is in these conflicts themselves that we should begin our explorations—conflicts that, while emerging in the same contact zones that make transcultural fandom possible in the first place, are inseparable from transcultural fan experience.

Until recently, transcultural fan studies has largely been the domain of those anthropologists and media globalization scholars whose interests extend to the study of the audiences implicated in the transnational circulation of media. As fan studies has begun to undergo its own transculturalization, with researchers from not only a diversity of nations, but also a diversity of cultural and disciplinary backgrounds, contributing to an increasingly rich field of inquiry, fan studies itself has become somewhat ontologically unstable. The truths of less than a decade ago—about who "fans" and "fandoms" are, and what "fandoms" do—have altered, and in ways that demand new approaches and theoretical frameworks if we are to fully comprehend what happens when fans and fandoms can no longer reasonably be considered culturally discrete and homogeneous.

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Chapter 17

Fandom and Otaku

Miranda Ruth Larsen

In the mid-2000s, I walked into a music-based pop culture shop in a Central New York mall and picked up a t-shirt emblazoned with the words “anime freak” in English and the kanji for “otaku” in Japanese. At the time, Japanese content such as anime and manga were circulating widely in the United States and globally, aided by Web 2.0 and the time and effort of industry and dedicated fans alike. In the context of the United States, anime was accessible weekly on Cartoon Network’s Adult Swim and the on-demand channel Anime Network; Borders and Barnes & Noble bookstores were crammed with manga; Japanese video game consoles graced many households; and most teenagers had lived through the Pokémon and Yu-Gi-Oh multimedia crazes. Much has been written about Japan’s pop culture power—the fact “Japan has gained ground in an increasingly changing terrain of global fads, a transnational imaginary, and the cultural marketplace of ideas, images, and virtuality”—and Japan’s own official initiative of “Cool Japan” recognized this potential (Allison 2006, 237). Through said initiative, the Japanese government attempted to brand certain cultural exports such as anime, idols, fashion, and gourmet food as cool, unofficially in the mid-2000s and officially beginning in 2010. Yet, reconsider the moment I discovered the t-shirt. The garment symbolized something extremely problematic. The equation in English of the word “freak” with “otaku” did not resonate deeply with me at the time, but something complicated was going on in terms of transcultural conceptualization. Globalization led to the popularization of otaku as a term, both in popular culture and English-language scholarship—but what exactly is otaku(dom), and how is it the same or different from fandom?

This chapter will outline important points in the history of otaku, the term’s usage, and call for an improved understanding of otaku as a term within English-language fan studies. Through an overview of scholarship on otaku focusing on the term’s polymorphous nature, I hope to illuminate the many difficulties of bringing together discourses about the subject. Like many of the challenges facing fan studies, considering otaku requires thoughtful contemplation of lifestyle, the role media plays in the everyday, and global flows of capital and culture. Ultimately, I will argue that as our concept of fandom is continuously broadened transculturally, we must likewise reconsider the relationship between the terms fan and otaku with a focus on context.

It is vital to note that discussions of otaku could fill entire books (and already have); my argument here is limited due to the constraints of space. Additionally, attempting to bring together both Japanese and Western discourses runs the risk of making an explicit binary, which is not my intention.

It is necessary to recognize that otaku and any kind of study of otaku are inherently multifaceted, interconnected, and global in scope. As Mizuko Ito (2012, xi) succinctly notes, “otaku culture defies simple definition”; the same can, of course, be said for fandom. Yet there is still merit in examining previous definitions and putting them into conversation with one another, as previous work has done examining the etymology of the word “fan” in both academic and popular circles (Duffett 2013, 5). As we shall see, the otaku discourse sometimes shifts so rapidly that previous incarnations are often forgotten or relegated to nostalgic recollections.

What Is an Otaku?

Otaku, like the term fan, is exceedingly difficult to identify and label. Literally a polite way of referring to “your house,” otaku in Japanese kanji connotes a sense of both belonging and sequestration. Various permutations of what otaku means as an identity category have emerged over the years. We can begin with one of the most infamous overviews of the term’s history: otaku is “a subculture that emerged in Japan in the 1970s and gave rise to a massive entertainment industry producing manga, anime, and video games,” according to Hiroki Azuma (2001, 3). In the derisive form, otaku frequently connotes unhealthy obsession; according to one scholar “in Japan, the term otaku is a kind of insult; it refers to a person who is so involved with a particular type of fan subculture that he or she becomes obsessed, even insane” (Newitz 1994, 1). As a compliment, otaku can signify docent-level knowledge of something particular and a refined skill set. Otaku as a category is often narrowed down to a specific genre or field; “one is not just an otaku, but a manga-(comic book-) otaku or a pop-idol-(pop-singer-) otaku or a *Twin Peaks*-otaku,” indicating focused identification, sometimes with media originating outside of Japan (Tobin 1998, 109). This singular fixation is not always the case, however, as one otaku may also be “an enthusiastic consumer in another field (or more than two fields)” and “such a tendency of belonging to several fields is a significant characteristic of enthusiastic consumers,” a business euphemism for otaku in Japan (Kitabayashi 2004, 3).

Otaku as a suffix, like anime-otaku and game-otaku, therefore “gets appended to any number of fan subculture categories to indicate one’s allegiance to them,” similar to the attachment of ‘fanboy’ to any number of media properties, with similar potential for both positive and negative implications (Newitz 1994, 1). Crossing fields is also normal due to the Japanese media mix strategy, similar to but distinct from the concept of transmedia. The Japanese media mix strategy spreads the same characters across different media forms, making them available in multiple contexts, inviting otaku to experience the character in different narrative modes (Steinberg 2012, 69). This method of extending character and narratives provides many spaces for fans to inhabit, and also different layers of possible consumption behavior. This can be seen in franchises such as .hack (spanning video games, anime, manga, and light novels) and Gundam (including anime, movies, video games, scale models, etc.).

Whether one field or multiple, otaku sink deep into the subject matter. In Japan, this is usually considered to be beyond the normal consumption pattern of ‘regular people,’ though like otaku, the definition of regular is also a fluid concept. Addressing the Japanese media industry as his audience, Kitabayashi (2004) contends: “The big difference between enthusiastic consumers and ordinary users is that the consumption behavior of the former is driven by the pursuit of their ideals” (4). Simply put, otaku invest large amounts of time, effort, and (in many cases) money to pursue their interests with impressive passion. Far beyond a hobby, the subject of any otaku’s interest carries significant meaning and impact. Otaku network with other otaku online and in person, in chat rooms and at conventions, and create content such as fan art, fan sites, fanfiction, *doujinshi*, music videos, cosplay outfits, models, and set replicas. They may collect, circulate, and

distribute information and things related to their interests, often creating enough influence to impact the industry making the official content in the first place.

Yet what I have provided so far are simply generalizations of who otaku are and what they do. This is problematic in itself because otaku as a term for a certain kind of consumptive behavior oscillates depending on context, especially temporal context. To fully understand the relationship between fan and otaku as terms and the implications of using either to describe engagement with a media or object, we need to review the history of otaku as a term in both the Japanese and Western contexts.

Otaku in the Japanese Context

Both of these definitions of otaku within the Japanese context point to the tensions between individuals (otaku/fans) and media (including the producers of media). Even a brief examination of the usage of otaku, similar to studies of the usage of fan, offers us a chance to understand the importance of context. The meaning of otaku in Japan is not so clearly defined, despite industrial attempts to simplify the label such as Kitabayashi's (2004) White Paper which explains otaku as the previously mentioned "enthusiastic consumers" and "five major otaku fields (comics, animation, idols, games, and PC assembly)" in which otaku traditionally take an interest (1).

In terms of Japanese scholarship, Hiroki Azuma controversially contended that otaku are fixated on databases, and that this way of thinking is reflected in the structures and circulation of the Japanese media mix. By enjoying particular parts of something (trains, robots, anime characters), swapping information about those parts, and influencing the creation cycle of new media with different database combinations, Azuma's vision of otaku represents a single-minded pursuit of knowledge and pleasure in assemblage. Similarly, otaku thrive in the maze of parts, as "the increase of simulacra should raise the value of the originals" (Azuma 2001, 63). For Azuma, otaku "are the quintessential postmodern beings, who seek affective stimulation in a society where grand narratives are dysfunctional" (Kam 2013, 154). This link between otaku and postmodernism is recurrent. Though other scholars in Japan have taken on the topic of otaku utilizing the frameworks of various fields, Azuma stands out as a cornerstone text that most work cites and responds to. However, when interviewed by Henry Jenkins (2012), Okabe outlines otaku scholarship thusly:

I think we can probably peg the start of otaku research to the publication of Shinji Miyadai's *Dismantling the Subcultural Myth*. Before that, there were commentators like Akio Nakamori and Toshio Okada, but academic fan studies is about twenty years old. Since then, we've seen otaku research get some traction in sociology, cultural anthropology, psychology, media studies, and communication studies. (pt. 1)

Studies of otaku in Japan are often "more rooted in critical sociology and postmodernism" than frameworks of fan studies as in the West (Jenkins 2012, pt. 1). Theories on otaku in Japan also frequently fall into the category of *Nihonjinron*, or "theorizing about Japanese-ness" which as a genre has:

two sub-forms: conservative theorizing about the core, essential character of the Japanese character and culture and alarmist theorizing about the way contemporary young people are losing this essential character and undermining traditional Japanese culture and values. Japanese writing about the otaku-zoku are a classic form of the alarmist *Nihonjinron* genre. (Tobin 1998, 110)

Kam points out that studies of otaku in Japan generally follow a particular pattern: “1) they trace the emergence and history of the people defined as ‘otaku’; 2) describe people’s actions, behaviors and thoughts through content analysis and/or fieldwork; 3) provide an analysis and explanation of their emergence and behaviors” (Kam 2013, 154). Therefore, otaku exist at the crossroads of multiple disciplines, concerns, and agendas, and have done so since the popularization of the term.

While from the 1970s onward otaku (as a term) signified deep pursuit of a particular hobby and perhaps social awkwardness, the term took on a darker connotation after Tsutomu Miyazaki committed a series of child murders in 1989. During the investigation and media aftermath, associations were forged in the popular imagination between otaku consumption habits and the capacity for violent crime (Azuma 2001, 123; Hashimoto 2007, 88). Miyazaki possessed a large collection of videotapes including anime and horror films, and was subsequently dubbed The Otaku Murderer, popularizing the term as a label and even entering it into the dictionary (Hashimoto 2007, 88). Otaku, therefore, began to take on a connotation similar to stories of “crazed fans common in the West, subscribing to the “fan-as-pathology model” (Jensen 1992, 18). A more recent massacre in Akihabara, indubitably designated as Tokyo’s otaku mecca functioning as “an otaku’s room blown up to city scale,” adds to this pattern of stereotyping (Galbraith 2010, 210). In 2008, Tomohiro Kato drove into a crowd, killing three people, and then proceeded to stab at least twelve others, killing four more, before he was apprehended (BBC News). Kato had a troubled history and left a series of Internet messages detailing his loneliness, which some media sources then spun into the familiar narrative of otaku consumption habits leading to antisocial, disconnected individuals capable of horrendous acts.

As demonstrated by the Otaku Murderer case and the Akihabara massacre, otaku as a label is frequently used in Japan as a derisive term for an obsession gone too far, straying into the abnormal and one possibly detrimental to society. Discussions often center on a disassociation between real life and responsibilities faced by ‘regular’ people and the fantasy world of media narratives inhabited by otaku. Tied to other social phenomena reportedly prevalent among young people such as NEETs (a young person who is “Not in Education, Employment, or Training”) and *hikkikomori* (reclusives), the otaku remains on the fringe yet gets dragged into the limelight with frequent Cool Japan initiatives highlighting particular media (Todd 2011, 143). The exponential popularity of the novel and film *Densha Otoko* beginning in 2004, featuring an otaku protagonist,

fueled the renewed media and academic interests in ‘otaku,’ unleashing a spate of news reports and documentaries (though “mock-umentaries” might be a better description) on the subject ... these years also coincided with the time when the Japanese state and businesses celebrated and promoted forms of popular culture associated with “otaku” as new sources of national wealth and glory. (Kam 2013, 158)

As Japan struggles with issues such as an aging population, a decline in birth rate, and delayed marriage rate, otaku often become an easy scapegoat for various concerns.

Otaku are often categorized as a youth epidemic, a symptom of society’s ills that require both focused study and correction. At the same time, they are heralded as cutting-edge consumers with their fingers on the pulse of Cool Japan. Cool Japan shifted as an unofficial label of Japanese soft power to a government-funded project focused on cultural export (Galbraith 2009, 49). The focus on consumption as both problematic and celebratory is unsurprising, as “consumption in Japan works as a public performance of status, achievement, knowledge, and identity” (Yano 2013, 45). Okamoto (2015) notes that “the scale and nature of otaku culture have changed over time,” which complicates the academic approach to the subject (19).

Adding to these complications for study, it is imperative to note that otaku activity functions within a different paradigm of copyright in comparison to other fan activities. The creation of *doujinshi* (fan-generated comics), for example, involves taking characters and situations from a licensed property and changing/adding/retelling the story, often for comedic effect, to expand the plot or to expound on a sexual relationship. The *doujinshi* market operates fairly openly in Japan despite taking direct inspiration from licensed content. This kind of system is markedly different from, for example, the United States where fanfiction lies in a legally nebulous position and certain authors, such as Anne Rice, expressly forbid dissemination of fanfiction about their characters. This industry orientation toward the creativity of otaku fosters a large amount of cross-pollination, with fans frequently consulting with and eventually working for companies producing content. This promotes a circular system of influence with porous boundaries and a high degree of mobility quite different than the litigation-heavy situation in the United States. While such openness is not always the case in Japan, this ethos is exemplified by the Hatsune Miku phenomenon, where a character provided by copyrighted software has been remixed, reworked, and reinterpreted exponentially by fan-creators.

The otaku ethos manifests physically in the central Tokyo district of Akihabara. As previously mentioned, Akihabara holds a special place in the Japanese imaginary of otakudom. The district has long been considered a haven for otaku and a place symbolizing the future through technological consumption (Morikawa 2003, 123). Replete with electronics stores, maid cafés, book shops, and various meeting points, Akihabara is an excellent example of how “taste and personality are becoming a geographical phenomenon” (Morikawa 2003, 125). Tiny shops crammed with computer parts flank stores specializing in anime dating simulation computer games. Foreign tourists often walk around with mobile phones glued to their hands, ready to take pictures of nearly everything. Patrick W. Galbraith’s work in Akihabara reflects the importance of physical space for otaku around the world; his numerous writings on the subject expound the connectedness of otaku to place and each other (Galbraith 2010, 215; Galbraith, Kam, and Kamm 2015, 7). For years, Akihabara has functioned as a nexus of communication and socialization. Just as “the travel behavior of otaku creates new forms of interpersonal links and communication,” a place like Akihabara constantly refreshes itself (Okamoto 2015, 13; see also Steinberg and Ernes dit Alban’s Chapter 18 in this volume).

Nevertheless, the drive of the Cool Japan initiative has essentially put Akihabara on the map for tourists, somewhat altering the tone of the district. Tsuji contends that “it’s already losing its centripetal force as the center of otaku culture” because of this overexposure (Jenkins 2012, pt. 2). After the Akihabara Massacre, events such as cosplay parades were heavily monitored and regulated, also changing the freedom of activity in what was previously a more open otaku space. Once a popular pilgrimage site, especially for otaku outside of the Tokyo area, Akihabara lost some of its characteristic glamor as many goods and services became available elsewhere or even online. The influx of tourists of course changes the nature of the district in terms of sub-cultural status, as many small shops find themselves bursting to capacity between goods and customers. Releases for particular goods from anime and video games often result in long lines of patient fans that wind through the already narrow streets. As Akihabara becomes a national symbol of otakudom in Japan with ramifications around the globe, only time will tell as to the district’s future.

In sum, the usage of the term otaku in Japan carries a particular history and weight within both popular culture and academia. Using it, therefore, carries the danger of placing oneself on one side of a multifaceted debate about consumption and lifestyle in Japan. Frequently “otaku are ridiculed by media pundits and psychoanalyzed by social critics” in Japan, reassessed with each new hot-button pop culture phenomenon (Tobin 1998, 109). At the same time, otaku are celebrated as part of the Cool Japan initiative as standard-bearers of exportable commodities. Reflecting on the

cross-cultural potentials of otaku and otaku texts, we can now consider how otaku as a term has functioned in the Western context, particularly within academic and popular culture discourses.

Otaku in the Western Context

In 2012, Henry Jenkins contended that because “relatively little” Japanese scholarship has been translated into English, this “means that Fan Studies as practiced in the United States and Otaku Studies as it has developed in Japan have largely been autonomous fields” and that these fields have “much to learn from each other” (pt. 1). Jenkins’s observation, post-*Convergence Culture*, highlights how serious the gap is between these academic discourses with respect to methodology, access, and focus. As in Japan, the meaning of the term oscillates depending on the speaker. Much English-language scholarship focuses on fieldwork of particular otaku practices, such as cosplay, and expounding on the significance of Japanese popular culture in the West.

A stellar entry in English-language otaku scholarship is the work of Mizuko Ito, Daisuke Okabe, and Izumi Tsuji; *Fandom Unbound: Otaku Culture in a Connected World* brings together scholarly work from the West and Japan in anthology format. This kind of approach respects the diversity and complexity of otaku while forging links between fan studies approaches and Japanese media. Henry Jenkins’s interview with the three authors is a vital source for this chapter as it is one of the few resources addressing the gap between Western and Japanese otaku scholarship.

But examining the importance of otaku in the West requires an awareness that the term bears even more loaded meanings. Within English-speaking fandom, otaku is often used interchangeably with the word “fan” to connote a deep passion for anything in particular. It is more frequently used as a synonym but a stylistic marker when describing fandom of content that originated in Japan such as anime, manga, or video games. Galbraith (2009) points out that otaku as a term “gradually gained traction at anime conventions in the early 1990s, and spread like wildfire with Anime Eigo’s translation of *Otaku no Video* in 1993” before appearing on the cover of *Wired* magazine. The definition of otaku, as someone fixated on Japanese media, has similarly appeared in academia. For example, a study of Austrian visual *kei* (a subculture of Japanese rock) fans explains otaku as people who “invest substantial amount of personal resources into consuming and (re)creating Japanese popular culture” to the point of “obsessive preoccupation” and “distinctive fetishistic tendency” (Hashimoto 2007, 87). Another study of the Australian cosplay scene defines “members of anime fan communities” as otaku (Norris, Craig, and Bainbridge 2009, 3). In an elaborate description linking otaku to conceptions of the term “fan,” Hatcher (2005) writes:

In the West, fans of anime, the term for Japanese animation, behave much like fans of *Star Wars* and *Star Trek*: they “remix” the characters and ideas from the stories they watch. Especially in the United States, avid anime fans refer to themselves as otaku, much like avid *Star Trek* fans refer to themselves as Trekkies. Like other fans, otaku practice a wide variety of activities; all of which potentially infringe the copyright of the shows and films they love. (546)

Many self-proclaimed otaku in the West are involved in activities like fansubbing, thus making content more accessible transculturally. As Ito argues, “Fansubbers are filling a unique void in transnational connection by providing a high value function of translation and localization,” bringing Japanese content into their local context, boosting popularity for particular franchises, and creating further otaku networks of creation, circulation, and distribution (Jenkins 2012, pt. 3). Fansubbing has a long history within anime fandom, especially in the United States, beginning

with circulated VHS tapes at collegiate anime clubs and now exploding into industry-based content providers such as Crunchyroll.

While Hatcher's (2005, 546) points about fan practices and remix culture are valid, the reduction of otaku to just the word for fans of Japanese content deserves further investigation. The same can be said of Hatcher's (2005) blanket assurance that non-Japanese "otaku create fansubs because they love anime—in fact, most love all things Japanese" (548). Here I would like to stress Matt Hills's (2002) point that "US/UK fan cultures may *recognize* their own cultural devaluation in the figure of the otaku, provoking a transcultural identification" far beyond blanket appropriation (4, emphasis in original). This both meshes and clashes with Ito's argument that

[I]n many ways, the otaku in the US have some similarities to the early otaku cultures in Japan, in that they tend towards well educated middle class youth who don't fit into the mainstream and "popular" gender dynamics, and are engaged in more of a subculture of appropriation rather than of resistance to power. (Jenkins 2012, pt. 2)

There is an incredibly tricky zone when one ventures into talk of appropriation or fixation. Comments such as "one way otaku gets translated into English is with the somewhat derogatory term 'fanboy'" point to the attempt of Western scholarship to come to terms with otaku's loaded potential (Newitz 1994, 1).

As in fan studies, the Western discussion of otaku faces the usual conversations of subcultural and cult status, appropriation, and copyright. Therefore, otaku is both bound to and distanced from Japan; it becomes a marker for difference and yet also reflexively points to other national (and in no way isolated) contexts of consumption. Globalization forges links and pathways, specifically for media and fan communication, and identity politics are another complexity that must navigate these paths.

Complicating Matters Further: Otaku as Identity Terminology

As cited in the introduction, the word otaku is now easily found globally, stretching beyond the originating environment of the domestic Japanese media scene. Examples of otaku's popularization are plentiful: in the United States one wide-circulating anime magazine was called *Otaku USA*; one of the largest Japanese media conventions held yearly is called Otakon (literally a convention of otaku); and so forth. In Western discourses otakudom and fandom often converge, with trappings of subcultural and cult status surrounding the consumption of media originating in Japan. In the case of Australian cosplayers, for example, otaku are defined in one study as "an adolescent subculture of avid collectors who have a special lifestyle and who are obsessed with anime products" (Niu, Chang, and Tsai 2012, 712). In the Western context, the otaku label could be thought of as an answer to Japan's soft power, a way to demarcate the influence of Japanese-produced popular culture. Its usage points to Western understandings of Japan and the popular culture it produces, as well as reflexive understanding of Western popular culture and fandom.

Of course, some discourses are homologous; the wars between multiple generations of fans and otaku, the uses of particular technologies as marker of belonging, the designation of a lifestyle that often brings community together around an object of devotion and makes impactful meaning and change within participants' lives. This echoes Hills's (2002) previously cited point that fandom and otakudom are not necessarily the same but are capable of recognizing similarities; the added trickiness comes when identity is pinned to nomenclature with fluid meanings in multiple contexts (6). Just as Japanese otaku in the early 1980s requires a different consideration

than Japanese otaku in the present, and people in the United States self-defining as otaku in the mid-2000s require a particular discourse when brought into conversation with Chinese otaku in the late 2010s. Similar to serious engagements of fan scholarship which take into account context as well as detailed case study, the particularities of otaku in both academic and popular discourse necessitates close investigation.

An excellent example of the intricacies of otaku identity discourse revolves around gender. Tsuji notes that “until recently, otaku culture was dominated by men” (Jenkins 2012, pt. 1). Older stereotypes of otaku included men with thick glasses and often unkempt appearances, but a current “blossoming” of female otaku culture claiming both the moniker of otaku and the term *fujoshi* (or “rotten woman”) is now common, though debates abound as to whether female otaku and *fujoshi* are one and the same (Jenkins 2012, pt. 1; Suzuki 2013, 2). While Akihabara is still thought of as the stomping ground of otaku, Ikebukuro serves as the center of *fujoshi* culture—especially Otome Road which is replete with collector goods, butler cafés, and bookstores. Female otaku and *fujoshi* culture is quite active, in some ways more active than male otaku culture, which Tsuji notes is evident by “the fact that at Comiket (the largest fan comic convention in Japan), the first two days are centered on female content, and the last and final day on men’s content” (Jenkins 2012, pt. 2). At the same time, some studies reveal that Japanese university students simply cannot fathom an otaku as being female (Kam 2013, 165).

These contradictory positions require analysis beyond the scope of this chapter, but a few notes can still be made. Positioning oneself as an otaku in any national context also requires grappling with stereotypes and expectations for gender performance. As gender performance is often tied to patterns of consumption and sociality, this directly relates to notions of otaku behavior. Otaku are often criticized for hyper-consumption of media and narratives, or sensationalized if the media involves sexual or controversial content. Thinking back to the Tsutomu Miyazaki murders, otaku as a deviant label in Japan has always been tied to notions of gender and sexuality. This makes the recent visibility of female otaku and/or *fujoshi* incredibly interesting and important. Further examinations of work on female otaku and *fujoshi* and their boundary demarcations are needed to expand the gendered discussion of otaku, one of the most important and interesting factors in discussing the identity label.

The example of gender as a complicating factor within otaku discourse ties into the work of Thiam Huat Kam, whose central thesis that otaku exists as an identity label and not as a particular subcultural category both opposes and dovetails with the other conclusions I have overviewed. Kam’s research reveals that among Japanese university students, “who these students label as ‘otaku’ is intricately related to their common sense on consumption, a set of rules on how people should consume, which I have named respectively as the reality rule, the communication rule, the masculinity rule, and the majority rule” (Kam 2013, 152). These rules are varied among those placing the label; for example, the majority rule dictates that consumption of media currently “in fashion” is normal, while the reality rule affords any media indulgence as long as it does not interfere with one’s social productivity as a member of a capitalist society. Kam’s work points to the fluidity of “otaku” as label and category, reminding us to pay as much attention to consumption context as the activities of consumption itself. For Kam (2013), “people become ‘otaku’ because they are labeled, and not by virtue of their activities and preferences” (170).

Towards a Transcultural Understanding of Multiple Meanings

Taking into account these widely varied theories on otaku, I will now attempt to synthesize the many difficulties of placing this controversial identity label within a broader understanding. It is safe to say that no matter the location or time, an otaku is a type of fan. Yet fan and otaku are not readily

exchangeable terms, despite the often-used tactic of calling any Japanese media aficionado an otaku. Just as “fan” has undergone permutations within the English lexicon, so has otaku in Japanese, and the current mixing of nomenclature presents a challenge to anyone looking to sort out identity politics. But by accepting that otaku is a polymorphous term, perhaps more so than the label “fan,” we can then examine the importance of context, especially within transcultural exchange.

Galbraith and Karlin (2016) argue that “despite the inexorable process of globalization, national contexts—localized, linguistically, legally bounded systems—still matter in the production, circulation, and reception of media” (12). As both fan and otaku identities are tied to media, the same can be said about those terms as identifiers. As we have seen, otaku as a term signifies multiple things: wayward Japanese youth, tech-savvy docents, English-speaking anime fans, consumers somehow marked as abnormal by others, and so on. We must come to terms with Kam’s rightful assertion that otaku is a label where “people are called ‘otaku’ because they are judged by themselves or others to fail to keep to certain rules” (Kam 2013, 151). We must investigate these rules in each situation to fully grasp the implications of calling someone or their activities otaku. We must link these rules to frameworks of capitalist consumption, as ultimately otaku is in many cases a label for abnormal consumption patterns within a given system of value. Since transcultural globalization is “lateral and rhizomatic as various media platforms allow for the circulation or blockage of visual texts and human desires,” recognizing variation is key (Annett 2014, 5).

Essentially, what matters going forward to improve the quality of academic and fannish discourse is identifying otaku within particular contexts (see also Morimoto’s Chapter 16 in this volume). Just as “media consumers in different parts of the world engage with globally distributed and/or globally influenced texts in complex ways and from multiple points of entry,” so do media consumers in their usage of the word otaku (Darling-Wolf 2015, 152). Otaku written beneath “anime freak” on a black t-shirt encountered during my high school years, perhaps an attempt to reclaim the label, carries a different meaning than otaku muttered under someone’s breath when they see a young man leaving Akihabara with his backpack covered in anime character buttons. Similarly, non-Japanese fans of media calling themselves otaku because of their interest in Japanese media mark a connected and yet distinct space from the term’s original usage in early 1990s Japan immediately after the Miyazaki murders. What connects the multiplicity of otaku is essentially the same thing that connects the multiplicity of the term “fan”: people and passion. The academic and popular focus is often at either end of the spectrum; an admiration for the deep commitment of otaku to their interests, or the examination of their behavior as somehow singularly important. The whole picture is complicated, but recognizing that is essential. In doing so we can answer Bertha Chin and Lori Hitchcock-Morimoto’s (2013) call that we “need to take seriously not just the national, but also—especially—the gender, sexual, popular, and fan cultural contexts within which fans consume and create, if we are to comprehend how and why fandoms arise almost regardless of borders both geographical and cultural” (93).

Conclusion

Hiroki Azuma (2001) opines that “subculture for the otaku is no longer the object of analysis but is transforming into the very environment of criticism, in which the power of words is circulated and tested.” While Azuma puts some restraint on the concept of otaku by here delineating it as a subculture only, his point about the power of words and criticism is valid. Popular opinion on otaku does not occur in a vacuum; otaku often discuss these conceptions and stereotypes just as much (if not more so) than the latest TV interview or catchy news piece.

What otaku means and how it will function as an identity label in the future will also depend on changes in media. When interviewed by Jenkins in 2012, Ito argued that:

[W]e are in an interesting transitional period where the Internet and otaku culture have become much more mainstream, accessible, and out in the open because of the scaling up of these networks and the advent of social media. In the early years of the Internet, it was much more geek and otaku centered, and felt like a match made in heaven, but I think today there's a different feel to the online scene in part because the commercial industries have also taken to online culture in proactive ways now. (pt. 3)

Actual technology and what people do with it are central to a discussion of otaku. The rapid dissemination of the *Densha Otoko* story via smartphones in Japan, later collected into a printed volume and then developed into visual adaptations, points to how media circulation can quickly impact sociality. The “scene” that Ito references is now replete with industry members who were former otaku or still are, and analysts hoping to gain a creative edge by picking the brains of otaku and their derivative works. Kitabayashi (2004) even suggests that “with the aim of making effective use of enthusiastic consumers, from the perspective of their customers, businesses should begin reviewing the features in their lines of products or services that evoke strong feelings and what aspects of their products are currently being pursued” (8); effectively, he suggests that media products should be designed with otaku in mind from the get-go by appealing to their emotions. This brings the concept of affect, central to the otaku and fan experience, into the fray. What is the significance of products especially designed to elicit otaku affect?

At the same time, many otaku are enterprising for themselves, sharing and gaining by selling their fan art or *doujinshi*. Cosplayers gain international fame through their painstaking recreations of Japanese media character designs. Fanfiction still remains a creative outpouring for extradiegetic creativity. As consumption patterns and distribution networks in Japan are full of juxtapositions—the popularity of the physical CD market versus digital and the recent launch of streaming services such as Netflix and Amazon Prime Video come to mind—self-identified and labeled otaku have a plethora of choices in terms of what, where, and how they bring media into their lives (Galbraith and Karlin 2016, 4). As new media fads arise on a global scale, such as *Pokemon Go*, how does one conceive of otaku in an overly-connected world? At the same time, how do we consider the technological gaps between national contexts and circulation of media? Should scholars recognize that “while otaku have diversified, they have also become more mainstream[;] rather than limiting the definition of otaku to the type of person, therefore, it is more appropriate to define otaku according to the objects of their interests” (Okamoto 2015, 19)?

We must also consider the fact that in Japanese, it is quite common to hear the word “fan” (written in katakana, the script for foreign words) used as an identifying term. In my own fieldwork researching K-pop fandom in Japan, I encounter Japanese women who even use the term “pen” from the Korean pronunciation of the English word “fan.” This is not entirely unlike some Western fans of Japanese media self-labeling as otaku—but it does not mean that the situations are structured the same, and that the investigation should stop with that comparison! There are sociopolitical ramifications on self-labeling for many of my informants, who choose their vocabulary to reflect their level of dedication and closeness to the media in question. This is also complicated by the status of Korean media like K-pop in Japan, which has a large impact on the music market but is also tied up in political debate. Variables such as age, social status, linguistic ability, and peer groups all influence whether someone who deeply enjoys K-pop labels themselves as “fan” or “pen” or “otaku”; they may even use all three terms when talking to different people. I share this example as a reminder that as media circulates beyond all kinds of borders, we must pay attention to how we situate media and sociality.

In a similar vein, we must recognize that self-label as an otaku carries with it political ramifications. For example, after intense consideration I chose my Twitter handle @AcaOtaku in a reference to Henry Jenkins's concept of the aca-fan widely popularized in fan studies (Jenkins 2006). While this personal example runs the risk of bias (see Garner's Chapter 6 in this volume), it took me a great amount of thought to settle on that Twitter moniker precisely because of the multivalent significance of otaku as well as the presumption that there was some statement in using that term instead of fan. This often becomes a point of discussion at academic conferences where people recognize me and remember my Twitter handle. It signifies something particular to those interested in fan studies who understand Jenkins's aca-fan concept, but is still polymorphous enough to invite curious questions. A K-pop idol familiar with my Twitter account once remarked that he was surprised by the name as he didn't consider me an otaku. Encounters like this remind us we cannot take words too lightly.

Just as defining fans and fandom has challenged fans, academics, and aca-fans alike, the term otaku offers a similar challenge in the Japanese, English-speaking, and frankly global context. Otaku have been linked to databases, social ineptitude, and closed communities; simultaneously, to creative freedom, close relationships, and passionate engagement with objects of devotion. As we have seen throughout this chapter, otaku can function as a self-label, a label given by others, as a subcultural concept, as a scapegoat population, as a step above 'regular' consumption, and as an unproblematic way of finding happiness. Perhaps the best definition for otaku we can hope for comes from Ito, Okabe, and Tsuji (2012): "otaku culture references a constellation of 'fannish' cultural logics, platforms, and practices that cluster around anime, manga, and Japanese games and are in turn associated with a more generalized set of dispositions toward passionate and participatory engagement with popular culture and technology in a networked world" (xi). We can expand on this by recognizing the plethora of otaku cultures mitigated by contexts such as media object, technological access, gender, geographical location, and so on.

Future scholarship about fandom and otaku will hopefully take into account the importance of transcultural communication and media circulation, and provide fruitful conversations about consumption, convergence, and conviviality. Through a stress on particular contexts, we can study media and what media makes possible between people. On the industrial side, Kitabayashi (2004, 1) advises in his White Paper that otaku "passion and creativity will be the driving force for bringing about industrial innovation," and that the future of successful media consumption hinges upon this recognition. On the otaku/fan studies side, we can step forward by considering Ito's definition of otaku culture as a final thought: "a kind of zone of cultural tolerance for non-mainstream imaginative life" (Jenkins 2012, pt. 1). As the zone's boundaries shift, we must keep up.

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Chapter 18

Otaku Pedestrians

Marc Steinberg and Edmond Ernest dit Alban

Japanese “otaku,” or fans of anime, manga, light novels, and games, are an impressively self-reflexive group. Much of the early scholarship produced on otaku was in fact produced *by* otaku, whether the writings of the “Otaku King” Okada Toshio, the otaku editor and manga screenplay writer Ōtsuka Eiji, or the more recent generation of self-identified otaku critics and theorists spearheaded by Azuma Hiroki.¹ While self-reflexive and productively theoretical, much of this group took an alternatively *textual or autobiographical* approach to narrating and analyzing fandom in Japan. This history of fan meta-writing has resonances with Anglophone fan studies scholarship. Matt Hills (2004; 2010), for instance, articulates how fans adopt or “poach” theories of popular culture in their responses to texts, developing something of a theorization from below. Henry Jenkins (1992) too suggests the importance of fan writings within his work, and his self-positioning as an “aca-fan.” Otaku writings arguably offer even stronger ties between practitioners and scholars, insofar as the two are often inseparable, with major figures involved in the creation of fandom—such as Okada and Ōtsuka—also key to its theorization. That said, otaku studies have traditionally been dominated by male voices, discussing male fandom (the work of Kotani Mari being a rare but important counterweight to this, at least until the 2000s emergence of important female and feminist perspectives). However, the dominant trend in this writing has been a concern with the key texts and traits of this fandom. The *places and spaces* of otaku fandom, and the constituent role of the city in producing this fandom, have been much less addressed in this work.

This chapter revisits the study of the otaku, imagining this figure through the combined lenses of media mobility and urban space. Specifically, we explore how the mobility of media (i.e. the material circulation of otaku commodities) in Ikebukuro—an area in Tokyo known as a mecca for female fandom—is productive of this very fandom. The aim is to explain how media mobility conjoined with a local urban milieu and the mobility of pedestrians through this space gives rise to otaku culture. Otaku culture, we argue, must be understood neither merely through particular foundational texts nor merely through specific ways of seeing (Okada 1996; Steinberg 2004; Lamarre 2009)—as it has been understood until this point—but rather through a conjunction of these visual and narrative elements with specific patterns of urban encounters. City spaces and transportable media commodities can become key methodological tools for mapping otaku movement. First, however, we must explain the stakes and reasons that force us to adopt this method of inquiry in our search for an urban definition of otaku fandom.

If otaku tourism has recently become a theme in otaku studies (Okamoto 2013) with the maturation of the practice of visiting “otaku sanctuaries” or holy sites across Japan, “urban space” as a concept has still not been fully explored in otaku studies. On the one hand, North American scholars as well as early Japanese advocates and interpreters of otaku culture tend to give pride of place to the analysis of moving images, finding in these the organizing logic of commodity production and reception practices. The otaku phenomenon is therefore frequently studied in terms of the reception of anime, which is characterized as an industrial form of cultural production. Key texts on anime and otaku culture such as Thomas Lamarre’s “Otaku Movement” (2004) and *The Anime Machine* (2009) or Ian Condry’s *The Soul of Anime* (2013), as well as earlier ones such as Okada Toshio’s *Introduction to Otakuology (Otakugakunyūmon)*, (1996) tend to frame Japanese animation series as both a mode of producing images and a visual model of image consumption that together construct otaku publics. (Their approaches nevertheless differ: Lamarre’s definition emphasizes the immanence in the process of making otaku subjectivities in between distributive fields of images whereas Condry finds the emergence of otaku fandom in social exchanges.) In these accounts, the movement of images in otaku culture is tied to their mode of appreciation and is consequently conceptualized as a medium-specific quality that emerges from particular techniques of animation (by movement of images, the authors mean both the style and aesthetics of anime, as well as their cultural circulation through transmission technologies or formats such as television, VHS tapes, and so on). These methods crystallize specific definitions of fandom only through their relation to moving images. Japanese scholars of fandom from the late 1990s and 2000s have, for their part, tended to focus on the narrative patterns created by otaku commodities. From Azuma Hiroki’s (2001) systematic research of meta-structural tropes in so-called “Girl’s Games” (*bishōjo* games, or dating sims) purporting to explain the logics of otaku fandom’s imagination (41), to the analysis of the place of the “beautiful girl” (Saito 2006), there is a tendency to focus on narrative structures within otaku culture.

On the other hand, there are also some works that take a more sociological or material cultural approach, emphasizing how cultural subjects build their identities through the mediation of manga magazines and narratives (Miyadai 2007, 25) or operate through the specific logics of collection cultivated by magazine premiums or candy campaigns (Ōtsuka 2001); these latter approaches develop models of media mobility to explain the formation of fandom. In *Anime’s Media Mix*, Marc Steinberg (2012) builds on Ōtsuka’s approach to the Bikkuriman collectible chocolates (Ōtsuka 2004, 235), developing a material cultural analysis of the transmedia environment around manga and anime, known as the *media mix*. Media mobility, in these accounts, arises in part from the stylistic patterns of anime, but also in part from the *material circuits of circulation* (of stickers and toys in particular) that are the infrastructural support for fan desire. Nogami Akira’s (2015) recent history of modern children’s culture suggests a similar understanding of the emergence of otaku culture from the material circulation of collectibles (Nogami 2015). If otaku culture is too often conceptualized as a product of an indoor culture revolving around the TV screen or computer screen, Nogami’s history of otaku culture, seen from the perspective of children’s culture, gives pride of place to the urban cultural history of the “hobby” of garage kits and the other small collectible toys (*gashapon*) that were distributed in various locations. In short, this work in the material cultural vein takes otaku culture out of the living rooms and bedrooms of fans, and inscribes them in the city. Some early studies of the male otaku mecca of Tokyo’s Akihabara district similarly pay attention to the location of otaku within urban space, most notably Ka’ichiro Morikawa’s *The Birth of the Hobby City (Akihabara moerutoshi no tanjō)*, (2003) and work by anthropologist Patrick W. Galbraith (2013),² as does recent work on the practice of visiting the holy sites of fandom (Okamoto 2013).

Here, however, we would like to offer an integrated approach to otaku culture that places the mobility of images, the mobility of things, and the mobility of persons through urban space at

the center of our analysis. This triplex mobility of images-things-people is the key, we argue, to understanding the emergence of the otaku as a fundamentally *pedestrian* phenomenon. The otaku, we suggest in this account, emerges from a specific relation to the city that is mediated through her or his interaction with networks of collectible commodities. This has an impact not only for otaku studies, but also fan studies in general. The textual emphasis that characterizes both realms of scholarship has left the relation between fan formation and the urban environment relatively unexplored; our methodological proposition to fan studies is hence that this intervention in otaku studies could usefully be expanded to fan studies in general.

Otaku in the City, or, a Pedestrian Method

This approach to the otaku as pedestrian has both methodological and theoretical consequences. The focus on the mobility of images and text tends to presume either (1) a vertical logic of industrial organization, wherein the activity of fans are conceived—in everyday discourse and in scholarly treatments—within the frame of “secondary uses” (*nijisōsaku*) subjugated to or coming after “official” media production, or (2) the horizontal, autonomous production of fan cultures outside the regime of official circulation, often located in such places as the Comic Market. In both treatments, such “secondary uses” products as *dōjin* (fanzine, hand-made items or amateur music or cosplay) are mostly addressed when discussing fandom formation as the reception of anime, most studies do not address the “hobby” aspect of otaku fandom. “Hobby” cultures are constructed around particular collectible objects and practices of collection that in turn induce specific regimes of social interaction. Like the Bikkuriman collectible case (wherein a candy company sold chocolates with a sticker premium that encouraged collection in order to understand the larger world or story told through each individual sticker), anime is too often framed as a vertical, industrial storytelling strategy driven by the fragmented production of image-based commodities, erasing the horizontal process of fan-to-fan engagement around these commodities. The constitution of otaku fandom is not only sustained by the appropriation or reproduction of images but also by their horizontal, physical exchange between fans: fanzine magazines or cosplay accessories are material objects that sometimes travel in between fans. Hence we propose to marry vertical and horizontal aspects of production and consumption along the axis of the circulation (and re-circulation) of toys and collectibles (adopting an approach similar to that of Lincoln Geraghty (2014) in his analysis of Comic Con geographies).

The practice of collection is often related to recycling shops where fans sell their used media commodities within second-hand economies. As Gregson and Crewe (2003) demonstrate in *Second-hand Cultures*, second-hand economies localize consumer agency by giving new value to used products and inscribing them into various geographies in between the first and second circles of distribution. In the otaku sanctuary case, the urban convergence of *dōjin*, cosplay and other “secondary” fan cultures with the infrastructures of official otaku commodity circulation highlights the dynamics of item sourcing and recycling that occur in between different sites of amateur and official distribution present in the same district. Hobby items unite subjects with the same taste, creating urban networks of media circulation that we propose to map (see Chin’s Chapter 15 in this volume). As such, fanzine circulation also highlights how fan cultures rejoin two nuances of the notion of *second-hand cultures*: otaku fandom’s social interaction happens when exchanging both the content and material aspects of otaku media commodities. The mobility of otaku culture therefore resolves around the social organization of commodity exchange and circulation more than the consumption of images. Describing the whole otaku milieu requires that we demonstrate how the vertical logic of industrial production meets the horizontal exchanges of fandom *within urban space*. The encounters and exchanges noted above occur in urban milieus in particular.³

Otaku culture is, hence, a deeply pedestrian culture, wherein the mundane encounters with media commodities within urban life become the grounds in which fan culture develops. In “Otaku Movement,” Lamarre offers an account of what he calls “Gainax discourse” (after the production company most associated with a particular imaginary of the otaku), suggesting that this discourse describes a subject position in relation to the anime image in which “the entire city becomes a distributive field of visual information” (Lamarre 2004, 162). Here, we would like to extend this suggestive image of the city as a distributive field, focusing on how the city functions as the primary site of emergence for otaku subjectivities. In *Unlearning the City*, Swati Chattopadhyay (2012) explains how infrastructural studies tend to conceptualize inhabitants’ political agency as subjugated subjectivities limited by the material space they are given to express themselves. Here, we follow Chattopadhyay’s defense of inhabitants’ “invisible” agencies, arguing that otaku create their own space in cities through the occupation of the same material spaces through which media circulate. Image networks, we will suggest, are first and foremost defined by their urban distribution and circuits of second-hand circulation. Matt Hills (2002) also suggested the need to think of fan studies within urban space, arguing that we tend to “despatialize fan studies” when focusing on the fictional space of imagination in fan cultures (147), and hence focus too much on the indoor subject. Following Hills’s and Lamarre’s provocations, we argue that we cannot understand otaku culture in particular without understanding the urban; and that otaku culture is a pedestrian culture, using this term pedestrian with a nod to its two meanings: it is both *present* when walking in the different parts of cities and it is almost too utterly *ordinary* to be noticeable. Whether this is the case for all fan cultures, we leave open to debate; this is in some respects specific to Tokyo as an urban milieu, though we would argue that this approach needs to be pursued in other contexts of fan cultures as well.

Rethinking otaku fandom requires it to be integrated in a larger urban history of popular culture. Our primary methodological tool will be urban mapping, which makes visible the otherwise invisible or assumed material conditions of otaku visibility that are found within urban space. In our treatment of the urban, we follow Stephen Graham and Simon Marvin’s (2001) critique of cultural studies in *Splintering Urbanism*, where they suggest that the latter fails to adequately understand the urban aspect of modernity because infrastructural space is invisible in their framework (31); and we also follow Shannon Mattern (2015) in *Deep Mapping the Media City*, where she posits the city as a medium in between social groups, institutions, and power structures. The mediatization of cities through otaku urbanism opens the question of the place of fan consumption as a factor of urbanization.

The mapping of urban otaku media environments remains an underused method of inquiry. Specific forms of mobile media such as anime and game paraphernalia, fanzines, cosplay, and other media commodities represent mobile landmarks in a landscape of local, regional, and (trans)national Japanese cultural production. The stores that sell otaku media commodities, and the fans who follow and interact with these commodities give form and sense to urban space. Social interactions of visibility and agency are negotiated at different urban scales by otaku fans as they interact with transportable media commodities (what Bruno Latour (1986) in another context calls “immutable mobiles”). These media commodities can be exchanged, resold, or altered. More than a common experience of visibility, otaku culture is a common experience of “localized” urban intimacy in a material environment of collectible, transportable, and fragmented media objects.

To capture the essence of this encounter between pedestrians and media commodities, we coin the term “otaku pedestrianism,” a term meant to bring together multiple aspects of media, human and cultural mobility within a given urban environment. To track the emergence and formation of otaku pedestrianism, we map the territories of media circulation in the particular “anime sanctuary” of Otome Road (located in the East Ikebukuro district of Tokyo). An anime sanctuary

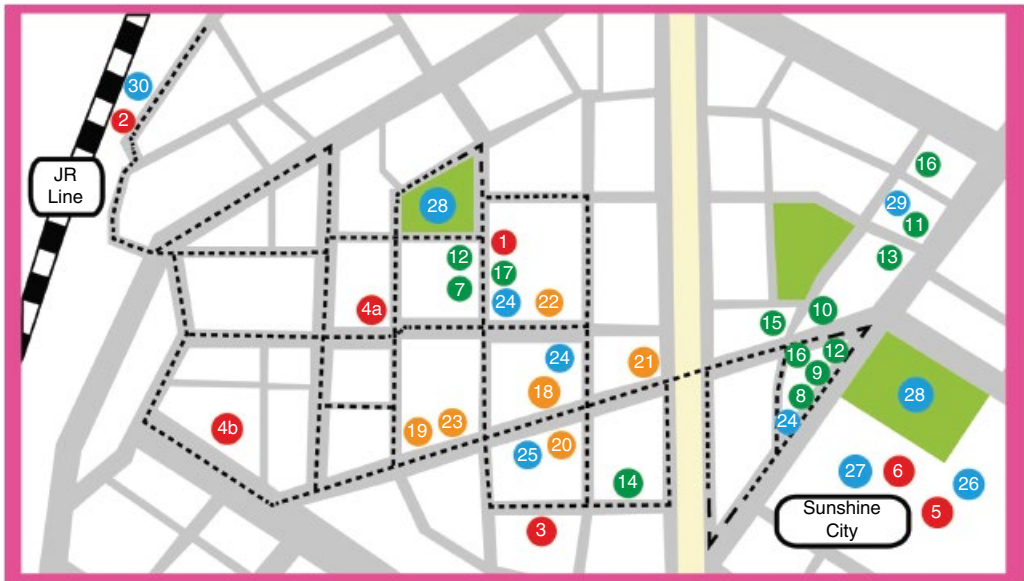
is a gathering spot for fans that is either a real place which appears in animation series (similar to the “liminal spaces” in Will Brooker’s (2004) account of fan tourism) or one where fans can acquire new items for their collections. Otome Road is mostly known for the latter; its large number of official distributors and recycling shops provide female otaku with media commodities representing male characters, video games for girls, and Boy’s Love fanzines (see Larsen’s Chapter 17 in this volume).⁴ The analysis of Otome Road here will make visible the emplacement of otaku cultural practices in cities. Anime sanctuaries in particular reveal how recycling and interacting with media commodities represent an intimate yet collective sense-making process that, crucially, includes repurposing urban space through cultural production.

This method of mapping media circulation responds to our conceptualization of everyday otaku fandom life in more expansive socio-political terms. Namely, the otaku is an *infrapolitical* agent participating in cyclic, episodic, and pedestrian events of local cultural production (from yearly festivals to weekly bookstore events, to one-off events). By terming it infrapolitical, we wish to draw on the urban, infrastructural dimensions of the otaku, as well as the notion of the “sub” or “below” implied in the prefix *infra* (mobilized, for instance, in Brian Massumi’s (2015) term “infra-individual”). The otaku is always being formed in the city, and transformed by their passage through places. Although otaku identity is often figured as a static one, romanticized in various subcategories of subcultural niches (Akibakun for male otaku gathering in Akihabara, or Ikebukuro’s *fujoshi*, a term that translates as “rotten girls/women”), the paradoxical *mobility* of otaku fans across urban and social infrastructures and the persistent *locality* of social relations and collectibles point at the transitory and location-specific aspect of the otaku as a subject.

Limited Time Offer: Ikebukuro and the Production of Rarity

Ikebukuro’s history as a female otaku sanctuary started in the early 2000s when the fanzine recycling shop K-books situated in front of the local shopping mall, the Sunshine City, became a “girl-only fanzine” store (*Aide Shinbun*, 2005). This movement was later followed by the progressive implantation of several other recycling shops (such as Lashinbang) that also specialized in female-oriented media commodities on the same street, renamed Otome Road (the maiden’s road) in the mid-2000s. The local official retailer Animate, located in front of the Sunshine City since 1983, also became one of the new centers of development for Otome Road’s facilities in the 2000s and 2010s, organizing female-oriented events in the Sunshine City and opening cafés inspired by anime male characters. Ikebukuro’s otaku milieu is constituted by a constellation of specialized (official and recycling) stores combined with other local infrastructures such as game centers, cinemas, fast food restaurants, and cafés. Figure 18.1 diagrams these spaces where otaku commodities are distributed and then displaced when exchanged or resold in nearby venues. Ikebukuro’s formation reveals the development of navigation routes between the west side occupied by official distribution sites (numbers 1–6 in Figure 18.1) and the east side of Otome Road’s recycling shops (7–17) where fans buy, resell, and exchange commodities. Other sites of seasonal events as game centers (18–23) and cafés or events halls (24–30) are also presented to visualize the larger environment of Otome Road.

Because the circuits of paraphernalia circulation are connected with various types of media production, we stress how fan mobility (walking) is an important process unifying these urban territories. In what follows, we offer a typology of otaku media commodities in Ikebukuro in order to paint a picture of the local intimacy that emerges in otaku sanctuaries through the transportation of collectible media commodities. As we demonstrate, it is the logic of the limited time offer or the special item that informs the event spaces of Ikebukuro, drawing fans to these spaces, and generating the movement of people and things through them. By giving visibility to the



Official distributors:

1. Animate
2. P. Parco
3. Stella Worth
- 4a. Toranoana (fanzine)
- 4b. Toranoana (girls' shop)
5. Pokémon Center
6. Jump Store

Recycle shops:

7. Rashinban Jump
8. Rashinban Audio
9. Rashinban Character Goods
10. Mandarake (fanzine)
11. Kbooks (fanzine)
12. Kbooks Characters goods
13. Kbooks Games, CD, DVD
14. Kbooks Musical
15. Kbooks Anime Idols
16. Caramel Cubes (handmade items)
17. Fromage (fanzine)

Leisure spots:

18. Taito Station
19. Adores
20. Adores Girls
21. St. Tropez
22. Karaoke no Tetsujin
23. Sunshine Cinema

Coffee shops, event halls:

24. Animate Cafes
25. Animate Plaza
26. Namajatown
27. Samshine City
28. Park (official cosplay spots)
29. Swallow Tail
30. Nico Nico Douga

----- Cosplay walking area

Figure 18.1 Map of infrastructures of media commodity circulation in Otome Road, in 2015
Source: Courtesy of Edmond Ernest dit Alban.

objects, the places and the times of otaku pedestrianism, we seek to render the acts of urban mobility legible, making sense of the calendars of otaku cultural production and performance and the organizational logics of otaku urbanism. As such, the example of female otaku in Ikebukuro represents the new ways otaku culture is disseminated within urban space. That otaku urban phenomenon is similarly on the rise in many other regions of Japan demonstrates how rather

close urban milieu configurations are produced by the convergence of official distribution and “recycling” tendencies in the same districts.

In 2015 the majority of Ikebukuro’s media commodity circulation is currently represented by small accessories released as limited edition series, lottery items, randomly distributed collectibles, or fan-made products (Table 18.1). The official template for this type of production is Movic’s or Gift’s collections of acrylic and rubber straps depicting male characters from anime or Otome games (video games for girls): series are released franchise by franchise in “blind boxes” containing one of the collection’s items representing one male character (blind boxes conceal which character they contain). In the case of fan-made media, bracelets and badges also based on male characters are mostly collected as *gashapons* (items for purchase from a vending machine) in retailers for hand-made items (as the Caramel cube shop) when purchased outside of the delimited space of fanzine events. Otaku paraphernalia also flows in game centers as variously priced items (towel, figures, plush toys), and in theatres as limited gifts celebrating movie releases. Coasters and clear files are distributed when participating in a promotional event at a café or a department store.

Table 18.1 Commodities in Ikebukuro

Media	Format	Distribution area	Recycle area	Connected events
<i>Tokuten</i> or gifts to attract fans	Any above	Official Distributors Café	K-Books Lashinbang	Fairs Official Releases Musicals Exhibitions Only shops
Books	Manga Magazine Novels Fanzine	Stella Worth Animate Tora no Ana K-Books	K-Books Fromage Mandarake	Conventions Official Releases Summer book fairs
Games	Mostly Otome games	Stella Worth Animate	K-books Lashinbang	Official Releases Cafés Musicals Exhibitions Only shops
Drama CDs Situation CDs	Audio with some images	Stella Worth Animate Tora no Ana	K-Books Lashinbang	Only shops Animate festivals Rejet Fest
DVDs	Musicals Anime series Live events	Stella Worth Animate	K-Books Lashinbang	Musicals Live broadcasts TV releases Pre-release in theatres
Accessories (small)	Metallic badges Rubber or acrylic straps and keyrings Clear files Bracelets	Game Centers Gashapons Animate Tora no Ana Stella Worth Caramel Cube Cafés	K-books Lashinbang Mandarake Caramel Cube	Any Animate event Musicals Fairs Fanzine conventions Live and concerts Lottery Crane Games Only shops
Accessories (big)	Bags Towels Soft toys	Game Centers	K-books Lashinbang	Lotteries Crane Games

Both fan-produced items like fanzines and official character goods are present in Ikebukuro in various locations and together constitute a single, integrated media ecology.

Amateur and official otaku media commodities coexist in the same urban spaces around Otome Road. Hence there is a coupling of the small-scale commodities listed above with the larger-scale infrastructures (streets, stores, nodal points) of Ikebukuro, which facilitates the pedestrian movement of fans in between different places where media commodities are distributed, exchanged, and altered during what is often a limited period of time. For instance, special seasonal events bring limited edition items, game centers and *gashapon* change their prices every month, and fanzine items are mostly available during one-day conventions. The modes of distribution of otaku media items point at three recurring qualities: (1) they are of limited quantity; (2) they are small and transportable; and (3) they are collectible. From fanzines to official production, otaku media commodities are always limited in number when it comes to a specific object. The circulation of such paraphernalia is hence shaped by two further factors: random modes of distribution and temporally limited availability. For example, the coasters at the Animate cafés are given inside blind boxes when purchasing a drink and a new series of coasters is offered each month. Accessing such commodities—and getting the particular strap that one wants—requires that fans reserve a table at Animate café and be lucky enough to get the desired special item during the hour the table is reserved. “Fairs” and other weekly events also promise random limited stickers and postcards when purchasing a certain amount of one series’ merchandising. The model of the fair has moved beyond the yearly event to become the systematically recurring technique for creating hype, and gathering crowds.

This combination of specific media commodities with particular urban milieus is in play even in the case of mass media products such as books or DVDs: official stores offer unique sets of gifts (*tokuten*) in order to artificially recreate a sense of rarity around what are otherwise broadly distributed products. Official distributors such as Animate and Tora no Ana differentiate themselves by the creation of these collectible gifts (often received when one pre-orders the book, blu-ray or game in question), forcing some hardcore fans to purchase the same item in various locations in order to collect all of the *tokuten* gifts. (“Gotta catch them all” is the logic of collection here, just as it was with Pokémon.) In most cases, *tokuten* gifts can include original goods ranging from audio stories (Drama CDs) to accessories like straps. Different stores are known for their specific kinds of gifts; Animate and Tora no Ana collector editions are known for being focused on a collection of accessories depicting one male character where Stellaworth’s special gifts (*tokuten*) are mostly bags and photographs representing the whole cast.

The rarity value of fanzines is produced somewhat differently, relying on an event of limited duration and spatial location. Since conventions barely last a day, the circulation of amateur accessories relies on retailers of hand-made goods (Caramel Cube) located behind Otome Road where fans can rent spaces to display their creations. Amateur products are even more limited in number; when they are not distributed by official retailers such as Tora no Ana, manga and novel fanzines tend to become accessible after conventions, when resold in recycling shops such as K-books or Fromage. The limited access to singular commodities therefore creates a particular urban geography that can be mapped: a geography of specific places where media is only available ephemerally. In this sense, it is worth noting a distinction between media that are ephemeral by obsolescent design (as in Acland 2006) and media that are defined by their ephemerality from their beginning.

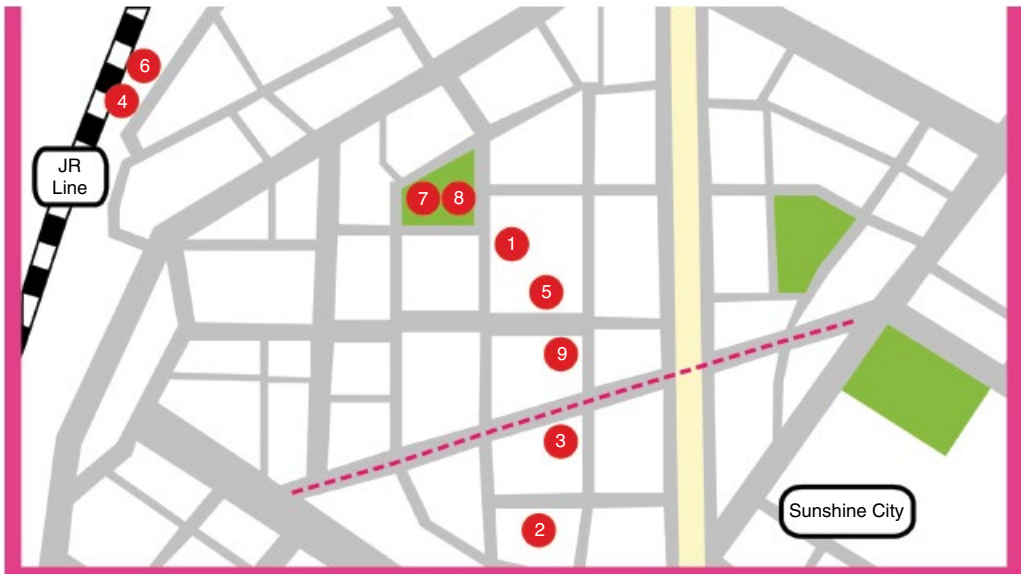
The logic of events that was formerly limited to amateur bi-yearly events such as the Comic Market (*komiket*) has thus been adopted by chain stores and deployed on a regular basis—generally in collaboration with major media producers such as Kadokawa—in order to generate buzz around particular product launches, that are in turn generally tied to wider media mixes or transmedia franchises. However, if, on the one hand, the principal aspect of such media commodity

production is to be available in a specific location during a limited time (Animate café, theatrical release), on the other hand, all of the large catalog of small otaku accessories are portable enough to be transported outside of their originally delimited territory of distribution. Even if you don't care for the keyring that you randomly got in a lottery, chances are that someone else does. Otaku media therefore demonstrate an ambiguous form of limited ubiquity in the city. In contrast to standardized, mass commodities, otaku spaces are increasingly defined by and through the production of niche, limited edition items to which only few otaku will have access. This limited media availability is defined by tight time schedules, random modes of collection, and very specific distribution sites.

These factors of limited circulation make media circulate in locations like Akihabara (Tokyo), Nakano (Tokyo), Namba (Osaka), or Sannomiya (Kobe), sites with an abundance of recycling shops or second-hand shops where one can search for particular items outside of official distribution circuits. Recycling shops become the sites of a secondary market of circulation that gather, redistribute, and resell all the surplus of unwanted items fans accumulate in blind packages, lotteries, and other random modes of distribution. In the case of Ikebukuro, the hyper-specialized recycling shops on Otome Road (numbers 7–17 in Figure 18.1) extend the temporal availability of various media commodities from anime paraphernalia representing male characters to Boy's Love fanzine magazines. The vast selection of amateur and official media commodities induces a temporally cyclic navigation dynamic between places of periodic official releases where fans source random items and the recycling shops of Otome Road where these items are sold outside of their blind packages. The major difference between official and recycling shops is the modality of distribution representing the range of strategies one can choose to acquire a precise item. In other words, a single item draws multiple contexts of (in)direct social interaction when transported across Ikebukuro and mediated by fan movement and commodity circulation. Therefore, Ikebukuro's media circulation represents an interactive actualization inside urban infrastructures of a shared environment of material, limited edition, transportable media commodities.

It is this environment and the passage through it that characterize otaku—as subject position and as agent (or act) of passage and collection.⁵ Ikebukuro girls' interactions in and with the localized and individualized urban milieu happen through the collection of fragmented media commodities networked by their passion for specific male characters, often first encountered in novels, anime, manga, or games. In that regard, media commodity availability and transportability highlight *walking* as the unifying logic of an infrastructural network of territories and places mediated through the consumption, recycling, and performance of otaku media commodities. As Lefebvre explains in his book (1992) *Eléments de Rythmanalyse*, space is constructed through its habitation; similarly, the otaku as subject position exists in the mobile construction of space. These logics even include new uses of urban spaces that were initially outside of the routes of otaku media circulation: nearby parks, cross stops, cafés, and other restaurants (numbers 24–30 in Figure 18.1) are progressively integrated into Otome Road's circuit. As such, the flow of commodities from official events to unofficial distribution sites like recycling shops and the often frowned-upon exchanges in parks describes the navigation routes of this shared environment of material collectibles.

But Ikebukuro's media ecology also relies on a more formal calendar of events and fan-made performances. The broadcasting channel headquarters of Japan's premier video streaming service, Nico Nico video, moved to Ikebukuro in 2014 and daily broadcasts, including fan performances, are filmed next to the train station. Paraphernalia distributor Animate regularly organizes national fan performance contests in the nearby parks while the Sunshine City organizes fanzine and cosplay conventions. As a concrete example of this, Figure 18.2 presents the infrastructures used during the promotional campaigns of the Drama CDs (audio stories) brand, Rejet. Such events take over both official distributors as well as adjacent areas such as bus companies and public spaces like parks and streets. Their organization is produced by the conjoined forces of the



Rejet Collaboration 2015 in Ikebukuro:

1. Animate: Rejet tokuten distribution Aug. 11th–Sept. 1st
 2. Stella Worth: Rejet bromides (small photos) distribution Aug.
 3. Adores: Rejet badges in crane games Aug.
 4. Rejet Shop (in P.Parco department store): fan letter distribution, limited collection of badges Aug. 15th–31st
 5. Karaoke no Tetsujin: Original Rejet drinks with premium coasters Aug. 8th–Sept. 30th
 6. Rejet Cafe in Nico Cafe: Original Rejet food with premium coasters Aug. 20th–Sept. 30th
 7. Live Stage: Rejet live performance Aug. 15th–16th
 8. “Traditional” Japanese Festival: Limited premium accessories booth Aug. 15th–16th
 9. Bus Tour Anitentokkyu: Roundtrip bus service to the Comic Market with Rejet music and design Aug. 14th–16th
- Rejet Decoration

Figure 18.2 Mapping the infrastructures of Rejet Fest 2015

Source: Courtesy of Edmond Ernest dit Alban.

Toshima ward cultural foundation, the Itabashi ward retailer associations (including recycling stores) and the contribution of fan performances. Most of these events combine several well-established points in fan navigation routes, attracting them with so-called “stamp rallies”: each place proposes limited collections of merchandise during the event. Visiting each location reenacts the tour logic of Otome Road and fans are motivated by the promise of a free original clear file (designed for the event, and with two different patterns) distributed at the local Animate store to those who have collected all the stamps.

In sum, the limited time offer of media commodities functions to *dynamize* and quite literally *animate* different scales of everyday life, making Ikebukuro the go-to place for event-like happenings. By participating in the consumption of these limited time goods, fans themselves circulate through space, and by extension allow the objects themselves to circulate through the space of Ikebukuro. What is not taken home enters secondary circulation through the means of recycling shops.⁶ Being otaku here means participating, through consumption, in the circulation of collectible media commodities; otaku gather at the key nodes of this circulation, and in turn make these

commodities move through the city space and circulate through secondary networks. The transportable yet static state of otaku products is associated with specific sites of cultural performance, and fans are agents associated with these products, embedded in a walking-static, mobile-immobile dynamic. Otaku are spectators in theatres, consumers in shops, gourmets in cafés, performers when dancing or singing in a karaoke box, and pedestrians moving across the city. Shops, parks, and other leisure spots represent fixed points in Ikebukuro's infrastructures populated by a calendar of official and informal events announcing a new wave of media commodities to interact with. Walking becomes essential to collecting, exchanging, and transporting fragments of collections that can be continuously enlarged or resold during successive events. For instance, we might follow otaku pedestrian navigation in relation to the displacement of a specific commodity: a character-based keychain sold in Nanjatown (26). During monthly events the keychain one receives can be exchanged inside the store (just in front of the vending machines where it is distributed and initially acquired) or in parks nearby (28). If it represents a less favorite character and is not given to another fan found on Twitter, it will mostly end up in recycling shops Lashinbang (7 or 9), at Kbooks (12) or possibly even in the trash bin.

The Birth of the Recycling Shop: A Brief History of Ikebukuro

After a first look at the material circulation of female-oriented paraphernalia in Ikebukuro, this section turns to an examination of the history and uses of recycling in otaku sanctuaries to explore the roots of the social intimacy created by this mobile material environment of collectibles. Recycling shops were essential to the emergence of Ikebukuro as a milieu for the type of otaku consumption and circulation described in the above section. Recycling shops' presence in otaku sanctuaries highlights how the limited media circulation of collectible media commodities depends on the social circuits of niche hobby communities, but also helps to create and sustain these communities. Indeed, the emergence of recycling shops in Ikebukuro from the 1990s (Lashinbang, Mandarake, K-books), we argue, is responsible for Ikebukuro's transformation into Otome Road. Furthermore, we demonstrate how fan activity creates trends in urbanism, and how localized cultural production (and event production) in turn transform the city space into a mecca for fan gatherings. In short, we briefly describe how the history of the pedestrian routes of recycling practices becomes the impetus for the formation of an urban media environment for fans.

Before turning to a history of Ikebukuro, though, we should consider the notion of "recycling." Recycling shops, as we have seen, are places where second-hand goods are sold, and where the recirculation of otaku goods takes place. Recycling practices in Ikebukuro assemble two nuances of the term: first, recycling designates a form of remix culture expressed in its fanzine and other performances, and second, it refers to the circulation of goods in and through shops which truck in second-hand goods. The two meanings are, however, very close as most of the recycling shops of Otome Road started with the recirculation of collectible school accessories and toys before opening to fanzines in the mid-1990s. If such shops do have a certain role nowadays as archives for old fanzines, DVDs, or books, most merchandise recycling shops tend to gather new items from rather recent events and fairs. Indeed, stores for older versus newer used items differ in their very geographies; while older items can be found in the Nakano area of Tokyo, particularly in the sprawling mecca for historical objects of fandom, Mandarake (their catch phrase being "Masters of Time"); Ikebukuro and Akihabara are known to truck in newer items. We might add that while online buying has in many realms become the cultural dominant, and indeed online stores are increasingly offering their own gifts (*tokuten*) for pre-ordering, otaku sanctuaries are central to these circuits insofar as they offer easier and cheaper ways to obtain the very specific items representing the character one seeks.

Two models of recycling dominate today. First, going to otaku sanctuaries gives access to networks of direct exchange: female fans searching for a specific item representing their favorite male characters use Twitter to exchange randomly acquired collectibles in the nearby parks. Although distributors tend to forbid such exchanges in front of their stores, the introduction of a limit to the number of random items a consumer can buy per day intensified non-official networks of exchange. Second, and more prominently, one can resell unwanted items in the second-hand shops of Otome Road. As we have seen, luck has a large role when it comes to official modes of distribution because limited time offers and seasonal fairs tend to attract more pedestrians than there are goods (an enviable situation for commodity sellers). In the case of very popular franchises, customers must win a ticket lottery first in order to even enter such places, and then must hope that, within the limited amount of items they can buy, they will obtain the desired one. Moreover, some items are exclusive to crane games (or claw crane machines) and require either great skill or significant capital in order to obtain them. The strategies to access limited collectibles are therefore described as festivities, playful rally games requiring players to win on many occasions. Given the above, buying the desired item in recycling shops or exchanging it with other fans is generally a “cheaper” and more economic strategy (favored by students, whereas older customers tend to buy the whole collections of collectibles directly from resellers); buying a desired object directly in recycling shops restrains consumers from buying too many blind packages.

The economy of recycled collectibles in Ikebukuro is highly dependent on male characters’ fame who attract female fandoms: a recycling shop’s selling price for a given good could be either very low (around 20 percent of the original price) or very high (ten times the original price). Less famous characters and common paraphernalia are quite cheap and stocked in the alleys of recycling shops whereas star characters figured on highly inaccessible commodities are exposed as treasures in glass cases. As less famous characters’ prices depreciate quickly after six months on the market, most of them end up in 100-yen (one dollar) cases. Recycling stores also demonstrate a complex form of value creation based on local media ecologies of taste: in Ikebukuro, items proposed in female-oriented events held in nearby stores will stay at a relatively high price whereas male-oriented paraphernalia will systematically end up in the discount bins (these tendencies are reversed in male-oriented recycle shops of Akihabara). The “old” is not necessarily labeled as trash: most tendencies in collecting otaku media commodities are centered on one character and fans tend to buy the same item many times in order to construct so-called “ita-bags” (or “sick bags”) covered with items representing the same character.⁷ Recycling stores resolve the question of the devaluation of commodities in very specific ways as they serve as a space mediating local and personal economies of paraphernalia consumption. Recycling tendencies sustain the synergic forces of niche communities circulating in very specific places to obtain very specific objects. The social interaction surrounding otaku media commodities describe a pedestrian form of intimacy that tends to occur during punctual exchanges.

Ikebukuro’s path toward becoming a mecca of girl otaku culture developed over several decades. Ikebukuro was redeveloped in the 1960s after the demolition of a local prison. Sunshine City was built in the early 1970s as a mall designed both to have apartments and to provide a place for families to spend their weekends. Embracing this family-friendly image, certain children and young adult cultures came to Ikebukuro in the following decades. As such, hobby and fanzine culture has a long history in Ikebukuro starting in the 1980s with the implantation of paraphernalia distributor Animate in front of the Sunshine City, as well as with the development of fanzine conventions in the neighborhood. Although Ikebukuro first grew as a male-oriented otaku area, mostly represented by trading card game shops around the Sunshine Street and manga shops in the JR station, a strong female population was also increasingly attracted to the area, due in no

small part to the high concentration of all-girls cram schools in the area. The presence of schoolgirls running into Animate for school accessories, frequenting fanzine events with friends from their school clubs, and studying in the nearby Sunshine cram schools fostered the transformation of bookstores into fanzine and paraphernalia recycling shops in the early 1990s (*Tōkyōsandaiseichi Kōryakugaido* 2014, 90–91). As the boom of *shōnenai* or Boys' Love manga by the Yonjūnengumi artists in the late 1970s and 1980s provided the foundations of girls' otaku culture (Ishida, 2008), older female communities also moved progressively from Shinjuku to Ikebukuro. The promiscuity of fanzines with hobby accessories of anime in recycling shops and the expansion of Yaoi-oriented fanzine events created a specific media environment for the hobbies of girls that was more fully established in Ikebukuro in the 2000s, when Ikebukuro's K-books became a girl-only fanzine shop. As Broccoli's Takaaki Kidani testifies when interviewed (*Aide Shinbun* 1998), publishers were invested in fanzine conventions such as Comic Castle in the Sunshine City and followed their evolution.

In the 1990s, the number of recycling shops and fanzine shops in Ikebukuro rose with the development of the Comic Market and attracted male communities using direct bus companies after the event. However, the early 2000s drew a new context for the otaku market that was rediscovered by publishers with visual novels (Azuma 2001), fanzine accessories conventions, and so-called "only" fanzine conventions ("only" events refer to small-scale events focusing on a specific series or even a specific coupling of characters; these events developed alongside the expansion of female fanzines). If this proximity of Boys' Love communities with accessories communities happened mostly outside of Ikebukuro, recycling shops providing only male character-based media commodities flourished in the Sunshine City (Kings-Kings and CharacterQueen). Following the urban emergence of girl otaku culture, publishers such as Broccoli and Kadokawa started a new market in the mid-2000s centered on male character goods and followed by their orchestration of a boom in Otome and Boys' Love visual novels, items, and narrative forms that are the main stream of Ikebukuro goods today.

Here, we have stressed the inter-fan modes of exchange that sustained the creation of small interconnected spaces for niche hobby and fanzine communities during the emergence of Ikebukuro as a mecca for female otaku. Niche girls' fandom should be understood as deeply intertwined with the emergence of Ikebukuro as a small urban space founded on recursive modes of exchange and sociability. The mobility of otaku culture is neither solely industry-produced nor exclusively fan-made. It is rather a cyclic movement born from the gray media commodity circulation that emerges from second-hand economies while responding at the same time to media mix strategies. The synergies of recycling practices have shaped the urbanism of Ikebukuro that has transformed its media ecology, progressively integrating otaku culture into its family- and student-oriented infrastructures surrounding the Sunshine City. The transformation of Ikebukuro into a sanctuary and the emergence of Otome Road or ("maidens road") after 2004 is due in no small part to the circuits of pedestrian mobility driven by the circulation of recycled commodities.

Conclusion

Otaku urbanism with its circulation of transportable commodities blurs the boundaries of intimacy between public and private space. Even though otaku may have historically emerged as subjects under erasure, or subjects at the social margins, over time they "conquered" certain urban milieus which they turned into their own, proprietary zones. These zones in turn produce new forms of otaku and new modes of fandom that are deeply embedded in and indebted to the city fabric, as argued here.⁸ As Morikawa (2003) notes in *The Birth of the Hobby City*, the

connections between the private space evoked by the collection of media commodities and the public space of otaku sanctuaries bind distinct locales. If Morikawa uses the example of how recycling shops represent extensions of the bedroom of otaku, we argue that they should be seen not as extensions of the bedroom (which privileges the “bedroom” as the originary site of fandom) but as sites of encounter that generate the otaku as subject in the first place. Otaku as pedestrian fans evolve inside defined, niche spaces, as well as limited-time events and commodity circulation, as we saw in the case of Ikebukuro. By framing otaku fandom as *niche*, we aim to draw attention to the spatial dimension of the term: a small space that we locate spatially in the city. While we have focused on Ikebukuro here, these niches have also sprung up elsewhere around the city, and outside its perimeters, along the edges of Tokyo in Saitama prefecture, for instance, or the urban niches of teen fashion in Harajuku, or the late teens to early twenties demographic of Shibuya—all of which function as connecting points for female otaku pedestrians.

The presence of otaku in the urban landscape and as a product of it, is, moreover, historically traceable to a shift that occurs during the 2000s. In the 1990s, the otaku designated a discriminated subcultural figure who struggled to find acceptance as a market in Japan’s cultural landscape (Ōtsuka 2004, 41). If the otaku is even today often figured as a home-bound figure, this image is a relic of the 1980s and 1990s during which the consumption of garage kits and anime paraphernalia was understood as a devalued mode of consumption supposedly reserved for children, or adult-children who stayed at home. However, the 2000s saw a shift of the otaku niche market wherein the otaku became a public figure, an *infrapolitical* public (Scott 1979). In that regard, the largest fanzine convention (Comic Market) editorials started to respond to censorship, pedophilia accusations, and other discriminations, by referring to fanzine events as “*matsuri*,” using the connotation of the term “festival” as a recurrent, non-threatening annual practice. This lexical rapprochement of otaku events with local festivities foretells how grounding cultural production inside urban infrastructures and a cyclical calendar delimited the fan communities as minor threats. It also coincides with the urban coming-out of otaku; the shift from otaku as a home-bound subject to one that is formed in and through the city. Otaku events started to draw limited yet repeated occupations of urban space that were self-regulated enough and economically beneficent enough to be normalized. Otaku culture became pedestrian as a movement connecting urban space and as a landscape of cultural commodities present everywhere. In sum, the limited exception of otaku festivities emerging from limited-time media circulation gave birth to an everyday routine of consumption that was integrated into already existing infrastructures of children’s culture in toy stores or gaming centers. Pedestrian modes of cultural production thereby became the dominant form of otaku subject formation.

As we have argued here in relation to Ikebukuro specifically, otaku social circuits emerge from media recycling as a limited action inside an intimate yet public territory. As otaku media commodities draw up a cartography of various direct and indirect zones of interaction and intimacy shared through their exchange, they also tend to become a recognized and tolerated mode of consumption: otaku culture has become a “pedestrian” culture (i.e. based on walking within urban areas) and “pedestrian” (i.e. a common element of the urban landscape). Otaku identity designates not a fixed subcultural subject, but rather refers to the multiplicity of times and spaces when a person “acts” as an otaku. The peripatetic mobility of otaku pedestrians delimits blurred moments of subjectivity in between social places where people gather to interact with niche media commodities. Breaking away from the static characterization of subcultural groups as a mode of engagement with mainly textual representation demands seeing, mapping, and narrating the material circulation of persons and goods in between the colorful images of animation. We must turn our attention to the specific city spaces and fans’ urban-centric consumption of transportable media commodities. The mapping of urban infrastructures characterized by the collection and circulation of limited edition items becomes a key methodological tool for mapping otaku

movement. Otaku culture is hence a set of static and mobile conjunctions, mass yet pedestrian, local yet everywhere, rare yet ubiquitous. Moving forward, the study of otaku—and, arguably, fandom in general—requires that increased attention be paid to the relations of material space to transportable commodities, as well as to the urban milieus that foster the formation of particular communities of media circulation.

Notes

- 1 Here we follow Japanese custom for name order, with family name appearing first, given name second.
- 2 In “Maid Cafés: The Affect of Fictional Characters in Akihabara, Japan,” Galbraith (2013) examined the affect of the local cafés where barmaids play characters while wearing maid outfits. Galbraith (2015) also recently edited a volume dedicated to the contemporary study of otaku, *Debating Otaku in Contemporary Japan, Historical Perspectives and New Horizons*.
- 3 At this point, we should acknowledge that while the model of fandom sketched here relies on the circulation of subjects through urban space, fandom in rural, non-urban spaces is also possible, as is fandom that does not engage in material practices. The decentralization and dispersion of otaku commodities and collectibles throughout Japan by stores such as Animate are one key aspect of how the rural subject can also be folded into the mode of otaku engagement discussed here.
- 4 Boy’s Love is somewhat like North American “slash” (fan production describing love relationships between male characters based on characters from TV shows).
- 5 Here we would like to consider the otaku as the agent who acts in this way, more than as a predetermined subject position; the otaku is hence the subject that passes through Ikebukuro, who consumes and trades in the manner described above.
- 6 To be sure, the circulation of limited edition items can also be traced outside of the particular sanctuary of Otome Road, trickling into other parts of the city, or country.
- 7 Game centers and recycling shops often make partnerships to organize ita-bag contests and influence the routes of pedestrian navigation.
- 8 One of the tropes repeatedly encountered within otaku literature is that of generational divides: first-generation otaku, second-generation otaku, third-generation otaku, and so on (Okada 1996; Azuma 2001; Ôtsuka 2004). This article sidesteps these generational debates (which articulate male fandom more than female fandom), but nonetheless accepts that there has been a paradigm shift in the emergence-from-the-city which takes place among more recent otaku, and which we focus on here.

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Chapter 19

The Unbearable Whiteness of Fandom and Fan Studies

Mel Stanfill

Fan studies, as a field, currently does not have a robust engagement with race. This is influenced, though obviously not excused, by the fact that the kinds of fandoms fan studies prioritizes do not themselves engage routinely and deeply with race. This may be surprising because fandom and fan studies have strong critical traditions, and because both fan studies and fandoms themselves like to think of fandom as progressive. In this chapter, I argue that it is the whiteness of both fandom and fan studies that encourages this inattention to race. By this, I do not mean that all (or most) fans or fan studies scholars are white—though numerical dominance seems likely to be the case for the fandoms and bodies of scholarship I mean—but rather that they engage in *structural whiteness* through participation in mainstream American culture's default to whiteness and through engagement with default-white media. As a result, there is a need for fan studies to name whiteness as it functions in fandom and interrogate its workings as well as attend to the experiences of fans of color in predominantly white fandoms and the particular cultures and practices of fandoms of color.

While studies of sports (e.g., Ruddock 2005; Müller, van Zoonen, and de Roode 2007; Newman 2007) and music (e.g., Brown and Schulze 1990; Rose 1994) fandoms do consider race, media fandom studies generally does not.¹ Race is fairly often mentioned—scholars note that audiences are segmented based on gender and race, or that white and male audiences are privileged, or that populations of fans are diverse by race, age, and class, or that populations of fans are substantially white, female, and middle class. After this hand-waving in the general direction of race, however, it is then never heard from again as authors move on to discuss whatever issue or topic interests them.

Recent years have seen the emergence of some awareness of fan studies' gaps with regard to race. There has been criticism of the ways many of the broad generalizations made about media fandom disregard race as a relevant structure. Kristen Warner (2015b) points out that inattention to social inequality sometimes produces strange statements: "I am troubled by the notion that fandom wholesale operates as Other—especially when considering the fact that many fans are part of dominant identity groups—White, cis-gendered, and heterosexual" (36). That is, the notion that fandom is a vector of inequality often ignores the ways fans may (or may not) experience marginalization on the basis of race, class, language, or other structures. Fan studies, Rukmini Pande (2016) correctly notes, has "limited critical engagement with the fact that not all fans are

on an equal playing field” (210). Accordingly, Rebecca Wanzo (2015) argues, “one of the primary ways in which attentiveness to race can transform fan studies is by destabilizing the idea that fans choose outsider status,” which has tended to foreground the people for whom a minoritized position is a choice and erase those for whom it is not (2.1). Frequently, analysis of groups of white women is described as applying to “women” universally (Scodari 2012). In fact, it might be more exact to say the assumption is that fans *are* universally white women; as Warner (2015b) notes, “few people even realize that Black women take part in fandom at all” (33), and similar sentiments could be expressed for other women of color, who “go about fan labor in ways that speak to specific cultural experiences that traditional fan studies has yet to consider” (48). While this scholarship is not yet numerous, there have been important moves in the last several years to begin examining how race functions in fandom, asking about “the interplay between salient identities, how they interact, and how they are prioritized in macro and micro situations, both by those who hold the identities and by everyone else” rather than automatically proceeding as if other identities than fandom do not matter (Gatson and Reid 2011, 1.1).

In the media fandoms that fan studies tends to focus on, which I’ll call Predominantly White Fandoms, engagement with race is similarly present but not prevalent. I coin the term “predominantly white fandom” here on the model of “predominantly white institutions”—a descriptor that is a counterpart to the term Historically Black Colleges and Universities and refuses to allow the whiteness of the PWI to go unmarked. Similarly, to name a Predominantly White Fandom is to not allow fandom’s whiteness to be neutral, but to flag its particularity. There have certainly been important conversations about race in these fandoms; of these, RaceFail’09 is the most well-known. RaceFail’09 is a name given to “a series of blog posts” that emerged in response to “advice about ‘writing the other’ in fiction” from author Elizabeth Bear; “these posts pointed out both Bear’s apparent hypocrisy, critiquing her record of portraying people of color, and encompassed the failings of the SF/F genre as a whole on the issue of race” (Pande 2016, 214). The discussion ranged over topics such as white authors writing characters of color, or not writing them, or writing them in racist ways; the feeling of people of color that they are excluded or, at best, tokenized, in fandoms and fannish texts; and defensiveness from white people about all of the above. Sarah Gatson and Robin Anne Reid (2011) note that there have been “years of antiracist praxis and theory done in online and offline fandoms,” such that RaceFail ’09 was not “a singular event that has come and gone,” but rather “occurred within a complex network of discussion relating to the cultural makeup of fandom and is connected to a history of work by fans of color and white allies” (sec. 3.4).

These conversations, however, are not routine and central in many of the fandoms that fan studies examines. That is, indeed, why RaceFail’09 became a large-scale blow-up in the first place, because of pent-up frustration from fans of color over a long period in which such issues had *not* routinely been worked on. This contrasts sharply, for example, with the way discussions of gender and sexuality are routine and central in many fandoms. Indeed, Warner (2015b) contends that “fandoms erase [racial] Others from the notion of fandom altogether” (33). Given this erasure of the subject and the people, it is no surprise that nontrivial proportions of fandom treat discussions of race and racism “as unproductive Internet drama” (TWC Editor 2009, sec. 1.2). Helen Young (2014), describing George R. R. Martin fandom, says that “simply raising the question of race, particularly when that question might be interpreted as a criticism of Martin’s world, is exceedingly fraught” (739). Pande’s (2016) research found that critical approaches are often met with “policing, both in terms of content (responses like ‘this is not an appropriate topic of discussion here’) and in terms of tone (rules like ‘please keep this list friendly and supportive’)” (213–214). In such ways, discussions of race in the fandoms fan studies tends to consider are intermittent at best and actively avoided at worst.

However, it is vital not to continue to elide race in fandom and fan studies. To do so is to participate in what Eduardo Bonilla-Silva (2003) calls “colorblind racism.” Racism is not simply “whether

actors express ‘resentment’ or ‘hostility’ toward minorities” (8), as it is often popularly conceptualized, but also inheres in this sort of refusal to examine or even acknowledge existing inequality, because this helps keep the white-dominant system in place. In what follows, I first detail the existing research on fans and fandoms of color, then work to make visible fandom and fan studies’ structural whiteness, rather than allowing it to remain unmarked, invisible, or “neutral.”

People of Color in Predominantly White Fandoms

Despite the whiteness of Predominantly White Fandoms, fans of color do of course exist in them, and the specificities of this dynamic need to be examined carefully. Fan studies is now beginning to do this work (see also chapters by Morimoto, Pande, and Seymour in this volume). Henry Jenkins (2014) advocates the study of cases “where diverse sets of fans are critically engaging with each other’s assumptions, seeking to promote a more multicultural and multiracial model for fan engagement” (99). Indeed, Pande (2016) argues, scholarship “lags behind actual fan practice where these debates have never been more energetically pursued” (210). Jenkins (2014) contends more specifically that Internet fandom makes contact “between participants with very different historical experiences of race” (98–99), which is driving the important work happening within fandoms. Gatson and Reid (2011) point out that there is “a history of work by fans of color” around racism, but this history is largely absent from our academic understanding of fandom and a worthy project for recovery (3.4). Jenkins (2014) adds, “We urgently need more research into the specific fan geographies and politics that emerge within fandoms with a high degree of participation from people of color” (97).

There have been a few inquiries into the experience of fans of color in Predominantly White Fandoms. Warner (2015b) describes the experiences of “women of color, who strive for visibility in a landscape that favors a more normative (read: White) fan identity” and as a consequence often disregards the ways people of color want “to see themselves equally represented not only on screen but in the fan community at large” (34). This denial of inclusion and inattention to the sorts of transformative impulses lauded when enacted by LGBTQ populations and white women are important to examine. For her part, Pande (2016) describes the ways that “dialogic platforms like Twitter and Tumblr ... offer greater visibility, both in terms of a willingness of individual fans to ‘claim’ a non-white identity within a fannish space and, in doing so, find others who share or understand their experiences,” pointing to how shifts in fans’ platform use have enabled new forms of community for formerly isolated fans of color (214). Warner (2015b) further describes a number of key practices for women of color in Predominantly White Fandoms, such as racebending, which she defines as an intervention through fan production like fiction and art to “change the race and cultural specificity of central character or pull a secondary character of color from the margins, transforming her into the central protagonist” (39). Such tactics “enable non-white fans to ‘interrupt’ both hegemonic popular texts *and* fanworks that reify privileged racial and cultural representations” (Pande 2016, 216). These practices employed by fans of color in Predominantly White Fandoms need further study in order to understand fandom as a social formation.

Fandoms of Color

There is also a substantial gap in our understanding of the specific experiences of fandoms of color. In one of the few such analyses, Wanzo (2015) applies “an identity hermeneutics—interpretation by placing a particular identity at the center of the reading or interpretive practice” in order to

“explore the possibility that a different kind of fan, as well as different issues of concern to fans, might be visible if we focus on African Americans” (1.6). She highlights the ways that, as opposed to notions formulated solely in relation to Predominantly White Fandoms, “African American fans make hypervisible the ways in which fandom is expected or demanded of some socially disadvantaged groups as a show of economic force and ideological combat” (2.1). That is, Wanzo contends that African Americans often feel an expectation that they will show up to support Black media to prove that they sell and to stake a claim that such stories are important, which is very different than the fan studies narrative about choosing marginalized texts as part of a choice to refuse mainstream values and embrace otherness. For her part, Warner (2015b) describes “Black female fandom” as a distinct fandom even when it is for shows that otherwise have a Predominantly White Fandom, arguing that it coalesces in part because such fans “choose to exist despite their invisibility and exclusion from mainstream fan spaces. Further, exclusion pushed them to develop space where their own interests, agendas, and perspectives could be foregrounded” (35). Accordingly, these distinct forms of fandom—as well as those created by groups other than African Americans—are an important site of inquiry to better understand the culture and practice of fandom.

Such analyses allow insight into key contemporary practices. Wanzo (2015) points out that “Black Twitter has provided evidence of black antifan hate watching, with fans consistently tuning in to watch and comment on shows that they hold in contempt” (3.3), enriching fan studies’ understandings of antifandom (Gray 2005). Warner (2015a) similarly traces out practices and dispositions particular to Black women’s fandom when she describes real person shipping of the lead actors in *Scandal* as resulting from “a desire among the audience, especially black women, for the series’ fictional storyline to contain elements of verisimilitude”—a desire for the possibility, in the face of persistent devaluation, that Black women are desirable to powerful men in real life the way they are in the show—which she describes as “a cathartic fantasy able to release all the affective pleasures available from the characters’ torrid love affair” (16). In all of these cases, these are populations and practices that can and should be illuminated by extending fan analysis beyond Predominantly White Fandoms.

The Elephant in the Room: Naming Whiteness

That race is so under-studied by fan studies and under-discussed by fandoms may seem surprising given that fan studies, and fandom more broadly, have a strong critical tradition, in the sense of “critical” as tracing flows of power. There is a long history of attention to inequalities between media industries and fans on the basis of structures such as law (Roth and Flegel 2014; Tushnet 2014; Noppe 2015) and economics (Jones 2014; Hellekson 2015; Scott 2015). There is also a substantial feminist tradition examining gender inequality (Coppa 2008; Scott 2011; Busse 2013) and a body of analysis that considers sexuality (Flegel and Roth 2010; Russo 2010; Winters 2012). Importantly, these are not simply academic considerations but also topics that are broadly debated and discussed in a variety of fandoms.

However, these analyses are quite often not intersectional. The term “intersectionality” was coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1991), though a similar theoretical framework had been employed by women of color feminists writing earlier (Combahee River Collective 1981; Anzaldúa 1983; Hill Collins 1990). Intersectionality’s premise is that there are “multiple practices of categorization and regulation that systematically marginalize and oppress those subjects thereby defined as deviant and ‘other’” (Cohen 1997, 439); accordingly, “given that relationships of power ‘intersect,’ how we inhabit a given category depends on how we inhabit others” (Ahmed 2006, 136). Thus, when analysis considers economics or gender or sexuality, it must also consider how these

systems are inevitably experienced differently on the basis of other systems such as race. Under an intersectional framework, then, it is a problem, and produces inaccurate analysis, for fandoms and fan studies to consider gender, sexuality, or economics and not consider race.

Importantly, as Cathy Cohen (1997) reminds us, the fact that systems impact one another means that there are differences in power and experience *within* social categories—even marginalized ones. That is, as suggested by Warner's and Pande's arguments above, fans have unequal levels of power for reasons outside of fandom itself, and intersectionality tells us this must be taken into account. In particular, Sara Ahmed (2006) points out that "bodies that pass as white, even if they are queer or have other points of deviation, still have access" to more privilege (136). While "there are plenty of unmarked categories (maleness, heterosexuality, and middle classness being obvious ones)," Ross Chambers (1997) contends that "whiteness is perhaps the primary unmarked and so unexamined—let's say 'blank'—category" (189). Race, in the US framework and many other white-dominant ones, is the primary or dominant categorization system, and fan scholarship would benefit from taking it seriously. Race is one of the key means by which those with relatively more privilege within marginalized groups are more readily welcomed into power (Cohen 1997; Ahmed 2006).

To ignore the role of race is to support the "racial status quo"; this makes it an implicitly white position to take (Bonilla-Silva 2003, 8). Simply declaring race irrelevant "without changing the material conditions that makes race a *socially* real category" is problematic because the effect is making current inequalities harder to disrupt (9 n55, emphasis in original). Accordingly, taking a colorblind position marks fan studies and the fandoms it tends to examine as structurally white. In the face of a colorblind ideology that teaches white people to pretend not to see race out of a fear that they will be called racist for noticing, it is important to recall Cohen's (1997) point that "difference, in and of itself—even that difference designated through named categories—is not the problem. Instead it is the power invested in certain identity categories" (461). The call is not, as colorblindness would have it, to cease to "see" race, but rather for that difference to cease being one that produces differential outcomes.

Colorblindness and its concomitant implicit whiteness are features of contemporary culture in general, but they are also features of internet culture and its study and so especially relevant to contemporary fandom as a substantially internet-based practice (see Part IV in this volume). This is due in large part to the fact that early utopian notions of the internet took the premise that in a space without immediately visible bodies where all could (in theory) contribute, inequality would simply go away. In a similar project to my consideration of fan studies here, Jessie Daniels (2013) has examined race in Internet studies, finding that race and racism do not go away on the Internet, but rather "persist online in ways that are both new and unique to the Internet, alongside vestiges of centuries-old forms that reverberate both offline and on," but that despite this, analyses of race and racism are not "central to the field of Internet studies" (696). Daniels (2013) is particularly critical of "the preponderance of research about the Internet done by white people that rarely acknowledges the salience of race but instead clings to a fantasy of a color-blind web" (712).

This fantasy is not merely academic but also popular. André Brock (2011) found that the African American-specific web browser Blackbird was subject to backlash because it disrupted the notion that browsers, and the Internet itself, are racially neutral. Heather Hensman Kettrey and Whitney Nicole Laster's (2014) research shows that "online spaces are presumed to be nonracial until they are racialized by the presence of users of color" (269), but as this equation of "people of color" with "race" suggests, they also discovered that whiteness in particular was the default, with routine assumptions that other users were white unless there was information to the contrary; users "assumed white identities, white privilege, and white space to be the default," pointing to unexamined slippage between "nonracial" and "white" (265). In all of these ways, then, contemporary culture in general and the Internet in particular tend to downplay race out of a

colorblind ideology. However, this simply ignores a racialized reality and acts from the position of someone who benefits from the current race system, and so is structurally white.

“When You Talk About Race, It Makes Me Cry!”: How Whiteness Shapes Fandoms

Much like this work in critical race theory generally and studies of race on the Internet more specifically, it is vital to name the workings of race in fandom and fan studies. Moreover, I argue that the fact that fandom and fan studies often do *not* name the workings of race, structures them as white, and that whiteness must also be named. Race needs to be named, for example, in the face of the usually implicit belief that in the Predominantly White Fandom space the fan identity takes precedence, effectively calling on fans of color to be fans first and people of color second. As Gatson and Reid (2011) contend:

Although one might assume that a fandom identity takes the ultimately salient position in a fandom space, especially an online fandom space created specifically for the development of a particular fandom, what exactly might that fandom identity entail? Who is to determine the salience of a fan’s other identities in that fan-expressive space? Not to speak about race, gender, class, sexuality—or being pressured not to speak—in a fandom space ends up creating the image of a “generic” or “normalized” fan. (4.1)

That “generic,” “normalized,” or unmarked fan is—among other characteristics—going to be a white one in a white-default racial frame, “leaving the assumed—white and USA-centric—racial/cultural and ethnic makeup of these communities in place” (Pande 2016, 210).

The default whiteness of fandom drove a lengthy “meta”—a fannish analytic essay—that caused an uproar in online fandom during May 2016.² The essay is a defense of slash fiction against arguments that it is sexist and, especially, racist in its arguably disproportionate focus on white men. In response, the author seeks to explain away the absence of men of color rather than confronting the fact that race inevitably plays a role in people choosing not to advocate such pairings. Men of color are simply absent in the source texts from which fanfiction writers work, the piece argues. People write out of pleasure and men of color (who apparently do not bring pleasure) would have to be artificially added out of antiracist duty. Additionally, men of color cannot be written in raunchy or violent or any other kind of negative situation because of the risk of reproducing racist stereotypes, and this takes the fun out of fanfiction. White authors are, further, afraid of being “bullied” if they make mistakes writing characters of color, the inability to bully up a social hierarchy notwithstanding. The essay ultimately provides a microcosm of the ways that Predominantly White Fandoms tend to resist conversations about race and racism. Similarly, Jason Sperb (2010) contends that fans of the Disney film *Song of the South* do not reckon with the argument that the film is racist—despite there being enough controversy about its racial representation that Disney has refused to make it available for 30 years—but instead defend it on the basis of audience nostalgia, the film’s music, or its inclusion of harmonious racial relations.

In addition to the implicit whiteness of refusing to address race, Predominantly White Fandoms often actively foreground whiteness. The 2016 meta centers white fans, emphasizing their discomfort about writing men of color or being taken to task for not writing men of color or doing so poorly. The idea that such discomfort could drive people away from writing or from fandom itself relies on such people having a baseline experience of comfort and inclusion to disrupt, which is not necessarily the case for fans of color in particular or people of color navigating

a white supremacist reality in general. It also implies that the only potential harm with respect to race in slash fanfiction is to (implicitly or explicitly) white authors, and not to fans of color seeing themselves or people like them misrepresented or erased. The piece further, and perhaps most damningly, acts to tone-police people who might raise questions about race in fandom, prioritizing white writers' feelings over people of color's pain, frustration or, yes, perhaps anger.

This kind of centering of whiteness is quite common. Young (2014) explicitly examines fantasy fandom's immersion in whiteness, noting that because Tolkien established many conventions of the genre, and was interested in Europe, genre is "used to justify imagining a world which is Eurocentric in ways that the real-world can no longer maintain" (742). Indeed, the fans Young studies work to maintain whiteness through arguing that people of color were not present in medieval Europe and that accordingly "racial inclusion would occur either 'just for the sake of it' or because it was somehow externally imposed on [George R. R.] Martin, the creative genius behind the world" (741). This is a contention that people of color do not "naturally" belong and must be "forced in," while blanket whiteness is neutral and unremarkable. Sparkymonster, one of the participants in a 2009 roundtable on race in the academic journal *Transformative Works and Cultures*, discusses the ways white fans, when faced with discussions of race, often refuse or derail the conversation: "'when you talk about race it makes me cry!' and then suddenly everyone is comforting the white woman instead of continuing to discuss race" (TWC Editor 2009, 4.2). CoffeandInk similarly describes that "multiple white people posted about being frightened by RaceFail, that it made them afraid to write about people of color" (TWC Editor 2009, 6.1), re-centering themselves in much the same way, and this is "a way of affirming the public space is white, as a space where white concerns are paramount" (TWC Editor 2009, 6.3). It is interventions like these that make the whiteness of Predominantly White Fandoms visible, and the field of fan studies would be enriched by there being more of them.

Pasty-Faced Nerds Straighten Up and Fly White: Industry Approaches to Fandom

Corresponding to analysis of whiteness within fandoms themselves, as fan studies has increasingly considered how media industries incorporate fans into their business models, this inquiry also needs to take race into account. The field conducts such analysis with gender, considering how practices and populations that are embraced and normalized by industry skew masculine, while feminine practices and populations are not recruited (Scott 2011; De Kosnik 2012; Busse 2013). There are also interrogations of economic power in these relationships (Hellekson 2009; Lothian 2009; De Kosnik 2013). In light of asking such questions about other social systems, omitting race is perplexing.³ Though one might argue that race doesn't matter because industry cannot see the bodies of fans, this is colorblind logic again, and, as such, not only has limited explanatory power but uncritically centers whiteness.

In my own research on how media industries constructed the concept "fan" from 1994–2009, I found that representations of fans imagine them overwhelmingly as white people, particularly white men. When fans are fleshed-out characters—primarily in fictional representations but also in some documentaries—these white men are often constructed as having a substandard kind of masculinity whose failings are simultaneously failings of whiteness. However, in contrast to the stereotyping described in the early 1990s (Jenkins 1992; Jensen 1992; Lewis 1992), these representations often provide redemption narratives demonstrating how to better comply with masculinity and whiteness. The features of the social category "white" shape both the forms fan "deviations" from the norm take, and why and how redemption is possible for fans in these popular representations.

Judith Butler's (1990) theory of gender performativity argues that we become members of gender categories by acting like it—only through certain socially-determined kinds of grooming, dress, and comportment do we “know” a person “is,” for example, a man. I extend this argument to say white skin or phenotypic whiteness is necessary but not sufficient to be white: One must also behave in the way socially expected of whiteness. That there is a set of behavior to be properly white means it is possible for phenotypically white people to fail at whiteness (Dyer 1997; Ahmed 2006). Using this framework, we can see that fan characters are often not simply white but more specifically what Richard Dyer (1997) calls “skin” white but not what he terms “symbolically” white—while fans represented in mainstream cultural artifacts are most often *phenotypically* white, and while fans of color are marginalized in these texts, images of fandom frequently do not match up with the positive valuation attached to whiteness in dominant American culture.

In particular, fandom and normative whiteness come into conflict—and fandom becomes an insufficient form of whiteness—around the issue of self-control. The category “white” has traditionally been constructed as requiring self-control (Roediger 1991; Dyer 1997; Savran 1998). If proper whiteness demands bodily self-control, when fans are represented as not strong, not able to successfully commit violence, and soft and flabby rather than firm and muscled, these are failures of whiteness just as much as they are more obviously deviant with respect to masculinity. For example, in the 2008 film *Fanboys*, a friend of the main characters—all white fan men—comments that “This is, like, the most exercise you guys have had all year” as they all run across the grounds at *Star Wars* creator George Lucas's production facility Skywalker Ranch. Visually overweight fans are very consistent in both fiction and documentaries, over-represented as a seemingly indispensable part of any flock of fans. Certainly, Patton Oswalt joked in a question and answer session with viewers of *Big Fan* that he had to “get fat for the part,” reinforcing the idea that this physical state is expected or necessary for a fan character. In these ways, then, fan men don't comply with expectations of normative white masculinity.

The interplay between poor bodily maintenance and whiteness is particularly clear in the stereotype of fans as pasty-faced because they are constantly indoors consuming media. Paleness and especially tan-ness are phenomena of whiteness. Though historically being pale was associated with upper-class people's freedom from outdoor work, by the late twentieth century, being tan had been articulated to health and fitness—good bodily maintenance—and became the privileged condition, but it was still fundamentally about white bodies (Dyer 1997). Thus, the paleness of fans is an improper, insufficiently physically active embodiment of whiteness. In such ways, normativity rests on a “notion of whiteness having to do with rightness, with tightness, with self-control, self consciousness, mind over body” (6).

Mike Hill (1997) argues that “Although more obviously connected to race and class issues, whiteness sustains itself ultimately on sexual grounds” (157). The fundamental interlacing of sexuality, particularly sexual self-control, and race can be seen from how sexuality is racialized: “Sexual stereotypes commonly depict ‘us’ as sexually vigorous (usually our men) and pure (usually our women) and depict ‘them’ as sexually depraved (usually their men) and promiscuous (usually their women)” (Nagel 2003, 10). Under this construction, then, white men's sexuality is “vigor” without “depravity”—modulated and controlled. This position for sexuality relies on the affiliation of whiteness with civilization and rationality as opposed to (uncivilized and irrational) sexuality (Sandell 1997; Nagel 2003; Floyd 2009). The counterexamples reinforce this association: A failure of the normative expectation of sexual self-control grounds the “failure” of whiteness built into the category “white trash,” constructed as prone to bestiality, incest, and rape (Newitz and Wray 1997a, 1997b; Sandell 1997). Thus, while people “deviate” from norms of whiteness for different reasons—class in the “white trash” case or “excessive” attachment to media for fans—the stereotype often takes a sexual form.

Accordingly, fans as represented in media are bad at the “proper” sexuality necessary for normative masculinity and whiteness. They are not virile and sexually successful but rather virgins or

sexually desperate. They prefer the object of fandom over heterosexuality or romance. The stereotype that fans fail at normative sexuality was already well established before William Shatner's famous 1986 *Saturday Night Live* tirade, which included demanding of "Trekkies" whether they had ever "kissed a girl"—implying, of course, that they hadn't, foregrounding this belief that fans have no (hetero)romantic success. Fans are frequently constructed as virgins. Indeed, the lead character in *The 40 Year Old Virgin* (2005) is a fan, though he is out-virgin-ed by *The Simpsons* Comic Book Guy, who describes himself as among "45 year old virgins who still live with their parents" ("Mayored to the Mob," 1998). Moreover, the stereotype insists, fans' deeply homosocial ties impede heterosexuality and sometimes become homoeroticism. *Fanboys*, as with most things, has no subtlety about this: "Gay" and "fag" are common insults among these characters (and not just the men). In particular, they call the *Star Trek* fans they encounter things like "Kirk-loving Spock-suckers," and using an accusation of homosexuality as an insult suggests they perceive a need to stabilize their own heterosexuality though destabilizing that of other men.

If whiteness depends on sexual self-control and fans are white people sexually out of bounds, however, they are also constructed as able to be "salvaged" by exercising the "innate" white power of self-control and changing their behavior. The deviance of the fan, these narratives say, comes from correctable bad decisions by people culturally understood as perfectly capable of doing better. In all of the cases, though fandom does not have to be given up, it does have to be brought under control, and this alignment with the white norm, made possible by their white men's bodies, makes these fans eligible for "redemption" into normative white male heterosexuality. Andy in *The 40 Year Old Virgin*, for example, sells his extensive superhero "toy" collection, makes half a million dollars, and uses it to finance the wedding that his move away from fannish virginity permits. The narrative of moving past all-consuming fandom to contained appreciation compatible with appropriate white masculine heterosexuality turns up even in documentaries. In *Trekkies* (1997), we meet Gabriel Koerner, who is excessively nerdy and focused on his fandom, but by *Trekkies 2* (2004) he has become a man, calmed his appreciation of *Star Trek*, begun a career, and found a girlfriend, collecting all the normativities. Nonwhite and women fans, by contrast, never "reform" and get their fandom "under control." The exclusion of fans other than white men from the recuperation narrative of fandom either constructs other groups as incapable of being normalized or assumes everyone will identify with and want to emulate the redemption of the white man fan. In either case, it reinforces the construction of self-control as a characteristic of white men.

In this way, the non-normativity of fandom in popular representations reinforces normativity. "Deviant" whitenesses, like fandom, seem to disrupt the normativity and dominance of whiteness. However, constructing fans as lacking normativity and dominance relies on an assumption of whiteness precisely *as* normative and dominant. Like other representations of non-privileged whiteness, this is seen as not normal, that something has been done to these men or they have strayed. Privilege can be regained in the "happy ending" of normativity because fans' skin whiteness—their imagined innate capacity for self-control—makes them eligible for symbolic whiteness, so that these narratives reinforce rather than undermine the connection of whiteness and privilege. Though this is only one example, the ways the media industry's notions of fans are structured by whiteness is an important area of inquiry.

Conclusion

The study of race in fandom is an emerging and vital area. This chapter has been weighted toward whiteness in part because this is my own area of expertise, but also because it is so pervasive and so invisible—such that people hear "race" and think "person of color"—that work needs to be

done to render whiteness visible and deny its “neutrality.” Because of their often (though not always) progressive positions with regard to economics, gender, and sexuality, fandom and fan studies are thought of and think of themselves as progressive. However, examining race shows that this progressivism is partial. As Jenkins (2014) points out:

Even if fandom were as welcoming of cultural diversity as it has sometimes perceived itself to be, there would be many forms of exclusions and marginalizations based in the racialization of taste that would determine who came to conventions or which texts became incorporated into fandom’s canons. (98)

Sperb (2010) calls for “a recognition that the Internet presents both utopia and dystopia, and that fandom is reactionary and indifferent as often as it is progressive” (27). Daniels (2015), in an analysis of feminism on the Internet, puts the issue more bluntly, arguing that “without an explicit challenge to racism, white feminism is easily grafted onto white supremacy and useful for arguing for equality for white women within a white supremacist context” (9). This provides some important insight for fandom and fan studies: To the extent that fandom and fan studies do not challenge white supremacy, they effectively support it.

That the burden of interrogating race has been disproportionately borne by fans and scholars of color, and that fan studies’ unexamined whiteness has produced such colorblindness, give us much to think about as a field. Importantly, this call to consider race should not be taken as an insistence that all social systems must be examined at all times. As Cohen (1997) notes, “Demands that every aspect of oppression and regulation be addressed in each political act, seem, and are indeed, unreasonable” (449). Such a demand would inevitably produce what Butler (1990) describes as the “embarrassed etc.” as authors sought to defensively include all things listwise (182). However, race is one of the primary social systems of contemporary culture, and should be incorporated into analysis of fans much more often than it is at present, making its integration a key direction for further research.

Notes

- 1 There is work, however, on the practices of media fandoms outside of Europe and the United States that focuses on fans who would in the United States be understood as people of color, such as, for example, work on fandoms in Asia: Kinsella 1998; Chin 2007; Punathambekar 2007; and see chapters by Larsen, Steinberg and Ernest dit Alban, and Pande in this volume.
- 2 Because the essay is available only to people with accounts at the Archive of Our Own, because the intended audience was fandom rather than academics or the broader public, and because obtaining informed consent would be impossible, I am not naming or directly quoting this essay but rather speaking in general terms.
- 3 Sexuality is also under-studied in this respect.

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Chapter 20

Who Do You Mean by “Fan?” Decolonizing Media Fandom Identity

Rukmini Pande

As the field of fan studies has expanded in the last decade, the image of the generalized “fan” has gone through a reclamation of sorts. Spurred by the sprawling success of popular culture conventions like the annual San Diego Comic Con, and with dedicated “nerdy” audiences propelling media companies like Marvel and DC Comics into international powerhouses, multinational media corporations now compete to woo fans. Often this takes the form of encouraging fan practices once seen firmly as weird or deviant, including cosplay, fan art, and even fanfiction. While the attempted monetization of fan practices is nothing new, the advent of social media has meant a new level of mainstreaming and attendant hypervisibility for media fan cultures. Once characterized as subcultural “poachers” by Henry Jenkins (1992), fans today seem, at least on the surface, to be more mainstream than ever before. However, it is my argument that *which* fans are considered the most “valued” remains enmeshed in a complex matrix of identity markers, most notably those of race, gender, and sexuality.

In the context of fan scholars’ increasing interest in what analyses of fan activity can tell us about globalized media cultures and their consumption patterns, it has become even more crucial to highlight the field’s recurrent blindspots. One of my primary contentions in this chapter maintains that while “identity” has been very much a focus of fan scholars, this has remained largely limited to a consideration of gender and sexuality (Penley 1991; Busse, Lothian, and Reid 2007). As I have argued in more detail in *Seeing Fans* (2016), it is only by embracing theoretical approaches that *insist* on emphasizing the operations of racial/cultural/ethnic identity that fan scholars can break this cycle. To interrupt this dominant paradigm I will first examine how this privileging has shaped the development of the field, before demonstrating how adopting inclusive theoretical frameworks can enable more nuanced evaluations of fan activity. To accomplish this, the concept of the “fan-as-activist” is interrogated to show how its positivist evaluations have so far ignored complex power relations within fan communities. Building on this, interview data is also used to examine the diverse ways in which non-white fans engage with these issues in English-language media fandom spaces, such as finding points and terms of solidarity such as “Fans of Color.”

Fan Studies and Identity

Identity has remained central to fan studies as a discipline from its foundation, forming a core aspect of the work produced by what is now seen as the first wave of scholars working on the topic. In order to question the idea that fans were uncritical consumers of popular cultural texts, these scholars focused particularly on the activities of (white) women fans in science fiction fandoms mainly located in the USA and the UK (Russ 1985; Lamb and Veith 1986; Penley 1991; Jenkins 1992). This focus on the “active” or “resistant” media fan has been critiqued since then with more situated analyses of fan activity being advocated instead (Hills 2002; Gray, Sandvoss and Harrington 2007).

In response, some scholars have focused on fandom activities less invested in resistant meaning-making, such as sports fandom or fan tourism patterns (Crawford 2004; Brooker 2007). Others have examined the ways in which transmedia narrative strategies are increasingly co-opting fan labor (De Kosnik 2009; Scott 2009). Yet others have focused on fans as amateur producers for profit, leveraging their popularity within fan circles to launch their own careers (Anelli 2008; Flegel and Roth 2016). This shift in focus in turn has also attracted critique, as some theorists argue that this has meant an erasure of women fans whose interests are seen to be more marginal to discussions of monetizable fan activity (Stanfill 2013; Stein 2015).

While remaining cognizant of these issues, I argue that a crucial intersection of identity in this fanboy/girl split in fan studies continues to be erased and elided. That is, within this dominant paradigm, there has so far been no space to discuss how the operations of racial/ethnic/cultural identity destabilize these simplistic binaries. What remains unacknowledged in most papers, keynotes, or edited collections on media fan communities is that when “the fandom” or “fangirls” are discussed, the referents of these terms remain US- or UK-centric popular media texts and white, cisgender, middle-class women. Relatedly, even though there is an increasing acknowledgment of the fact that fan communities are now “global,” the material ramifications of this development are rarely acknowledged. While there has been some recent work on transnational and transcultural fandoms (Chin and Morimoto 2013), these works are invariably located as outside of “the fandom” and usually somewhat “othered” due to unfamiliarity with the source texts. Any discussion of transnational and transcultural fandoms seems to circulate around fan cultures that are demonstrably outside the dominant paradigm that grants certain texts and fandoms canonicity, either by geographic location or language (Punathambekar 2007; Madrid-Morales and Lovric 2015).

It is also crucial here to note that this footnoting of racial/cultural/ethnic identity in traditional fan studies must not be seen as an oversight but as a consistent pattern of erasure. Rebecca Wanzo’s (2015) significant intervention into the genealogy of fan studies as a field points to the glaring whiteness of its bibliographies and the excision of the theoretical apparatuses and academic histories that do take into account the influence of race on the experience and interpretation of popular culture.¹ Wanzo’s focus is specifically on African American popular cultures but the critique holds as strongly for other apparatuses that foreground racial, ethnic, and cultural identity along with gender and sexuality. Wanzo observes that this excision and erasure are grounded not only in a failure to “see” race—and specifically whiteness—as a racialized identity as opposed to a universal one, but also underlines the fact that “One of the reasons race may be neglected is because it troubles some of the claims—and desires—at the heart of fan studies scholars and their scholarship” (1.4). Kristen Warner (2015), another scholar working on African American fandoms, points out, “The stark reality is that the only people who are *allowed to be visible* within fandom and *imagined to be fans* by the media industries are White men and women” (33; emphasis added).

In order to push back against this practice while encompassing the complex and shifting identity positions and power relations at work within media fandom's communicative platforms as well as its individual transnational and transcultural exchanges, my chosen framework is that of postcolonial cybercultural theory. To expand on this approach briefly, postcolonial cybercultural theorists examine the circulation of representational power between the Global North and the Global South—encompassing both resistance and co-optation—within digital networks (Fernández 1999; Nayar 2008). Positioning media fandom as an example of a postcolonial cyberspace is to reframe its operations as a transnational/cultural dialogic networked space that interfaces with U.S./U.K.-centric popular cultural texts influenced by neo-liberal capitalism and neo-imperialism. At the same time, this positioning also allows a more nuanced examination of how diverse interstices of identity—racial/cultural/ethnic identity, sexuality, religion, nationality, etc.—impact the way transformative practices are popularized within these communities. The adoption of this theoretical approach has several effects. First, it forces a (re)examination of these communities in terms of their relationship to media objects (that are produced under the conditions that can be termed neo/colonial); second, it foregrounds the importance of their demographic makeup; and, third, it puts a spotlight on the unevenness of Internet-mediated platforms themselves as related to geopolitical positioning. It is in this theoretical frame that I will now move on to problematizing the category of the fan-as-activist.

Fans-as-Activists: Possibilities and Pitfalls

The rise in profile of fan-as-activists in the contemporary moment is driven by several considerations, perhaps most notably the fact that multinational media conglomerates have become increasingly sensitive to concepts of social justice activism, often using them as fodder for their own agendas. For instance, several US-based television shows like *Teen Wolf* (2011–present) and *The 100* (2014–present) have recently promoted the inclusion of queer and/or non-white characters in their narratives. The resulting fan-investments in particular character-arcs and storylines are often leveraged for shock value and the resulting outrage is dismissed as “over-reaction” (see Bourdaa's Chapter 24 in this volume). Of course, the fact that these fan investments are now seen as possibly monetizable is partly due to the rising visibility of diverse audience demographics for these texts that include women, non-white, and queer fans (and those at the interstices of these identities). As a result of this, there is an increasing amount of cultural capital being associated with the projection of being socially progressive, though there is considerably less care being taken in terms of any follow-through on these promises. As an example, in 2014, the movie studios associated with both Marvel and DC Comics greenlit movies around female superheroes—Captain Marvel and Wonder Woman. Marvel also announced a solo project for Black Panther, which will be their first movie centered on a non-white superhero, and is slated for a 2018 release. These developments are certainly encouraging, but when looked at within the larger context of Hollywood hiring policies, or overall output of texts, they remain isolated examples (Hunt and Ramon 2015).

These discrepancies have also begun to be highlighted through social media campaigns, such as when the hashtag #OscarsSoWhite went viral in the wake of the Academy Award Nominations announced on January 14, 2016. The hashtag mobilized the anger that many fans felt at the fact that, for the second year in a row, not a single non-white actor had been nominated for an award. This was also reflected in the nominations for the other major categories, including Best Film. The results of the criticism were felt immediately as Cheryl Boone Isaacs (the Academy's first African American and only its third woman president) announced that the organization was going to take serious action to diversify its voting base. The eventual quiet dilution of the

initiative is perhaps emblematic of the struggle to combat institutional racism in Hollywood, but social media was certainly effective in its consciousness-raising activities around the issue (Feinberg 2016).

The viral power of these campaigns is, in part, due to the actions of non-white fans who are finding more confidence in articulating their concerns around representation in popular media. The increasing vocality of fans on issues relating to various axes of identity—race, gender, sexuality, disability, religion, etc.—has prompted varying reactions. Some commentators disapprove of such “fan entitlement” on the grounds that it results in creators being bullied about potentially controversial storylines (Faraci 2016). Others, however, object to the lumping in of *all* fan-based campaigns into one category (Mason 2016; Pulliam-Moore 2016). There is, after all, a difference between the sense of entitlement toward popular cultural texts exercised by individuals who have always seen their view of the world being reflected in them; and those who have rarely, if ever, been “catered to” in any way by popular media industries. For those who would defend fandom against charges of “entitlement,” the ability of certain parts of fandom (i.e., media fandom) to organize around socially progressive causes is laudable. However, I contend that such defenses of media fandom communities based on a progressive view of them as interested in social justice issues do not encapsulate the full complexity of the matter either. The current theorization of fan activism must therefore be placed in context with the multiple power dynamics that operate within these audiences.

A growing body of literature considers fans-as-activists as engaged audiences who leverage their personal networks in order to boost support for particular causes. Fandom spaces are being seen as potential sites of civic organization, where fans are motivated to put their support behind various socially progressive causes without being overtly associated with any one political ideology. This was seen in Henry Jenkins’s (2012) examination of the Harry Potter Alliance (HPA), a US-based non-profit organization, which he described as “a sustained effort to mobilize a network of fans of J. K. Rowling’s fantasy books around an array of different issues and concerns, ranging from human rights in Africa to rights to equal marriage, from labor rights to media concentration and net neutrality” (1.9). Jenkins’s discussion foregrounds the possibility for fan spaces to prompt and sustain “civic action” by harnessing the power of particular narrative universes. The founder of the HPA, Andrew Slack, articulates this strategy as one of “cultural acupuncture” which encapsulates

finding where the psychological energy is in the culture, and moving that energy towards creating a healthier world ... We activists may not have the same money as Nike and McDonald’s but we have a message that actually means something ... What we do not have is the luxury of keeping the issues we cover seemingly boring, technocratic, and inaccessible. With cultural acupuncture, we will usher in an era of activism that is fun, imaginative, and sexy, yet truly effective. (4.6, quoted in Jenkins 2012)

While the work the HPA does undoubtedly has some positive effects, the framing of such civic engagement as “fun” and “sexy” is questionable, especially in regards to issues like the Darfur crisis² (one of the issues with which the HPA has engaged). This kind of approach, where complex situations are mapped on to simplistic good versus evil narrative paradigms, can also lead to dangerous outcomes, especially when local realities are ignored for a “bigger picture.” This happens most frequently when well-intentioned interventions are pursued in countries located in Africa, where deeply parochial and colonialist stereotypes still influence their perception, particularly in the Global North. This aspect is developed further in Trish Salah’s (2014) examination of imperialist Western feminism in activist fandoms with regard to Muslim women. Thus, while “playful, imaginative, social and fun” styles of activism may well have a place in modern conceptualizations of civic action, they can also be wholly incongruous and informed by incredible amounts of privilege.

I propose that this complexity of power relations is also a critical aspect to be considered when reading the multiple “defenses” of fandom that have responded to charges of “fan entitlement.” These defenses, much like the threads of theorization I have traced above, celebrated the resistance of media fandom in particular, seeing it as a response to the domination of popular cultural media texts by mainly white, heterosexual male creators. While true to a certain extent, it must also be noted that a lot of the most vocal protests still concern white characters. To examine a recent example, the CW show *The 100* promoted the characters of Lexa (Alycia Debnam-Carter) and Clarke Griffin (Eliza Taylor) as a highly popular queer couple referred to as Clexa. Their relationship was built up as significant in the show’s third season but ended with a “shocking” twist when Lexa was killed. Since this was only the latest event in a long history of queer characters being killed on-screen, many fans were understandably upset at the way the narrative ended (Roth 2016). However, as some non-white fans of the show pointed out, the same fanbase had been ignoring the hugely racialized violence that was a staple of the narrative from its inception. As an example, in the show’s third episode, the character of Wells Jaha (Eli Goree) is murdered by a troubled girl called Charlotte (Izabela Vidovic) because he is the personification of her worst nightmares. The violent symbolism of the act, wherein a young black boy is murdered by an ‘innocent’ young white girl was never dealt with in the narrative and was also largely glossed over by the fans. It is therefore necessary to pay attention to patterns of fan prioritization so as to identify *which* characters are consistently valued over others within fandom spaces, even when issues of social justice are highlighted.

Fan Negotiations: Identity, Representation, and Authenticity

Fan campaigns, as discussed above, also bring into focus extremely difficult questions such as what constitutes “authentic” representation in cases of marginalized identities. Lori Kido Lopez’s (2012) examination of the fan protest against the whitewashing of the live-action remake of the animated series *Avatar: The Last Airbender* (2005–2008) highlights this issue particularly well. The protest was led in large part on the online platform Racebending.com, which has continued to raise issues related to race in fandom, working to draw attention to the casting choices of big US-based studios particularly when they cast white actors to play non-white characters. While this advocacy fulfils a vital function, Lopez (2012) points out that the initial campaign also prompts complex questions about what constitutes a character or actor’s “true” racial/ethnic/cultural identity. In the case of *Avatar*, for instance, the source text was set in a mythologized land and the character designs drew from a range of Asian and Indigenous cultures. Lopez points out that:

[W]e must consider how this discourse contributes to an essentialized or fixed notion of Asia. Not only do these images suggest that an escalating pile of artifacts can be used to ascertain what is really Asian and what is not, as if Asian identities cannot exist outside of these artifacts, but we are to use this evidence to match a racialized body to this perfect image of Asianness. This becomes somewhat difficult given that the show seemingly appropriates and mixes cultural artifacts from a wide range of Asian cultures, none of which could be accurately represented by any single actor ... The demand for an Asian actor to play the role of Aang also assumes that identity and representation can be collapsed within an actor’s body, when representation is always a mediation and our identities can rarely be straightforwardly mapped out without complexity or shading. (435)

This critique identifies the central difficulty that haunts any such discussion of what constitutes an “authentic” representation of any particular identity, whether sexual, gendered, racial, cultural, or all of the above at once. As Lopez points out, the arguments about the “Asian-ness” of the

original text must rely on an ossification of identity that accepts the melding of entirely disparate cultural markers into a common narrative universe. The “matching” of an appropriate racialized body to this universe (the original animated text was produced by a white creative team) does lead to complex questions about what visual racial signifiers would be valued most in such a scenario.

However, these debates are not being conducted in a space where both white and non-white bodies are subjected to the same modes of racialization. As reflected in the recent debate about the casting of Scarlett Johansson in the live-action adaptation of the Japanese anime classic *Ghost in the Shell*, the “slipperiness” of racialized markers is only ever mobilized in defense of white actors getting cast in “universal” roles. In stark contrast, this consideration is almost never granted to non-white actors. This is proven by the high level of backlash received by those who take up supposedly neutral roles—Idris Elba as the demigod Heimdal in *Thor* (2011) and John Boyega as a stormtrooper in *The Force Awakens* (2016) to name only two instances.

These debates are not a new phenomenon by any means. Discussions of the politics of representation following the “cultural turn” and the “discursive turn,” particularly around marginalized subjects, have been taken up repeatedly in disciplines ranging from critical feminist and post-colonial studies to queer theory (hooks 1984; Mohanty 1984; Trinh 1989; Puar 2007). While these theorizations cover a complex range of ideas, a shared concern has coalesced around how these regimes of representation, or signifying practices that structure how we “see” the world, function through exclusion and boundary policing, even when employed in the service of oppositional politics to oppressive institutions.

Of these, Stuart Hall’s (1996) examination of “black” cultural representation in the UK remains foundational. In “New Ethnicities,” he mapped how the term was coined as “a way of referencing the common experience of racism and marginalization in Britain and came to provide the organizing category of a new politics of resistance, among groups and communities with, in fact, very different histories, traditions and ethnic identities” (442). To Hall, this politics of resistance, initially formed around a double-pronged push for access to representational space for black artists as well as a contestation of their marginal position, then morphed into a new phase. He posited that this was a shift from, “the relations of representation to a politics of representation itself,” which signaled an “end to the innocent notion of the essential black subject” (444). This was in effect a call to end the claims of “authenticity” for any sort of cultural production, not as a sign of defeat, but as an acknowledgment of the vast heterogeneity that made up any racial or ethnic category and their inherent slipperiness. For Hall, to be involved in a politics of representation was to be “plunged headlong into the maelstrom of a continuously contingent, unguaranteed, political argument and debate: a critical politics, a politics of criticism” (445).

More than twenty years on, while the notion of authenticity remains (rightfully) suspect in critical discourse around representation, it is equally clear that it continues to mediate any text’s relationship to the cultural signifiers it engages with in its narrative. This remains especially true for popular cultural texts with great power to influence narratives about already marginalized individuals. Fandom communities are definitely one example of spaces where these texts are interrogated by those individuals themselves, often mobilizing the language of authenticity with all its problematic associations. However, it is also clear that, while a certain amount of boundary policing and essentialist discourse is present in these critiques, the dialogic nature of fannish spaces ensure that Hall’s description of a critical politics as a “maelstrom” of debate also remains relevant to any theorization that is attempted.

In terms of bodies being raced “correctly,” it is also crucial to remember that these classifications have a specific (often violent) history perpetuated under the guise of scientific endeavor (Herrnstein and Murray 1994; Sullivan 2003). Therefore, to insist that any particular combination

of markers based on physical appearance or hereditary traits is “authentic” with regard to a particular racial, ethnic, or cultural identity comes dangerously close to replicating and reifying these same violent classifications. Lopez’s (2012) concerns around the discursive construction of racial identity in fan spaces also follow this logic. Nevertheless, it is equally clear that while racial identity as a comprehensible category cannot be defined on any single or absolute biological level, the idea that it is a biological attribute remains highly prevalent, and discrimination on the basis of perceived racial identity remains as entrenched as ever in every aspect of our lives.

This is also applicable to the influence of white privilege when it comes to the texts that form the focus of media fandom communities. For example, the reality of the casting practices of US-based movie and television studios are certainly influenced by such biases. However, the elevation of white male protagonists over all others *within* fan spaces is also very much part of that same continuum. The fan strategies under consideration in this chapter must then be seen as attempting to articulate differential modes of resistance in these particular contexts. These modes of resistance are messy and when framed in casual speech sometimes seem to reify dangerous ideas of “authenticity,” yet in practice can also be seen to produce (or hold the potential of producing) multiple authenticities.

Fan Identity Articulations: The Case for Differential Authenticities

One of the ways to approach these multiple authenticities is through John Jackson’s (2005) influential conceptual framing of what he terms “racial sincerity,” which is articulated as functioning differently from “racial authenticity.” Jackson’s theorization maps how individuals continually rearticulate their relationships to their raced identity both on their own and as part of communities. Jackson’s formulation is predicated on the problematics of negotiating the shifting shoals of “identity politics” that remain central to civil rights movements even as they are increasingly decried as “failed” in some parts of academia because of their sometimes prescriptivist and essentializing nature.

In the case of media fandom, debates about “authentic” casting or aspects of storytelling often devolve into essentializing discourses that come uncomfortably close to replicating the very oppressive structures they aim to resist. Jackson articulates this conflict as one that oscillates around the idea of agency. He argues that authenticity “presupposes a relation between subjects (who authenticate) and objects (dumb, mute, and inorganic) that are interpreted and analyzed from the outside, because they cannot simply speak for themselves” (14). In contrast, sincerity sets up a different paradigm entirely:

A mere object could never be sincere, even if it is authentic. Sincerity is a trait of the object’s maker, or maybe even its authenticator, but never the object itself, at least not as we commonly use the term. Instead, sincerity presumes a liaison between subjects—not some external adjudicator and a lifeless scroll. Questions of sincerity imply social interlocutors who presume one another’s humanity, interiority and subjectivity. It is a subject-subject interaction, not the subject-object model that authenticity presumes—and to which critiques of authenticity implicitly reduce every racial exchange. (14)

Sincerity, then, is always an exchange of meaning rather than an imposition. Jackson’s framework offers one way of evaluating how texts that deal with representations of marginalized communities and individuals (specifically in terms of racial scripts but also how those scripts interact with gender, sexuality, religion, etc.) work and what reactions they generate. To simply dismiss these reactions—as in the academic discourse referenced above—as boundary policing and inherently flawed is to lose a vital interactional component, especially within fandom communities that

build their own relationships with texts that they acknowledge are flawed but still offer a “sincere” articulation of their social realities. That is to say, racialized identities not *only* fence individuals into essentialist positions but also offer diverse points of solidarity (and disagreement) within and between marginalized groups. Jackson’s formulation then injects a vitality and “lived-ness” into concerns about how racial signifiers function, both between individuals and communities but also how popular cultural texts can be seen to operate.

In terms of fandom communities, the idea of sincerity also encapsulates the emotional and interactional element that is contained in fan reactions (both positive and negative) to particular texts. These reactions can be parsed both in terms of “fan activism” and also in more specific practices that produce individual fan works. Sincerity as an analytic category allows for the examination of how imperfect texts are simultaneously loved and critiqued by an engaged audience that is also articulating and rearticulating their own raced, gendered, and sexualized selves in response to the various societal scripts around them.

To return to the campaign around *Avatar: The Last Airbender* using this formulation, it is possible to see how such sincerity operated to establish its rhetorical and consciousness raising strategies. It was not as if participants believed that the text represented an undifferentiated “Asian” body but rather recognized (and mobilized against) specific racist casting practices of Hollywood studios. Similarly, the signifiers of “Asian-ness” of the text were underlined through comparisons to real-world artifacts and cultural practices in the pursuit of a specific goal. The collective identity in this case was not just based on fans’ own racial, ethnic, or cultural identity, but also on their identity as fans of the series.

Racebending.com makes a point of underlining the demographic diversity of their supporters by stating that, “7 out of 10 Racebending.com supporters are NOT of Asian descent. People from many different ethnic groups felt strongly opposed to the film’s casting decisions” (“Demographics of Racebending.com Supporters” 2010). On the same page, the website cites a survey of supporters showing that 60 percent of the respondents identified themselves as white. This is an important point as it shows the possibility of such campaigns forging intersectional solidarity around social justice issues while keeping the voices of those primarily affected by such inequalities at the forefront. This is also seen in the other campaigns that Racebending.com continues to run, as well as in their boosting of similarly themed educational and activist posts from other sources on their Tumblr blog.

This aspect of constructed and expressed solidarity among fans who might come from different racial/cultural/ethnic backgrounds but wish to engage and support strategic consciousness-raising critiques across popular cultural texts was also reflected in my interview data. I interviewed the respondents quoted in this chapter between 2015 and 2016. I used purposive sampling (Tongco 2007) to select my interview group and conducted semi-structured interviews of thirty-nine respondents, located in nine countries. The respondents ranged in age from 18 to 43, with most identifying as using she/her pronouns and a majority identifying as queer. In terms of racial/cultural and ethnic identity, the data reflected twenty-five different self-classifications.

As one respondent notes:

Most of the events that have moved me to engage have been directly related to anti-blackness since Latinos are simply not represented in media. But I think it’s important to non-black poc [People of Color] to speak up and show solidarity with black people and black fans. (Silent_parts, interview with author, 2015)

Reactions like this reflect a broader concern for issues of diversity and representation that do not necessarily match up to respondents’ own specific identities, yet are informed by a shared experience of marginalization and misrepresentation within white-character-centric fandom texts and

communities. This is not to say that frustrations about the perceived level of engagement with different issues were not also expressed. For instance, one respondent felt:

Discussion of race in fandom tends to center around black and maybe Latin@ issues and characters; Asian and Asian-American issues are mostly invisible (Mako Mori is an exception). When they do pop up, I'm sometimes kind of uncomfortable with the tack they take, because they sometimes seem to involve non-Asians making sweeping statements about Asian culture that lack nuance, and then sometimes mashing Asian-Americans (who have complex and widely varying negotiations between the two halves of their identity) into that mold. (Anonymous respondent, interview with author, 2015)

This kind of discomfort is important to register as it shows that these alliances and resonances are not uncomplicatedly felt or expressed. While one of the aims of my project is to show how non-white fans articulate strategies to talk about how media fandom spaces remain unsafe and unwelcoming in many ways, it is not my intention to project these strategies as all-encompassing. Broadly, however, a sense of solidarity was expressed in interviews around signal boosting critiques even as the US-centricity of such discussions was repeatedly underlined.

Strategic Assemblages: Fan of Color

Another question that arises here is whether a further consolidation of identity can be observed in fandom spaces. That is, do fans in this kind of discursive space also self-identity or ally themselves with specific labels such as that of “Fan of Color”? Recently, there seems to have been a rise in circulation of such terms within fandom spaces—seen in collectives such as *The Nerds of Color* (Phi 2010)—and so this trend merits further investigation. The problems inherent in such a nomenclature stem, again, from its USA-centricity, something that respondents from other countries flagged as frustrating.

This issue is not something that is limited to fandom spaces. The ways in which USA-centric language and theorization of activism around queerness, gender, and race have been enforced on the rest of the world is echoed in multiple debates, particularly around the extension of the term “People of Color” to a transnational space. As Sri-Lankan SF/F writer Vajra Chandrasekera (2015) notes, the usage of the term outside of the USA makes little sense because its power is contextualized within specific histories of marginalization. Outside of that, however, for him, the term becomes a “pure statement of American cultural hegemony” (para 7). Despite this declaration, he does go on to admit that he does not have any answers to this conundrum either. After all, to remain unmarked is not to remain outside the global discourses of power that affect him, particularly in the context of his own published work. The forces of neo-imperialism and globalization thus combine to enforce the very language by which any resistance can be articulated. This same conflict is also seen around the term “Fan of Color” in my interview data. When asked about their opinion of the term, respondents gave a variety of responses. Some recognized the potential usefulness of the term but also pointed out its limitations—making all non-white fans appear to be a homogeneous mass.

It's good as an umbrella. It shouldn't be allowed to erase that there are significant differences in the interests and needs of specific ethnic and race groups within the “of color” community. What I look for and need from fandom as a Black American fan aren't going to be the same as a Latinx American fan, or South Asian British fan, and I wouldn't want people to think that, for instance, writing about one character of color is sufficient for all of us to feel represented. (Anonymous respondent, interview with author, 2015)

Others, however, interpreted it as way of marking themselves out in a space that is still often presumed or defaulted to as white-centric. This was interpreted to have both positive and negative repercussions:

I think it tends to go 50/50 ... i usually go by fan but sometimes there are moments when i remember that i am a fan of color and it's not the same experience, if that makes sense? sometimes i have no problem at all with going i guess i really wish i could just see myself as a fan but i feel like that erases a pretty significant part of my identity. (Arzoensis, interview with author, 2015)

I like it, I guess. I am not actively making myself invisible anymore, like I did years ago. I am a fan and I am several minorities in one. (Snackiepotato, interview with author, 2015)

In an intriguing variation on that theme, some respondents saw its usage as reifying the idea that fandom is somehow essentially for white people with non-white fans forever figuring as outliers and exceptions. This was something that they objected to strongly, reaffirming their right to fannish spaces.

I use it when talking to other fans of color, or fans of ... non traditional sexual orientation (?). I guess we using it mockingly among ourselves, a badge of "other" honor? I don't like seeing fandom as a whole use the term because it just reiterates the idea that you can't just be a "fan" if you're not white. (Anonymous respondent, interview with author, 2015)

Weird. On one hand, it's like ... why are we getting singled out again? Are white people the default for "fan" then? But on the other, if it gives our opinion on issues more legitimacy, then I'm all for that. (Mian, interview with author, 2015)

This was a set of responses I was intrigued by, as they highlight the difficulties of articulating the experience of being marginalized in such spaces without perpetuating those very same othering mechanisms. My respondents therefore struggled with the ways in which these terms provide tools that both "legitimize" their experiences and also mark them off from the fandom mainstream.

The above responses point to a high degree of complexity in the way these labels are being thought through within fan spaces and how they might be expressed differently in different environments. Jackson's (2005) emphasis on the interactional and contextual element of racial sincerity rings especially true for this set of responses as respondents are clearly very aware of the various layers of historical meaning that have accrued in such labels as well as what they might signify in the future.

In the same vein, others spoke of the usage of the term as "strategic," which is something that ties into my earlier argument about non-white fans using rhetorical strategies to form loose, contingent, and informal alliances in order to help make a larger point or support a particular popular cultural text without that translating into a formal identification. They described it as a tool to find other non-white fans and as a signal to identify that they share common ground in terms of their engagement with fannish spaces.

I feel like I'd identify with this term differently with different people. I'd never call myself that here (in Mumbai), but abroad I used it while talking to other fans of color. (hena, interview with author, 2015)

I don't use it except for strategic circumstances, for the sake of simplicity or solidarity. (Swatkat, interview with author, 2015)

I feel it's a shorthand and useful way to describe a group of people, especially in heavily US-dominated, English-language discourse. It does have the effect of linking you to other non-white fans and makes it easier to search for more racially diverse media. (Anonymous respondent, interview with author, 2015)

One respondent, interestingly, articulated their discomfort with such a term being applied to fandom spaces and activities at all:

I don't use it myself, but I also don't know if I would use "fan" as an identity, either. I think of fandom as something I do and participate in, rather than being something I /am/. Woman of color's origin is very much rooted in radical activism, so I would also not associate fandom with a radical political identity. (Lurrel, interview with author, 2015)

This distancing from "fan as identity" perhaps points to some of the dangers of fan studies' reliance on ethnographic data collection that sometimes projects collectivism onto diverse groups (Hills 2002). However, I would like to build on this response in the context of another frequent trope in fan studies—the extension of the identifier of "fan" to indicate a marginalized identity. This trend is seen repeatedly when theorizing how fans deviate from prescribed societal norms through their passionate engagement with media objects (Bennett 2010; Larsen and Zubernis 2012). Other scholars have pointed out that such passionate attachments also intersect with the power of whiteness in nuanced ways. However, while fans who "misdo whiteness" (Stanfill 2011) in such a fashion may indeed be penalized by certain societal structures, they also continue to retain considerable privilege *within* fandom spaces. As I have consistently maintained, due to the focus on "transgression" in fan behavior only around the axes of gender and sexuality, the effects of the racialization of these spaces have remained unexamined. My disquiet with characterizing media fandom participants as inherently marginalized stems from this disjuncture. As I have argued in this chapter (while discussing sweeping defenses of media fandom spaces in the context of "fan entitlement,") without an intersectional analytical frame, these analyses remain alienating for many non-white fans.

It also must be noted that there were some respondents who wholeheartedly embraced the term precisely because in their view it is something self-crafted, drawing from a radical political legacy:

I love the term "fan of color." I like *most* of the labels that we've come up with for ourselves, actually. I like *labels* -- they tend to make things easier, just in terms of the gross "who the hell are we, anyway?" definitions. (Te, interview with author, 2015)

As the quotes referenced here show, there is a considerable difference of opinion around such labels. Most significant to me is their mobilization strategically and as a way of connection. The focus on these labels as a shorthand, and their use as contingent rather than as some kind of rallying cry is, I think, crucial to the ways in which non-white fans negotiate the fannishness "demanded" of them in various contexts. These demands can take different forms, sometimes as a demand to stay silent in spaces which are dismissive or outright hostile to discussion of these issues, or conversely as a demand to become spokespersons or educators or sole creators of more diverse content.

This simultaneous use of and discomfort around the "labeling" of racial/cultural/ethnic identity in fandom spaces are therefore indicative of the fraught nature of these negotiations and the erasures that they sometimes effect. However, within my recorded responses there is also a repeated conviction that these strategies are still required as methods for finding like-minded fans or signal-boosting critique or pushback to fandom juggernauts that are inevitably focused on white characters. The reservations expressed by respondents further point to an acknowledgment of the difficulties surrounding notions of "authenticity," especially with regard to media representations of racial/ethnic/cultural identity.

Conclusion

It has been my aim through this analysis to trace some of the strategies that non-white fans employ in order to engage in fannish spaces that are not always friendly to them or their concerns. I have also demonstrated how a lens of criticality allied to axes of identity apart from gender and sexuality is crucial in digging deeper into the operations of fandom communities than is facilitated by dominant theoretical models. This is not to treat these communities or individuals as a monolith but rather to try and tease out some common threads both from my respondent data as well as larger trends being observed in fannish spaces.

It is clear that media fandom remains an inhospitable space for non-white characters, who inevitably get sidelined and erased even in the rare occasions that they have significant roles in canonical texts. Fans who would like better representation, or pushback against the dominant view that media fandom spaces are subversive and liberatory by *default* because of their willingness to explore queer sexualities also inevitably face a backlash. It is these points of rupture and disjuncture that fan studies must take into account in order to be truly reflective of the diverse and robust levels of debate that characterize contemporary fan spaces.

Notes

- 1 It must be said here that “whiteness” as a monolithic category or default, has been complicated by numerous theorists (Frankenberg 1997; Roediger 1999) and this applies to fandom participants as well. However, as Spivak (1990) has theorized, identity positions are often articulated “strategically” by minority groups in order to gain visibility.
- 2 The Darfur region, located in western Sudan, has been in the grip of civil war since 2003. At one point described by the United Nations as the “world’s worst humanitarian crisis,” the conflict has claimed thousands of lives and has displaced millions more (Flint and Waal 2005).

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Chapter 21

Racebending and Prosumer Fanart Practices in *Harry Potter* Fandom

Jessica Seymour

There's an unspoken rule in literature: Characters are white unless explicitly described otherwise.

(Blay 2015)

The Ralph J. Bunche Center for African American Studies' 2015 report on diversity in Hollywood found that less than half of film leads were played by racial minority actors, despite more than half of frequent moviegoers identifying as coming from a racial minority. Although some minorities were better represented than others, the Bunche Center found that black actors were significantly more likely to appear as leads than Latinx actors. The Bunche Center included *all* racial minorities under one heading, meaning that white actors significantly overwhelmed black actors, Asian actors, Latinx actors, and others. This disproportion exists despite the fact that the films with more relatively diverse casts “enjoyed the highest median global box office receipts and the highest median return on investment” (Ralph J. Bunche Center for African American Studies at UCLA 2015, 2–3). Additionally, these films did extremely poorly in industry awards which were dominated by white judging panels. The 87th Oscars in 2015 drew controversy when none of the twenty actors nominated for awards was a person of color—and, in fact, only 14 black actors have won acting Oscars in the award's history (Ryan 2016). The hashtag #OscarsSoWhite became the rallying point to all viewers who were fed up with the lack of racial diversity in Hollywood's mainstream.

Although there is rich and exciting racial and cultural diversity in the lived experience of consumers, Hollywood—and to an extent, book publishing—has failed to reflect that in the media produced for mainstream consumption. Junot Díaz, during an appearance on the *FanBrosShow* podcast, relates the lack of representation of minorities in mainstream culture to a vampire being unable to see their reflection in the mirror:

[W]hat I've always thought isn't that monsters don't have reflections in a mirror. It's that if you want to make a human being into a monster, deny them, at the cultural level, any reflection of themselves. And growing up, I felt like a monster in some ways. I didn't see myself reflected at all. (Díaz, cited in *FanBrosShow* 2013)

Fans of media that fail to reflect their world beyond the harmful stereotypes traditionally perpetuated in mainstream media have begun combatting this lack of diversity by producing their own works, based on the works of others, which reflects a more inclusive view. This chapter examines how fans creatively engage with race dynamics in the *Harry Potter* world, and how fanartists can create a space for more racially diverse characters and explore cultural expectations and misconceptions. This is an important element of the racebending practice, and also separates it from more toxic expressions of appropriations such as the white practice of “blackface,” which often spreads misconceptions and stereotypes (Padgett 2016).

The *Harry Potter* series is a set of seven novels written by J.K. Rowling that were adapted into eight films between 2001 and 2011. While the directors and crew occasionally changed over the run of the film series, the only significant casting changes were Michael Gambon, who portrayed Albus Dumbledore when the original actor, Richard Harris, passed away, and the character of Lavender Brown, who was recast between *Prisoner of Azkaban* (2004) and *Half-Blood Prince* (2009). The main characters of the book series, Harry, Ron, and Hermione, are played in the films by white actors Daniel Radcliffe, Rupert Grint, and Emma Watson, respectively. The majority of main characters in the series were cast as white actors as well. Exceptions, such as Cho Chang, Dean Thomas, and Kingsley Shacklebolt, provide minor non-white representation in the films, but there was some controversy when Lavender Brown, who was originally played by black actress Jennifer Smith, was recast by white actress Jessie Cave for *Half-Blood Prince*. Lavender Brown was originally a non-speaking role, but when the character was established in the book series as a love interest for Ron Weasley, the film series responded to that news by recasting the role. This chapter is concerned with fans’ reaction to the predominantly white cast in the *Harry Potter* films, and in particular the reactions by fanartists who have visually reimaged these characters as a kind of protest against this homogeneous casting.

The *Harry Potter* series is unique in Young Adult (YA) fiction publishing in that it has never had a movie tie-in version of the book published with the actors from the film on its cover. This is an interesting diversion from expected publishing practice; most YA novels which are adapted to film release movie tie-in editions to attract more readers who may have seen, or will see, the stories on the big screen. Merchandise featuring the characters from the *Harry Potter* series has been sold through various retailers, and while the merchandise usually includes depictions of characters from either their book incarnation or their film incarnation, they are almost universally portrayed as white. But the books remain very clearly identified as separate from the films. This separation has created a fertile playing field for fans to explore their own interpretations of the main characters in the series based on their book descriptions, as well as how they are portrayed in the films, or in direct opposition to both the book and the film if it suits their purposes.

The *Harry Potter* film series provides a visual confirmation of the expectation of whiteness in publishing, but a selection of fans have reacted against this by ‘racebending’ main characters—drawing and editing them as racially diverse. Racebending is a similarly subversive act to genderbending (Seymour 2016) and is common in prosumer fan labor practices where characters who are traditionally viewed as white are drawn or edited as different races. My reading of fandom practices indicates that, while both genderbending and racebending are typically found in both fanfiction and fanart, fanart tends to be the more readily accessible medium for racebending. This is probably due to the visual clues which fanfiction cannot provide—fanfiction, being read and interpreted by a reader, can occasionally leave a space for racial diversity to be overlooked or assumed depending on the reader’s interests. Even racial diversity in published, mainstream fiction can be readily ignored by readers, as was shown in *The Hunger Games* fandom when the book character Rue was portrayed in the film adaptation by actress Amandla Stenberg. Fans went to Twitter to voice their displeasure at this casting choice (Holmes 2012; Sastry 2012; Stewart 2012),

apparently not realizing that Rue was described as having “dark brown skin and eyes” (Collins 2008, 55) in the novels. Fanart, alternately, is much more ‘in your face’ when it comes to racebending. A viewer may disagree with a fanartist’s interpretation, but they cannot ignore it or overlook it as they can in written texts.

Whether the fanartists are reacting against hegemonic representations of the characters in official film adaptations, or whether they consider their art to be filling a descriptive gap in the story, their creative motivations appear from observations of the community to be based on their own personal, social, and cultural desires and expectations. They act in homage to the originary text, but not out of a desire to produce a carbon copy of it. Some fanartists argue that they remain faithful to the series because, although the movies cast the main characters as predominantly white, the books never specify race—indeed, J.K. Rowling herself has come out in support of racebending in fanart since the release of *Harry Potter and the Cursed Child* (Rowling, Tiffany, and Thorne 2016) at the Palace Theatre in London, which cast a black actress to play the middle-aged Hermione Granger. But the racebent fanart does not appear to exist to appease the author—it exists because artists have asserted a space for themselves, to show fans of the books that there is a place for them in the context of that particular fictional world.

Intense feelings and passionate attraction define the fan experience (Jenkins 1992). Fans of the *Harry Potter* series enjoy a dynamic relationship with their originary texts, and they are often engaged in prosumer fan labor such as fanfiction, fanart, crafting, and cosplaying. They are also known for their engagement with social justice issues and charitable causes; the Harry Potter Alliance is a registered charity that works within the fan community to assist in issues important to them (Jenkins 2014), including sourcing books for libraries in developing countries, sending supplies to victims of natural disasters, and ensuring that chocolate used in *Harry Potter* licensed products is fair trade (The Harry Potter Alliance 2016). Their attachment to social justice issues is, arguably, a strong basis for the tradition of racebending that has come out of the *Harry Potter* community.

There have been several strong academic analyses of fanart as a method of expression (Schott and Burn 2004; Brown 2013; Thomas 2013). These analyses have also explored fanart’s cultural impact and the benefits to artists as a result of the practice (Manifold 2009a; Turk 2014; Włodarczyk and Tyminska 2015). Recently, Elizabeth Gilliland (2016) examined racebending across multiple fandoms. This chapter focuses specifically on *Harry Potter* fandom, the artworks themselves, and how fanartists interact with the originary texts and fandom preferences. Fandom is a vibrant rewarding space where the participatory culture is performed both in online and offline spaces. Fans engage with the objects of their affection, sometimes at a distance from their source material, and other times in close proximity to texts, celebrities, or sports practices. For the purposes of this chapter, I will be drawing on creative arts academia from a variety of disciplines in order to inform my understanding of fanart as a practice and the implications of racebending in the fanart community.

In the past, fan studies research within the online space has often employed the methodological theory of netnographic research outlined in Xun and Reynolds (2010). Xun and Reynolds write that this approach is “genuinely anthropological” (18) in that it is driven by observation. The researcher enters the online space, observes the participants and the culture of Internet fandom, and acts as an extension of ethnographic (or non-participant) research based on reflection on a textual discourse or dialogue. Xun and Reynolds presume that online users are aware that their communications on forums and social media are open to public access unless they are password-protected, which suggests that informed consent is not required for academics to analyze these communications.

While this may be true, prosumer fans often post their work online in good faith that they will not be mistreated, disrespected, or co-opted by others for profit. With that in mind, I have made

every effort to seek the consent of the fanartists whose work I am analyzing in this chapter; I have sent drafts of the chapter to the artists in question so that they can see how their work is being used, and asked for their consent in using it. When referring to fanartists, this chapter will use the gender neutral pronoun ‘they’ unless their pronouns are specified in the bio on their webpage, which is often the case in the Tumblr community especially.

Fan/art Studies; Harry Potter and Beyond

Fanart is a new term, born from the contemporary cultural awareness of fan culture and fan labor, but the practice is an old one. An argument could be made, for example, that much of the artwork produced during the Renaissance could be considered a prosumer creative engagement with the Bible as a literary/cultural text. Artists in this period would take liberties with what they considered to be the canon of the religious text, painting whitewashed versions of Middle Eastern characters and creating a community around these representations.

From a Jungian perspective (1969), the pleasure that fans take in the fan phenomenon can be read as an intuitive awareness of the psyche being nourished; to integrate successfully into society and to make sense of the physical and cultural environment, people can engage with protagonists of stories which act as archetypes of humanity. Prosumer fans, in particular, engage critically and creatively with these archetypes through their fan labors. This is as opposed to *consumer* fans, who interact with their chosen media in a less active way—choosing to read and observe without feeling the need to explore the work in alternative spaces such as online communities and conventions.

Through prosumer fan labor, particularly creative works based on the originary text, fans can experiment with sexuality, socio-cultural issues, and issues of race and gender in the safe spaces of their (usually online) communities (Jenkins 2006; Tosenberger 2008). In fact, Gilliland (2016) notes that: “As a living stream of constantly rebirthing images, Tumblr creates a space in which people can be connected by ideas, by emotions, and by a network that allows users to restructure their own sense of identity while also building conceptualizations of a possible future” (5.1). Gilliland writes that the online space also allows users who may not have been directly affected by whitewashing characters in popular media “but with a common interest in this sort of social justice activity” (5.3) to get involved in the community. The anonymity of the online space provides a forum for users from a diverse range of backgrounds to explore social justice issues at varying levels.

In the past two decades, there have been significant strides in fan studies and audience studies, particularly with regard to how fans interact with media on a creative level. Fan cultures have become more engaged with academia as academics have become more comfortable with their aca-fan positioning and have focused their research on media that interests them on a personal as well as professional level. Historically, being part of an audience meant a face-to-face, or crowd-to-face, situation where one person or group is entertaining while another person or group is being entertained (Livingstone 2005). Mass media eliminated the need for this physical colocation (Livingstone 2005), and this allowed audiences to enjoy media from thousands of kilometers away.

Fanartists have interacted creatively with media for many years, but this particular fan labor has not attracted the same academic engagement as other fan labors such as fanfiction (Curwood, Magnifico, and Lammers 2013; Van Steenhuyse 2014; Citton 2015), fan vidding (Coppa 2008; Freund and Fielding 2013; Winters 2014; Freund 2016) and fan tourism (Lundberg and Lexhagen 2014). Research suggests that fanartists are largely a female demographic (Brown 2013) and predominantly self-taught, with nearly 79 percent of fanartists stating that they learn their art through

initially copying commercially made art before experimenting with their own styles and approaches (Manifold 2009a). There has been some significant scholarship that examines fanart as a practice and its benefits to both the artist and culture (Manifold 2009b; Turk 2014), as well as some discussions of fanart as a text for interpretation and examination (Schott and Burn 2004; Brennan 2013). This chapter combines these two approaches by examining the artworks as texts before exploring their potential cultural impact.

Racebending initially developed out of the *The Last Airbender* (2010) fandom as a protest against the whitewashing of Asian and Inuit characters in the live-action movie (see Pande's Chapter 20 in this volume). While the original Nickelodeon series, *Avatar: The Last Airbender* (2005–2008), portrayed these characters respectfully—both in terms of the artistic style and with cultural signifiers to demonstrate a particular race—the live-action movie cast white actors to play the lead characters, while the villains remained as people of color. This established a disturbing racial divide within the story which the original series had seemed to actively avoid. A LiveJournal page, which would eventually become Racebending.com (Lopez 2011), was created for fans to discuss activism approaches and how to engage with the media proactively and productively. Lori Kido Lopez (2011) analyzed how the fans of the series used the skills they'd developed as part of a fandom to transition into activism:

In this case we can see that fans of *The Last Airbender* are able to transition from everyday fans to political activists ... honing their arguments through community discussions, producing and editing multimedia creations, educating themselves about every facet of their issue, and relying on their trusted networks to provide a database of information. (432)

As discussed above, the *Harry Potter* fandom is strongly engaged with fan activism, so the fact that racebending as a tradition began, and remains, an act of activism driven by social justice issues is telling.

Racebending is commonly used in fandoms with predominantly white characters, as it allows people of color to see themselves in these stories. Disney films are regularly criticized for their minimal representation and misappropriation of non-white cultures, and fans have taken it upon themselves to racebend characters from Disney's past (see racebentdisney 2016), establishing inclusivity retroactively. The racebending tradition can be seen across many fandoms which establish an expectation of whiteness—or, at the very least, fail to explicitly create space for people of color to see themselves reflected in that media (see Stanfill's Chapter 19 in this volume). The Marvel fandom (see racebending 2016), *Welcome to Nightvale* fandom (see nightvaleofcolor 2016), and the Tolkien fandom (see hobbitlotrpc 2016) all have strong racebending subcommunities, and there are Tumblr pages dedicated to finding and promoting racebending fanart across all popular fandoms.

Agata Włodarczyk and Marta Tyminska (2015), in their analysis of cultural differences in the *Welcome to Nightvale* (2012–) fandom, write that fan initiatives have the power to counteract insensitive and misleading representations of people of color in popular media. In many cases, fanartists often take pains to ensure cultural sensitivity in their work. These artists, in general, do not want to superficially change a character's race; they want to understand how race and cultural identity would affect the character's experience and how they see the world. Some fans can draw on specific elements of the originary story to build their racebent characters around, while others will incorporate culturally sensitive elements into their fan labor practices. There is an awareness among the community that the artworks may be viewed by people who identify with the culture and race that the characters have been reimagined into, and there is therefore particular attention paid to ensuring accuracy and avoiding insensitive appropriation wherever possible. Tumblr users often debate the racebending of characters, and how alternative interpretations of a character's

race can affect the reaction of the reader to those characters. They also use race to explain some of the characterization and micro-aggressions that they experience in the book canon. Tumblr user spritzel (2015) writes: “and if harry is dark-skinned well kind of explains why the uber-white middle class world of privet drive so easily accepted that this scrawny child in too-big clothes was a ‘criminal’ and ‘disturbed’ and why nobody called the goddam police.”

Tumblr user ginnyweeasly (2015) reblogged the post with their own commentary: “and if hermione is also dark, it adds an interesting factor to the racism she experienced not only in the muggle world but in the wizarding one too, just because of how she was born plus, her freaking out about the slavery thing with the house elves.” These are important points because it places the onus of race not on the physical description of the character, but on the reactions of other characters and the institutions which may contain some institutionalized racism at their core. It allows readers the opportunity to engage directly with a character’s *experience*, rather than their *appearance*, though the physical appearance of visible minorities is also a significant point in these discussions. Tumblr user halfdesiqueen (2015) writes: “Literally everything about hermione as a character is made better if she’s black. Made fun of for hair? Ppl can’t pronounce her name and don’t care enough to try? Casual, overt, and institutionalized racism? Rage over house elves? Fight me.”

As Blay (2015) notes in a *Huffington Post* article, in the case of *Harry Potter* fandom, racebending creates the opportunity for: “a more complex reading of the book series, which has political themes that draw parallels between the Death Eaters and racist hate groups.” Fanartists then take those experiences of characters and the world they are a part of and imagine how a character may look, all while incorporating ideas and images into their work in order to establish the character’s connection to a culture as well as a racial identity.

Sarah Fiona Winters (2014) writes in her analysis of fanvids in teaching environments that “[v]ids can be read in two ways: as creative texts to be analyzed; or as critical analyses of other texts” (239). When examining the fanart in this chapter, I approach each piece as a creative/critical engagement with an originary text which, while potentially able to stand on its own, requires being read concurrently with the original text and the fandom community in order to provide important context. Similarly, Joseph Brennan (2013) uses Barthes’s (1977) image semiotics as a theoretical framework for analyzing fanart in the *Merlin* slash community. Barthes writes that there are certain images which are ideal for analysis because they are “undoubtedly intentional” (270). This can include advertisements and other texts which have a “floating chain” of signifiers and signifieds designed to impart meaning. In fanart, the artist is working within a community of fans while also reacting to a (in most cases) visual text. So there is a ‘floating chain’ of signifiers which can impart meaning to those who know how to read them. Brennan describes this theoretical approach to fanart as “semiotic significance of selection,” and argues that it allows him to examine the intentionality in artistic choice—discussing the importance of particular elements and their significance in meaning-making within a community.

When drawing characters, whether racebent or otherwise, artists will generally incorporate physical characteristics which recognizably belong to that character—whether drawing on book or movie canon, or fanon. “Canon” is any element to the story which is officially endorsed by the writer/producers. Story elements from *Pottermore.com*, for example, are considered canon in the sense that J.K. Rowling wrote much of it, though some fans will ignore the *Pottermore* canon in favor of the book canon, and vice versa. “Fanon” is any element of the story which fans have agreed upon within the community.

In visual art, the visual clues employed by the creators act as a kind of iconographical shorthand (Schott and Burn 2004); like ancient gods drawn in temples and tombs with nothing more than a sickle or a wolf’s head to differentiate them, *Harry Potter* characters have certain physical traits which identify them within the community. Those within the fandom, and even those

outside of the fandom, will recognize some of these elements and identify the characters through them (Thomas 2013). For example, *Harry Potter* fans who draw Harry Potter will include his lightning bolt-shaped scar and circular eyeglasses, as these have been deeply embedded in the fandom's visual memory and make them easily recognizable. The eyeglasses were originally included in the cover art for the books, and then later incorporated in the film's character design and costuming, and are therefore supported by both book canon and film canon. Indeed, any Harry Potter fanart or cosplay which does *not* include the visual clues of the circular glasses and the scar may be misunderstood or thought to be a different character entirely—such as James Potter, or one of Harry's sons.

Hand-Drawn Art

When it comes to racebending fanart, hand-drawn art is a very important tradition in the community. Hand-drawn art is one of the most accessible media for budding artists who want to practice their skills—and in the *Harry Potter* fandom in particular, there is a strong hand-drawn art community. Some artists are so embedded in the community that they are almost considered celebrities and leaders. Their interpretations, and any changes which occur in their interpretations of characters, can be seen as a litmus test for the community.

Burdge, a well-known participant in the *Harry Potter* fandom, has been a practicing fanartist for many years. Her deviantart account was opened in 2007 (Burdge 2016a), and her Tumblr page, where she also showcases her artwork, was opened in 2012 (Burdge 2016b). Initially, Burdge drew the characters as white in her fanart (Burdge 2011). However, Burdge recently began drawing the characters as non-white—shading Hermione and Harry with darker skin tones and positioning them with Ron to indicate the contrast between the three (Burdge 2014). This shows a shift not just in newcomers, or fans who are predominantly interested in social justice issues, but also in well-established artists who appear to be changing their interpretations of main characters along with the rest of the fandom. Ron, as a redhead, is assumed to be white, although fan casts (fans re-casting the film adaptations with actors of color, often in a photo-manipulation, or manip, which will be discussed later in this chapter) of Lily Evans prove that this is not always an assumption that has to be made (see tenderpotter 2015). But Harry and Hermione are described in the books as having darker hair, and so there is more space for fanartists to be creative about these characters' ethnicity.

The important physical markers remain to indicate who the characters are meant to be—Harry's glasses, messy hair, slim figure and scar, and Hermione's bushy hair and large front teeth, but the shading that Burdge uses in her recent artwork indicates that Hermione has darker skin than Harry. This is a common theme in racebending fanart, which often depicts Harry as having Indian heritage. While Burdge's interpretations are interesting, she has long produced her art in the context of the wider *Harry Potter* community—her work is therefore a reflection of that community and the practices which are becoming more prevalent among them.

Tumblr user *transdraco* (2015) also incorporates the community's shorthand into their art by drawing Harry and Hermione with darker skin and the expected physical markers of glasses for Harry, and bushy hair for Hermione. *transdraco* uses black and white coloring, with the only color in the image being the pink hearts around Draco's head, displaying their versions of Harry and Hermione ethnicity through shading of the image. They combine this shading with physical characteristics such as full lips and high cheek bones. *transdraco*'s work is interesting from a sociological perspective because it challenges not only the expectation of whiteness, which was established in the film series, but also the heteronormativity. Fanartists often use their creative license to draw characters in romantic or erotic situations (Brennan 2013; Brown 2013) because

the visual narrative of the canon is often devoid of LGBTQ+ representation. By drawing most of the image in black and white, and using pink for the hearts around Draco's head, *trransdraco* draws attention to the romantic nature of Draco's gaze, which is focused on Harry and Hermione.

While it could be argued that Draco's gaze is directed solely at Hermione, and thus heteronormative, the work is tagged *#drarry*, which is fandom shorthand for the slash relationship between Harry and Draco. This means that the work will appear when Tumblr users search for the keyword (see Kohnen's Chapter 22 in this volume). The tags and caption are an important element of fanart—providing context and the author commentary for the viewers to engage with. *trransdraco*'s depiction of the racebent Harry and Hermione is captioned: “Redraw! The original has the most notes I've gotten on art, so here's a redraw that I put way more effort into. And thanks for all the notes on the original!” This establishes *trransdraco*'s work not as an interpretation which is expected to influence others, but as a site for personal practice and development. This is *trransdraco*'s space to test their artistic abilities and, hopefully, improve by taking a character whose physical characteristics are open to debate, incorporating the visual shorthand recognized by the community, and using this space to examine and reflect on their own creative practice and how they can improve.

Similarly, Tumblr user *Otterp0p*'s (2015) image of Harry and his canon love interest Ginny is captioned with a clarification that the art is a work in progress: “Will I ever have the patience to finish this? PERHAPS NOT but here's a WIP anyway. Just messin around with 20-something G/H.” *Otterp0p* portrays Harry's ethnicity by combining physical characteristics such as a larger nose and high cheekbones with a full color image, and the lightning bolt on his forehead is more stylized than usual. This is an exciting take on the typical iconographical elements to the Harry Potter character—making him recognizable as an older version of the canon character while drawing in newer ideas about his appearance beyond the racebending. *Otterp0p*'s and *trransdraco*'s captions both frame the images as acts of experimentation and exploration.

Fanartists often use existing characters and stories as a baseline so that they can develop their own style, posting their experiments online for the community to engage and comment. This creates a communal atmosphere of exploration where pushing boundaries, trying new things, and incorporating new techniques are not only expected, but encouraged as a part of the medium. *Otterp0p*, in particular, has several tutorials on her Tumblr page for beginning fanartists (*Otterp0p* 2014; 2016a; 2016b), extending the community of homage through shared knowledge. Seen in this light, racebending could be considered an extension of this community of experimentation.

As the racebending style becomes more popular, more artists are inspired. Tumblr user *sharkbomb* (2016) writes in a caption beneath their interpretation of the Golden Trio that: “I saw a thing where *Hermoine[sic]* is black and Harry'd be Indian and hell yeah, more diversity. Why not?” *sharkbomb*'s image incorporates the physical markers expected of Hermione and Harry—the bushy hair, scar, etc.—as well as other physical markers such as Hermione's SPEW badge and Harry's owl. *sharkbomb* also colors the two characters with slightly different shades (giving Harry a more reddish undertone than Hermione) in order to demonstrate their different ethnicities. This is an important point; when racebending characters, special care is usually taken to portray them sensitively. Cultural sensitivity is a deeply important aspect of the Tumblr community, and this is often reflected in the fanart produced. This is also the case in photoshopped images and aesthetic posts which combine the racebent characters with culturally-appropriate imagery.

Manips, Aesthetics, and Film

Manips and aesthetic posts are photoshopped images of real people and images. While manipulations tend to focus purely on the image of a person or character, aesthetic posts are a collage of images which represent a character's personality or storyline. In the case of the *Harry Potter* fandom,

manips are usually images of actors and models as characters from the franchise (a “faceclaim”), while aesthetic posts are usually a combination of images and a faceclaim for the character that the aesthetic post represents. This is seen most frequently in images depicting characters from the Marauders era—that is, the mid-1970s and early-1980s when Harry Potter’s parents were students at Hogwarts—and the era of the Hogwarts founding fathers. In this case, the younger versions of the Marauders and Lily Evans were not cast until the eighth film, while the founders were never included in the film franchise, and so fans would cast their own versions of the characters and photoshop their chosen actors into Hogwarts uniforms.

Fanvids are videos created by fans from one or more media sources, often put to a musical track, exploring characters or stories which are either AU (alternative universe) or canon-compliant (see Freund’s Chapter 13 in this volume). The practice, known as “vidding,” is usually used by shippers who want to manipulate the film footage to celebrate their favorite pairings. As a result, the majority of fanvids use the existing *Harry Potter* footage, which depicts the main cast as white. There are, however, several vlogs (video blogs) from people reacting to racebending in the *Harry Potter* franchise, both in fanart and in recent canon (Betwixt the Books 2015; TheFemaleReviewer 2015).

Manips and aesthetic posts adapt the existing visual media of film and television by casting actors and models—people who could theoretically have played the characters if they had been cast in the roles—as the racebent versions of the characters for the purposes of prosumer fans. They act as a kind of “could have been” for fans, demonstrating the real-world potential for representations of racial diversity by putting living faces to the characters they would like to have racebent. For the purposes of this chapter, I will focus on aesthetic posts because they combine the manip tradition of introducing new actors in the role, at the same time as drawing cultural details into the image so as to avoid a minor or superficial change to the character’s race. Aesthetic posts draw layers of cultural diversity into the character, and are therefore a rich area of study.

In the *Harry Potter* films, Lily Evans is played by white actress Geraldine Margaret Agnew-Somerville. Lily Evans is a difficult character to racebend because, like Ron Weasley, her character is described as having red hair, which limits the number of alternative races she can be portrayed as while maintaining some plausible compliance to canon. This is not always a driving factor for some fanartists, as seen in the racebending aesthetic posts which cast the blond Neville Longbottom as John Boyega (see rhaenys-martell-targaryen 2015), but the element of plausibility does help viewers and readers to suspend their disbelief when engaging in racebent fanart. Their physical traits are, after all, the iconographical shorthand through which fans engage with a piece of fanart. For Lily Evans, this means her red hair and bright green eyes.

Tumblr user tenderpotter (2015) casts Lily Evans as South Korean model and actress Lee Sungkyung. There are three elements to this aesthetic post which, combined, establish Lee as the character of Lily Evans: the faceclaim with the iconographical physical markers, the text within the image, and the caption beneath the image. First, the faceclaim. Lee’s red hair was part of the original image—probably dyed—and so tenderpotter did not need to manipulate that element to make it true to canon. tenderpotter writes in the tags of the aesthetic/manip post that they needed to change Lee’s eyes to make them greener, bringing the image more in line with the book narration that establishes Lily’s eyes green. This is an important point because Lily Evans’ eye color is a defining feature of the character, repeatedly addressed by other characters in both the books as a physical trait which connects her to Harry. The fact that the films failed to establish this physical similarity between Danielle Radcliffe and Ellie Darcey-Alden, who played the young Lily Evans in *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows: Part 2*, has become something of a sticking point within the fandom—the film producers essentially failed to maintain the iconographical standard of physical identifiers that the fans maintain among themselves. By ensuring that this physical trait remains a part of the manipulated image, tenderpotter is able to establish their racebent interpretation

of Lily Evans as acceptable by canon standards and ensures recognizability of the character—tying it to both the canon, in that Lily’s hair is red, and the fandom’s own tradition of racebending.

Second, the text is a very simple font so as not to overwhelm the vibrant colors of the image. The name “Lily Evans” is a clear marker for anyone looking at the image, made particularly important when seen in connection with the third element of the image: the caption. tenderpotter’s caption is not a quote from the *Harry Potter* series, as is usually the case with manips and aesthetic posts, but a quote from Suzanna Arundhati Roy, an Indian author. The caption is a quote from her 2001 Lannan foundation lecture (theskeeboo 2012):

Caption: the only dream worth having is to dream that you will live while you are alive, and die only when you are dead. to love, to be loved. to never forget your own insignificance. to never get used to the unspeakable violence and vulgar disparity of the life around you. to seek joy in the saddest places. to pursue beauty to its lair. to never simplify what is complicated or complicate what is simple. to respect strength, never power. above all to watch. to try and understand. to never look away. and never, never to forget. — arundhati roy

This is a powerful quote, but particularly interesting when seen as an extension of Lily Evans’ character. In this case, tenderpotter has chosen to supplement their visual image with text: not from the book, but from a woman of color speaking about power and joy in the face of injustice, which is arguably a central point to Lily Evans’ character. This creative choice draws in alternative, non-white discussions of injustice in order to explore and extend elements of a racebent character, further supporting the racially diverse fanart tradition and setting the image in among wider discussions of the character traits that Lily Evans as a character is known for.

Tumblr user rhaenys-martell-targaryen (2015) reimagines the “silver trio,” Neville Longbottom, Ginny Weasley, and Luna Lovegood as, respectively, a black actor, a white actress, and an Asian model. rhaenys-martell-targaryen establishes these characters through a combination of new faceclaims, general images pertaining to their personalities, and still frames from the movies. The effect of this combination is a strong and clear connection between the new, racebent characters and their film counterparts—a clear shorthand to the fandom that these new faces are supposed to be read as the original characters.

In Neville Longbottom’s aesthetic, rhaenys-martell-targaryen alludes first to his participation in the Battle at the Ministry of Magic—a defining moment for the character’s arc—with a scene from the film which is framed so that the ethnicity of the characters is unclear. As this is the top left-hand frame, the eye is drawn to this image first. Next, the succulent plants which indicate his love of herbology. As the only member of Dumbledore’s Army (with the exception of Hermione Granger) who excels in herbology, the combination of these two images gives the strong impression of Neville Longbottom, so that by the time the viewer’s eyes come to the new, racebent faceclaim they have already come to understand that this aesthetic post is of Neville Longbottom. The newly racebent character in the fourth frame is therefore foreshadowed and the groundwork laid for the viewer to recognize the new face.

Later, when the viewer comes to Luna Lovegood’s aesthetic, the expectation of racebending has been established so that rhaenys-martell-targaryen only needs to change the color scheme (purple, the color Luna Lovegood wore in the Battle of Hogwarts, juxtaposing her character with the majority of other characters in neutral tones) before introducing the racebent faceclaim in the second frame. By drawing on the images from the film of Luna’s magazine, the *Quibbler*, as well as images of Quidditch players for Ginny Weasley, rhaenys-martell-targaryen establishes the connections to the film canon at the same time that they are actively developing potential racebent alternatives to the white actors who played the characters.

As was the case in the hand-drawn art, most fan artists pay special attention to cultural sensitivity in racially diverse aesthetic posts. Tumblr user a-mei-ling (2015) has produced a number of *Harry Potter*-inspired aesthetics, particularly of the four Hogwarts houses: Gryffindor, Hufflepuff, Ravenclaw, and Slytherin. In a-mei-ling's Ravenclaw aesthetic, she casts an Indian model as Rowena Ravenclaw, the founder of Ravenclaw house, and includes a number of key images in her aesthetic post to imply Ravenclaw's personality and, importantly, her cultural heritage. The viewer is shown Ravenclaw's faceclaim in the first line of images, followed by two significant images which are connected in the *Harry Potter* series with Ravenclaw: books (learning) and the diadem (the item that Voldemort stole as an heir of Ravenclaw and turned into a horcrux).

Unlike rhaenys-martell-targaryen's aesthetic posts, which establish the personality first and then the faceclaim, a-mei-ling seems to be relying on the fact that Ravenclaw was never cast in the films. A viewer will not have a clear idea of her face in their mind before they view the post. rhaenys-martell-targaryen was working against the established expectation of whiteness and the well-known white actors, and so their interpretation required a clearer framing of characterization at the outset. a-mei-ling incorporates not only the faceclaim of a woman of color to stand in for the (presumably) white Rowena Ravenclaw, she incorporates an image of henna tattooed hands in the aesthetic. Henna tattoos are an important element of Hindi and Sikh weddings. By incorporating this particular, identifiable aspect of Indian culture into her work, a-mei-ling draws a cultural connection to support the visual of the re-imagined character. a-mei-ling does the same in her aesthetic post for Godric Gryffindor, which casts a black man as the faceclaim and incorporates visual clues that suggest a central African culture.

Conclusion

Since the *Harry Potter* fandom has made this shift towards racebending in its fanart, the Palace Theatre production of *Harry Potter and the Cursed Child* (2016) cast Swaziland-born Noma Dumezweni to play the middle-aged Hermione Granger, with her daughter Rose cast as Cherrelle Skeete. While the fanart community generally responded positively to Dumezweni's casting, there was a vocal minority of *Harry Potter* fans who responded negatively to what they considered "inconsistency" between the two visual media, with some Twitter users arguing that making Hermione black for the play is an instance of reverse racism.

Hanna @myfriendhanna_: Wait wait wait... Harry Potter and the cursed child.... Hermione is black now... Did I miss something? I'm very confused... 4:58 PM - 14 Jun 2016

N.R. @NadiyaNanoha: Harry Potter had different nationalities in it. Hermione was always white, and it's RACIST to make her black now. 6:25 PM - 30 Jun 2016

NovusOrdoAdOrientem@beaverliciouuss: im still bothered why Hermione became skinny-heck-black in the Cursed Child. i wondered if she touched a portkey and made herself to the sun 9:06 PM - 27 Jun 2016

Vrinda Singh@vsp_vrinda: @jk_rowling I've still not come in terms with a black Hermione. How are you okay with that? Which spell changes the colour of a person?? 1:26 PM - 18 Jun 2016

HappyLittlePill @cikseriaisyah: i know JK Rowling only mention Hermione characteristics not her race in the book, but it kinda awkward u know 9:31 AM - 12 Jun 2016

It is difficult to unpack all of the issues at work here, and many of them are well beyond the scope of this chapter (see Stanfill's Chapter 19 in this volume). But the above sampling of tweets can give an impression of the sorts of arguments and responses that Noma Dumezweni's casting attracted.

The argument that the play is “inconsistent” with the film was not applied to the casting of Paul Thornley, a blond, as the red-headed Ron Weasley, nor was “inconsistency” a concern when the books were adapted into films and the brunette Matthew Lewis was cast as Neville Longbottom, who is described in the books as a blond. The fact that Jessie Cave replaced Jennifer Smith in *Half-Blood Prince* has not been addressed by those Twitter users who take issue with Dumezweni’s casting either. So there is a correlation here between the race of the actor and whether they receive negative criticism when they play the role.

Dumezweni responded to the backlash with a recognition that the initial visual representation of Hermione as a white character has affected how people respond to the casting of a black woman in the role: “... we’ve all grown up with the books, with Emma Watson playing her in the films. Imagery is so strong” (cited in Jones 2016). Fans of the films who were unhappy with Dumezweni’s casting addressed Rowling through Twitter as well, but Rowling responded with her support. She has been quoted in a number of interviews as being in favor of the racially diverse casting (Tan 2015; Hautman 2016), and retweeted several pieces of fanart which depicts Hermione as non-white in order to demonstrate a clear precedent for this interpretation of the character (cited in loquaciousliterature 2015). While there is no clear evidence that the racially diverse fanart produced by the community *caused* the producers to cast Dumezweni in a role which had, until then, been associated with a white actress, the fanart did demonstrate a desire within the fandom for more racial diversity in the series that the producers of the Palace Theatre production were able to address in their casting choices.

But the beauty of fanart is that it has nothing to do with J.K. Rowling’s choices. The racebending of Neville Longbottom (explored above in rhaenys-martell-targaryen’s aesthetic post) ignores both the white actor who plays him in the film and the book’s description that he is blond, and therefore highly likely to be white. The fanart produced by the *Harry Potter* community is not designed to support a hegemonic narrative, it is designed to challenge it by creating a space where young readers and prosumer creators can see themselves in the narratives they love. That is where racebending fanart gets its power.

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Part IV
Digital Fandom

Chapter 22

Tumblr Pedagogies

Melanie E.S. Kohnen

This chapter surveys fandom practices on Tumblr that celebrate, critique, and transform contemporary film and television. I argue that fandom on Tumblr is a pedagogical space: through fannish practices, fans educate one another about identity formation, diversity, media representations, digital technology, and the media industry. These fandom conversations often echo the same concerns or topics that come up in media studies classes. The integration of Tumblr into the classroom allows students to see how fans (and Tumblr users more generally) grapple with the same questions of diversity, texts, technology, and industry they encounter in readings and discussions. Tumblr offers a vibrant creative space centered on visual media and popular culture that can transform students' ideas of who creates complex analyses of media.

I want to begin with two examples that show how fandom, media critique, and pedagogy intersect on Tumblr. My first example is a piece of fanart by shop5 that portrays Steve Rogers aka Captain America as bisexual (Figure 22.1).

The drawing conveys this message by placing Steve in a T-shirt that says "It's Stars AND Stripes" and by painting a small pink-purple-blue bisexual pride flag on his cheek. This fanart challenges viewers to reconsider what they know about the character and to ask, what if Captain America were revealed as bisexual in the Marvel Cinematic Universe (MCU)? Another Tumblr user reposted this piece of fanart and expanded the drawing's provocation into a meta post about the significance of imagining Steve Rogers as bisexual, focusing on the question, "why are there so few bisexual characters in comics and the media at large?" (shipperhipster 2016). Specifically, in arguing for the possibility of Steve being bisexual, the author lists a number of reasons that simultaneously provide evidence from the MCU and educate readers about the absence of bisexuality in the mainstream media. Regarding the MCU, the author writes, "his hesitance to jump feet-first into an all-woman dating pool could be Marvel's subtle way of telling the audience there's more, he's looking for more." She continues, "[b]i-erasure is real: As much as our society has marched towards equality, there's still tons of misunderstanding about bisexuality," and then proceeds to dismantle a number of stereotypes attached to bisexuality. Thus, in arguing for imagining Steve as bisexual, the author also educates her audience about bisexuality. As a final point, the author addresses the media industry, wondering whether or not Marvel would risk loss of profits if they revealed that Captain American is bi. The author denies that possibility: "For that handful of bigots they would lose, thousands more gay, lesbian, bisexual, and questioning people would see THIS Marvel movie, even if they normally



Figure 22.1 Bisexual Steve Rogers, shop5
Source: Courtesy of Abigail Shaffer.

wouldn't be the usual audience." Many fans on Tumblr share this sentiment: a greater degree of diversity would lead to greater profits because audiences want more diversity; a 2016 *Variety* study also suggests that more diversity could lead to higher profits for Hollywood's film industry (McNary 2016). Overall, many fanworks on Tumblr combine a demand for more diversity with a pedagogical element that explains why this increase in diversity is necessary and desirable. It is these types of fanworks and discussions that I want my students to come across when engaging with Tumblr because they illustrate how scholarly and popular debates around diversity echo one another.

My second example of the intersections among fandom, media critique, and pedagogy on Tumblr relates to precisely such an encounter between a student and Tumblr fan discussions. As Assistant Professor of Rhetoric and Media Studies at Lewis & Clark College, I teach a variety of classes in Media Studies. My students participate on Tumblr by reblogging content or creating original posts. For my Introduction to Rhetoric and Media Studies course, one student reblogged a fan-made GIF set of Viola Davis discussing the lack of complex roles for black women in Hollywood (GIF stands for Graphics Interface Format and designates a short looping animated image; Figure 22.2). The GIF set pairs four GIFs with text that transcribes Davis's statements; the GIFs act as a summary of Davis's interview and capture its most salient points. Fans frequently circulate content like Davis's remarks to take a stance on the absence or insufficient diversity in film and television. My student reblogged this GIF set and related it to a previous class discussion about race on television by explaining that black characters often "are less three dimensional than other (white) characters and are less fully developed ... This is not an accurate representation—humans are complicated and confused and ambiguous, but usually only the white people cast are displayed with these more realistic traits."

My student's post was reblogged by another Tumblr user, whose bio reveals that she identifies as a fan. This fan added her own comment by explaining that "even when the black character is just as well or even more developed [*sic*], and multi dimensional as the white character ... white



conzyricamora:

Viola Davis Talks Diversity in Television and Film

Just another example of how, even though black people may be represented in television, their roles are typically confined to the comedian, the caretaker, or the strong character. Often times, they are less three dimensional than other (white) characters and are less fully developed. Their character can be described easily and simply and there is no ambiguity. This is not an accurate representation—humans are complicated and confused and ambiguous, but usually only the white people cast are displayed with these more realistic traits.

(via [werepresent](#))

Figure 22.2 Introduction to Rhetoric & Media Studies Tumblr post

fandom will then completely ignore anything both the writers and actor put into said character, and pigeonhole them into those clichés.” Here, the fan remarks on the fact that fandom can be complicit in perpetuating the ideological dominance of white characters in mainstream media by focusing fanworks on white characters rather than on characters of color (a point that has come up more frequently in recent years, for example regarding *Star Wars: The Force Awakens*, Pande 2017). This fan’s comment allowed my student to gain a broader perspective of fandom’s engagement (or lack thereof) with racial diversity. Moreover, this was an exciting and valuable pedagogical moment in which a student gained a first-hand experience of a critical media discussion that is typical of Tumblr users, especially among fans. It is those kinds of discussions that make Tumblr a useful platform for a variety of classes.

In addition, the Tumblr interface allows for the easy sharing of multiple types of media, which can create a vibrant backchannel or platform for multimodal assignments. Specifically, the interface and fan practices on Tumblr focus on the archiving and circulation of visual media—another feature that makes it useful for courses on media and culture. Moreover, Tumblr emphasizes participation and community as a core feature of its infrastructure, which is a central reason why I have included it in my classes. As a platform with a distinct digital culture, Tumblr can foster meaningful participation and collaboration in the classroom. I call this collaborative creation and analysis of contemporary media Tumblr pedagogy. Both fans and students participate in Tumblr pedagogies; they happen inside and outside of the classroom. Indeed, I hope that the integration of Tumblr pedagogies can help to break down that divide. Discussing fandom as classroom, Paul Booth (2015a) argues that “Once formal schooling is complete, one’s fandom may be

one of the only places where one is encouraged to think critically, to write, to discuss deeply, and to make thoughtful and critical judgments about hegemonic culture.” Calling upon Tumblr pedagogies, I invite students to experience critical fan culture while they are still students so they can see how the concepts they study in class resonate and have meaning outside of class as well.

Fandom and Tumblr

Tumblr was founded in 2007 by David Karp and bought by Yahoo in 2013. As of October 2016, Tumblr consisted of 318 million blogs, 140 billion posts, and 399 employees (<https://www.tumblr.com/about>). In contrast to other blogging sites such as WordPress or Blogger, Tumblr’s central feature is not the publication of original content, but rather the reblogging of other users’ posts. It is not unusual to see a post that has been reblogged thousands of times; some posts have been reblogged over a million times, as documented on <http://amillionnotes.tumblr.com/>. With the click of one button, each Tumblr user can re-publish another user’s post on their own account. A comment field allows a user to add their own thoughts or images to the reblogged post. This almost instantaneous sharing of content has contributed to Tumblr’s current popularity. For users who wish to create posts, Tumblr’s interface makes it easy to share a variety of media forms, including text, links, audio, images, and video. Visual content dominates Tumblr, which is another divergence from older types of blogging and blogging platforms that focus on text as the central medium of exchange. Some of the main characteristics of Tumblr as a base for fandom practices include the circulation of GIFs and the multivalent use of tags.

GIFs have become the visual currency of Tumblr. Among fandom users, GIF sets capture favorite moments from films and TV shows; single GIFs often appear as short-hand visual reaction in support of or as a challenge to other people’s posts. GIF sets can function as a summary of a moment or scene, in which each GIF captures one shot, featuring a text overlay that transcribes the dialogue. These kinds of GIF sets often appear in the wake of the first airing of a television episode or the premiere of a film. Their main function is to allow fans to relive and rewatch key moments in a media text. GIF sets can also capture character and story arcs, or juxtapose multiple TV programs or films to point out commonalities. These sets are more transformative and exceed a simple summary. Rather, they offer a fan’s perspective on characters, story arcs, or intertextual moments. As Louisa Stein (2016) observes, transformative and meta GIF sets “select particular moments from the source text, some highly recognizable, some not, and recontextualize them among one another, in so doing revealing or establishing new visual and thematic patterns.” The approach featured in transformative GIF sets recalls the long-standing fan practice of *vidding* (Booth 2015b). Indeed, instead of featuring canonical dialogue, these meta GIF sets may feature song lyrics as an interpretative lens for the GIF set (Stein 2016). Standalone GIFs capture a key reaction or moment from a film or TV show: they are “distillations of pure affect: a confidently striding posse, an eye-rolling outsider,” as Michael Newman (2016) argues. It is this concentration of affect that allows GIFs to transcend their original context of a specific moment in a text or fandom and become a widely understood shorthand for a particular emotion, used even by those who do not know the original meaning or context of the GIF. Instead of typing up a comment, Tumblr users might use a GIF or string of GIFs to convey the emotions evoked by another user’s post, by a new episode of their favorite TV show, or even by events in their own lives. GIFs are thus a significant way of communicating among Tumblr users that rely on shared conventions and literacies.

In addition to GIFs, tagging is another key feature of Tumblr that is extensively used by fans. User-generated tags function as Tumblr’s main organizational tool. There is no central directory of Tumblr; all searches on the site rely on users’ tags, which can make searching for content difficult. Tags serve multiple functions: first, they help to organize posts into thematic categories

Tumblr). It is also important to keep in mind that Tumblr fandom is a vast space with many different clusters of interest whose participants develop their own specific practices. Due to the central importance of reblogging, even a single Tumblr blog may feature a wide variety of fanworks and practices. As Paul Booth (2016) observes, “[i]t is impossible to talk about Tumblr’s influence on fandom because *every Tumblr blog is a cacophony of voices*” (223).

As the brief discussion of GIFs and tagging illustrates, fandom has developed a set of implicit conventions for sharing content on Tumblr over the past few years. Tumblr began to replace LiveJournal as main hub of fandom activity around 2012 (for a brief history of fandom on LiveJournal and in earlier online spaces, see Hellekson and Busse 2006; Bury 2016; De Kosnik 2016). Fans bring up a number of reasons why the migration to Tumblr happened, including the increasing difficulty of using LiveJournal after the Russian company SUP bought LiveJournal (Fanlore “Livejournal”). These difficulties included downtime due to DOS attacks related to the use of LiveJournal as forum for political protest among Russian users, and changes in the interface that disrupted fan practices, including the removal of subject headings for comments. Another reason for the migration to Tumblr includes the origin of massive new fandoms for the band One Direction and the TV program *Glee* on Tumblr. These fandoms put Tumblr on the map as a fandom platform (Romano 2015; Fanlore “LiveJournal”). Some fans trace the decline of LiveJournal farther back to two events in 2007, namely, the creation of a commercial fanfiction archive by the company FanLib and the so-called “Strikethrough” event (see Chin’s Chapter 15 in this volume). FanLib’s proposed archive alienated fans due to the Terms of Service that claimed all rights to the content uploaded to the site and led to discussions about the need for a fan-run non-profit archive (Astolat 2007). During Strikethrough, LiveJournal deleted a number of fandom blogs that were (falsely) accused of hosting child pornography. As a reaction, fans looked for other safe spaces to host fanfiction and fanart, which initiated a splintering of fandom across several blogging sites (although many continued to cross-post content to LJ). Another consequence from Strikethrough and FanLib was the founding of the Organization for Transformative Works (OTW), a non-profit organization advocating for fans’ rights, and the OTW’s creation of the Archive of Our Own (AO3), a central space for posting fanfiction (for a detailed overview of the OTW’s founding, see De Kosnik 2016, especially Chapter 3). As the publication of fanfiction was one of the main fannish activities on LiveJournal, the creation and increasing popularity of the AO3 supplanted one of LiveJournal’s central functions for fandom. The decrease of new content on LiveJournal and the increase of content, especially visual content, on Tumblr, pushed even those fans who preferred the interface and LJ-specific fandom interaction to Tumblr. As one fan stated in response to a “How to start conversations and make friends on Tumblr” post: “my friends are sad at the moment because tumblr is such a weird and uncommunicative place compared to LJ fandom” (hellotailor 2013). Currently, AO3 remains a central site for the publication of fanfiction while much of the day-to-day fandom life happens on Tumblr.

In many ways, Tumblr is what we might call the private side of fandom where fans mostly talk among themselves without engaging with actors, producers, or other media industry professionals. In contrast, Twitter often serves a more outward-facing purpose, i.e., is a site where fandom renders itself visible to celebrities and the media industry at large for the purposes of live-tweeting or other types of quantifiable interactions. While the film and TV industry has ventured onto Tumblr to interface with fandom—for example, by setting up Tumblr accounts for popular TV shows—this engagement remains limited. While industry-driven Tumblr accounts imitate the fandom-specific use of Tumblr’s interface, their engagement often does not move beyond the level of imitation, with a few noteworthy exceptions, such as the official Tumblr accounts for MTV’s *Teen Wolf* and for a number of Freeform’s programs, such as *The Fosters* or *Shadowhunters* (Tumblr accounts associated with web series such as *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* often demonstrate an even deeper understanding of fan practices due to their actors and creators’ personal involvement on

Tumblr, Stein 2015, 166ff). The *Teen Wolf* Tumblr introduced the practice of “live-GIFing,” i.e., the production and posting of GIFs from an episode of *Teen Wolf* as the episode airs on TV (Willard 2016). The producers’ direct access to the text provides the official Tumblr account with a crucial temporal advantage as fans need to wait until after the episode has aired to gain access to the text via torrenting sites. Being able to post a GIF first means that it will be among the most heavily circulated among fans eager to share content from an episode in-progress. Moreover, as the official Tumblr attaches the MTV logo to their GIFs, these official GIF sets “function simultaneously as fanwork fodder and promotional material” (Willard 2016). Lesley Willard argues that live-GIFing and the release of high-quality promotional GIFs co-opt fandom practices and distribution channels. Indeed, one could see this as an intervention into directing fans’ conversations about the episode in certain ways as GIF sets highlight specific moments and thus deems them as particularly important. But the official GIFs only represent a first wave, and fans catch up within hours, supplying those moments that have been left out of the official live-GIFing. Fans’ content production, including GIFs and fanfiction, is a continuous stream of content while official Tumblrs post in bursts centered around episodes. Fans may happily reblog GIFs and videos posted by industry Tumblr accounts, but the centers of fandom on Tumblr reside elsewhere, often away from the eyes of the industry.

Tumblr conventions around tagging and GIFs may be difficult for students to grasp at first, but they offer a rich insight into how users engage with a digital platform, transform media texts, and engage with the media industry. For example, a discussion of the tensions between industry-produced and fan-produced GIFs can enrich a class focused on the contemporary media industry, especially to highlight industrial strategies of audience engagement and the varied embrace of these practices by fans. Similarly, a discussion of tagging conventions fits into a variety of classes stretching from digital media to linguistics. As introduction to GIFs and tagging, I have found it useful to share many posts that exemplify these practices in the first few weeks of the semester and to set some time aside in class to discuss them. While this is not a replacement for an immersion into Tumblr culture, it is a gateway to understanding and identifying these practices on Tumblr, and hopefully, to integrate them into students’ own Tumblr posts.

Tumblr and Social Justice

In the more private corners of Tumblr fandom, one can often find a direct engagement with discourses of diversity and social justice. In general, Tumblr serves as a platform for identity exploration and community formation, especially for LGBTQ and trans youth (see Allison McCracken’s (2013a, 2013b) series of blog posts about LeakyCon 2013). Similarly, fandom and activism have a long entangled history. It is thus perhaps not surprising that fandom on Tumblr also often includes discussions of diversity in media representation and the intersections of fandom and social justice.

In terms of Tumblr as a platform for queer identity exploration, it is both the content and the affordances of the interface that create a queer space on Tumblr. Alexander Cho (2015) observes that the mix of visual content on Tumblr encompasses everything from personal narratives and pornography to landscape and architecture photographs (43). Together, this stream of images creates a sense of “intimacy, assembly, intensity, and aesthetic” (44). Similarly, Marty Fink and Quentin Miller (2014) argue that aspects of Tumblr’s interface such as sharing content through reblogging and non-organizational tagging enable practices of “wrestling trans sexualities out of a white, middle-class, cisgender (non-trans), mass-consumption paradigm and toward an individually tailored, polyvocal, margin-based, and personalized form of distribution” (612). Cho, Fink, and Miller argue that Tumblr constitutes an important space where queer and trans* identity formation

and performance happen. They also worry about the impact of Yahoo's purchase of Tumblr in 2013. For example, Fink and Miller (2014) state that "[t]hese networks [of trans Tumblr users] are particularly vulnerable to and potentially jeopardized by the advertising-marketing-demographics interests signaled by the sale" (616). Similar worries were shared by fans; after all, fans have experienced multiple sites turning hostile toward fanworks, such as the video hosting site Imeem, which went from welcoming fan vids to banning all remix content from their site (Russo and Coppa 2012). For the most part, Yahoo has not introduced changes that radically alter Tumblr's interface or functionality; perhaps most significantly, Yahoo has not banned adult content from the site. Tumblr briefly removed the possibility of searching for adult content on its mobile app, but restored that functionality. Despite the lack of major changes, it is important to keep in mind that Tumblr and Yahoo have ultimate control over the back-end of the site—the software, servers, and data centers—and thus over users' data. On the front-end—the interface where users interact—users seem to have the agency to create "a personalized form of distribution," to borrow Fink and Miller's words. Ultimately, however, the control over the back-end is decisive (which is precisely why the fans who founded the Archive of Our Own, a prominent fanfiction archive, insisted on having control over both the front- and the back-end of archive; for more on the tensions between the front- and back-end of social media, see Stalder 2012).

Fandom overlaps with the queer and trans spaces on Tumblr in three main ways: (1) fans who identify as LGBTQ and/or trans; (2) fanworks that one can identify as queer cultural production; and (3) fans' against-the-grain exploration of Tumblr's interface in ways that echo Fink and Miller's observations. Fan scholars have long argued for the possibility of seeing fandom and fan practices as queer spaces and undertaking (Lothian, Busse, and Reid 2007). Abigail De Kosnik (2016) argues that "Fan archives are queer archives. I make this assertion not only based on the counts of queer users of fan archives generated by the archives themselves . . . but also on the ways that fan archives 'count' in the lives of fans" (148). The value of queer fan spaces comes through in this fan's statement:

When I discovered fandom, many many years ago long before tumblr existed, I was a minor feeling very confused and and alone with regards to my sexuality. Instead of corrupting or traumatizing me, fandom welcomed me with open arms and provided a safe, supportive space to explore all of those feelings. (cherrybina 2013)

This type of identity exploration via fan practices and fan interactions continues on Tumblr. Indeed, it is a significant part of Tumblr pedagogies: by sharing experiences, writing fanfiction, and producing fanart that address LGBTQ identities, fans participate in an ongoing conversation about what it means to be queer in our current moment, both in the United States and beyond.

Considering fandom's frequent involvement in non-normative practices and identities, it should not come as a surprise that fans are invested in activism and social justice, especially around diversity in the media. For fans on Tumblr, involvement in fandom and concern for social justice exist on the same spectrum. Kaitlyn Dowling, Content Director at Women Online, describes her exploration of One Direction fandom on Tumblr and observes that in the wake of a grand jury deciding not to indict police officer Darren Wilson for shooting Michael Brown in Ferguson, MO, fans began sharing their outrage about the decision. Dowling argues that "[c]onsidering the sheer number of notes Ferguson posts received, I think it's reasonable to assume a huge segment of Tumblr's users saw at least some Ferguson-focused content on Monday night—regardless of what the blogs they follow typically focus on" (Dowling 2014). In addition to serving as an example of the continuity between fandom and social justice, One Direction fans' concern about the events in Ferguson also pushes back against the idea that fandom/participating in online culture—especially something like boy band fandom—is a form of escapism from so-called "real life."

Fans also make direct connections between their fandom and activism (Brough and Shresthova 2012). Some fannish activism faces outward: fans find their way to political protest or social

justice-oriented charity work through fandom and fandom organizations like the Harry Potter Alliance, which focuses on enhancing “equality, human rights, and literacy” (Harry Potter Alliance 2015). Among other things, the Harry Potter Alliance has distributed 250,00 books world-wide and raised enough funds to send five cargo planes of supplies to Haiti after the earthquake in 2010 (Harry Potter Alliance 2015; for more on the HP Alliance, see Jenkins 2012). Fan activism can also face inward, directed at changing fans’ attitudes toward diversity and moving fan practices toward including a higher degree of diversity (see De Kosnik 2016, especially “RaceFail and Social Justice Fandom” 182ff, and the special issue “Race and Ethnicity in Fandom” edited by Robin Anne Reid and Sarah N. Gatson in *Transformative Works and Cultures*).

In both types of fan activism, Tumblr’s organization of the dashboard as a stream of images contributes to an integration of activism and fandom that does not divide the two. As such, one can easily find a call to action followed by a GIF set followed by a piece of fanfiction, or even a call to action or a statement on diversity that comes in form of a GIF set or a piece of fanart, thus seamlessly blending fandom and concerns over social justice. An example of fanart as activism is the practice of racebending, i.e. the replacement of a film’s white cast with actors of color in fanart, which I discuss below (and see also Seymour’s Chapter 21 in this volume).

Fannish Pedagogies on Tumblr

Fans’ investment in issues of diversity and social justice frequently connect protest to education—that is, fans will call out problematic issues of representation in the source text or in fan productions both to call attention to these issues and to educate fellow fans about them. For example, fans will blog in protest of stereotypical representations of queer, female, and/or characters of color, often connecting current characters and storylines to tropes and patterns that stretch back decades. Recently, fans have also spoken out against the practice of whitewashing via casting practices, that is, film adaptations that cast white actors for characters that are described as people of color in the original text, as happened with *The Last Airbender*, *Dr. Strange*, or *Ghost in the Shell*, to name just a few. Fans’ protest can take several forms: written and visual meta that draws on ideas also found in (and perhaps inspired by) cultural studies, and the creation of fanart and fanfic that shows greater degrees of diversity than the source text.

The fan practice of “racebending” is instructive as it merges protest, education, and fan creativity. It originated in fan protests against the 2009 film *The Last Airbender*. As discussed by Seymour in Chapter 21 in this volume, *The Last Airbender* is a live-action film adaptation of an animated series that constructs a fantastical universe deeply embedded in Asian cultural traditions; the cast of the film, however, is mostly white. Fans tracked the whitewashing of *The Last Airbender* from casting announcements to the release of the film (Lopez 2012, 433). Moreover, fans came together to form racebending, “an international grassroots organization of media consumers who support entertainment equality” (Racebending 2017). While the founders of this organization define racebending as “situations where a media content creator (movie studio, publisher, etc.) has changed the race or ethnicity of a character” and as a “Hollywood practice that has been historically used to discriminate against people of color,” fans on Tumblr have adopted the term for a practice that does the opposite (Racebending 2017). As a fannish practice, racebending allows fans to bend the racial background of characters to their will: fans create photo or GIF sets featuring actors of color as a suggested replacement for a majority white cast. While fans have transformed the sexual identities of characters for decades by writing slash, racebending as a practice is tied more closely to the visual focus of fandom on Tumblr and to a higher degree of attentiveness to issues of race in fandom in recent years.

Racebending is a practice that stretches across genres and fandoms, from *Friends* to *The Avengers* to *Star Wars*. For example, a photo set entitled “A Game for a Different Throne”



Figure 22.3 Racebending *Game of Thrones*
Source: Courtesy of Bhujerban.

reimagines *Game of Thrones* in an Asian setting with Asian actors including Fan Bing Bing as Cersei Lannister and Takeshi Kaneshiro as Renly Baratheon (bhujerban 2013, Figure 22.3).

In a similar photo set, a fan casts the role of Newt Scamander in *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them* with black British actor Nathan Stewart Jarrett, adding the tag “because poc newt is the best newt” (thatcupofjo; for an in-depth analysis of racebent fan art in *Harry Potter* fandom, see Seymour’s Chapter 21 in this volume) (Figure 22.4).

Even though most Tumblr posts featuring racebending do not include an explanation for why this user decided to cast these actors, the photos alone intervene in both mainstream media and in fandom practices. The appearance of a racebent photo set on someone’s dash can disrupt their notion of how to (re)imagine characters’ racial backgrounds and to alert them to the pervasive whiteness of mainstream Hollywood film (especially in fan-favorite genres such as science fiction, fantasy, or superheroes). As De Kosnik (2016) argues, these types of fanworks address a lack in the “metaphorical archive constituted by studio films and broadcast and cable programs” (168). In creating racebent images, fans simultaneously voice their protest against mainstream media and encourage fellow fans to think beyond the whiteness of many feature film casts—after all,



Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find them • Newt Scamander

posted 3 years ago on 14th september

tags: newt scamander, fantastic beasts and where to find them, harry potter, fb&wtft, racebending, because poc newt is the best newt, wo de.

4,205 notes

Figure 22.4 Racebending *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them*

transformation is at the heart of fannish engagement. Racebending and similar fan practices such as fanfiction challenges centered on characters of color declare “an agenda for fandom, as a collective, to answer the erasure, exclusion, and diminishment of characters of color from the archive of media” (De Kosnik 2016, 169; for more on racebending, see Lopez 2012; Gilliland 2016).

Interpreting racebending as an agenda for fandom also highlights its place as part of Tumblr pedagogies: it educates fans by drawing attention to racist casting practices in Hollywood films and encourages fans to create more diverse alternatives. In terms of classroom pedagogy, these types of discussions about race and representation are a valuable addition not only to courses focusing on fandom, but to a wide variety of classes engaged with media and cultural studies: students can observe that people outside of academia are deeply involved in discussing and thinking about the theoretical ideas students encounter in the classroom. As I will discuss later, I have designed an assignment that helps students to accomplish this.

In addition to fan discussions and protests sparked by specific events, some fans bring together fandom and social justice in a day-to-day engagement. Some fans even understand Tumblr fandom

as a feminist space. As Aja Romano (2014) argues, “I believe feminism thrives on Tumblr *because* fandom thrives on Tumblr; because they were always hand-in-hand as ways to actively engage with and deconstruct the narratives you’ve been given, whether that narrative is ‘See this dude? He’s so totally straight’ or whether it’s ‘The patriarchy works.’” This convergence is exemplified by a Tumblr account called “Fandom and Feminism.” As the name suggests, the user running this account posts a mix of typical Tumblr fan content such as GIF sets and discussions that highlight feminist and social justice issues in fandom and beyond. For example, a recent string of posts includes: a GIF set of *Moana*, celebrating the main character; a GIF set of *Supergirl*, celebrating the program’s lesbian coming out storyline; a pro-choice statement and the ensuing discussion about abortion rights with other Tumblr users. Seen in context on the user’s Tumblr, even the fandom posts about *Moana* and *Supergirl* reveal their activist undertone: both celebrate female characters and issues of diversity (in the case of *Moana*, Disney’s first film about Asian Pacific Islander culture, and in the case of *Supergirl*, the program’s thoughtful storyline about coming out later in life). Since Fandom and Feminism deliberately mixes fannish and political posts, the intersection of fandom and activism becomes particularly obvious here. In a way, Fandom and Feminism is a microcosm that mirrors Tumblr and Tumblr pedagogies at large. Following a Tumblr like Fandom and Feminism in class provides a particularly good entry point into understanding how seamlessly some fans integrate their fannish activities and their concerns for social justice.

Tumblr users’ online education and dialogue around social justice issues can also extend into offline spaces such as the fan conventions LeakyCon and GeekGirlCon. LeakyCon originated as a Harry Potter fan convention, but has developed into a multi-fandom convention that also includes a panel track on Young Adult literature. Discussing LeakyCon 2013, Louisa Stein (2015) describes the convention as a “hub for an intersection of largely female, queer-friendly youth cultures who use the media around them for their own (not necessarily normative) ends” (172). Having attended a LGBT meet-up at the same LeakyCon, Allison McCracken (2013b) observes that “Tumblr, specifically, was repeatedly cited by fans as providing *the* vital space for in-depth, supportive discussions on the topic of their own sexual and gender identities.” The importance of Tumblr as a space of discussion of and learning about queer identities comes into even sharper relief at GeekGirlCon. The con celebrates the accomplishments of women in fields where they are often excluded, such as STEM, comics, and gaming, and aims to create a strong female community at geek-focused events (“About”). Many of the panels have an explicit focus on issues of diversity. For example, the 2016 program includes “Saving Sci-Fi & Fantasy: POC, Women, & LGBTQ Voices Saving the Genre” and “Geektivists, Geek Grrls, & Gaymers: Hacking Popular Culture in the 21st Century.” Allison McCracken and Jen Kelly (2014) argue that spaces like Geek Girl Con and Tumblr offer education on issues missing from the public school curriculum. Regarding their on-site research, they remark that “[m]any of the young panelists at GeekGirlCon made the point that they learned about feminist criticism, intersectionality, and social inequities from social media and at cons, not from the traditional public education system” (McCracken and Kelly 2014). McCracken’s insights underline the significance of Tumblr pedagogies: they take place in spaces where young fans interact and they try to provide a safe space for an engagement with important social issues that are not part of formal schooling, at least not at the pre-college level.

Fandom and Tumblr in the Classroom

Integrating fandom into the classroom always poses a challenge: fandom is a complex social practice that is unfamiliar to the majority of students. Outside of a class focused on fandom, it is difficult to convey the intricacies of fannish practices, especially those on Tumblr, to students. Despite those challenges, teaching fandom can form a rewarding and important part of class. As

Paul Booth (2015a) argues, “[f]andom can offer a bastion of critical thinking in a world of conformity. In other words, we need to teach how to be critical and thoughtful fans in a world increasingly hostile to affect.” Tumblr pedagogies are one example of fandom’s non-conformist thinking. I selectively incorporate aspects of Tumblr fandom into my classes. Even when my classes do not touch on Tumblr fandom in a direct way, students usually come into contact with fandom on Tumblr due to how widespread fandom and fanworks are on Tumblr, as the example from the beginning of my chapter illustrates. Those chance encounters demonstrate Tumblr pedagogies to students; in addition, I model Tumblr pedagogies through the posts I reblog, tag, or create for my students.

My approach to integrating Tumblr pedagogies consists of picking different aspects of fandom depending on the course. For example, in a course on digital media, I emphasize how fans use digital tools and platforms like Tumblr to distribute fanworks and how fan practices like vidding challenge copyright laws. Participating on Tumblr allows my students to experience many of the principles of digital media that emerge from course readings and case studies. Thus, I use the features of Tumblr to weave theoretical explorations of copyright, privacy, interface design, user-generated content, etc. into a lived experience that shapes students’ encounters with digital media. I often design small group work focused on exploring Tumblr’s Terms of Service (TOS) with the goal of getting students to realize how their interactions on Tumblr are shaped by the TOS even if they are not directly made aware of that.

In a class centered on media and cultural analysis, I choose a different focus by introducing fans as a specific type of very engaged audience and the media industry’s relationship with fans. I also highlight discussions about race, gender, and sexuality that circulate on Tumblr. In this case, my students frequently contribute the same kinds of short analytical posts of media texts that fans also produce (except that I ask my students to add an explanatory note to their video or image posts whereas fans often incorporate the explanation into the images themselves, as with the song lyrics added to GIF sets that I mentioned earlier).

I want to highlight a few components of my assignment design that I have found crucial to the successful integration of Tumblr into my classes. I exclusively use Tumblr as a backchannel in my classes, where Tumblr runs in the background of my class as a platform for discussion and sharing of examples related to class (there are also other ways of using Tumblr, e.g., as an image repository for a class called *Queer Visual Culture* (Sikk 2016), as a collective digital archive for *Gender, Race & Empire* (Murillo 2015)). As every course can only include a limited number of topics, one of my Tumblr goals is the creation of a space where everyone can introduce additional material. Occasionally, students will also use Tumblr as repository to archive in-class work. A crucial component of my Tumblr assignment is the collective ownership of the backchannel. As I explain in the assignment guidelines, “We will use Tumblr to share news, art, and activism about and involving digital media. Everyone shares the same username and password—this means everyone also takes responsibility for curating the posts and reblogs that appear on our Tumblr account” (Kohnen 2012). Sharing one account among the entire class creates an immediate sense of shared space and collaborative creation of content; as such, this assignment component draws on important principles of participatory culture a defining feature of Web 2.0 and social media (Jenkins 2006; the shared account also cuts down on logistical issues such as everyone needing to keep track of twenty or more different accounts). Everyone identifies their individual contributions via tags that can consist of a real name or a pseudonym, which allows students to maintain a level of anonymity in their posts. Once again, making this decision allows students to experience defining features of fandom and digital media more broadly—in this case, identification vs. anonymity, online and offline identities—that become topics of discussion in my digital media classes. I also try to encourage and model the type of free-form tagging that characterizes fans’ way of tagging, but this type of tagging is usually only adopted by students who have previous exposure to Tumblr

culture. Another defining feature of my Tumblr pedagogy is the appointment of a weekly curator. As a way to ensure that new material will regularly appear on our Tumblr, I ask one student to take up the role of Tumblr curator and be responsible for adding and reblogging posts related to our topic of the week. I encourage all other students to contribute as well but leave the parameters of participation open.

The first time I used Tumblr in a course, I noticed that it was mostly the designated Tumblr curator who contributed most of the posts, and other students only contributed sparingly. Pondering solutions to this dilemma, I finally realized that the missing component of the assignment was bringing the backchannel into the foreground of class meetings. The main purpose of Tumblr, after all, is to circulate photos, GIFs, video clips, quotes, news, and thoughts via reblogging posts. A single post can be reblogged thousands of times, indicating its importance to thousands of individual users. Similarly, my students wanted to talk about the posts that they had made and seen on our Tumblr—they wanted to share what they found important about their contributions. Once we set aside the beginning of class meetings to talk about the latest posts that had appeared on our Tumblr, participation took off. In subsequent classes, I have always set aside time in class to look at and talk about the content on our Tumblr.

Over the course of one semester, it is not unusual for students to generate 400–500 posts of original and reblogged content that are frequently reblogged by other Tumblr users. Posts appear at night, on the weekend, and even during class. Class Tumblrs also gain a (modest) number of followers, ranging from five to twenty, depending on the class. I believe that the reblogs and followers helped students to see that their contributions resonate and have meaning beyond our class. A few students also decided to share work they had produced publicly on our Tumblr.

Student evaluations confirm the value of Tumblr as place of continued conversation in and out of class. One student wrote, “I really liked that we went over content posted in the beginning of class”; another student added, “I contributed when I had to (because it was my week), for participation (because I knew it counted), but mostly because I was invested in the topic of my posts and the class as a whole.” The most encouraging feedback was a student’s statement that “[t]he tumblr made me feel very up-to-date on digital media news and helped bring the interacting of the class to a whole new level. Please continue this!” I have indeed continued to use Tumblr in many subsequent classes (eleven in total, ranging from *Digital Media & Culture* and *Introduction to Rhetoric & Media Studies to Transmedia Television*).

Tumblr Pedagogies and Beyond

At the time of writing, Tumblr is a thriving social media platform, and Tumblr pedagogies are a significant aspect of fandom on Tumblr. Fans write critical commentary on diversity in the media in posts and tags. They also create fan art practices like racebending to imagine a more diverse media landscape and to challenge other fans to do the same. A strong dedication to social justice has emerged among fans on Tumblr—indeed, participation in fandom and in social justice goes hand-in-hand for many fans. It is important to keep in mind, however, that Tumblr will not be the home of fandom forever. The move from platform to platform has characterized fandom since it became digital in the 1990s. Fandom’s most recent move from LiveJournal to Tumblr shows that commercially owned platforms can become hostile to fans (as LiveJournal did in the Strikethrough events) or fans find a new platform that reorients fandom practice (the rise of GIFs on Tumblr is one example). Eventually, fandom will move on from Tumblr to the next platform and develop

practices that arise out of the interplay of interface and fandom needs. However, the core aspects of fandom will manifest on this new platform as well: the creation of fiction and art that transforms mainstream entertainment, the meta discussion about media and fandom, and the continued exploration of diversity. Even on a different digital platform, fandom will remain a place to think differently about mainstream media and thus remain an important cultural community to explore with students.

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Chapter 23

Active Fandom: Labor and Love in The Whedonverse

Casey J. McCormick

In 2015, Alan Tudyk and Nathan Fillion traded on the social capital of their roles in Joss Whedon's short-lived cult classic *Firefly* (FOX 2003) and launched an Indiegogo crowdfunding campaign to produce a web series entitled *Con Man*. The series layers meta upon meta, following Wray Neeley (Tudyk), star of a canceled sci-fi TV show (called *Spectrum*, an obvious stand-in for *Firefly*), as he begrudgingly travels to fan conventions and bemoans his lack of career success post-*Spectrum*. Neeley resents his fan base and everything about convention culture; fans are depicted as entitled and sometimes unhinged, and the convention space is little more than a place for commodity exchange. When it comes to understanding fandom, *Con Man* misses the mark in disturbing ways, failing to capture the complexities of fan practice and the sociality of convention spaces. There is an uncomfortable tension, therefore, between the fact that this project was paid for by fan donations, then goes on to misrepresent and even attack fans as such. Paul Booth (2016) writes that crowdfunding reveals “the industrial commoditization of affect” (208), and Tudyk and Fillion certainly capitalized on the affective spillover from *Firefly* to produce a text that positions such affective attachment as absurd, if not completely deranged. *Con Man* is thus instructive regarding the perception of fans from a non-fan perspective, and also the dangers of fannish affective economies when fans do not know exactly what they are buying into. *Con Man* also demonstrates how labor and love in the Whedonverse—a fan-coined term for Joss Whedon's oeuvre—do not always work in the service of fan communities and can be misunderstood and appropriated by the very objects of fan attachment. In this chapter, I will explore Whedonverse fandom as a complex social network of desire, work, fulfillment, and, sometimes, disappointment that is indicative of fan practice in the digital age.

This chapter uses the term “active fandom” to describe a variety of ways in which audiences form relationships with media texts. “Active fandom” alludes to concepts like: “interactivity,” “participatory culture” (Jenkins 2006), “forensic fandom” (Mittell 2009), “antifandom,” “digital fandom” (Booth 2010), “maker culture,” “transmedia engagement,” and “millennial fandom” (Stein 2015), among others. By framing multiple fannish phenomena as part of one swift cultural tide, we can begin to see how active fandom reshapes the media industries by recognizing, confronting, and impacting its dominant structures. Active fandom is not a new phenomenon, but digital technologies enable a variety of practices that mark contemporary fandom as especially active. The increasing visibility of content producers on social media strengthens the feedback

loop that constitutes the producer/consumer relationship. Social networking increases the ability of fans to connect among themselves, make links across texts, and share emotional experiences on a large scale. As many media scholars have noted, it is beneficial for content producers to embrace the rhetorics of active fandom: the more empowered fans *feel* in relation to a given text, the more dedicated they are likely to be. It is important to recognize, then, that fan dedication equals free advertising, which brings issues of fan labor and exploitation to the foreground. As Myles McNutt (Chin et al. 2013) argues:

Fans are exploited every day. When they tweet about a show using a hash tag, or when they tell a friend about that show, they're completing free labor for the television network whose show they're watching. Of course, we subject ourselves to this exploitation because we've accepted that the value we get from participation—the enjoyment of social media, the satisfaction of sharing things we love with other people—is worth giving part of ourselves over to the industry.

This chapter considers the benefits and dangers of active fandom, exploring how fan communities negotiate labor and love, commodification and empowerment. I argue that recognizing the restrictions of our technologies and the limits of our participation allows us to see that, while digital media can be a transformative force for fans, it can also lead to the increasing commoditization and pathologization of fan attachment.

The Whedonverse

Active fandom demonstrates how emotional investment is sustained across time and space, eschewing strict textual boundaries in favor of intertextual engagement. The result, in the case of the Whedonverse, is a system of narrative and emotional connections; sometimes this system reveals quite specific relationships, other times the connections are more nebulous. The idea of “the Whedonverse,” as well as the fandom’s tendency to proclaim certain things “Whedony,” are conceptual embodiments of this tenuous connectivity. What do we mean when we call something “Whedony?” To a large extent, “Whedony” is like pornography: “you know it when you see it.” On the other hand, there’s a whole set of specific narrative tactics, visual aesthetics, and thematic inflections that are evoked when we use this term. I conducted some casual polling on Twitter and Facebook, and Whedonites (fans of Joss’s¹ work) cited elements such as strong female protagonists, rag-tag ensembles, dark humor, self-referentiality, unlikely and/or lonely heroes, apocalyptic stakes, and heart-wrenching character deaths as some of their associations with the word “Whedony.” Of course, none of these elements are exclusive to the Whedonverse, but somehow they come together to create a “Whedony feeling.” Some responses from my crowdsourcing focused on how “Whedony” differs from “Whedonesque,” another authorial signifier in circulation (and the moniker of the registration-based community weblog that, on occasion, serves as an official platform for Joss to communicate with his fans). Others noted that their use of “Whedony” coincides with the term’s pervasiveness as a hashtag in the Twitterverse, especially during the weekly Whedony Chat (Mondays @9 pm EST).

Whedony. Whedonesque. Whedonite. Whedonverse. What other fandom can claim such an array of neologisms? It seems nearly impossible to speak of the narrative world in question without these words, but they also perpetuate a problematic single-auteurist impulse, one that is exacerbated by Joss’s status as a “fanboy auteur” who “equates his close proximity to the fans with an understanding of their textual desires” (Scott 2012, 44). I suggest that the creation and use of the Whedony lexicon is a practice in active fandom that uses digital technologies to establish a cohesiveness within the fan community, reinforcing the idea that these narratives exist in one big, interconnected

Whedonverse. Whedon fandom is thus inherently a practice in what some scholars refer to as “transfandom,” in which fans mash up media objects to create relational meaning (Booth 2013). Furthermore, this articulation of narrative and emotional connectivity allows fans to resist the finality of any particular Whedon text—fans’ excess energy when one story ends carries over into other parts of the Whedonverse. Resistance to finality is a common trend in active fandom, as we’ll see later in this chapter.

In his theorization of paratexts, Jonathan Gray (2010) argues that television authors are “discursive constructions . . . , signifiers of value, and . . . paratextual entities that frame both value and textual meaning” (113). He points specifically to Joss, analyzing an interview in which “[Whedon] deliberately confuses author and reader roles by adopting part of the reader role himself, and yielding part of the author role to the reader” (112). Gray’s point here is significant for understanding the dispersal of authorial agency that occurs in the Whedonverse. While Joss may be at the center of the Whedonverse, the ‘Auteur’ at stake here is much more than one man: it is all of the writers, directors, producers, artists, scholars, and fans that combine to make the Whedonverse an expansive yet profoundly connected singular entity. The breaking down of the producer/consumer binary, an essential position in nearly all contemporary media studies, allows for fans to become authors of the Whedonverse through various participatory practices. As Gray (2010) notes, “The power to create paratexts is the power to contribute to, augment, and personalize a textual world” (165). Therefore, we might consider a dispersed auteurism through “collective authorship” (Stein 2015) at play in the Whedonverse, in which the auteur figure is not one but many, combining to create the kind of paratextual author construction that Gray highlights as important to processes of narrative signification. Joss may be the auteur with the action figure, but he is only one part of the collectively authored Whedonverse.

The idea of the Whedonverse as a singular narrative entity is apparent in many aspects of Whedon fandom, even if individual fans do not explicitly or consciously articulate the connectedness of storyworlds. The Whedonverse is thus particularly invested in what Matt Hills (2002) calls “hyperdiegesis,” a system of signification that operates on an extra-textual level. In a 2012 Slayage Conference keynote address, Whedon scholar Alyson Buckman discussed the importance of “hyperdiegetic casting” in Whedon texts—how the repetition of actors in the Whedonverse creates levels of meaning that can only be understood intertextually. I’ve extended this concept to account for what I call “interdiegetic feeling,” or the affective spillover that results from intertextual comprehension. Hyperdiegetic casting can occur across any set of texts, but the Whedonverse is particularly incestuous in this sense. Hyperdiegetic casting in Whedony texts presents a contradictory interpretative position: at the same time as it reinforces the connectivity of these narratives, it also reminds viewers that the storyworlds are distinct. For example, Whedonites cannot watch Nathan Fillion as Caleb in *Buffy* without thinking of Captain Malcolm Reynolds (and vice versa), but our attachments are so vastly different that this hyperdiegetic moment creates cognitive dissonance for the Whedonite. Similarly, when Amy Acker and Alexis Denisoff, star-crossed lovers in *Angel* (FOX 1999–2004), whose characters both died before they could consummate their love, appear as Beatrice and Benedick in *Much Ado About Nothing* (2012), Whedon fans negotiate their pain and loss from the series with their joy at the resurrection and union of these actors displaced into another storyworld. In a sense, hyperdiegetic casting is fan service—deliberate attempts by creators to capitalize on existing emotional investment. But if we consider this tactic as more than a cheap trick, it demonstrates the complexity of intertextual fandom at stake in the Whedonverse, as well as the ways in which audiences’ mental labor frames interpretation, revealing one form of active fandom.

While active fandom is not new, digital technologies have enhanced and diversified the ways that audiences can respond to media texts. Whedony fandom is thus imbricated in the

larger phenomenon of “digital fandom,” as articulated by Paul Booth (2010). Many elements of the Whedonverse rely on Internet culture to sew the fabric of connectivity, but active fandom includes non-digital practices as well. In fact, since active fandom is fundamentally an affective phenomenon, we could say that the impulse to activity really has nothing to do with digital technology; rather, these technologies are vehicles through which fan affect manifests and, importantly, spreads. The spreadability of fan affect, the “viral” nature of certain fan texts, is key to locating the kind of dispersed energies at stake in active fandom. Take, for example, the fanvid by YouTube user MrMorda898 entitled “The Whedonverse: This is War.” The vid blends scenes from *Buffy*, *Angel*, *Firefly*, *Serenity*, and *Dollhouse*, using thematic continuities that correspond to the accompanying song, as well as clever visual continuities using a series of matches on action. MrMorda898’s vid appeals not to fans of one or two Whedon texts, but to the Whedonite who can contextualize thematic associations through very brief visual cues from multiple texts. The vid is evidence of narrative iconography in the Whedonverse—fan energy distilled into only a few frames (see Freund’s Chapter 13 in this volume). The vid includes several major character deaths and other dire narrative moments, layering pain and loss so that they manifest and feel differently—a re-familiarization of emotional moments that creates a layer of affect only attainable by the knowledgeable fan. There are a handful of similar vidding projects, as one can see from a quick YouTube search for “the Whedonverse.” I point to these vids because they serve as an excellent crystallization of how fans engage with the Whedonverse’s connectivity, blurring textual boundaries and presenting a cohesive, interconnected storyworld. In these vids, the various texts bleed into one another: the narrative significance of each shot works on the affective experience of the vid as a whole and, though digital remixing, visualizes the Whedonverse from a fan’s perspective.

My conception of active fandom and the ways in which emotional attachments motivate and fuel these practices builds on Louisa Stein’s (2015) work on “millennial fandom” and what she calls “feels culture,” which “thrives on the public celebration of emotion previously considered the realm of the private” (156). She writes:

In feels culture, emotions remain intimate but are no longer necessarily private; rather, they build a sense of an intimate collective, one that is bound together precisely by the processes of shared emotional authorship. In this equation, emotion fuels fan transformative creativity, and performances of shared emotion define fan authorship communities. (156)

Stein’s emphasis on the emotional core of fannish activity is a key contribution to fan studies, one that identifies the repercussions of digital fandom and its normalization in daily life. Her discussion of “feels,” a popular term to describe fannish attachment to texts, is a helpful model for articulating the difference between “affect” and “emotion” in audience experience. We are beginning to see a necessary affective turn in how we understand media consumption; but I am wary of “affective turns” as such, since these approaches can often obscure the specificities of experience. Eugenie Brinkema (2014) points out that we need a “richer language” to describe affect that moves “beyond violences or frenzies or intensities” (39). While I agree that this vocabulary runs the risk of avoiding specificity, these words are still quite useful in articulating how affect moves beyond easily identifiable emotional categories—we need a language of intensities to analyze the lived experiences—the “feels”—of fandom. Therefore, in this discussion of active fandom, I’ll use “affect” to distinguish the complex layers of experience that often separate the fan from a more casual viewer. So in this chapter, “emotions” are those responses which can be labeled and contained by a given narrative, but “affect” is the excess energy produced by fannish attachment and that powers active fandom in the Whedonverse.

Buffy and Fandom's Digital Turn

Before scholars spoke of such a thing as “Whedon Studies,” there was “Buffy Studies,” an international conversation surrounding the series that made Joss Whedon a household name. *Buffy* is the foundation of the Whedonverse. Its expansive storyworld includes a feature film, seven TV seasons, a spinoff TV series (*Angel*), and multiple comic book runs. It is consistently invoked as a key series in the advent of television’s “second golden age” of storytelling, and its emphasis on female power is oft-cited in discussions of feminist media (see, e.g., Jowett 2005; Wilcox 2005; Sepinwall 2013). The timing of *Buffy*’s initial release is important for framing the series’ impact on the development of active fandom. The series’ debut coincided with the launch of AOL (America OnLine) service, which brought user-friendly Internet into the average household and made digital fandom more widespread than it had ever been. And its home on The WB, one of the first networks to successfully cater programming flows to a teen demographic, hailed audiences as tech-savvy “millennials.” Official and unofficial fan spaces emerged: chat rooms, fan sites, and spoiler boards proliferated—trust me, my first AOL handle was BtVsGal21. I recall voraciously seeking out spoilers, “shipping”² Buffy and her platonic friend Xander, and reading all variety of fanfiction that the series generated. I was an active fan long before I knew what fandom meant or how it differed from other forms of spectatorship. Like thousands of others, I poured hours of time into this attachment because I loved the media object. It didn’t *feel* like work, but it was—and the nascence of digital fandom further obscured the fact that my “play” (Booth 2016) was also labor that contributed to the success of the show. These were the early days of the “digi-gratis” economy that Booth describes as a “mash-up of market economics and gift-giving” (43). Booth notes: “The digi-gratis economy applies to fandom in the way that media [industries] and fandom coexist. In regards to the market economy, fans routinely purchase merchandise based around the object of their fandom ... Fandom, however, can also be perceived in a non-monetary environment online” (36).

The digi-gratis model is useful for understanding how fandom operates beyond a capitalist infrastructure, but it can also make the line between fannish labor and love even murkier. And while it’s likely that fans today are more aware of the ways that their work can be appropriated, further evidence in this chapter suggests that love always outweighs labor to Whedonites, sometimes leading to exploitation or denigration of their fan identity.

“Active fandom” describes a wide range of modes of engagement, but the common denominator is that there must be a degree of emotional investment that motivates the individual to move from passive consumer to active producer of *something*. This “something produced” may take physical or digital form, or it could take discursive form. Booth (2016) writes of the “*productive consumption* at the heart of fan affect” (22), emphasizing a “philosophy of playfulness” in which digital technologies enable fans to *do* a variety of things with texts: “We play with our media; it is malleable in our hands” (8). Booth’s understanding of media play helps us see how active fandom can be part of a user’s daily practice, how active fandom is affectively motivated and experienced, and how active fandom is enhanced by, though not contingent upon, digital technologies. Like digital fandom, then, active fandom is not a distinct break from earlier forms of fannish behavior, but rather a rearticulation of the relationship between fan and text that normalizes (to an extent) audiences as active producers of meaning. Most importantly, digital fandom facilitates community-building on a scale previously impossible to achieve. Fandom in the digital age thus engenders “networked publics,” or publics that “are restructured by networked technologies,” that “allow people to gather for social, cultural, and civic purposes,” and “help people connect with a world beyond their close friends and family” (boyd 2010). As Zizi Papacharissi (2016) notes, networked publics “[do] not present a guaranteed avenue to impact” but “may bring about disruptions to the stability of powerful hierarchies” (310). My conception of active fandom, therefore, does not hold

digital practices above other forms of engagement, but it does recognize the increased opportunities for community-building that digital and social media create, and it positions these fan communities as potentially destabilizing forces in the media industries. Therefore, *Buffy's* historical location at the verge of digital fandom is key for understanding how fans participate in the creation and perpetuation of the Whedonverse.

Though *Buffy* garnered (and continues to build) a cross-sectional fan demographic, its initial marketing to millennials remains significant. As Stein (2015) points out, millennial and fan identity may be closely intertwined: “Popular discourse envisions millennials to be active participants in, rather than passive recipients of, the media culture that surrounds them. This image of the young, media-savvy millennial reworks popular perceptions of a cultural figure with a much longer history: the media fan” (3).

While the millennial discourse has become especially prominent in recent years, *Buffy* and the WB (and, to a lesser extent, the series' season 6–7 home, UPN) are strong indicators of how that discourse developed in relation to shifting perceptions of fandom within digital culture in the early 2000s. *Buffy's* appeal to active fandom is also evident in its transmedia migration to comic book form after the series finale in 2003. Henry Jenkins (2007) notes how transmedia storytelling relies on “collective intelligence” in which “participants pool information” about vast storyworlds—a practice in active fandom. Jenkins also suggests that transmedia storytelling often provides a “set of rules and goals” for engaging with texts; and indeed, the *Season Eight* (2007–2011) and *Season Nine* (2011–2013) *Buffy* comics are landmark examples for teaching fans how to negotiate transmedia narratives and expand conceptions of canonicity. For example, in *Season Eight*, Buffy has sex with a woman, effectively queering her previously straight identity—mimicking, or perhaps validating, Buffy-centric slash fiction. Fan debates continue to this day regarding how this event rewrites Buffy's sexuality, with fans variously accepting or rejecting her bisexuality as canon. I argue that *Buffy's* transmedia extensions (not only the comic books, but its many other paratexts) are essential for positioning its fandom as active. When stories migrate into new platforms and spaces, a higher degree of commitment—and media savvy—is necessary for participation. The transmedia persistence of *Buffy* also set a precedent for the Whedonverse, establishing transmediality as an essential component of active Whedon fandom.

While the goal of transmedia storytelling might be the creation of a “unified, coordinated entertainment experience” (Jenkins 2007), the reality of transmedia narratives is that they are experienced in a wide variety of ways dependent on the individual. And digital viewing technologies create diverse temporalities of narrative encounter: *Buffy's* availability on Netflix for the past few years has hailed a new generation of fans. I've seen my students, most of whom are roughly a decade younger than myself, binge *Buffy* with fannish intensity. They won't have the same experiences with the text as I did, but rather they'll navigate an existing fandom and contribute fresh insights to the community. *Buffy's* finale aired more than 14 years ago, but digital technologies allow the storyworld to persist through active fandom.

***Firefly* and Doing the Impossible**

While *Buffy* is the longest-running storyworld in the Whedonverse, *Firefly* fandom is the heart of Whedony affect. Due to its short and ill-fated network run, intense fan campaigning to motivate a cinematic sequel, and a persistent cultural narrative of its tragic cancellation, *Firefly* boasts a sacred aura in the Whedonverse. In many ways, it came to define Joss's—and Whedonites'—relationship to media culture. The show's cancellation firmly situated Joss as an underdog figure and confirmed Whedonites as a “cult” audience, working against mainstream culture and corporate media. As Stacey Abbott (2008) notes, “Ownership of the *Firefly/Serenity* text by fans was reinforced

by their own identification with the series' Browncoats, the Independents who fought a losing war against the Alliance" (237). The Browncoat can thus be understood as a hyperdiegetic political identity, combining storyworld performance with fan activism to support a cult media object. In addition, *Firefly* generates an affective excess in the Whedonverse that spreads and intensifies the series' aura and inflects fan experience in other Whedon texts.

Firefly's intense fandom is most remarkable in how it relates to the question of scale. The wild discrepancy between the amount of narrative material and the emotional impact that it has in the Whedonverse reveals some important aspects of fan attachment. Scarcity becomes a key factor—we want what we can't have, or what we don't have enough of (supply and demand). Every episode becomes a rare commodity: as series regular Adam Baldwin puts it, each script was "like gold" (*Done the Impossible* 2006). Purity is also a consideration—the brevity of the series signifies a lack of superfluous material that is considered common in longer-running series (*Buffy* included). In short, the textual boundaries of *Firefly* cannot contain the emotional energies of Whedon fandom. And so those energies disperse into paratexts and intertexts; but what distinguishes this outward movement from similar patterns of active fandom for other storyworlds is how little with which the fans had to work. Active fandom thus takes on new significance in the context of an inverse economy of scale in which textual scarcity generates more fan affect.

The issue of textual scarcity comes into play in *Firefly* fandom not just in terms of the amount of existing narrative, but also in terms of access to that narrative. FOX infamously refused to air the season's episodes in order, and also aired them on different times and days with no clear programming schedule. While some Whedonites stuck with the series during its initial airing, the Browncoat fandom did not really begin to expand until *Firefly* was released on DVD. At this point, the digi-gratis economy became a key factor in growing the fandom. In addition to sharing their love of the show via fan sites and message boards, fans loaned out the DVD boxed set, often purchasing multiple copies to distribute to friends. *Firefly* fandom was thus unique (especially for the time) in how it relied on monetized access to the text in order to gain viewership and spawn a fan campaign after the show had already been canceled.

Done the Impossible is a testament to active fandom at the crossroads between digital and embodied forms of fan labor. This fan-made documentary draws on the experiences of an intersection of Browncoats to tell the story of campaigning after the series' cancellation, ending with the grand triumph of 2005's *Serenity*. Like other accounts of Whedon fandom, the film is invested in the tropes of a Cinderella story, in a narrative of intimacy (among fans, and between fans and creators), and in a valorization of "cult" media that pushes back against all things mainstream. In depicting the sociality of Whedon fandom and fan conventions, it projects the opposite message of *Con Man*. *Done the Impossible* tells an uplifting tale of fan attachment and empowerment, but it is an uncritical picture of *Firefly* fandom. In particular, it glorifies fan labor with no consideration of the dangers in this model of active fandom. As is the case with *Con Man*, when an affective economy drives fan practice, it is easy for fan labor to be absorbed into a media ecosystem that only seeks to commodify that attachment. So, let's celebrate the pleasure of fandom, but be critical of how these pleasures fuel a market economy in which audiences still remain relatively powerless to control the fate of their favorite media objects.

Campaigning is certainly one of the most proactive incarnations of active fandom. It implies collective, organized efforts to achieve a specific goal. Most often in media fandom, campaigning means trying to keep a show on the air, or attempting to get it resurrected in some form. Fan campaigns may also (though less commonly) take on widespread systemic issues, such as queer representation in popular media (e.g., Framke, Zarracina, and Frostenson 2016). Fan campaigning is, in sense, the opposite of crowdfunding, though they share some common elements. Save or renew campaigning is a bottom-up practice, initiated by the fandom, and the goal is to convince "the powers that be"³ to produce more of an existing media object. Investment capital is rarely

involved; rather, fans articulate power through a variety of action-oriented tactics. Crowdfunding, meanwhile, is relatively top-down. Industry creatives, usually a mix of writer/directors and actors, appeal to existing affective attachment to produce something new(ish). But the most dangerous part of crowdfunding is that it “stratifies” fandoms: “One can be a ‘better’ fan if one has the money” (Booth 2016, 207). This stratification may be apparent in other sectors of fandom, such as purchasing merchandise and attending conventions, but crowdfunding deliberately conflates money and affect in a rhetoric of empowerment that leaves the impoverished fan doubly disempowered. Meanwhile, the variety of tactics associated with campaigning open up collective movement to community members of all economic levels.

Like other elements of active fandom, campaigning is by no means new, but digital technologies have diversified the tactics that fans can use to organize their efforts. Campaigning techniques include letter-writing, coordinated tweeting, petitions, and even guerilla advertising. In *Done the Impossible*, one Browncoat explains how she created a large sign and placed it next to the *Firefly* DVDs in her local Wal-Mart in an attempt to increase sales. As she recounts the experience, she appears giddy remembering the sense of power that this practice gave her. This example demonstrates how campaigning can involve embodied, non-digital forms of active fandom that turn commercial spaces into affective territories. Active fandom from the Browncoat community was not enough to get *Firefly* back on the air, but fan intensity was partially responsible for the production of *Serenity*. The Browncoats’ success set a precedent for campaigning in media fandom before the days of Twitter hashtags, Facebook Pages, and Tumblr. Fans used social media such as chat rooms to form communities, but in order to make their fandom visible, campaigning had to take place largely offline.

Interlude: RIP Wash

One of the defining factors of Browncoat fandom is the death of Alan Tudyk’s character, Hoban Washburne (Wash) in *Serenity*, and the narrative moment is symbolic of Whedonites’ relationship to corporate media. When Universal agreed to produce *Serenity*, one of the stipulations between Joss and the studio was that the film should appeal to both *Firefly* fans and newcomers to the storyworld. The extent to which the film succeeds in this imperative is debatable, but there’s no doubt that particular scenes carry a layer of signification that is only accessible to the fan. This layering of meaning through double address is most perceptible in the two major character deaths—Shepherd Book and pilot Wash. Book’s lack of screen time in the film makes his death fairly meaningless to the uninitiated viewer. Wash’s death is likely still meaningful regardless of prior knowledge, but its impact on the fan is far stronger. For Whedonites, it is one of the most affectively charged moments in the Whedonverse for what it means diegetically and extra-diegetically.

In the final act of the film, the *Serenity* crew devises a plan that creates a near-impossible piloting challenge for Wash, who weaves among fighting ships, repeating his mantra “I’m a leaf on the wind. Watch how I soar.” After successfully landing the ship, he turns to Mal and his wife Zoe and says: “I’m a leaf on the wind, watch how I—” but before he can say “soar,” a jagged spear flies through the windshield and plunges through his chest, killing him instantly, impaling his lifeless body on the pilot’s seat. His death is sudden, jarring, but narratively parenthetical within the diegesis. Zoe cries out briefly, then, like a good soldier, leaves her husband’s body, and moves on to the next stage of the plan. Grief is deferred until the final moments of the film, when we see a short, wordless funeral ceremony before returning to a repaired *Serenity*, with a slightly smaller crew, heading back into space for their next adventure. The seemingly open ending of the film is undercut by the death of two main characters, ensuring that *Firefly* could never return as the same

series. At a recent convention, one fan donned a Wash costume that included a jagged piece of faux-metal with the words “FOX” written on it, solidifying this correlation between the character’s death and that of the series. RIP Wash.

***Dollhouse* and Discourses of Cancellation**

In the previous section, I emphasized the offline components of Browncoat fandom, because when *Dollhouse*, Whedon’s next TV venture, faced cancellation in 2009, the resulting “save our show” campaign looked quite different from the fan efforts of only a few years earlier. Embodied fandom was still key, especially in the campaign’s emphasis on getting fans to watch the show during its initial air time, despite its scheduling in the “Friday night death slot.” But the ease with which fans could organize and vocalize their attachment to the show resulted in a visibly dedicated fandom, and FOX renewed *Dollhouse* for a second season despite low ratings. It was an early example of networks learning the value of a “small but dedicated audience” (Mittell 2006, 31) and a moment in which the value of Nielsen ratings was put into serious question across the TV industry.

Nonetheless, *Dollhouse* was, from the outset, framed by discourses of cancellation. Whedonites even launched “save our show” pages months before the pilot aired on FOX, indicating their lack of trust in the network after *Firefly*. Joss was forced to scrap his original pilot for the series, rewriting the first several episodes to emphasize narrative accessibility via a more episodic structure. But these adjustments muddled the tone of the series, and indeed, dismal ratings throughout season one had fans—and Joss—preparing for cancellation. He commissioned his brother Jed and sister-in-law Maurissa to write “Epitaph One,” a “secret thirteenth episode”⁴ that revealed the narrative telos of *Dollhouse*, to act as a potential series finale. So when, for fear of fan backlash, FOX renewed the series, season two had to negotiate the information revealed in “Epitaph One” while maintaining the storyworld established in the first season. The result is an intensely metatextual storytelling approach. While events of season two can be comprehended without having seen “Epitaph One,” they take on different meaning for fans who purchased or accessed the DVD. For example, in “Epitaph One,” viewers witness *Dollhouse* scientist Topher Brink in a state of mental collapse, muttering the line “I know what I know” as he attempts to come to grips with his role in the techno-apocalypse. In the first episode of season two, Topher declares “I know what I know” confidently, but the foreshadowing is clear for those who’ve seen “Epitaph One.” There are many such “Easter Eggs” in season two that can be read through one’s knowledge of “Epitaph One,” creating a meta-textual layer of significance for *Dollhouse* fans that would be inaccessible to a casual viewer.

While there were a variety of campaigning efforts before, during, and after *Dollhouse*’s two-season run, one element of the *Dollhouse* save/renew campaign that deserves special attention is the “Why I Watch” website, launched by Dessy Levinson. “Why I Watch” collects short testimonials from fans documenting their love of the show, and then places each testimonial into a box with a “doll” avatar. The visual organization of this website, transforming fans into dolls, creates an online space for fan performance of “interreal identity,” similar to how Booth (2016) conceives of fan/character amalgamations in mySpace profiles (115). Booth argues that there is a particular kind of performativity at stake when fans identify *as* (rather than *with*) characters (2016). The “Why I Watch” site deploys this interreal identity formation in the service of campaigning, staking a claim on *Dollhouse* by positioning fans as part of the storyworld even as they speak from outside of it. Though fan efforts failed to garner *Dollhouse* a third season, campaigning played a major role in establishing the fan community, and “Why I Watch” remains an important artifact of *Dollhouse* fandom that demonstrates some of the ways that digital technologies enable new forms of fan identity.

The theme of technology in *Dollhouse* is useful for thinking through fan practices, especially in light of how fans embraced interreal identity in their campaigning. The series challenges humanist notions of Cartesian dualism by emphasizing the virtual construction of identity. The Rossum Corporation is able to imprint and wipe personalities at will, and imprinted human dolls then carry out whatever narrative their programming demands. For fans to perform as dolls on “Why I Watch,” then, complicates the position of empowerment that campaigning is meant to achieve by suggesting that fans are simply “programmed” to continue consuming. *Dollhouse* also depicts a dangerous balance between corporate power and technological innovation, one that has apocalyptic ramifications in the storyworld. There are clear strands of technophobia in *Dollhouse*, but this position is overshadowed by a decidedly posthumanist conclusion. The main character, Echo, a self-actualized doll who retains dozens of personality imprints, chooses not to return to her original personality, instead embracing a rhizomatic self that includes the consciousness of her dead lover. If Echo is the hero of *Dollhouse*, then the series seems to champion hypermediated, interreal identity at a moment in which media fans were learning to negotiate new ways of constructing themselves in virtual spaces.

Activating Fandom in *Dr. Horrible’s Sing-Along Blog*

When asked in April of 2011 what *Dr. Horrible’s Sing-Along Blog* (DHSAB) meant to him three years after its release, Joss Whedon replied, “[I]t remains one of the purest experiences of my life. It just makes me happy all the time. It wasn’t like anything else” (Itzkoff). Indeed, the uniqueness of *Dr. Horrible* is the driving force behind the cultural narrative surrounding this difficult-to-classify text. Zack Whedon, *Dr. Horrible’s* co-creator, stumbles when attempting to describe the creation, musing that it is a “show or movie or online musical video short, there should be a word for this ... I just came up with the word. Mushortio” (Renaud 2011). The musical aired initially as a free-streaming online broadcast in three serial installments, dubbed Act One/Act Two/Act Three, displaying a self-awareness of its ambiguous media status by invoking theatrical form. *Dr. Horrible* then migrated to the iTunes “TV” section for purchase on a per-episode or “full season” basis, despite the fact that the entire text is only 42 minutes. Five months after its internet release, the musical became available on DVD (and later, Blu-Ray), complete with special features—including a full-length musical commentary. In addition, official supplements to the primary text proliferate in the form of a comic, a companion book, merchandise, and a sequel on the horizon. What began, according to Joss, as an attempt to “change the face of Show Business as we know it” (“Letter to the Fans”) looks a lot like your standard Hollywood franchise—albeit one that maintains a veneer of “cult” media due to the reputation of Joss and his fandom.

Whedonites’ response to *Dr. Horrible*, and its lingering importance to the fan community, are strong evidence of the transferability of Whedony affect across texts. This transfer occurs on the level of “star” texts and hyperdiegetic casting—recognizing Nathan Fillion as Captain Reynolds or Caleb-the-Preacher, but also recognizing the many cameos from Whedonverse writers and directors, such as Marti Noxon and David Fury. *Dr. Horrible* rewards Whedonites for their encyclopedic knowledge of the Whedonverse, and it capitalizes (by turning trivia into emotion) on the affective potential of the fans’ recognition process. It is a joyful practice in “forensic fandom” (Mittell 2006) that is less about watching closely to solve a mystery, and more about looking closely to see the fabric of the Whedonverse.

Dr. Horrible paratexts play a significant role in directing fans toward a reading of the musical as oppositional to mainstream media and encouraging active fandom. It is not difficult to imagine why the cast and crew of *Dr. Horrible* actively portrayed their creation as an industrially subversive text: the project was born in the face of the Writers’ Guild Strike of 2007. Nor is it surprising

that fans of *Dr. Horrible* easily embrace this narrative of organic artistic production unmotivated by financial gain, since that narrative simultaneously positions the fan in a seemingly subversive space of cult viewership. In order to peel back some of the layers of this cultural narrative surrounding *Dr. Horrible*, it is worth thinking through how the creators invoked the notion of “difference.” In his letter to the fans before the musical’s release, Joss writes:

The idea was to make it on the fly, on the cheap—but to make it.

To turn out a really thrilling, professionalish piece of entertainment specifically for the Internet. To show how much could be done with very little. To show the world there is another way. To give the public (and in particular you guys) something for all your support and patience. (Whedon 2008)

From the beginning, then, Joss constructed a narrative of industry subversion while claiming that he had “very little” with which to work. While it is true that Joss funded the project himself (“Low six-figures is the phrase that I feel comfortable using”), it is impossible to ignore the impact of his cult auteur status in terms of calling in favors and building a talented cast and crew who would be willing to work pro-bono. As Jennifer Vineyard (2011) points out on *mtv.com*’s movie blog, “[N]early everyone on the 30-person crew had worked on *Buffy*, *Angel*, *Firefly*, or *Serenity*.” This fact not only highlights Joss’s access to experienced crewmembers, but also helps to situate the text as an extension of traditional televisual practices. In the same blog post, Vineyard quotes *Dr. Horrible* co-producer Michael Boretz, who admits that “[t]he Internet is still the Wild West in some ways ... People still go all over the place to view content, but Joss is in a unique position that fans will seek him out wherever he goes.” Active fandom (“seek[ing] out”) is thus constructed at least in part as commitment to a creative auteur. The role of the television showrunner—of which Joss is consistently considered one of the major examples—is a strong indication of the persistence of authorial power. Derek Kompare (2011) asserts that “the figure of the cult ‘auteur,’ i.e., the attributed creator of the cult object, is important within most media fandoms” and that this figure is the locus of “cult television” (99). Again, Joss’s status in the television industry inflects the success of *Dr. Horrible* to a significant extent. The three stars of the musical—Neil Patrick Harris, Nathan Fillion, and Felicia Day—all tell stories on the “behind the scenes” DVD featurette about how they told Joss “yes” before even hearing the entire pitch for the project—blurring the line between actor and fan. Likewise, when asked about how long it took for *Dr. Horrible* fan sites to go live, Joss responds, “Generally whenever we announce anything? The fans get started” (Vary 2008). So, a slew of famous actors and an experienced crew dying to work with you on anything you come up with—coupled with a built-in fan base that follows your every move—certainly point to Joss’s cult auteur status and Whedony fandom as the primary explanation behind the success of *Dr. Horrible*.

Another way in which *Dr. Horrible* appeals to active fandom is through the elaborate paratext of *Commentary! The Musical*, a full-length musical commentary track available as a special feature on the DVD. Engagement with special features is generally considered fannish territory, and so we can assume fans as the addressees of these paratextual extensions: one line in the commentary jokingly calls the audience “huge f*cking nerds.” Through its emphasis on production circumstances, industrial context, and communal creativity, *Commentary! The Musical* invites a reading of *Dr. Horrible* as an allegory for the tensions between old and new media models that illuminates the stakes of active fandom in the digital age. The character of Dr. Horrible represents the “new media artist” who utilizes the Internet to tell his story and connect with fans (he even reads fan e-mails in the opening blog entry). Captain Hammer, in all of his cheesiness, stands in for old media models that are dominated by corporations (Dr. Horrible introduces his nemesis as “Captain Hammer, corporate tool”). Caught in between these two competing forces is the mainstream audience, embodied by the naïve, hopeful Penny, whose name evokes the economic baseline of media fandom.

The tensions among these symbolic characters come to a head in the penultimate scene of the musical. After Dr. Horrible effectively freezes Captain Hammer (a nod to the stoppage in corporate production during the strike), he launches into the musical number, “Slipping.” In this song, Dr. Horrible laments of the audience, “Why can’t they see what I see? Why can’t they hear the lies? / Maybe the fee’s too pricey for them to realize / Your disguise is slipping.” Dr. Horrible seems to be describing the state of mainstream media and the difficulty of maintaining control in the face of new media technologies. It is significant, however, that the story ends with the death of Penny—the mainstream audience—and not Captain Hammer, the corporation. The message then becomes that while new media can only slightly injure the established, corporate media institutions (“I think this is what pain feels like!” screams Captain Hammer after being hit by debris from Dr. Horrible’s malfunctioning “death ray”), the struggle to work completely outside of those institutions could result in the death of the mainstream audience. Penny’s death happens parenthetically, off-screen, a tiny bit of stray debris penetrating her heart and her gut. As her consciousness fades and Billy/Dr. Horrible crouches at her side, she assures him “Don’t worry. Captain Hammer will save us.” The most tragic part of this moment is perhaps not her death, but her persisting faith in corporate media. Reading *Dr. Horrible* in this allegorical fashion undermines the hailing of *Dr. Horrible* as a straightforward call to new media action and highlights the complexities of active fandom against a backdrop of mainstream vs. cult media.

Active Fandom and “Cult” Audiences

In an April 2011 *New York Times* interview, Joss explains of *Dr. Horrible*, “I still believe it’s a viable financial model, and a creative playground and I miss it. But in the year I was supposed to [make a sequel], I instead decided to make this little Sundance movie that I’m making” (Itzkoff 2011). The “Sundance movie” that Joss jokingly refers to is, of course, *The Avengers*. No matter the cinematic quality of *The Avengers* (2012) and *Age of Ultron* (2015), there is no denying that the success of these blockbusters signals a breaking into the mainstream both for Joss as a writer/director and for Whedony fandom. These films’ popularity brought unprecedented attention to the Whedonverse, potentially endangering the cult status that had defined it for so many years. In a *Huffington Post* article published after the opening weekend of *The Avengers*, Pulitzer prize-winning TV critic Maureen Ryan writes, “Our Joss Whedon, the man whose brain-bending, word-playing, heartbreaking shows needed constant care, attention and ‘save this show’ campaigns from legions of TV devotees in order to survive, is an entertainment industry superhero now. Will he forget about us? I sure hope not” (emphasis added). Three days after Ryan’s piece hit the web, Joss posted a letter to his fans on Whedonesque.com, writing, “This is me, saying thank you. All of you. You’ve taken as much guff for loving my work as I have for over-writing it, and you deserve, in this time of our streaming into the main, to crow. To glow. To crow and go, ‘I told you so,’ to those Joe Blows not in the know” (2012). Now, of course we could take this letter as a tactical move on Joss’s part to hang on to his cult fan base against the potential threat of being seen as “selling out.” However, if we take the letter at more or less face value—that is, if we read Joss’s intentions as genuine—this gesture might effectively validate and comfort Whedonites, assuring them/us that Joss intends to use his newfound powers for good, and that the cult may get a little bigger, but it’s still one big happy family.

Nevertheless, the thing about making a blockbuster is that once you do it, “the world’s all different.”⁵ And indeed, since Joss’s “streaming into the main” with the MCU, the Whedonverse just isn’t the same. Stein (2015) writes that “the call for a third wave of fan studies can be both a call to recognize the deepening relationship between fandom and mainstream culture and a call to be aware of the cultural, historical, political, and personal negotiations that color that relationship” (11).

The increasingly blurred line between cultish and mainstream fan practices is essential to my conception of active fandom. The cult show is no longer tied to an aura of obscurity, but rather to its visibility across a variety of discursive spaces. Therefore, I argue that active fandom forms the foundation of cult television by spawning expansive networks of narrative engagement. My position relies on the assumption that within our mediascape, the “cult” label becomes more about viewer activity than about the particular aesthetic or narrative elements of a series. It is true that many of the shows that come to mind when we think about “cult” television (*Star Trek*, *Twin Peaks*, *Firefly*, etc.) tend to fit a specific bill in terms of genre, production quality, and industry status. But it is no coincidence (nor any great insight) to say that these shows are canonically cult because of their intense fandoms. Whether or not we can assign any inherent artistic markers to “the cult series” is, in my opinion, secondary to the more basic point that the fans make the cult, and cult fandom is inherently active fandom.

When I say that the fans “make” the cult, I mean it quite literally. In addition to the obvious fact that a fandom comprises a physical cult of viewers, the various kinds of paratexts that fans consume and produce form the creative foundation of the cult series. From “official” paratexts such as websites, DVDs, and merchandise, to “unofficial” paratexts such as fanfiction, vids, and wikis, fan engagement beyond the primary televisual text is necessary to achieve cult status. This emphasis on paratexts demonstrates how the bar for cult television has been lowered in a major way. If we understand the fundamental element of cult TV as a high level of active fandom that extends into spaces beyond the text, then nearly every show on television could, theoretically, qualify as a cult phenomenon. Amidst a surge in social TV platforms and transmedia marketing and storytelling practices, it seems to me that we can now say: to every show, its cult. But what does it mean for media studies if the old ways of distinguishing a cult object no longer render the same results? If we level the playing field and concede that *American Idol* is as much a cult show as *Battlestar Galactica*, then has the word “cult” lost all meaning? Yes and no. If we recognize that active fandom is, at least in many cases, a normalization of cult fan practices, then discourses of “quality TV” certainly become more complicated, since series of all levels of quality can inspire cultish fan behavior. If “cult” once denoted some kind of opposition to mainstream television fare, it seems that this distinction has fallen away almost entirely, complicating the cultural signifiers of popular vs. niche programming. But the death of “cult TV” as we know it opens up media fandom to a broader array of participants and encourages a reconception of “the fan” as pathologized figure.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have discussed some of the texts that play important roles in the Whedonverse. But the ‘verse is expansive—other cornerstones include *Angel*, *Much Ado About Nothing*, *Cabin in the Woods*, and, of course, Whedon’s contributions to the Marvel Cinematic Universe (MCU). The degree of Joss’s involvement in these storyworlds varies, but they all boast “that Whedony feeling” that I discussed in the introduction as a result of dispersed auteurism and active fandom at play in the Whedonverse.

But where does the Whedonverse end? Whedony feeling extends beyond those texts in which Joss has a hand in creating. For example, in an episode of *Castle*, Nathan Fillion’s character dons his iconic Malcolm Reynolds costume for Halloween—he’s a “space cowboy,” he says. In an episode of the postmodern comedy *Community*, Troy and Abed (“nerdy” best friends) disclose a plan to blame their deaths on the “unjust cancellation of *Firefly*.” On YouTube, there’s a twelve-minute mashup of *Buffy* references on shows ranging from *South Park* to *Gilmore Girls*. What effect do all of these moments have on the Whedonverse? Are they inside or outside of the expansive intertextual realm that I’ve identified in this chapter? When considered together, these allusions

add up to more than the sum of their parts—they demonstrate how fan energies disperse across a media matrix and inflect narrative experience. The spillover of emotional investment from the Whedonverse into these other spaces demonstrates one of the ways in which affective intensity powers active fandom. *South Park* may not be part of the Whedonverse, but it's clear that Whedony fandom has tangible impact on a larger media ecosystem that demands fan labor, but rewards fan love.

As I posited in the introduction, Tudyk and Fillion harnessed Whedony affect to fund *Con Man*. The series does its Whedon fan service, mostly via a slew of cameos from Whedonverse actors, including a brief appearance from Joss as a gaffer; but its cartoonish representation of *Spectrum* (the *Firefly* stand-in), the morose Neeley character, and the unattractive picture of fandom in this series leave me wondering what Tudyk and Fillion want to accomplish with *Con Man*. There is no redemptive moment for Neeley, no comeuppance for his dismissive treatment of fans, no moment in which he appreciates fan labor or love, despite the fact that the series is powered by both of those things. Tudyk even mocks how Browncoats adopted Wash's final words in *Serenity* ("I'm a leaf on the wind") by giving Neeley a cheesy fan favorite line ("I'll see you hell") that he loathes to repeat. Of course, it would be a mistake to simply conflate Neeley and Tudyk, even if the series invites us to do so. And *Con Man* certainly deploys a heavy dose of irony to accompany its almost absurd metatextuality. But while a series that uncritically celebrates fandom would be boring to watch, the lack of nuance in *Con Man* follows films like *Galaxy Quest* and *Fanboys* in presenting extreme, pathologized depictions of fans in order to suggest "proper" modes of fandom to its audience (Booth 2015, 90).

Earlier, I noted how crowdfunding "stratifies" (Booth 2016) fandom based on economic affordances. Indeed, the donation infrastructures on Indiegogo and Kickstarter, the two most prominent crowdfunding sites, literally break fan dedication down into levels of "perks"/"rewards." The individual fan is hailed only by their level of capital investment. Furthermore, *Con Man*'s end credits feature a scrolling list of all Indiegogo supporters who donated more than \$100.⁶ The several thousand names appear in miniscule font, running quickly across the screen and forming an indecipherable backdrop to the "more important" credits, which are clearly visible in normal font. *Con Man* effectively reduces its financial backers (fans) to a nebulous mass—these names might have just as easily been little dollar signs.

Active fandom has become a way of life for a wide demographic of media users, but many fans resist identifying as such due to a persisting pathologization of fan identity. Recent work in fan studies has identified a "deepening relationship between fandom and mainstream culture" (Stein 2015, 12), emphasizing the normalization of fan practice in everyday life. My conception of "active fandom" also involves seeing the fannish in the quotidian. But when a fan-funded project misses the mark so drastically in conceptualizing fans, it is clear that the identity politics of fandom are still very much in flux. We need better depictions of fans in our media texts in order to shift perceptions of active fandom. Fan labor and love, like that in the Whedonverse, are powerful forces; and understanding the dynamics of active fandom can help media users negotiate a shift in industry power structures that could lead to a more diverse, responsive media ecosystem.

Notes

- 1 I will refer to Joss by first name for two reasons: to distinguish between him and his brothers, who also write for Whedony storyworlds, and to signify the relationship dynamics between Joss and his fans, who almost unanimously refer to him by his first name.
- 2 A popular term in fandom, derived from "relationship," "shipping" refers to the practice of rooting for a particular romantic pairing within a storyworld.

- 3 This phrase is often used in fandoms to describe the people who make production decisions; it is intentionally nebulous, since industry complexities often obscure such power structures.
- 4 FOX had already paid for thirteen episodes, but they were only going to air twelve of them. There was a great deal of Internet buzz about the mysterious episode thirteen, which finally appeared as a special feature on the season one DVD.
- 5 The opening lines of *Buffy Season Eight* are: “The thing about saving the world is, once you do it, the world’s all different.”
- 6 Based on the information on donor levels at [Indiegogo.com/projects/con-man#/,](http://Indiegogo.com/projects/con-man#/) there were 7,836 donations of \$100+ out of a total 46,992 “backers.”

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Chapter 24

“May We Meet Again”: Social Bonds, Activities, and Identities in the #Clexa Fandom

Mélanie Bourdaa

The CW Network’s *The 100* is set in a post-apocalyptic world, some 100 years after a nuclear attack. The survivors of that attack, led by The Chancellor, escape and live in an orbiting space station called The Arc. In this confined environment, any crime is punishable by death unless the perpetrator is less than 18 years old. After 97 years in space, supplies and oxygen are depleting and The Chancellor, along with the council, decides to send 100 convicted youngsters to the ground to see if the Earth is inhabitable again. When they arrive on the ground, a new tale of survival begins as they soon realize they are not alone and will have to fight to stay alive.

As Stephen King noted,¹ *The 100* is harsh and doesn’t shy away from being provocative. Adapted from the Young Adult science-fiction trilogy by Kass Morgan, *The 100* is known for killing main characters and (sometimes) creating massive fan backlashes. *The 100*’s solid fan base seems to focus on the show’s strong female characters, compelling story arcs and a solid narrative storyworld, and this fan community engages emotionally and intellectually with the shows through various activities. *The 100* is often ranked third on the Tumblr fandometrics, which references the most talked-about shows on Tumblr, highlighting the engagement around the show and the conversations generated among young adult fans. One story arc was particularly rough for fans—especially lesbian fans—when the producers decided to kill off a fan favorite character, Commander Lexa. She was the leader of the Grounder people, and in love with Clarke, the protagonist from ‘SkaiKru,’ or the surviving Arc children. After having sex with Clarke for the first time, Lexa is struck by a stray bullet and dies from the wound. This death provoked passionate, violent, and activist reactions from the fans, and as I discuss, uncovered the importance of the community, the expression of identity, and the sense of belonging among fans. For the fandom, an important issue of representation was tackled, as “a lot of our youth turn to fiction to find comfort and a sense of collective identity. They seek out fictional LGBTQ characters to find people whose struggles they can identify with, and look to these fictional characters for some sort of hope” (Bourdaa 2016b).

This chapter focuses on fans’ activities as testimonials of fans producing, reworking, and creating their own. I analyze these activities from four categories: (1) the creation of social bonds (Live Tweeting, cosplay); (2) the creation of collective intelligence (wikis); (3) the creation of creative activities (Tumblr, web series); and (4) the creation of social engagements (activism). Through these four categories, we will have a sense of the activities of *The 100* fans and how they organize

themselves as a social and creative community. This chapter demonstrates what some fans are looking for in their fandoms and how they rely on each other. I argue that fandom can be safe havens where collective discussion can bring social issues and debates into the public sphere. More than analyzing fans as productive (which I, of course, will talk about), I want to underline the activist and civic aspect of fandoms through a case study.

Context and Methodology: The Era of Convergence

Fans' uses of new technologies have shed light not only on fan practices, but also on the study of these "communities of special and specialized social audiences" (Ross 2009). The Internet, and new technologies more generally, have shaped practices, activities, and creativities from fans of any cultural product, be it a TV show, a movie, or even a comic book or graphic novel. I am interested in how "new" describes not novel activities, but more so how new technologies have redefined and restructured activities that fans have previously engaged in. As Roberta Pearson (2010) observes, "The digital revolution has had a profound impact upon fandom, empowering and disempowering, blurring the lines between producers and consumers, creating symbiotic relationships between powerful corporations and individual fans, and giving rise to new forms of cultural production" (84). Henry Jenkins (2006) coined the term "cultural convergence" in order to put the emphasis on the new role fans play in the digital age. He explains: "Cultural convergence describes new ways audiences are relating to media content, their increased skills at reading across different media, and their desires for a more participatory culture." Following Jenkins's (1992, 2006) seminal works on fans, fandoms and fan activities are being discussed in the French academic world and more largely in the English-speaking world as active and creative receptors who use new technologies to perform activities and gather in a "community of practices" (Baym 1999). In France, young scholars analyze specific fannish activity such as the creation of fanfiction (François 2009), or offer a typology of fan activities (Bourdaa 2014). They also envision fans as a virtual community empowered by their use of new technologies (Martin 2011; Peyron 2013). Other scholars study a particular object, e.g., TV shows, in order to understand a shift in the reception practices and draw some specific patterns in fans' reception (Combes 2011; Bourdaa 2012).

Given the new televisual, cultural, and technological environment of convergence, scholars need to develop new methodologies to analyze interactions within fan communities and the activities and creations shared by fans. Cyber-ethnography could be a valid option: this methodology involves the observation of a community but also, sometimes, participating in the debates via a user profile about a show to be legitimated as an expert (Bourdaa, Hong-Mercier, and Seok-Kyeong 2011). For example, in research on *Battlestar Galactica* conducted between 2007 and 2009, I analyzed how fans used new technologies and interacted in official forums, and what creative activities they shared and spread in their community. The sense of belonging was strong among those *BSG* fans, and they appreciated having a place where they could meet and discuss freely. But, apart from debating storylines, plots, and possible spoilers, they also wrote and created fanfiction stories that they shared within the community.

In this chapter, I dive into *The 100* fandom, navigating through Tumblr posts, wikis, YouTube channels, DeviantArt pages, and Twitter accounts both from the writers, producers, actors, and the fans themselves. During two months, between early March and late April, I gathered digital conversations and creations from fans using specific hashtags to collect the clues and digital traces. I watched the show but I did not participate in any fan activities, except live-tweeting some episodes with the hashtag #Clexa at relevant times. This cyber-ethnography was thus not part of what Jenkins refers to as an aca-fan analysis. The amount of data collected is a testimony of the

creativity of the fandom and of their multiple activities within the fandom and beyond that in the public sphere. I focus mainly on the Clarke/Lexa shippers (LexKru or Clexa), as they were the most active fans for the period I chose to analyze.

Keep Calm and Join the Fandom: A Typology of Fans' Activities

As active producers, fans rely on various activities and new technologies (social networking sites like Twitter, Tumblr, Facebook among others) in their fandom communities to share and spread content and meaning in the public sphere. Fans are a culture of participation, expressed through interactions, activities, activism, and sharing:

A participatory culture is a culture with relatively low barriers to artistic expression and civic engagement, strong support for creating and sharing one's creations, and some type of informal mentorship whereby what is known to the most experienced is passed along to novices. A participatory culture is also one in which members believe their contributions matter, and feel some degree of social connection with one another (at the least they care what other people think about what they created). (Jenkins et al. 2016a, 4)

These activities can be classified into five distinct categories, which underline how fans organize themselves, how they create new content and use canonical ones, and how they discuss and debate core issues within the fandoms (Bourdaa 2016c). Of course, not all fans partake in these activities as there is a deep sense of intellectual and emotional engagement for each of the categories, and one fan can take part in one activity in a specific fandom and in another one in a different fandom, moving and migrating from fandom to the next.

Fans create social bonds in their communities that often transform into solid and lasting friendship. These social bonds appear of course during discussions and debates in forums, during sessions of cosplay at conventions, and during sessions of live-tweets when fans gather and share their viewing experience using a common hashtag. Fans can also act as cultural mediators, for instance when they propose subtitles for episodes or films, an activity that is coined fansubbing. With the translations, they can make the series known to a larger audience and explain some cultural, social, and political aspects of the show. Collective intelligence, demonstrated by the creation of wikis, is also something fans experience. Wikis allow them to be archaeologists, as they can dig deeper, find clues and information, and map the narrative universe. Fans' creativity is the cornerstone of every fandom, and fans can write fanfiction, create fan arts, make vids, maintain websites like Tumblr, and/or impersonate their favorite characters in Twitter feeds or Facebook posts. All these creative activities highlight the capacity of fans to intellectually engage in the stories and appropriate the characters to produce new meanings.

But it is fan activism that interests me most in this chapter. This category is at the intersection of cultural and political participation and implies a heightened level of civic engagement, especially among young fans who use the property as a tribune to express their topical opinions. For Jenkins (2012), fan activism refers to "forms of civic engagement and political participation that emerge from within fan culture itself, often in response to the shared interests of fans often conducted through the infrastructure of existing fan practices and relationships, and often framed through metaphors drawn from popular and participatory culture." Social activism and civic engagement are the most powerful activities of fans as they collectively take a stand and defend a social or political cause and make it visible in the public sphere.

***The 100* and Clexa Social Activism: Taking Back the Narrative**

The death of Commander Lexa (also known as Heda), in the seventh episode of season three of *The 100*, led to a massive backlash from fans as it raised issues of representation (here of LGBTQ representation in a network show), and of production and of social interactions as the producer and its staff deliberately queerbaited (offered the suggestion that queer characters will be prominent in the narrative only to negate that promise) the lesbian fanbase into believing that Lexa was a central character and that she was safe (see Morimoto's Chapter 16 in this volume). Fans felt betrayed, as I will show in the next sections of this chapter, as Lexa was a model of representation of the LGBTQ viewers, and especially lesbian viewers, in a televisual landscape that is still shy about putting lesbian characters in the forefront of their shows. According to the website Autostraddle, 160 lesbian and bisexual characters have died in American TV shows since 1976, and 10 in 2016 alone (Riese 2016).

The most original and visible part of fans' activity that transpires in the Clexa fandom is social activism and engagement relayed on different media outlets after the death of Lexa. The reactions from the fans were overwhelming and worked in three steps: (1) an outpouring of grief shared on social media; (2) a vocal backlash; and (3) an online fundraising campaign. As creators of the movement "We Deserved Better" stated in an interview I conducted with them: "We wanted to be acknowledged and we wanted to show them that we couldn't be expected to continue offering free social media buzz and promotion after having been so blatantly used. The social media platforms we had previously used to aid the show would now be used to send a message" (Bourdaa 2016b).

Fandoms work as social communities, and as such they participate within and collaborate in social actions. As Jenkins, boyd, and Ito (2016) note:

Participatory communities work together to inform each other about the world and teach communication and organization skills. They help each other find their personal and collective voice to provide a context through which they can articulate their common interests and shared values. Ultimately, these communities encourage conversations about social and political change. (152)

After the shock of Lexa's death, fans rallied and took actions to make their voice heard in this issues. This activism was a response to both the death of the lesbian character,² and to the *queerbaiting* the executive producer Jason Rothenberg shamelessly performed for the promotion of the show's third season. Rothenberg interacted with his lesbian fan base by posting behind the scenes pictures of both actresses, sending reassuring messages during the hiatus between season two and season three and the early filming of season three, and stating multiple times on Twitter that Lexa is a defining representation and very important to the people creating the show. For example, on January 28, 2016, he tweeted "you guys know I don't ship. But I gotta admit, #Clexa is seaworthy. #JustSaying #The100," with mentions to the actresses Eliza Parker and Alycia Debnam Carter. Moreover, The CW promoted Lexa as the poster girl for the show, yet again emphasizing the importance of representation in the show (wedeservedbetter 2016, compiled by fans to make their case). Having this information carefully distilled to the fandom with the use of the #Clexa hashtag, fans felt betrayed by the death of the character and more importantly by how she died, hit by a stray bullet, just after she has sex with Clarke for the first time (the two scenes are montaged one after the other). Rothenberg, who lost 15,000 Twitter followers the day following the airing of the episode, issued a public apology in the form of an open letter where he explained why he chose to kill Lexa and how he didn't really think about the social consequences in terms of representation at the time. But that was not enough

for the fans. Moreover, at *The 100* panel at fan convention WonderCon in March, all Lexa-related questions were banned at the demand of the showrunner, leaving the fans with a bad taste in their mouth. So, fans gathered on their virtual community and decided to act on it in several ways.

First, they organized themselves on social networks—especially Twitter—to trend some hashtags to make their discontent visible and worldwide. For example, for the airing of episode eight, fans boycotted the live broadcast and managed to make the audience drop from 1.47 million viewers for 3x07 to 1.25 for 3x08. This collective decision was taken in order to put pressure on The CW, and to show that Lexa as a character was an important part of the show and the narrative. Since then, every day a new episode airs on the channel, fans created a new, meaningful hashtag to continue their lobbying. For example, for episode 3x12 aired on April 21, one month and a half after the death, fans chose to trend the hashtag “#307ReasonsToFight,” to show that this specific audience was still there to voice their concerns about the show, and that they wanted a better representation of minorities on American television. The organizers of this movement (@Clexa_Asia) posted instructions and a guideline for the other fans to follow and make sure the actions were linked together. They provided specific information on the timelines, given that the movement is global, and asked fellow fans to program tweets on TweetDeck to synchronize the movement, specified the mentions fans had to use in the tweet, explained that pictures or GIFs would help, and noted that the profile should be public for a better way to retweet and share and spread the content. The hashtag trended in the USA with more than 147,000 tweets posted and registered. On the 24th of March, they trended #ClexasOurs, vocalizing the fact that the characters are a representation of who they are and an important one for that matter. In a further example, which was not during a live-tweet of an episode of the show, fans decided to trend GOOD REPRESENTATION MATTERS to The CW, CBS, and WarnerBrosTV after multiple lesbian characters died, to show that the movement is alive and fans are aware of other tropes being displayed on other TV shows, and to show their support to other fandoms, thus creating a multi-hub of fandoms. Of course this kind of lobbying actions existed in a pre-Internet era as Jenkins and Tulloch (1995) recalled when Gaylaxians (gay fans of *Star Trek*) sent letters to the production to get a gay character on the show. But today, with the Internet, the lobbying is massive, worldwide, visible, loud, and fans use digital tactics to make things happen.

Fans can be more political in their actions and organize themselves to support social causes that matter to them and that are related to the narrative of the show they love. The Harry Potter Alliance, created by Andrew Slack and Paul de George, is a good example of an organizational activism community that “built connections between cultural and political participation through multiple levers, including narratives that wove together real-world and fantasy-based civic action, and hybrid practices brought civic action into fan events and activities” (Jenkins et al. 2016b, 167). Other examples of fan activism include *The Hunger Games* fans fighting against the over-glamorization of the Lionsgate Transmedia marketing campaign and “taking back the narrative” (Bourdaa 2015) into their hands or fans of Superman who represented him as a symbol of good immigration and a fighter for justice. For *The 100*, lesbian fans turned their frustration, anger, and disappointment over the death of Lexa into positive social and political activism in order to underline how representation and identities matter. They created two websites to give context to their outrage and their actions—wedeservedbetter.com and lgbtfansderservebetter.com—stating that Lexa as a character was the representation of the community on the show and killing her had a direct impact on lesbian fans. They wrote a statement in which they archived all the tweets from the writers’ room, the showrunner, the network, showing how misled they were and reinforcing their decisions to take actions. They also compiled 28 articles

from critics, and continue to do so on their Twitter accounts, to explain how their anger was not only related to the end of their ship but turned into more of a social and ethical issue that needs to be addressed.³ This database of tweets and articles created by the fans themselves is important because it gives an informative background to justify and amplify their actions. They turned their energy into something positive by organizing a fundraiser for The Trevor Project, an association that provides suicide prevention to LGBT people. The tagline they used for their homepage on the fundraising website is noteworthy: “Heda, may we meet again. Your fight is over, ours is just beginning.” The character Heda (for Commander) is their mentor and they use the same sentences characters on the show say to each other when they part. The second part of the tagline underlines the re-appropriation of the fight by the fans, by the passage from the pronoun “your” to “ours” and by the fact that they clearly position themselves in the continuity of Lexa’s actions.

They explain on the website the goal of this social activism: “We continue to attempt now what we did then. To forge the creation of a safe haven opposing the baffling misrepresentation we had so hoped to eradicate for the younger generations. We will take this yet again to serve as a lesson, but, let it be us this time who teach it.” Clearly, the creators of the movement needed The Trevor Project at some point in their lives and now they want the LGBT community to feel protected and loved. They managed to raise almost \$121,000, donated by 3,827 fans. These actions are important to fans as a symbol of what matters to them and how to bring fans together in a social fight. This fundraising “has been effective at addressing the politics of self, helping young people to think differently through everyday life concerns, such as suicides, mental health and body imagery. It encourages them to come to grips with their own personal identity as well as to commit to changing public policy” (Jenkins et al. 2016b, 168). The example of *The 100* fits this description as the point of gathering was the death of a lesbian character, which encourages young lesbian fans who felt they were misrepresented on TV and in the public sphere to take actions together. These actions also give young fans a sense of empowerment and a tribune to voice their concerns, their choices, and their fears. As George de Paul explained to me in an e-mail conversation on the political actions of the HP Alliance:

To an outsider perspective, fans may seem geeky or socially awkward. But really, it’s just a community of people with a shared passion and enthusiasm. So when we’re able to give that community positive and meaningful projects to engage with, it can help to validate their enthusiasm on both a personal way and in a public way. Henry Jenkins’s research has also shown that many of the young people involved in HPA weren’t politically engaged before. They are using new media in innovative ways, but are often cut off from the political process. Jenkins draws on the potentialities of new technologies to enhance the political and social activism of young people and generations: Yet the availability of networked communications has given more people access to the means of expressing their voice, increased public and governmental awareness of the diversity of voices that are seeking to be heard, led to new consideration of what kinds of spaces and platforms are needed for effective political exchanges, and fostered what he calls “new intensities of listening” (140) as more participants feel an ethical need to try to process the emerging conversation” (Jenkins et al., 2016). Our work has helped create a political and civic identity for young people that they’ll carry for the rest of their lives. (George DePaul in Bourdaa 2014)

My analysis of the wedeservebetter movement shows that fans use social media to organize themselves, recruit fans, and make the movement visible and loud via numerous meaningful hashtags, and that they chose to empower themselves and fight the misrepresentation of lesbians on TV by raising awareness around the issue and helping a LGBT association.

A Strong Social Bond: Discussion, Debates and Friendship

The social link is strong in *The 100* fandom, especially for the Clexa shippers, as there is an issue of representation and identity at stake in the show and in the public space. Fans find each other on Twitter using the hashtag #Clexa, a name created by melting the names Clarke and Lexa. David Peyron (2015) underlines that giving a name to the fandom, or here the sub-fandom, “represents an act of social validity of their identity” and reinforces the existence of the group. They also called themselves LexKru, in reference to the character and the way tribes’ names are given in the show:

Lexa was an inspiration, and in that sense people wanted to identify with her culture, people wanted to honour her in a sense, and what better way to do this than to take our cues from the show? The naming of our group “Lexkru” in the fashion of grounder clans (TriKru, Skaikru, etc.) gives people a sense of belonging and a way to reclaim Lexa as ours. (Bourdaa 2016b, interview with We Deserved Better)

The activity of live-tweeting is central for the fandom as it reenacts a pseudo collective viewing of the show, reinforcing the sense of belonging and the experience of sharing that is present in any fandom. After the problematic death of Lexa during the seventh episode of season three, fans gathered around hashtags they created to show their disappointment and how betrayed they felt by the show and the producers. Around #WeDeserveBetter and #LGBTFansDeserveBetter, fans tried to explain how the death of a lesbian character has an impact on their lives and on the way they are represented in general. For example, Mel on April 8, one month after the episode aired, tweeted “DARE TO DEFY TROPES – this is more than just TV ur playing with. It’s our lives. My thoughts. #wedesevbet,” emphasizing the importance of lesbian portrayals on TV and how Lexa’s death affected her and other fans. To take the problem into the public space, domik added “movies: we die tv shows: we die books: we die video games: we die real life: we’re done #wedesevbet #lgbtfansdeservebet.” In those two examples, fans made themselves part of the issue by using the pronoun we/our and thus identifying themselves as lesbians, justifying their right to be mad and vocal on this issue. On Tumblr, again with the hashtag #Clexa or #ClarkeAndLexa, fans share their thoughts and their happiness of being part of a group that won’t judge them and that will understand their devotion to the characters. Pgj1982 posted a reflection of how she felt about the fandom and how important it is for her to be part of it, to not be alone. She concluded the post saying:

We are strong together; it is true the majority of us will never meet or cross-paths in life at lest (*sic*) not physically; but we do have one thing in that connects us....that is **Lexa**. For me when life is getting me down, or there is infighting within the fandom I ask myself.....**W.W.L.D WHAT WOULD LEXA DO?**

The character brings fans together; she is the cement that created the fandom for this fan. Lexa is also a vector of moral and ethical issues, and Pgj1982 uses her as a role model to make her decision, inspired by the narrative of the character and her choices in the show. The support and the newly-found friendship in the fandom are central and reinforce the sense of belonging among the Clexakru. Nico, a 22-year-old female English fan, thanks her fellow members in a heartfelt message for their support after the death of Lexa and thus the end of Clarke and Lexa together. In the conclusion of her thank you note, she pointed out the support in the community: “But i have support and that matters. But thank you once more. Kindness is something that i find much easier to extend than gross traits such as hatred and pettiness; to see it in such overwhelming numbers was inspirational. Thank you.”

On another Tumblr, a fan posted her support to all her fellow members after the death of Lexa and gave them comfort and advice to handle the pain they might feel, as friends might do in a sad moment:

@ clexa fandom

- we're all here for each other, if you need to talk just send a message to a fellow clexa shipper
- i love you all and i wish i could give everyone a hug
- don't forget to eat and take care of yourself
- i hope you find at least one thing on your dash that will make you laugh today.

The friendship that fans might feel in a fandom is linked to the sense of belonging that is particularly strong in those communities, and to the importance of sharing. Sharon Marie Ross (2008) argues that “the sharing involves a reciprocity of listening, allowing for an awareness among spectators of being a part of a collective – a social audience – which brings its own pleasures” (74). Fandoms can thus be considered as both an interpretative community (Radway 1984), in the sense that fans will decode together the meanings of the narrative, and as a social community, in the sense that fans share a social bond. Fans “take pleasures in the fact that they are part of a specialized social audience while also working to defend their text as worthy of a broader social audience” (Ross 2008, 49).

The community is primordial for fans, as it represents a safe haven, a place where they can find people who understand their passion and who will share it with them in various discussions and activities. The creators of *We Deserved Better* underline this aspect and highlight the camaraderie that came to live in the fandom:

There is a special type of bond that can only form when you've been through something particularly rough with someone or have fought at their side. This is something we all shared and that was unique to us. It has fostered camaraderie and sisterhood between people who prior to this may not have directly been interacting with one another and were mostly active in their respective corners of the fandom. (Bourdaa 2016b)

The virtual space broke the barriers of time and geographical spaces, bringing fans a sense of belonging much wider than before the Internet.

Collecting and Editing: The Wikia and Collective Intelligence

Wikis constructed around TV shows are part of fans' activities that show organizing skills as well as editing skills and a will to collect and compile information on the shows and the narrative. For Erinoff (2011), “a wiki provides a way to create, nurture and sustain an intellectual community of this nature without its members ever physically coming together by providing them with an asynchronous electronic meeting space” (D-1). Paul Booth (2010) explains that “ExtantWikis are databases with organizational principles, ... and user-generated archives, which other users can read, add to, delete, change, add pictures or links, revert to an older form, or even delete entirely” (89). In that sense, Wikis fit Pierre Lévy's definition of collective intelligence, since fans collect and share information, contribute to the editing of the document, and act as social mediators in the community. Lévy explains how collective intelligence created what he calls “cosmopedia,” a collaborative and universal space of thinking: “the members of a thinking community search, inscribe, connect, consult, explore. Not only does the cosmopedia make available to the collective

intellect all of the pertinent knowledge available to it at a given moment, but it also serves as a site of collective discussion, negotiation, and development” (Lévy 1997, 217). The 100 Wikia, the section managed by the American fans, counts 356 pages on the wiki⁴ divided into different sections such as characters, episodes, locations, groups, governments, events and links to the narrative of the books, and a transcript of all the episodes that aired. These details underline the comprehensive approach of the stories and worldbuilding by the fans as they manage to cover all of *The 100* on one interactive and collaborative website. This flux of information can be edited or altered at any moment, changing the entire narrative and structure of the wiki, and thus making the database built by the fans malleable. Related to Clexa, a disclaimer from the administrators of the wiki states that the Clarke and Lexa page has been permanently locked to avoid unwanted edits, meaning that only the registered users can change the page. This attempt to undermine the importance of the ship and corrupt the fan page underlines the “war” between shippers of the Clarke and Lexa couple and shippers of the Clarke and Bellamy one, called Bellarke, putting again into perspective some identity issues (lesbians vs. heterosexual fans). This issue is also raised on the Clexa-centric Tumblr, when, for example, a fan posted: “Sorry Bellarkes, I don’t want them to be a thing anymore, Clarke and Lexa will forever be meant to be.” The battle between the two sub-fandoms led to some actions within the Wikia, and the change in “the collaborative authorship” (Booth 2010, 92) of the platform.

But the Wikia is also and above all a symbol of how well organized the fandom is, and how resourceful they are in managing the flux of information, creating on-going and interactive documents and texts, and socializing in the forum section. They have put together rules and guidelines to create articles, and to use pictures, media, and a template to harmonize all the references and quotations they will use in their articles. They also imagined roles in order to administrate the Wikia. The administrators have extended rights (they are elected to this position based on their skills and knowledge of the show) while the enforcers keep trolls away from the Wikia and fans can only apply to this position when they have shown that they are active users (50 edits at least). Then the Update Team makes sure the information is verified and relevant, especially after a new episode airs, and fans can apply only if they have the support of two other members of the community to back them. This categorization of organizational roles matches the one Ivan Askwith (2009) draws when he analyses players of the *Lost* Alternate Reality Game. For him, players naturally endorsed roles such as organizers (usually the ones who set up the wiki), detectives (the ones who search for the clues), decoders (the ones who analyze the clues), and lurkers (the non-active members of the community). But most of all, fans who build the Wikia play two major roles in the fandom. They first act as archaeologists, what Jason Mittell (2009) calls “forensic fandom,” as they constantly search for information, navigating from media platform to media platform, gathering news and intel. Then, they are true cartographers, as they try to reconstruct the narrative of the show and build an encyclopedia of the series. “Rather than being viewed as a *tabula rasa* to be filled and edited by fans, wikis have been seen and used largely as online encyclopedias (likely due to Wikipedia’s popularity)” (Toton 2008). Fans aggregate what they collect from the show, as well as what they understand of it, in one interactive platform—a database constructed by the fans themselves, a testimony of their readings of the show.

The Many Facets of #Clexakru Creativity

Fans’ productivity and creativity are one of the pillars of fandom, which shows how fans interpret and re-interpret texts, create meanings from texts, and share their textual productions in the fandom but also in the public space, via a movement called “spreadable media” (Jenkins, Ford, and Green 2013). As Jenkins notes, fans’ creativity is exacerbated by a paradox between fascination for

the text but also frustration. In the wake of Lexa's death, this paradox fueled many creations, from fanfiction to GIF sets, from web series to vids. These creations were for the most part posted on Tumblr, a fan favorite interface for the sensation of limitlessness it provides (see Kohnen's Chapter 22 in this volume), and archived with the hashtags #Clexa, #Clarke x Lexa or #Lexa x Clarke. The affordances of the interface allow fans to post texts, GIF sets, videos, comments, drawings, and make it easy for fans to share the productions via the reblog button. Fans use the culture of remix (Allard 2005) to underline their additive or their transformative comprehension of the texts. This is what Henry Jenkins (2009) coined performance, where fans can actively identify "sites of potential performance in and around the transmedia narrative where they can make their own contributions." It should be noted, as Louisa Stein (2016) states, that "these fan aesthetic forms did not emerge from nowhere; that is, they've evolved out of already existing fan practices, and it is useful to think of them both in relation to previous fan creative traditions and as evolving forms of fan authorship in their own right." For example, she points out that the creation of GIF sets is a legacy from vidding, since fans use specific parts of the texts and mix them together to create a "new reading or new meaning born of new contexts and juxtapositions." After Lexa's death, fans began posting their GIF productions focusing on the moments Clarke and Lexa spent together as a couple or when they ruled together as the Commander and the leader of SkaiKru. Fans chose either to repeat the moment when they finally consummate their love just before Lexa is shot or to put into perspective every moment the two characters met to show how they loved each other. For example, one GIF set on the *We Deserve Better Tumblr* that received 5,591 notes, puts together all the scenes where Lexa and Clarke look at each other from their first encounter in season two to the moment of Lexa's death in Clarke's arms in season three, reproducing as the author states "the timeline of their love story," thus producing a time period for their romance. Some other GIF sets emphasize the importance of Lexa in Clarke's life by mixing interviews from actress Eliza Taylor (who plays Clarke) in which she talks about the love Lexa and Clarke felt with scenes of the two characters together. Some fans preferred reworking their GIF sets with actual moments from the show but incorporating new dialogues that create a new meaning and a new context to the scene. Those posts are tagged "The 100+ incorrect quotes" and emphasized on the fantasized sexual attraction of the two characters by the fans, some of them beginning with the words "I want you" or "I want to make sweet, sweet love to you" which come from the interpretation and reading of the fan. Clarkdml posted pictures from moments of the couple in love, with a last picture showing Clarke crying after Lexa dies with this quote from Fitzgerald's *Tender is the Night*: "I don't ask you to love me always like this, but I ask you to remember. Somewhere inside of me there will always be the person I am tonight." The choice of the quote underlines the literary knowledge of the fan who puts it into perspective, highlighting once again the importance of Lexa in Clarke's life. Opposite these creations, some works contextualize the love in some alternate universes where Lexa is not dead and the couple live together. For example, fans invented text messages between the characters where they are a couple deciding to adopt cats or puppies. Other examples enact conversations between Raven and Clarke or Octavia and Clarke where the latter announces her engagement and then her wedding to Lexa. As well as AU fanfictions, these creations allow fans to get past their frustration and create a new imaginative world that fits their readings of the show. The characters can thus outlive their death on screen and continue to evolve and develop in alternate universes made up by fans. Vidding is another popular form of creation where fans do a video montage of their favorite scenes set to music. The aesthetics differ from one video to another but this creation shows the technical skills of the fans as they often do elaborate montage edits to make scenes match and fit to the music they have chosen to illustrate the meaning of their video.

Many fan videos in the Clexa fandom put the emphasis on the relationship between the two characters, aggregating scenes from different episodes. For instance, Angie created one of those

videos and justified it by saying that she “made this because I miss my heda (Commander Lexa) and I had to... okay? Thanks for watching. P.s: Jason (Rothenberg, the Showrunner), I hate you. P.s 2: Bring Clexa back, thanks.” The frustration of the fans, and the void felt by the fans, are clearly filled by the creation of the montage in which the two characters are still alive. The video montage allows fan to archive the relationship, to hold on to and to watch whenever they want. Some of these videos are multi-fandom oriented and use footage from *The 100* as well as from *Fear The Walking Dead (FTWD)*, a show in which Alycia Debnam Carey (the actress portraying Lexa) stars. For example, a video entitled “Clexa AU // She found me,”²⁵ parallels some scenes from *FTWD* and *The 100* imagining a dialogue on walkie-talkie between Lexa and Clarke. At the end of the video, the author chose to edit a moment where Alycia Debnam Carey says “I love you” in *FTWD*, finally vocalizing the words Lexa couldn’t pronounce in *The 100* before she died.

Many fans on Tumblr asked the authors of fanfiction to make the character still alive in their stories, thus erasing the actual moment of her death. “Fan fiction has long been the most popular way of concretizing and disseminating the fans’ passion for a particular fictional universe” (Eate 2015, 22). Fan fiction is a good example of fans’ creativity as they often rework the source material. This phenomenon also calls out to the polysemy of a text. As Cornel Sandvoss (2005) acknowledges, the polysemy of a text is crucial for audiences to unleash their creativity: “Such approaches assume that the more polysemic a given text, the greater the ability of audiences to evade existing patterns of social and cultural power.” This issue of the polysemy of a text has been widely analyzed by various scholars such as Jenkins, Sandvoss, and Sara Gwenllian-Jones (2000). She states that her research on Xena’s fandom has opened up paths to understanding “how fans interpret their chosen television texts, how they relate them to their personal experiences, how they produce subsidiary texts of their own (fanfiction, fan art, fan videos, etc.), and how they form interpretative communities predicated on a common interest in a particular text” (405). On the website fanfiction.net, which compiles texts from fan authors of multiple fandoms, 645 texts are linked to the Clarke and Lexa pairing. Among them, many are tagged AU for Alternate Universes, either in a modern world where, for example, the characters are modern-day college students or in *The 100* universe where Lexa didn’t die. The summary for the fanfiction titled “we will make some day together” states that the text is “canon-divergent post 3x07,” implying that the text is fanon, directly from the mind of the fans and not using the real canon of the show anymore. With these alternate stories, fans want to resolve the wrongs made in the show and continue the blossoming romance of the two characters they are rooting for. Penelope Eate in her study of *Twilight* fanfiction, analyzed the same issue in authoring the texts: “the authors of *Twilight* fanfic rewrite/right gender wrongs” (Eate 2015, 23) that fans perceived in the saga according to their readings. Buffy46143 puts in her fanfiction of 20 chapters “that day has come” just after the events of 3x07 with a twist “to resolve what it appears will go unresolved on the show (their relationship) while also wrapping up the plots of season 3 in my own way.” Clearly, these fanfiction stories are part of the femslash subgenre, a genre in which authors pair female same-sex characters in erotic stories.

Fans have also artistic and drawing skills that they share in the fandom and on a special website called DeviantArt (see Seymour’s Chapter 21 in this volume). Again using the keyword Clexa in the fan art section of the site, I managed to retrieve 430 works from the fans, some of which had received comments from their fellow members, underlining once again the discussions and the importance of sharing in the community. Fans re-created the story of Lexa and Clarke in a comic-book style, using the codes of the genre, with panels, dialogue bubbles, a serialization mode, and super-heroes style. The comic *Stupid Clexa* posted in five chapters on DeviantArt, is clearly intended to satisfy the Clexa shippers as it gives an alternate ending to an event that happened on the show. In the comic, the two characters end up having sex, an ending which clearly differs from the canon narrative at that time. The author AjcKorrasami created other drawings using a more

manga style in which she makes some crossovers between *The 100* and *Korra*, particularly to explain Lexa's decision to betray Clarke and the SkaiKru people at the end of season two. Again, as the author tells the fandom, the attempt to draw the situation was to "balance out my frustrations" (AjcKorrasami 2015). The drawings also appear to be a way to counter the anticipation especially after some fans watched the official teasers, like the one where Clarke and Lexa kissed for the first time (2x14). The drawer explains why she decided to work on this: "Oh my gosh I haven't even gone to the episode where they kissed and I'm already losing my shit. I love these two so much. Clarke looks innocent but she's viciously sexy. Lexa is badass, but damn is she just so precious! I WILL GO DOWN WITH THIS SHIP!" The drawing shows Lexa, and Clarke's mother Abby being very protective of Clarke. The last panel shows Lexa hugging Clarke very close and saying to Abby "she's in very good hands," while Clarke blushed in front of her mother. This drawing could be seen as an alternate universe at the time it was posted since the kiss hasn't already happened, but once again, it shows how shippers of Clexa define the relationship and were rooting for them since day one.

Finally, a group of fans created *The Clexa Series*, a parodic spin off web series streamed on the YouTube channel of the same name, in which Lexa and Clarke wake up in a modern universe in New York, and have no memories of knowing each other. The web series now numbers five episodes ranging from one minute, 48 seconds for the shortest segment to four minutes, 11 seconds for the longest installment. 120 members are registered to the channel and the first episode was seen by 3,074 people, and led to encouraging comments from the fans asking for episode two. The producers of the web series, fans of the pairing, functioned as a team in situ or on virtual spaces and did all the work from the writing of the web episodes (by a college student in screenwriting), to the acting, the filming, the montage and the post-production, showing their artistic and technical skills to produce and diffuse audiovisual content. They also value the interactions with their audience and the fandom; reinforcing the social bond I talked about in the first section, answering questions from Tumblr, Facebook, or Twitter and taking into account comments and suggestions for improving the creative process. For example, on their Facebook page, they post and share sneak peeks from the episodes, behind-the-scenes footage and pictures, and parts of screenplays to their followers giving them a glimpse of the production process and access to the creativity. In a Q&A session they did on YouTube, the two actresses of the web series admit that the biggest challenge for them was "mimicking the actions and the ways" the two actresses play both characters, but also putting a little of them in impersonating the characters. The idea of the web series came to their minds after a session of cosplay for a Halloween party where they both impersonated Lexa and Clarke. We can see the web series as more of a tribute to the characters in that sense than a parody, the sub-genre being more visible in the comic situation of the storylines.

All these examples, from writing fanfiction to producing web series, from creating GIF sets to drawing art, show the vast variety of creative activities in a fandom. But above all, these processes are like works-in-progress in the sense that creative fans share their productions in the fandom and fellow members make comments, suggestions, and reviews that will improve the material. They also prove that fans are expert viewers because they re-interpret the source material and re-appropriate the characters. These activities, though visible in other fandoms (fan arts, fanfiction, fan video, Tumblr are representative of any fandoms), are important for the Clexa community especially because they are part of their collective thinking and their will to re-write what they think went wrong in the show. For them, *The 100* showrunners made a mistake killing Commander Lexa, a symbol of the LGBTQ community, making her death a symbol of misrepresentation of LGBT characters on television, following the long list of dead lesbian and bisexual characters on American scripted shows. These creativities represent a way for them to share their grief and to make the character live again in alternate universes, and positively think of the character and her relationship with Clarke as a positive symbol for them.

The #Clexa Fandom and Questions of Identity and the Sense of Family

The social bonds and the sense of belonging are clearly strong in this fandom, and can be seen in interactions, creations or actions of social engagement, gluing fans together in this “community of practices” (Baym 1999), and posing the question of identity. The issue of identity was clearly an important point for the lesbian fans because, as I have stated before, the death of Lexa brought a question of representation (or more to the point of misrepresentation) of a minority on TV, continuing a long list of dead lesbians in American TV shows. As I mentioned earlier, this trend is called the Bury Your Gay (or BYG) trope. Since 1976, 165 gay characters have been killed on American scripted TV, often to advance the plot of a straight character, raising concerns and issues of positive representation on TV (Hogan 2016). A fan wrote an open letter to the showrunner voicing how terrified she is for young LGBT people around the world watching shows where gay characters are killed. She described witnessing the death of Tara on *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and feeling that there could be no happy ending for gay characters, and by ricochet for her and LGBT people. She ends her letter this way: “I have people I need to fix. I have young LGBT kids that I now have to convince they are good enough, that they are special, that they will get a happy ending...” This fan thinks Lexa was more than a character on TV, she was a reflection of who she is, and who other LGBT people are, and her death will have deep impact on their lives and their identity as a sexual minority. On Tumblr, numerous fans supported each other after the episode aired, giving comfort in the fact that who they are is strong and good. For example, clexasocial-media wrote: “to my fellow queer women who felt as though they have been punched in the guts after tonight’s episode. Our love is good. It is safe and strong. Our love is breathtaking. ... Our love is more powerful than any CW writer could ever hope to imagine.” She tries to reassure her fellow lesbian fans that everything will be okay and that, despite the trope, they have to continue fighting together. For other fans, the pairing of Clarke and Lexa was a gateway especially for young LGBT people who might be ostracized, different or alienated, a representation of what they feel and who they are in a harsh society, as expressed by this statement: “to all the underage queer kids who aren’t out to their homophobic parents and found solace of seeing Lexa and Clarke in loving each other once a week, I’m sorry. I’m so, so sorry, you didn’t deserve this, you deserved so much better, you deserve the world, and I promise that one day we will get there.” As these posts prove, the #Clexa couple was much more than a ship for the fans, it was a matter of representation, that helped young fans identify. And in this context, the fandom, with all the sharing, the social bond, the activities, and the activism, is a place of gathering, a united “family.” Even if they are arguing about which hashtag to trend or which actions to take next, they are a community of individuals with a common interest and goal, engaging in social activities and bringing awareness on social and political issues to the public sphere.

Notes

- 1 On April 11, 2016, he tweeted: “totally hooked on THE 100. Harsh and propulsive.”
- 2 Reinforcing the now infamous “Bury the Gay” trope, which details how shows kill gay characters to make straight characters plots advance.
- 3 Many of the articles referred to the death of Tara in *Buffy The Vampire Slayer*, where the lesbian character is shot by a stray bullet meant for Willow, just after they have sex. Critics also paralleled the death of Lexa with the death of Denise Cloyd, hit by an arrow out of nowhere that happened the same week in *The Walking Dead*.
- 4 http://the100.wikia.com/wiki/The_100_Wiki last checked on April 20, 2016.
- 5 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3hxdDYeMpT4>

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Chapter 25

Of Spinoffs and Spinning Off

Louisa Stein

The financial rewards [of spinoffs] are so great that they routinely overwhelm such aesthetic qualms as may exist ... Most spinoffs are like wealthy heirs, living off capital accumulated by the forefathers.

(Gitlin 2005, 68–69)

This chapter explores the politics of “spinning off” a TV series from both a fan and industry perspective. I approach the spinoff not necessarily as a done deal (so, actually, not always “the spinoff” in a contained way) but rather as the process of “spinning off,” a process that exists in the tensions between audience and producer visions and desires for the original TV series, and indeed that performs those very tensions. I seek to put into conversation industrial and fan strategies for spinning something new out of an already existing TV text.

Mel Stanfill (2015) uses the metaphor of fans spinning yarn to understand the value inherent in fan labor:

To think that all of the value derives from the cotton and that the yarn-making process adds nothing is another manifestation of commodity fetishism: acting as if the thing itself has value independent of the human processes that put it there ... In thinking about fan creative production, then, we need to talk about spinning yarn—an aptly gendered metaphor for deeply feminized forms of labor ... These notions of creativity focus on what’s added—the particular way the yarn is spun.

Thus, fans “spin” yarn out of the fibers of media culture, and that act of spinning—a gendered fan labor—contributes to and shapes the very value of the media text, which becomes itself a product of fan work. Fan spinning (off) exists in conversation with industrial spinning (off), encapsulating the tensions inherent in industry/fan relationships.

Through commercial TV spinoffs, TV producers strive to extend a TV series’ characters, narrative, concepts, and fandom beyond the premise of the initial series in order to continue the life and reach of a series. Fans also seek to expand and transform TV series through fanfiction and multimedia work, creating concepts and universes that spin off from the original commercial media texts to become their own centers. Where commercial spinoffs posit limited futures and interpretations, and foreclose upon collective ownership of the future of a series universe, fan spinning off thrives on a potentially limitless multiplicity of shared narratives and authorship.

These two perspectives come into conflict most clearly when TV producers integrate “back door spinoffs” into current series, offering a possible vision of a future series which fans may engage with or reject even as they continue their own creative processes of spinning off.

In these different modes of potential spinoff we see the negotiations between audience and industry over who controls the ideas of a particular media text, who can share their vision of how that media text might expand or transform, and in what form and with what boundaries. Fan spinoffs exist as spreadable media circulating through digital fan networks. Fans can create spinoffs of TV series that take similar but not identical form to the TV source—a web series as opposed to a TV series—but often instead take the more decentered transmedia form of written fanfiction combined with GIF sets and playlists, often authored by multiple creators in a nonlinear fashion. Official TV producers can attempt to spinoff into TV itself (where fans cannot), but the stakes for doing so are high and expensive, and so they also create transmedia spinoffs that compete with fan creativity in the digital sphere. Embedded in the interplay between fan and producer spinoffs, we find fraught tensions: who controls the imagined future of a media text, the industry or fans? And who gets to make that future happen, in what form, and for whom?

Valuing the Industrial Spinoff

Fans and scholars alike approach the commercial TV spinoff with suspicion. Like Todd Gitlin in the opening epigraph, fans often look at spinoffs as unoriginal and commercially driven, and thus artistically inferior. Yes, the potential of an official spinoff offers significant value to fans in that it presents the promise of more: more of the beloved characters and universe, and more of the stories fans want to hear. However, precisely because the spinoff matters to fans, it can also represent a potential personal betrayal, as producers and network shift attention and energy away from the concept and cast that drew fans to a TV series in the first place, in search of a new audience that will extend the life of a series. To fans, spinoffs can represent a vital misreading of audience interest, or worse, a rejection of actual fans in favor of an imagined future audience that would be somehow preferable in terms of breadth, demographics, or buzz-spreading labor.

Although we can certainly list successful TV spinoffs that have taken their place in TV history, like *The Jeffersons* or *Laverne and Shirley*, we also have more than a handful of somewhat laughable examples of TV series spinoffs that seem absurdly misguided in their attempts to continue a franchise, to name just a few: *Joanie Loves Chachee* (and I say this as an early fan of the Joanie/Chachee pairing), *The Ropers*, and *AfterMASH* (Bellamy et al. 1990; Gitlin 2005; Kilian and Schwarz 2013). While perhaps possessing some charms, these spinoffs generally did not equal the legacy of the series from which they were spawned, nor did they maintain original levels of audience interest. More recently, some TV spinoffs have arguably been more in touch with fan desires. *Angel* is an example of a successful spinoff that some fans even liked better than the beloved original series, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, and that lasted close to as long (five years for *Angel* to *Buffy*’s seven) (Kilian and Schwarz 2013). The TV series *Flash* spun off from the fan favorite *Arrow*, and both now have interrelated, equally dynamic fandoms. Both of these spinoffs thrived on fan engagement with the series’ intertextuality, with clear interrelationships and ongoing narrative connections between the television series, and similar interweavings in fan production. But even successful spinoff series such as these undoubtedly leave behind fans of the mothership series who did not see all the things that they loved and/or wanted out of the original series represented in the televisual spinoff.

More recently still, TV producers have explored the possibilities of official digital transmedia spinoffs, in which producers tell paratextual stories through digital media that might either bring in new audience members or maintain audience interest during the gaps between television

seasons. Thus, TV producers have created (or hired others to create) web series that focus on particular characters that play minor roles in a TV series' televisual center, but are given central roles in a digital spinoff. For example, in the case of the popular sitcom, *The Office*, a proposed televisual spinoff focused on side character Dwight failed (in the sense that it was not picked up for its own season), but in contrast an *Office* spinoff web series, "The Accountants," was able to tell the story of minor/supporting characters Kevin, Oscar, and Angela for a full season, streaming on NBC's website. Recently, *UnReal's* web series "The Faith Diaries" served as promotional hype for the second season of the LifeTime TV network's critically acclaimed *UnReal*. *The Faith Diaries* strived to remind viewers what they love about *UnReal* in order to entice them to come back for season two (Bendix 2016; Bix 2016). But *The Faith Diaries* also served as *UnReal* spinoff, centering on minor character Faith, and thus continuing her storyline, a storyline that would not appear in the upcoming second season. As a digital extension, *The Faith Diaries* offered a storyline focused on queer identity, yet it served to advertise a season that did not foreground issues of queerness nor queer characters, thus suggesting that digital transmedia spinoffs can tackle ideological issues to a degree of depth TV series perhaps cannot; or we might also more cynically argue that web series spinoffs offer TV producers a way to seem to offer diverse representation while still maintaining more conservative broadcast foci in the core televisual text.

In the more decentered world of social media, official spinoffs take the form of socially-networked stories not tied to televisual centers but instead to digital centers, or to a network of multiple interconnected stories with no obvious centers. For example, *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* adapted Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* to the digital age, with Lizzie telling her story through her video blog on YouTube. The series initially was told predominantly through Lizzie's vlog, but part way through the narrative, her sister Lydia began vlogging in what appeared to be a "spinoff" of Lizzie's vlog. However, Lydia's vlog (entitled *The Lydia Bennet*) turned out to be central to the larger *Lizzie Bennet Diaries'* narrative and its transformation of *Pride and Prejudice* (Sarah T. 2013). *The Lydia Bennet* transformed viewers' understanding of the narrative from something that took place via a single vlog to something that took place across a network of online sites, including not only Lizzie's and Lydia's vlogs but also the Pinterest site of their other sister Jane, and through the videos released by Darcy's younger sister, Georgina, for the fictional company Pemberley Digital. The follow-up series produced by the (non-fictional) Pemberley Digital (also the name of the LBD production company), *Welcome to Sanditon*, starred Georgina, who had been only a minor character in *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* (Klose 2013; Seymour 2015). In addition to its own status as spinoff, *Welcome to Sanditon* enacted an even more decentered vision of the spinoffs, as audiences were encouraged to create their own fictional characters and spin off their own stories within the world of *Welcome to Sanditon*. Further, web series like *Green Gables Fables* offer networks of vlogs that present multiple perspectives as they tell a story or set of interlinked stories; each could be read as a spinoff of the other, or of a central storyline (depending on the series). Together they form the overall advancing narrative, and this collective storytelling in itself offers pleasure to viewers who follow the multiple sites of narrative and character development. This decentered digital storytelling, seemingly composed of multiple intersectional spinoffs, functions as a form of digital narrative complexity sometimes spectacular in its orchestration, just as Jason Mittell (2014) writes of "narrative special effect" in his work on narrative complexity in television. The multipronged story structure and its dynamic unfolding in real time are a key part of the appeal for these web series. Again, the emphasis is on the "spinning" of the multithreaded story rather than the final product of the "spinoff."

Web series seem to offer infinite potential for spinning off, official and unofficial, especially as audiences have access to the same (or similar forms) of production as do commercial producers. In contrast, the possibilities for TV spinoffs are greatly inhibited because access to production is much more limited, even to commercial producers. The backdoor pilot offers TV producers the

opportunity to incorporate into the original series a pilot for a potential spinoff, thus offsetting production costs for a TV pilot. Well-known examples of successful spinoff series that came out of backdoor pilots include *A Different World* and *CSI* (in multiple instances). Failed examples include the Dwight-focused *Office* spinoff mentioned above, the attempted *Gilmore Girls* back door pilot focused on bad boy Jess, or the *Gossip Girl* backdoor pilot focused on a young Lily van der Woodsen, and the failed *Supernatural* backdoor spinoff, *Bloodlines*, which I will examine at length shortly.

The backdoor spinoff is in a sense the industrial equivalent of an attempt to have one's cake and eat it too. Rather than investing in an entirely new project to create a plot, producers use the production and narrative context of an already existing series to launch a new spinoff series. There are some pitfalls to this Trojan horse approach. The in-series context may allow little viewer tolerance for departures from the tone, themes, and central characters of the mothership series. More than that, fans of a given series likely have their own ideas about what a successful spinoff of that series would look like. More pointedly, fans envision spinoffs that would not only offer more of the same but would also give them more of what they want and less of what they don't want. Fans often hope for a spinoff that will fix some of the problems they perhaps grudgingly tolerate in the original series. For, as we know, fans are not solely celebratory viewers of the programming they love. They have strongly held critical opinions, and not only that, but they've been pouring these critiques into their own production (and reception of that fan production), into meta theorization, fanfiction, fan art, fan videos, RPGs, and fan-produced web series.

To my mind, there is no better example to demonstrate the politics of the "official" spinoff in conversation with energies and labors of fan spinning off than the long-running fan-beloved TV series *Supernatural*, and so for the rest of this chapter I will use *Supernatural* as my case study. I do not mean to suggest that the spinning off that occurs by the hands of *Supernatural* fans is necessarily different in quality or significance than that of other series, fans, and fandoms, past and present. Rather I turn to *Supernatural* because its now 12-year run offers a wealth of snapshots of different modes of industrial and fan spinning off, and the relationships and tensions between the two.

In their digital authorship and community workings, fans demonstrate sophisticated knowledge about the media industry processes of production, including the larger context in which spinoffs get greenlit. This base of literacy about media/industry production empowers fans to enter the fray and propose their own spinoffs, albeit not through the traditional routes, since those traditional routes are not open to them. Fan networks of publicity and fundraising further enable fans' sense of possible influence. Fan-influenced comebacks and remakes, most visibly with the *Veronica Mars* Kickstarter (Chin, Jones, McNutt, and Pebler 2014; Hills 2015), demonstrate the proven ground of fan impact. Fueled by this perception of the potential for fan influence in commercial production, *Supernatural* fans proposed their own *Supernatural* spinoff, wrangled significant publicity and the support of folks involved in *Supernatural*'s official production, and coordinated both petition and fund raiser. But I've started telling the story with which I want to conclude. Let's put a pin in the fan-proposed spinoff known as "Wayward Daughters," and focus for a while on how we get there, and in so doing we'll take a little tour of fandom history over the last decade plus, via the thread of *Supernatural*.

***Supernatural*: A Fraught History of Spinning Off**

When the paradoxically behemoth yet cult TV series *Supernatural* attempted to create a backdoor spinoff, the fan base, known for its dedication, its vocal critique, and its extensive web of fan production, were poised to analyze and reject. The spinoff, entitled *Bloodlines*, depicted the hunter

and monster culture in Chicago, thus bringing the viewer more deeply inside the demon perspective, as arguably *Angel* did for *Buffy*. Indeed, like *Angel*, *Bloodlines* hinged on a “forbidden love” between a werewolf and a shapeshifter (Mitovich 2014). In what seemed a promising departure from *Supernatural*’s white male focus, *Bloodlines* was set to feature one main character of color and another female main character. However, when the backdoor pilot aired, fans instead saw primarily a continuation of the misogyny and racism that they argue have haunted the series from its first season. Aja Romano (2014) writes that for *Supernatural* fans:

“Bloodlines” failed in its first five minutes, when a character sees his girlfriend die in front of him. Of all the things “Bloodlines” could have culled from the SPN pilot, the SPN writers chose to mirror the horrible opening sequence, fridging a female character in order to imbue the surviving male character with angst. Around and around the devil’s trap we go.

Thus, fans rejected *Bloodlines* as a fundamental misreading of their investment in and hopes for *Supernatural*, or, perhaps even worse, as a rejection of the current fans of *Supernatural* in favor of future fans with different ideological leanings. This perception emerged in part from a fandom history in which female *Supernatural* fans consistently had felt misrecognized by the series’ producers, or disregarded in favor of the network’s pursuit of a male audience (Felschow 2010).

When *Supernatural* first debuted, it offered a mix of expansive storyworld, compelling characters, and hints of a larger serial background (most especially through family history and melodrama) but was told primarily through episodic narrative structure (what fans termed the “freak of the week” structure), laced with serial elements. In fanfiction, art, and video, fans departed from this episodic structure, instead expounding on character development and relationships, most prominently with the development of “Wincest” which conjectured an erotic or romantic relationship between the two leads, brothers Sam and Dean Winchester (hence, if it’s not yet clear/familiar to you, Winchester + Incest = Wincest). I wouldn’t necessarily go so far as to say that Wincest was a spinoff in itself; like Alexander Doty who moved from “queering the text” to the notion of unpacking/reading available queer meanings present in an unstable text, I believe that Wincest is a set of queer meanings and queer readings available in the source itself, (whether or not placed there intentionally at any level of production) (Doty 2010; Flegel and Roth 2010). But I would argue that the shared tropes of Wincest emerging out of fanfiction created a loose *spinoff vision* of *Supernatural*. Fans developed “Wincest” into an interpretive universe that fans inhabited in which Sam and Dean were already explicitly assumed to be romantically and/or sexually involved. This shared imaginary manifested in multiple different narrations that were not necessarily linked, and while the breadth of the multiplicity does challenge an understanding of Wincest as a “spinoff” in a singular sense, I see Wincest as a more unbounded but nonetheless significant shared fan “spinning off.” While not every piece of fanfiction is a “spinoff,” they are all part of larger collective processes of “spinning off,” and when they come together to create shared expectations and sets of knowledge and investment, we can begin to understand them as more bounded “spinoffs” as well. Let’s explore that spectrum of “spinning off” and “spinoff” *Supernatural* texts with a small sample of case studies that have been created by *Supernatural* fans.

IamCastiel: A *Supernatural* Twitterverse

Fans spin off media using different digital tools and interfaces, including social media network interfaces. I have written previously of other examples of fan storytelling through social media, including the Harry Potter LiveJournal accounts “boywholives” and “dracolicious” on LiveJournal, and “Glee/Little Liars” network on Tumblr (Stein 2006, 2015). *Supernatural* fans have created one

such long-running spinoff universe using Twitter. These fan authors deploy Twitter to create a network of fan accounts fictionally authoring individual characters and their interactions with one another.

When Twitter came on the scene in 2006, it was not immediately adopted for fan usage. At the time, media fandom's primary digital domain was, most visibly, LiveJournal (Moellenberndt 2013). Public discourse initially positioned Twitter as a place either for techie bloggers or for personal lifestyle blogging. Twitter users were also mocked as part of a generation of narcissists who supposedly used microblogging network to overshare mundane everyday details, from photos of coffee to excessive sharing of details of interpersonal relationships (Twenge 2006). These taboos, combined with the traction of fan communities elsewhere, mitigated fan adoption of Twitter at first. I have written elsewhere about how *Supernatural* actor Misha Collins's experimentation with Twitter brought many fans to the microblogging network in 2009 (Stein 2013). His experimentation was prompted by a request from the network that he tweet from the network account (Collins 2014). Thus, commercial media producer transmedia policies and transmedia outreach, intended no doubt in part to reach audiences where they were, also encouraged migration to new platforms, molding fans into industrial visions of what fans supposedly already were (and/or what industry wanted their fans to be): tech savvy and willing to follow a series from platform to platform (Marwick and boyd 2011; Bennett 2014). The other central actors from *Supernatural* in turn established their own Twitter accounts (Jared Padelecki in 2011 and Jensen Ackles in 2014) and more fans followed (Boris 2011).

Once on Twitter and familiar with its modes of communication, fans deployed the microblogging network to carry on fannish traditions. At the same time, fans on Twitter created new fannish traditions specific to the Twitter interface, deploying its affordances and limitations through uses of Twitter not necessarily initially intended by the interface's creators. Fans have a long history of using social media sites against their initial intent to create fictional accounts. (Busse and Stein 2009; Jenkins 2009). Indeed, this fan "misuse" has been a source of friction visible in part in blogging interfaces' changing policies regarding whether usernames must be bound to one's real-life name (boyd 2004, 2011). Twitter maintained no such enforcement of real-name/username alignment; users could have different accounts with different names for different purposes. Instead, the "verified" function highlights users whose username match their real name and whose real name is of "public interest," so that Misha Collins and the other *Supernatural* actors are verified users with little blue checks by their names, where most fans would not be able to apply for "verified" status. But there is another network of highly visible, much-followed accounts associated with *Supernatural*. These counts are by nature not "verified," for they are fan interpretations of the *Supernatural* characters played by Misha Collins, Jensen Ackles, Jared Padelecki: IamCastiel, DWinchester, and others. These accounts exist somewhere in between role playing game and digital interactive theatrical fan performance of *Supernatural* (Booth 2010). Of a similar fan-authored network for the series *Mad Men*, Bud Caddell (n.d.) writes: "If we begin to see all works as an extension of what has come before, we begin to appreciate something like *Mad Men* on Twitter for what it is, a story. It should be judged as a piece of entertainment and art; for how well it engages an audience and what it has to say about a changing world." As fans perform their interpretations of *Mad Men* or *Supernatural* (or any other series), they create internally coherent narratives, or sometimes purposefully incoherent narratives that follow their own rules of play and that orchestrate their own spectacle of storytelling. These we can see as both "spinning off" and in some cases as more bounded "spinoffs."

Likewise, with IamCastiel and friends, this network of accounts unfolds narratives that reflect, intertwine with, and at times temporarily depart from (or enhance, depending on your perspective) the story told by the TV series *Supernatural*, in so doing, telling stories of their own. The authors of IamCastiel and friends use Twitter to shift *Supernatural*'s narrative attention to focus

on the small details of the everyday; angel Castiel's discovering a taste for coffee, learning when to shower, slowly coming to understand sarcasm. The Twitter account's narratives also layer a domestic fantasy not available on the source text: Castiel adopts a dog named Flow, and returns regularly to give Flow food, water, and companionship. This story unfolds in "real time" via Twitter, and is difficult to experience in the same way after the fact, especially as character accounts interact with one another and with viewers who use their own Twitter accounts to interact with the story-in-process. Yes, you can go back and read (backwards) most of the posts of one character, or multiple character, with much effort fighting against the Twitter interface, and thus get some retroactive sense of what the story was, but that story experience will be vitally different than experiencing the actual "spinning off" of this Twitter story in the moment.

Moreover, this Twitter networked narrative overlays upon its retelling of *Supernatural* the modern technological realities of Twitter as they too evolved in real time, as, for example, when Castiel mentions a temporary Twitter outage that he and fellow Twitter users were experiencing in the moment. Thus, the *Supernatural* Twittiverse spins off from its televisual source at a slight angle, returning regularly to interface with the canon in "real time." It also infuses its retelling of the *Supernatural* story with the perceived public intimacy of Twitter interactions, as well as with the focus on the mundane and the ephemeral for which Twitter is known.

Nonetheless, this spinoff universe maintains its own coherence, with characters interacting with one another and with readers, based on a set of knowledge, history, and expectations specific to this universe in each given moment rather than to *Supernatural* more broadly. Arguably, only when one of the characters invokes a "canonical" event does it become canonical in this *Supernatural* Twittiverse, thus suggesting that the *Supernatural* Twitter network had spun off into its own entity, where it has continued spinning as (in Bud Caddell's words) "entertainment and art" with something to say about "a changing world." In a recent post, angel-with-fading-powers @IamCastiel writes of his experience of Twitter, "There is an option, when I log in, that says simply "'Remember me.' I think I'm making it out to be far more poignant than is meant." Thus, even as its narrative parallels the narrative unfolding in the TV series itself, this fan spinoff universe creates new meanings and avenues for engagement informed in part by the Twitter interface itself.

The Endverse & "Down to Agincourt"

Where the @IamCastiel & friends Twittiverse takes place on one interface and is shaped significantly by that interface, fans often spin off their stories across a diversity of sites and with a diversity of authorship tools and modes of creativity. We can read what *Supernatural* fans commonly refer to as "the Endverse" as a transmedia spinning off that emerged from a de facto backdoor spinoff. Although not officially framed as a backdoor spinoff, the season five episode "The End" was at the least cut to the mold of a hyped-up post-apocalyptic very-special-episode. It featured time travel to five years in the series' future, a date we (at the time of writing) have now all experienced in our home universes: 2014. While not intended to be a backdoor pilot in the official sense (or in any commercial/industrial capacity), for fans, "The End" has served as such in the realm of fan imagination. The episode established a shared fantasy of an alternate universe and set of storylines, characterizations, and character relationships. *Supernatural* is already a fairly dark show, but the Endverse's set-up is even darker, with Winchester brother Sam having accepted Lucifer, angel Castiel a non-angelic drug addict, and Dean Winchester a heartless leader of a band of survivors who are fighting both Lucifer and the encroaching "Croatoan" virus. The overall set-up of this episode drew on popular tropes less often present in *Supernatural*, reading more as a post-apocalyptic zombie-esque narrative rather than *Supernatural*'s more usual (pre-)apocalyptic

Judeo-Christian storyline. For fans who often take narratives and make them darker, more explicit, more sexual, “The End” offered a ripe playground. Likewise, “The End” had much to offer fans who like to “fix it” by healing wounded characters emotionally and physically in hurt/comfort type set-ups, or for fans who like to set characters apart in removed domestic settings. “The End”—a single episode—offered a shared framework from which to grow all of these shared fan desires.

The de facto back door pilot (to fan imagination) that is “The End” did not launch a singular televisual narrative, but rather a multiplicity of related narratives in multiple forms created by a multiplicity of authors and shared across a multiplicity of interfaces. As Anne Kustritz (2014) argues, we can see this transmedia collective authorship as a new and evolving form of narrative complexity, one that does not demand nor rely on singular narrative coherence but rather that embraces contradiction, breadth, and repetition, both with and without (a) difference. Elsewhere I have written of this embrace of multiplicity and contradiction as a quality of fan-authored transmedia and the transtext more broadly (Stein 2017).

The Endverse fanfiction series “Down to Agincourt” serves as an ideal example of a transmedia, multiauthored fan spinning off. Hosted on the fan works archive An Archive of Our Own, this series is written by fan author Seperis, who is famous for her epic and beloved series across multiple fandoms. “Down to Agincourt” started as a 154,411 words-long series; later installments included brought the total word count of the series to 1,046,067. Seperis added the series title “Down to Agincourt” only later, taking the title from a poem written by another fan author, bratfarrar, about “Henry V.” bratfarrar’s poem is listed as being a fan work both for “Henry V” (as in Shakespeare) fandom, and Seperis’s series, demonstrating the intense intertextuality as well as multiauthored nature of fan spinning off.

According to its Archive of Our Own listing, “Down to Agincourt” includes six “related works” from five different authors. Moreover, the “Down to Agincourt” fanworks collection on A03 includes 53 works, suggesting that “Down to Agincourt” has become a new canonical center from which fans write marginal fan work. Seperis writes of the fan authors who create “Down to Agincourt fanworks”: “they write my fic better than I do. Seriously. I wonder if I’m allowed to make requests.” This stance, combined with the fact that Seperis took the series’ title from another fan work, suggests an alternate form of author/reader and author/author relationships where authors are all simultaneously also readers, and constantly rotate around one another, spinning off in reading and responsive authorship together.

In *Textual Poachers*, Henry Jenkins (1992) described fan authorship as “scribbling in the margins” (155–182). Fan scholars have also described fan works as midrash (Barenblat 2011; 2014). In Rachel Barenblat’s (2014) words, “In retelling or reframing the original Bible text, [midrash] become part of the continuing unfolding of divine revelation.” Like midrash, then, fanfiction (as form of fan commentary) exists in relationship with the source, but also becomes its own source to be built upon and commented upon. Fanfiction, like midrash, can always develop its own multiple levels of paratexts, even as it is always already marginal; Joseph Dan (2006) writes, of midrash, “There is no midrash which cannot be followed by ... another midrash” (83). So it is with fan spinning. Fans can spin off from spinoffs. The paratexts becomes a new center, birthing new paratextual possibilities (Gray 2010).

Spinning Off to a Better Text: The Cambionverse

Also in *Textual Poachers*, Henry Jenkins talked about how fan authorship (often) emerged from dissatisfaction as much as from enthusiasm on the part of fans. Elsewhere I have argued that fan works can be seen as critique as well as supplement in that they point to holes, to misrepresentations,

to gaps, to things left wanting (Stein forthcoming). Some fan spinoff verses—like the Endverse—seem to cumulatively build on the source text, giving us more of what the text offered, and thus do not seem to be oppositional to the source text. But even such works that follow clear markers in the source text can be read as critique. Fan authorship of “Down to Agincourt” and other Endverse works function as critique as they voice fan desires for different narratives and themes, along the lines of: “We want more Endverse; We want darker tales that blur morality further; we want a darker version of Dean, a continued depiction of Sam and Lucifer, a more extended stay with drug- and sex-fixated Castiel.”

At the same time, spinoff verses can find their origin in critique driven by fan desire to fix some of the consistent perceived failings of the source text. For *Supernatural*, this means that fans envision and author spinoffs that feature female characters, people of color, and queer characters (and characters who merge these identity markers) who don’t get killed. For example, in between season eight and nine, fans envisioned a version of *Supernatural* that centered on powerful female “big bad” Abaddon, rather than relegating her to marginal, doomed, and finally unimportant figure. At around the same time, fans authored the first stories in what they termed Cambionverse, also referred to as “Team Free Will 2.0.” The Cambionverse envisioned the next generation of hunters, comprised of characters who had (then) only been featured in single episodes. One of these characters at the center of this fan-envisioned spinoff was Claire Novak, daughter of Jimmy Novak, whose body the angel Castiel possessed. Like the Endverse, Claire Novak had offered story and character potential that the *Supernatural* series seemed to overlook but that resonated with fans. Thus, as fans continued to write stories featuring Claire together with other one-off characters Jesse Turner and Ben Braeden, these stories to a certain degree served as critique of *Supernatural*’s poor story choices and flawed ideologies of representation.

Fans spin critique into new work with all the transmedia tools and then some that they deploy for the televisual source. Cambionverse creators create fic, GIF sets, vids, art, meta, and fanmixes (musical playlists created and shared on interfaces like 8Tracks and Tumblr <http://8tracks.com/explore/cambionverse/popular/1>). This active transmedia spread positions Cambionverse as an expansive multimedia universe in its own right with the fic at the center, but as was the case with “Down to Agincourt,” there is arguably more collaborative feedback with less purposefully-clear policing of the lines drawn between “official” and “unofficial” authorship. The Cambionverse spreads across multiple platforms deployed by fans, including An Archive of Our Own, Tumblr, and 8Tracks, spun by multiple authors in multiple forms. Thus, the Cambionverse demonstrates how transmedia authorship and the multiplicitous transmedia landscape further destabilize traditional notions of authorial control.

Reimagining the Televisual Spinoff: *Wayward Daughters*

Most loosely speaking, but no less important is the fan spinoff that remains imagined because fans envision it precisely becoming an actual commercial televisual production, or perhaps they argue that it already *is* the series itself. For example, there is the fan alternative reading of the character of Dean Winchester as bisexual. Fans assert that Dean’s bisexuality is written in the text yet paradoxically ignored by producers, that his sexuality is insistently implied but should be made explicit. Fans argue that “The Powers That Be” have already laid the groundwork in *Supernatural*, and now have the opportunity to make television history by explicitly establishing Dean Winchester as canonically bisexual. In a related push, fans argue that *Supernatural* has built in a romantic relationship between Dean and Castiel (known to fans as Destiel), and conduct close textual analysis and literary/genre readings to prove this. They argue that bi/dean or destiel should be not only “head canon” but “end game” (Pajor 2013). Fans have created and circulated multiple

Change.org polls inviting fellow fans to sign their name to “make Destiel canon.” Thus, fans have spun a shared interpretation that they direct back at the source, both in reading its past and attempting to impact its future.

Fan literacies extend beyond close textual analysis of the series to knowledge about the politics and potential of *Supernatural*'s future production, to a larger production literacy regarding the creation of spinoffs, as we have seen in fan coordination and campaigns for the *Supernatural* spinoff *Wayward Daughters*. Arguably, the concept for *Wayward Daughters* emerged from the same fan impulse that birthed the Cambionverse: the desire to tell the stories of characters with strong potential who were underused or introduced in an episode, and who were left underdeveloped yet with strong narrative potential. In response to these rich narrative gaps, fans told Claire Novak's story through to her teenage years. They wrote various versions of Claire's narrative in the years between her character's first (one episode-long) introduction in *Supernatural*'s fourth season and her eventual return six years later in the series' tenth season. By the time the official *Supernatural* writers cast Claire as a teenager and brought her to the screen, fandom had already fleshed out her character and narrative. *Supernatural* actor Kathryn Newton came to fill a character already fleshed out in the fan imagination, in GIF sets, vids, featuring actors from other media fancast to serve the character of Claire, and drawn and painted by fan imagination in lines inspired by these fan castings and by individual interpretation. Both fans and the *Supernatural* producers were working with the same source and question: what would Claire Novak as we saw her in season four be like as a teenager, given her physical qualities and personal trajectory? Thus, perhaps it is not surprising that the teenage Claire Novak of eventual *Supernatural* “canon” looked quite a bit like the fan-imagined Claire, blonde but sullen, a rebellious teenager with an angelic chip on her shoulder (and in the world of *Supernatural*, the descriptor angelic is not a compliment ...). Of course, given the visibility of fan work and the knowledge of fandom displayed by *Supernatural* producers, it is also entirely possible that the creators of the eventual “canon” version of Claire drew inspiration from the prior fan-authored versions of teenage Claire.

Significantly, however, the *Wayward Daughters* concept was not sparked by the potential offered by Claire alone. Rather it was the composite entrance of multiple female characters, some one-offs and others recurring, that helped spawn the fan vision of *Wayward Daughters* as a spinoff series. Moreover, this shift to fans envisioning an actual industry-created spinoff was bolstered by the series situating those multiple female characters within a shared context outside of the series' main storyline. This vision of a shared female network was embedded in a single line of script, in which Claire, upon finding out she is being shipped off to live with two other recurring but not regular female characters, says: “This is some sort of halfway house for wayward girls?”

Normally such an in-script throwaway set-up might ignite a shared set of interrelated fan universes like the Endverse, or perhaps a somewhat unified fan-authored world, with various offshoots, like the Cambionverse. But instead this brief set-up led to fan activism directed at the economies of production. In a cultural moment where fan-guided Kickstarters fund not only independent web series but also blockbuster movies (at least with the case of the *Veronica Mars* movie; Chin et al. 2014), the *Wayward Daughters* movement showcased fan knowledge of the intricacies of industry interests, processes, and negotiations, fueled by over a decade of fan frustration at *Supernatural*'s gender and race politics and misguided spinoff attempts (Romano 2014). In a fandom that continues to grow narrative worlds that feature Claire and other undeveloped female characters, the shining set-up of Sheriff Jody Mills raising Claire and Alex in a “home for wayward girls” presented itself as an opportunity for fans to campaign for the “spinoff they really want.” Moreover, in a cultural moment where fans and producers (especially writers and actors) increasingly interact in shared social media spaces like Twitter and Tumblr, and work together on shared production projects like the Hillywood Show's “*Supernatural* Parody,” *Supernatural* actor Osric Chau's webseries' *Kevin's Continued Winchester Gospels*, or even Misha Collins's scavenger hunt

Gishwhes, working with producers at various levels to progress a concept for official production seems plausible, a viable alternative route to articulating a vision and a narrative. Thus, fans collaborated with the actors playing Claire Novak, Sheriff Donna Hanscomb, and Sheriff Jody Mills (Kathryn Newton, Briana Buckmaster, and Kim Rhodes respectively), and eventually with Misha Collins's not-for-profit charity organization *Random Acts* to campaign for *Wayward Daughters*, "the *Supernatural* spinoff fans want." While it is not clear that *Wayward Daughters* has a chance to become its own series, their joint fan-producer efforts did seemingly result in the *Supernatural* episode "Don't You Forget About Me," which read to many fans as a backdoor pilot for a spinoff (Small Screen Girl 2016; see also Roth 2016). However, at the time of writing this chapter, it would seem that the *Supernatural* creators are actually unwilling to give away the fan investment in *Wayward Daughters* to a spinoff series but rather are weaving it periodically into the *Supernatural* mothership.¹ At the 2016 Comic Con *Supernatural* panel, when asked about what characters would be returning, new showrunner Andrew Dabb proffered the *Wayward Daughter*-associated characters Jody, Donna, Claire, and Alex. However, as a note of dissonance: at the moment that Dabb was promoting the *Wayward-Daughters-in-Supernatural*, the audience was chanting "Charlie!" (the name of Felicia Day's beloved queer geek character killed in season 9 of *Supernatural*), suggesting that what we as a fandom want is *Wayward Daughters* as its own show and Charlie returned to her proper place as *Supernatural*'s own queer geeky fan girl. *Supernatural*'s queer feminist fan communities want representation within *Supernatural* as well as a spinoff series that speaks to them more fully, and of course, they want to be left alone to continue their own spinning-off processes as well.

Thus, we see a new conflict arising: legacy media producers want to draw on the energy in fan spinning, its elasticity and expansiveness, while still striving to maintain singular authorial control. It is hard to imagine a TV showrunner stating, as Seperis did, that fans "write my 'show' better than I do," and renaming a whole television series after a piece of fanfiction. And yet actors and writers are beginning to talk the talk, if with some confused ambivalence. At the 2016 Comic Con Nerd HQ panel, both Jared Padalecki (who plays Sam in *Supernatural*) and Mark Sheppard (who plays King of Hell, Crowley) spoke to the power of fans spinning off the source text into something else and more. Mark Sheppard spoke of wishing to divert this energy from the word fan, which he equated with fanaticism, thus echoing Henry Jenkins's investigation of the association between fan and fanatic in *Textual Poachers* but rejecting fandom's own celebration of this term and the excesses it brings with it. Mark Sheppard suggests replacing the term "fandom" with "family," the *Supernatural* branded term that ties audience to the series' themes, thus seeking to cut *Supernatural* off from fandom at large. While to some degree Padalecki's and Sheppard's discussion of fandom at Comic Con 2016 misses the mark regarding what energies set fan creativity spinning in motion in the first place, it nonetheless does paint a picture of multiplicity of collaborative authorship directed beyond the mutual limits of the source text. We are undoubtedly moving into an era where commercial producers have extensive knowledge of the spinning-off work of fans and vice versa; the question becomes, how will this multiplicity of spinoffs come to co-exist? Will we move toward further collaboration between fan and producers, and if we do, how will this shape the spinning of authorship on both sides? By creating their own immersive storyworlds, fans are able to create a vision of *Supernatural* more purposefully feminist and queer in its politics. In some cases, fans proclaim these spinoffs their "canon," suggesting that they have created storyworlds of equal or greater weight than *Supernatural* (the TV series), but with a preferable politics of representation. If producers engage with fans in productive rather than policing ways, fan-producer dialogue could potentially bring these more progressive politics into commercial media texts. But even so, this feedback loop will not contain and limit fan energies; no matter how producers respond, fans will keep spinning off in a multiplicity of creative and often contradictory directions.

Note

- 1 At the time of editing, in July of 2017, the future for the potential *Wayward Daughters* seems brighter; at the 2017 San Diego Comic Con, *Supernatural* showrunner Andrew Dabb confirmed the rumor of an upcoming backdoor pilot called *Wayward Sisters*. Dabb describes *Wayward Sisters* as a spinoff concept that “evolve(d) very organically out of” *Supernatural*, and that “fans really latched onto in a way we never could’ve expected” (Kennedy, 2017).

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Chapter 26

#AskELJames, *Ghostbusters*, and #Gamergate: Digital Dislike and Damage Control

Bethan Jones

When Facebook appeared in 2006, few people could have predicted the effect that the advent of social media would have had on the ways in which fans interact with the objects of fandom. In her analysis of Amanda Palmer's social media use and strategies of participatory culture, Liza Potts (2012) demonstrates that Palmer and her fans are rewriting traditional norms about recording artists and audiences. Through using the crowdfunding website Kickstarter, Palmer was able to raise over \$1m to produce a new record and Potts notes the role that Palmer's engagement with fans on social media played in the success of the project. Similarly, Lynn Zubernis and Katherine Larsen (2012), in their analysis of the *Supernatural* fandom, note that:

The relationship between fans and the creative side, as well as the human representations of the fannish objects themselves, are increasingly reciprocal ... Even more strikingly, the advent of Twitter, Facebook, and instant feedback ensures that the relationship between fans and creators is no longer unidirectional ... The stars of the television have also delighted in solidifying the reciprocal relationship with fans, utilizing Facebook and Twitter to interact with fans and to publicize their own projects. (14)

These interactions with producers, and fans' relationships with texts, are not solely positive, however. Jonathan Gray began work on antifandom in the early 2000s, arguing that in order to fully understand what it means to interact with media texts, we cannot only examine fans; we must also look at antifans and non-fans. For Gray (2003), antifandom is "the realm ... of those who strongly dislike a given text or genre, considering it inane, stupid, morally bankrupt and/or aesthetic drivel" (70). In "New Audiences, New Textualities," Gray (2003) suggests that antifans construct an image of the text which they then react against. In particular, Gray suggests that antifans are "distant" readers who perceive the text differently to "close" readers, or fans. Gray (2010) later calls for taking paratexts seriously—that is, the variety of materials that surround a text and affect the ways it is read (6)—when studying antifandom, as they may be the only contact the antifan has with the text they react against. He develops this argument in his 2005 article "Antifandom and the Moral Text," in which he posits that "antifandom will either involve audiencehood from afar, as the antifan refuses to watch, or may be performed with close knowledge of the text and yet be devoid of the interpretive and

diegetic pleasures that are usually assumed to be a staple of almost all media consumption” (842–843). Gray (2005) also proposes that “[a]ll texts have moral, rational-realist, and aesthetic dimensions, but ... antifandom may prove the three to be always potentially distinct” (843). Thus, Gray proposes much antifandom is a result of moral or ethical issues the antifan has with the text or fan object, rather than dislike due to aesthetic, industrial, or factual reasons.

More work has been done on antifandom since Gray’s first articles, and as fan studies has moved beyond a simplistic notion of the fan as rebellious poacher, so too are antifans now examined in more nuanced terms. Indeed, Gray himself recognizes the issues with the atomic model proposed in 2003, writing “the model crudely lumps various practices, motivations, and affective positions into one big undifferentiated mass called the antifan. In the years since writing that article, I have come to regret not seeing more nuance and difference in antifandom” (forthcoming). This chapter aims to unpick the practices, motivations, and affective positions of three distinctly different groups of antifans: (1) those who criticize E.L. James’s *Fifty Shades of Grey* trilogy for its depictions of BDSM as domestic violence and its promotion of an abusive relationship; (2) those opposed to the 2016 *Ghostbusters* remake ostensibly for the possibility of it ruining the nostalgia of the originals, yet who took to Twitter to condemn its female cast, particularly black actor Leslie Jones; and (3) those involved in the Gamergate controversy which began as a critique of ethics in games journalism and developed into a sustained attack on female gamers and critics. I argue that each of these involve forms of antifandom and affective engagement with the (anti)fan object. Although each may appear distinctly different on the surface, and utilize different approaches in expressing that dislike, they can nonetheless be viewed, and theorized, through the lens of antifandom. I draw on Gray’s initial work as well as Emma Jane’s analysis of antifandom of people, rather than texts, to examine the ways in which discourses of hate and dislike manifest themselves in the digital era. I also examine the responses to these antifans by the (anti)fan object, their agents, and, in some cases, the platforms themselves. I acknowledge Jane’s (2015) assertion that antifandom is “something *more* than simply audience reception activity” (177) but disagree that terming rape and death threats as antifandom minimizes their impact (Jones 2014, 184). Rather, I suggest that, much as fandom has become a recognized state of being in our daily lives, encompassing much more than the love of a text, band, or celebrity, so too does antifandom permeate our politics, interactions, and affective engagements, and recognizing it as such informs the ways in which the “darker underbelly” of antifandom can be engaged with, examined, and pushed back against.

“What Do You Hate More, Women or the English Language?”: #AskELJames and Moral Antifandom

E.L. James’s *Fifty Shades of Grey* trilogy, published in 2012, is one of the most recent examples of antifandom, resulting in a wealth of academic work on the books and their subsequent film adaptations. The series focuses on Anastasia Steele, a college student and virgin, who meets billionaire businessman Christian Gray. Gray pursues Ana, eventually persuading her to sign a BDSM contract and they begin a relationship. The series began life as a piece of *Twilight* fanfiction, published online at fanfiction.net under the title *Master of the Universe*. The series’ fanfiction roots were made much of in press discourse around the series, and were one of the issues many fans and critics had with the books. Critics called the book “abominably written trash” (Kilpatrick 2012) and

suggested it “deploys every bonkbuster cliché in existence – powerful men, private planes and multiple orgasms” (O’Hagan 2012), while fans noted that James embodies “the worst stereotypes about fan fic writers. That we’re lazy, that we lack talent, that we’re leeching off the ‘real’ creativity of others. It makes every last one of us look bad” (audreyii_fic 2012), and suggested they were embarrassed that this was the story that represented fanfiction in the mainstream:

Terrible plot, terrible character development, and terrible writing are what “Fifty Shades” is, and many of us in the Twi fandom are truly embarrassed that this is the fic that puts us on the map. There are far better writers in the Twi fandom who deserve this success—Debra Anastasia and Jennifer DeLucy are a few. Unfortunately this poorly written and poorly edited soap opera that was “published” to line James’s and TWCS’s [The Writer’s Coffee Shop] pockets gains fame. It’s a truly sad day for our fandom. (Bonnie, quoted in Romano 2012)

In addition to the series’ roots in fanfiction, however, much larger criticisms came from the way the books presented BDSM as a form of abuse, and how they romanticized an abusive relationship. Posts discussing the books’ portrayal of BDSM were published on an array of blogs and websites. The play in which Christian engages Ana is often aggressive and non-consensual; Christian fails to read Ana’s body language, which suggests she is not comfortable with the play, and there is very little after-care following a scene. The conflation of Christian’s interest in BDSM with his under-age relationship with a much older woman and his mother’s drug abuse also angered those within the community, who argue the series “portrays kink as being an indicator of both mental illness and criminality in all circumstances other than [a] heterosexual relationship heading toward marriage and reproduction” (Zanin 2012). Many of the posts written by those within the community highlighted the ways in which James’s work is not BDSM, but is rather an abusive relationship—an underlying issue which many critics had with the *Twilight* series. Two readers with experience in BDSM carried out a close reading of the books in order to ‘spork’—or humorously hate-read—them. They read each book in the series, pulling out sections of interest and commenting on them online. In their first post, Ket (Ket and Gehayi 2012) writes:

All right, personal history time! Anyone who’s read other sporkings I’ve done will probably not be *shocked* to find out that I’m into BDSM. What you might not know is that I was in the Lifestyle for a while. As a Submissive. Yes, really. While I’m not in it now for reasons that will surely come up during the sporking, I know that there are healthy, happy Total Power Exchange relationships. But too often, they’re written as abusive, as predatory, and hey, let’s call a spade a spade here—as rape. And this...this piece of dried-up shit [*Fifty Shades of Grey*] here? Is all three of those things. And that just pisses me right the fuck off.

The conflation of BDSM with abuse is one issue that many readers had with the books, and the posts made by Ket and others evidence the antifandom of these readers for the series. James drew more ire with the publication of *Grey: Fifty Shades of Grey as Told by Christian* which retold the story of the first book in the series from Christian Grey’s point of view. In order to celebrate the publication of the book, James held a Twitter Q&A with the hashtag #AskELJames, in which users of the social networking site could chat with the author. Celebrities’ use of Twitter to engage with audiences has increased in recent years with a number of high profile Q&As taking place on the platform. As well as posting legitimate questions, however, the Q&As can also be used by Twitter users to critique the celebrity, or to simply troll them. James’s Q&A hashtag was quickly taken over by users who commandeered the hashtag and used it as an opportunity to highlight the ways in which both *Grey* and the

Fifty Shades... series perpetuate the notion of abuse as romance. Among the tweets James received about the abusive nature of the books were the following:

@becca_lundberg #AskELJames Did you mistake a list of abuse warning signs for romance tips and then just go with it? #JustWondering #FiftyShadesOfAbuse (https://twitter.com/becca_lundberg/status/615592468613103617)

@rrobbiereyes: #AskELJames why did you think it was okay to teach young girls that a possessive partner who refuses to hear no was romantic? (<https://twitter.com/rrobbiereyes/status/615572226998317056>)

@50shadesabuse: #AskELJames Is it only ok for Christian to stalk, coerce, threaten & manipulate Ana because he's hot, or is it also ok because he's rich? (<https://twitter.com/50shadesabuse/status/615535984025993216>)

Each of these tweets demonstrate the user's awareness of the storyline of *Fifty Shades* and thus demonstrates a close reading of, engagement with, and antifandom toward the text. I would suggest, however, that unlike those antifans who engage in hate-reading of the text to demonstrate their own cultural capital in relation to "good" and "bad" literature (Harman and Jones 2013), these antifans engage in a close reading and criticism of the text because of their knowledge of BDSM, their experiences of abuse, or their feminist politics. In this way, they demonstrate what Gray (forthcoming) calls antifandom of a "bad object" yet this is a bad object because of the ways in which it contributes to "a normalisation of [misogynistic] attitudes towards women" (Jones 2016) and reinforces messages that "bad boys" can be saved by women, and stalking really does equate to romance. Antifans of the *Fifty Shades* series thus evidenced what Gray calls antifandom of the moral text—albeit a moral text they had undertaken a close reading of.

In his 2005 study of *Television Without Pity* forums, Gray suggests that many expressions of antifandom evidence on the forums were framed as moral objections to a text. These posters' interaction with the various texts were influenced by their moral or ethical concerns, and Gray demonstrates how one poster "castigated a TV movie on homeland security" for:

taking advantage of a horrible tragedy, and seems more like pissing people off about our intelligence system than reporting the facts. Since no one knows how much information was known prior to the attacks and we're still trying to suss out how much the president knew, doing a TV movie about national intelligence right now is ludicrous. I hate it when they come out with TV movies like this just reeks of misinformation with some random writer giving their view of what happened. (quoted in Gray 2005, 847–848)

Gray argues that this engagement with the moral text often happens before the text itself has aired, and many of the posters Gray examined did not watch the programs that they derided. They "read" the moral text of the program—they had engaged with paratexts such as newspaper articles, news segments, and blogs, but had no desire to engage with the aesthetic or rational-realistic text. Gray (2005) proposes then that we either "once again have a case of a moral text without an aesthetic text or a case of the moral text wholly subsuming the aesthetic text to the point of erasure and insignificance" (848). In many cases, *Fifty Shades* antifans engaged only with the moral text (see the religious backlash against the novels discussed in Whitehead 2013, and the UK charity which called for copies of the book to be burned, referred to by Flood 2012), but many others did engage with the aesthetic text. Gray discusses an example where *Television Without Pity* commenters did engage with the aesthetic text, yet a moral text was also consumed and

eventually infringed on their ability to enjoy the aesthetic. In this case, viewers disliked a candidate who appeared on *The Apprentice* and engaged in a campaign against her. Gray (2005) notes that in this case the “moral text viewers” worried about other people’s reception of the candidate, and argues that “a good deal of what the text means to [the viewer] is a reflection of what they believe it will mean to others and what effects it will have on others” (851). This worry is also evident in *Fifty Shades* antifans’ concerns about the text, and was demonstrated in the Twitter Q&A with James.

The Twitter Q&A also afforded antifans with a new means of sharing their antifandom with James. As I have mentioned, many posts were written on blogs and websites criticizing *Fifty Shades*, but few would have made their way to James herself. As Harman and Jones (2013) note: “From micro-blogging sites such as Twitter or Tumblr, to the communities of Facebook and LiveJournal and the videoblogging of YouTube, *Fifty Shades* antifandom is performed to be viewed but also, more importantly, shared” (956). This has predominantly been with other people but the Q&A with James afforded antifans the opportunity to share their critiques of the series with her. Of course, James is under no obligation to respond to these critiques, as one user noted:

@50shadesabuse: The Ask EL James live-tweet Q&A happens today from 6pm UK time. We’ve got plenty of questions (which we’re certain she will ignore...). (<https://twitter.com/50shadesabuse/status/615469518245265408>)

And yet James did engage with users posting criticism of the books by blocking them from viewing her account:

@50shadesisabuse: When we told #ELJames that Mr Grey reminded us of our DV perps from our own accounts she blocked us, and didn’t want to know. #AskELJames (<https://twitter.com/50shadesisabuse/status/616128421215797248>)

@moliviarty: Got blocked by @E_L_James because of my genuine concern for victims of domestic violence. Neat. #AskELJames (<https://twitter.com/moliviarty/status/615888745414426629>)

In one tweet, which was subsequently deleted, James also called one critic a “sad fuck.” James’s policy of ignore and block was—at times—unsuccessful as when she responded, but her failure to respond to the antifans did not stop the criticism from coming on the hashtag.

Writing about the #AskThicke Q&A, Horeck (2014) notes that “This example of a hashtag feminist takeover is part of a vociferous discussion and debate about rape culture that is currently spreading online” and suggests that “the proliferation of social media sites such as Twitter has opened up important opportunities for feminists to talk back to cultural depictions of rape and to interrogate rape culture” (1106). The #AskELJames hashtag also functions as a means for readers to interrogate rape culture, but I suggest that they do so via an antifanish discourse. Gray (2005) suggests that although fandom and antifandom “could be positioned on opposite ends of a spectrum, they perhaps more accurately exist on a Mobius strip, with many fan and antifan behaviors and performances resembling, if not replicating, each other” (845). James’s antifans demonstrate similar behaviors to fans through undertaking a close reading of the text and engaging with the author on social media. They perform their antifandom in similar ways to which fans perform fandom, in multiple and varying ways and places online, yet they are motivated by concern over the text and its message, and are—as Gray notes—bothered and insulted by it.

“Who Else Came Here Just to Dislike?": *Ghostbusters* and Cult Antifandom Online

Unlike James's antifans, who are opposed to the moral text—the message they perceive the books to send—antifans of *Ghostbusters* engage with the aesthetic text and, in particular, the replacement of the male ghostbusters of the original with four women. Antifan reactions to the announcement of the reboot film were thick and furious. Many critics seemed to feel that a new *Ghostbusters* featuring female characters was a gimmick, prompting director Paul Feig to tweet “Interesting how making a movie with men in the lead roles is normal but making a movie with women in the lead roles is a ‘gimmick.’” #its2014.” Others suggested their dislike of the film was due to its status as a reboot and how that would affect their memory of watching the original: “Gerald_of_Rivia: If the trailer is any indication, they effing ruined it, normally I would wait and see it for myself, however I think I'm going to give this one a pass, as I don't wish to sully my fond memories of the original film.

Although there were some valid critiques of the film—Leslie Jones's Patty being portrayed as a sassy, street-talking black woman in contrast to the three white female leads' academic backgrounds—the majority of antifan critique of *Ghostbusters* were markedly different to the *Fifty Shades* antifandom expressed on the #AskELJames hashtag. This is perhaps best illustrated through an examination of the YouTube comments on the first official trailer, which was posted to the site in March 2016. As of December 2016, the trailer has been viewed 39,503,360 times and has 288,026 likes versus 1,001,412 dislikes, making it the most disliked trailer in YouTube history. The trailer also has 291,187 comments, the overwhelming majority of them criticizing the film, and its female stars:

Cameron East: I'm sorry, but having women in the movie just doesn't have a good shine to it. the movie looks terrible and honestly, women aren't funny, its a fact. (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w3ugHP-yZXw&lc=z12izhzzgrqodf3qz04cjlrokfdt13bhyk0k>)

horn123: It's not even worth an illegal download. This is what happens when feminists get in bed with movie studios and apply gender specific affirmative action. (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w3ugHP-yZXw&lc=z12bz3hzywqsv3ipx04chnkoeav514fhs>)

Emperor Intellect: Hey SONY! Making ghostbusters into a female ed movie would have been a great idea...FOR A PORNO! Next time hire some quality actresses for the role in “Ghostpussy” and not a dyke, a pig, a a giant she beast or a nebbish nerdling! (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w3ugHP-yZXw&lc=z135ixmx0q3rvvoa004ccpf5tmqz5hvrq0k>)

These comments typify many of those posted to the trailer, in which women, feminists, and social justice warriors (SJWs) are denigrated for their role in “ruining” *Ghostbusters*. The types of comments made by these antifans replicate those made by antifans of other female or feminized texts. Female *Twilight* fans have been variously described using the phrases “On the rabid side,” “ravenous and frenzied,” “[engaging in] fits of red-faced screaming,” and “enthusiasm bordering on hysteria”—terms, which, as Melissa Click (2009) points out, are reminiscent of “Victorian era gendered words like ‘fever,’ and ‘hysteria.’” Jacqueline M. Pinkowitz (2011) notes how the activities of these fans are still seen as culturally dismissible and even men who *admit* (and I use the word specifically) to liking the series are ridiculed. Film critic Mark Kermode (2012) wrote a confessional review of his enjoyment of the series entitled “Move over Luke Skywalker... I'm a Twilight fan,” and the vitriolic response of readers clearly drew on this gendered disavowal of the “feminine” text:

Your a grown man and you like Twilight. Thats just sad (scot36, 2012a, online)

These days he thinks he has to chime in with fashionable misandry and elevate anything that's related to teenage girls to the highest order. It would be very sad if it weren't so pathetic. (ChewToy 2012, online)

if it appeals to Mark Kermode's inner teen girl, then all I can say is she must be a bit of an immature airhead. Let's hope she matures soon, then he can stop writing this drivel. (MagiGibson 2012; online)

As Matt Hills (2012) points out, girls' desires are frequently attacked by cultural commentators and the mainstream media, but cult critics also differentiate between the gendered "masculine cult audience" and the "feminine mainstream." Natalie Wilson (2010) argues "[t]his gendered backlash dismisses the productive and engaged nature of *Twilight* fandom, allowing for widespread ridicule that is not only about not liking *Twilight* but also participates in the historical tendency to mock that which females enjoy (such as romance novels, soap operas, teen idols, etc.)." This is evidenced particularly in cult horror websites, as Nia Edwards-Behi (2014) has discussed. BloodyDisgusting.com, for example, is widely considered to be one of the most frequently visited horror news and review websites, and tends to provide "the most highly negative reviews" and write "most condescendingly of the teen girl audience" (Bode 2010, 709). The original *Ghostbusters* films are typically considered cult texts and the feminization of these with the remake fueled antifandom in a similar way to *Twilight* fans' attendance at Comic Con (Hills 2012) did. Hills (2012) theorizes this, using Bode's (2009) notion of inter-fandom, which is "not quite 'antifandom' in the sense defined in existing literature, but is rather a kind of fan protectionism, and boundary maintenance" existing between different media fandoms, such as *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and *Twilight* (115), and notes that "pathologizing notion of Twilighters 'invading' Comic Con is hence not only gendered, it also delegitimizes the activities of new fans who are younger and supposedly not socialized within normative fandom" (123). Given the 2016 *Ghostbusters*' attempts to appeal to older fans familiar with the originals as well as younger, female, fans, the antifan responses can similarly be seen as a gendered attempt to delegitimize the activity of these fans. Yet this inter-fandom activity in relation to *Twilight* also exists online. Hills suggests that while fans of texts such as *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* may be expected to share interests with those of *Twilight*, they instead critique both the text and its fans. Williams (2013) demonstrates a similar inter-fandom hatred of *Twilight* fans among fans of the band Muse. She suggests that, "Fans who feel they need to patrol the boundaries of their fandom against such interlopers are not (usually) deliberately occupying the position of the antifan. Rather, they are accidental antifans who have to defend their fandom against texts and people with whom they would often rather not engage" (334).

Ghostbusters (2016) antifans, however, deliberately occupy the position of antifan and do so by critiquing the gender-swap of the *Ghostbusters* themselves. This can be seen in the comments posted to the YouTube trailer, but also in the attacks against Leslie Jones on Twitter.

Horeck (2014) notes that we should not forget that "social networks also promulgate sexually violent discourse and expand the opportunities to shame and humiliate women" (1106). Although some antifans critiqued *Ghostbusters* by expressing legitimate concerns about the portrayal of the film's only black characters, many more used Twitter as a means to target Jones specifically. Among these tweets were the following:

@notfriendlyweeb: They trained an ape how to mimic human speech and behavior and put it in a ghostbusters costume and you are the result @Lesdoggg (<https://twitter.com/notfriendlyweeb/status/755240038644920321>)

@ThundyTheWeeabo: @Lesdoggg you're a dumb ape the ghostbusters reboot wasn't supposed to feature monkeys it was supposed to feature people like Jessica Nigri (<https://twitter.com/ThundyTheWeeabo/status/755191470387261440>)

@__Ryz: everyone should stop calling @Lesdoggg a gorilla. Thats a huge insult to harambe. Harambe is way more attractive. #Ghosbusters2016sucks (https://twitter.com/__Ryz/status/758503520521818112)

These tweets moved antifandom from the text to one of its stars, and raise questions about antifandom which Gray had not considered in his early writing. Jane (2014) argues that Gray's early work is situated firmly in the field of audience research and reception studies and positions antifans in terms of meaning-making rather than in textual production. She argues that given the collapse of the producer/consumer or sender/receiver binaries, "[it] may be taken as a given that antifans' increasingly organised and obstreperous articulations of displeasure—especially those self-published online—are something *more* than simply audience reception activity" and that "Conceptualising the voices of antifans solely or *primarily* through an audienceship prism, ... risks downplaying the force potentially wielded by antifan texts, as well as underestimating the agency and power possessed by their creators" (177). Key to antifannish statements about Jones rather than about *Ghostbusters*, however, is Jane's (2014) point that Gray classifies human targets of antifannish hostility as text and "human texts are liable to suffer from the circulation of vitriolic antifan discourse in a way that inanimate texts such as films or kilts do not" (177). Springer (2013) concurs, writing "texts cross genres, media, and venture into considering people and objects as texts. If celebrities are constantly vigilant about their 'brand' and regular citizens increasingly cohere personal identity through social media, bodies and personalities are, indeed, the text to which fans and antifans ascribe identification and *disidentification*" (59). This disidentification can be expressed in extreme terms, and Jane argues that in examining antifandom of a person we must engage more closely with what Gray (2005) describes briefly as antifandom's "darker dimensions" (852). Jane (2014) writes,

After all, when disgust and hate are expressed about a person or group of people outside of media contexts (especially when this disgust or hate is based on a priori prejudices), it is usually known by other terms. "Sexism", "racism", "homophobia", and "hate speech" are a few that come to mind. (177)

Typically, racist and sexist hate speech such as this has been linked to trolling but Springer (2013) suggests that "popular culture producers increasingly embrace 'haters' as part of fandom. If we accept that the antifan has a place in fan studies, we must also recognize variation in defining the antifan. The hater as s/he manifests in popular culture [is] one emerging dimension of antifandom" (63). Fan studies is beginning to recognize the role that haters play within fandom. Rather than accepting the positive and communal aspects of fandom proposed in the first wave, scholars are now examining the disagreeable practices or the "dark underbelly" of fandom, in which Chin (forthcoming) includes "discussions centered on hatred for a character and the actor who plays the despised character ..., campaigns to get actors fired from TV shows, and conflicts between fans, as well as with cast and crew members, in public forums and social media networks." Chin uses the examples of *Supernatural's* Misha Collins and *Hawaii 5-0's* Michelle Borth to demonstrate the ways in which these disagreeable practices develop and circulate online. In both cases, the actors played characters whom fans felt were taking the focus away from the main characters in the show. Collins was the subject of an (unsuccessful) "I hate Misha Collins" campaign on Twitter, yet did not engage with his haters. Borth, on the other hand, responded to many antifans in order to defend herself and her character. These interactions fueled the hate further, and led to antifans writing to CBS and reporting Borth for misconduct with the aim of removing her from the show. Death threats have been aimed at both Collins and Borth on social media, as well as hate speech at Orlando Jones, who often responds by retweeting those messages (Bennett, Chin, and Jones 2016).

Prior to the tweets aimed at Jones, the *Ghostbusters*' cast largely ignored the toxic comments made online. In an interview with Yahoo! Movies, Melissa McCarthy said:

The four of us talk constantly, and are always sending each other dumb notes. I don't pay attention to any of that stuff. [*Ghostbusters*] was a blast making, it was really fun and the movie's going to be amazing. [The criticism] doesn't even fall on my shoulder. Not even at all. (quoted in Polowy 2016)

Director Paul Feig, however, has attempted to call out, debate, and refute criticism on his Twitter since 2014. In an interview with *The Verge*, which asked about his attempts to engage with the trolls, he said:

It's the same thing that the women went through with Gamergate. They were just getting hammered, and everyone says "Well, why don't you just go offline?" But it's like getting chased out of your neighborhood ... I love the Internet. I think it's the greatest tool we've ever had. I can communicate with people, I can get what people are feeling, whether it's negative or positive. And so, no, I don't want to get chased off the Internet. I've never blocked anybody. And there are some people I'd love to block. (quoted in Yoshida 2016)

Following the hate speech directed at Jones following the film's release, however, the approach the stars took changed. Jones initially began retweeting the hate directed at her in the hope this would prevent more bile being tweeted her way. Her retweets served to increase the number of mentions, however. A hashtag in support of Jones, #LoveforLeslieJ, emerged in response to the haters, but Jones tweeted that she was leaving Twitter as a result of the hate. At that point, Twitter stepped in and blocked the account of Milo Yiannopoulos, a right-wing technology editor at Breitbart, who had directed the campaign of abuse at Jones (he has since been banned by Twitter). Following his ban, Jones began receiving more tweets criticizing her for not understanding "freedom of speech" and complaining to Twitter over her "hurt feelings." Jones's tactic this time, however, was to "spread the love," tweeting: "We have to start there. So I won't answer the trolls with hate anymore just love. And then block and report they ass lol. Won't do hate anymore." (<https://twitter.com/Lesdoggg/status/757279408839397376>).

Thus far, the examples I have examined fit into categories of antifandom. The #AskELJames hashtag served as a means for readers to share their textual antifandom of *Fifty Shades* with its creator, and the antifandom of both *Ghostbusters* and its star Leslie Jones demonstrates what Johnson (2007) refers to as "fan-tagonism" and what Theodoropoulou (2007) theorizes as antifandom within fandom. Yet much of the vitriol aimed at Jones were fundamentally hate speech. Jane (2014) notes that: "The arguably sexist nature of much vitriol targeting cheerleaders raises the question of whether this derogatory discourse ought to be designated as something other than antifandom—something such as misogyny, for example" (183). This is a pertinent question to ask and an important one to answer, particularly given fan studies' increasing awareness of an interest in the "underbelly" of fandom.

#Gamergate and the Darker Dimensions of Antifandom

In 2013, a game called *Depression Quest* was released by game designer Zoe Quinn. A game about depression, in which the player controls the actions of a person suffering with the illness, it was the subject of much criticism when it was released. Quinn was attacked for the timing of the release on gaming platform Steam (it was released on the same day that Robin Williams committed

suicide), as well as the quality of the game itself. The attacks increased in August 2014, however, when Quinn's ex-boyfriend published a blog accusing Quinn of having a relationship with a journalist who wrote about the game. A debate about ethics in video games subsequently followed and the #Gamergate hashtag was created, circulating on Twitter. Gamergate was ostensibly about ethics in videogames but other issues emerged, such as the belief that video-games were being overrun by feminists and social justice warriors, and that (white, male) gamers were maligned victims. Fueled by discussions on Reddit and 4Chan (Massanari 2015), attacks were made against Quinn as well as against feminist game critic Anita Sarkeesian by gamers who took umbrage at her YouTube series analyzing sexist tropes in video games. Game developer Brianna Wu was also subjected to rape and death threats after mocking Gamergate. But can we consider Gamergate to be an example of antifandom or is it symptomatic of wider discourses of misogyny and hate online? (A question posed by Wilson in Chapter 27 in this volume as well.) Gamergate, according to much analysis, stems from gaming fans' anger at a number of issues within the gaming community. Gray (2003) notes that antifans "often form social action groups or 'hatesites,' and can thus be just as organized as their fan counterparts" (70–71) and this is certainly the case with Gamergate, where fans, angry at the encroaching feminism in games culture, formed a backlash against it. Wanzo (2015) also describes Gamergaters as fans, writing, "Sexism, racism, and xenophobia are routinely visible in fan communities, including the cases of Gamergate" (§1.4).

Similarly, Parkin (2014) suggests that:

Gamergate is an expression of a narrative that certain video-game fans have chosen to believe: that the types of games they enjoy may change or disappear in the face of progressive criticism and commentary, and that the writers and journalists who cover the industry coordinate their message and skew it to push an agenda.

Fans pushing back against wider industrial or social contexts is nothing new. Writing about fans in 1992, Jenkins considered them textual poachers, fighting against corporations, and recent work on fan activism has also demonstrated the power of fans to campaign for changes to texts or industrial practices (see, e.g., the special issue of *Transformative Works and Cultures*, edited by Jenkins and Shreshtova, and Bourdaa's Chapter 24 in this volume). Work on antifan activism has also demonstrated the power of antifans in holding corporations responsible for the messages they share about people and communities (Jones 2015). Given this, it is possible to see Gamergaters as part of a larger community sharing concerns about what is happening to their culture. The fact that Gamergaters seem to be protesting progressive moves toward inclusivity does not make them any less part of a fan community, or their behavior any less antifandom against progressiveness. Furthermore, Jane (2014) argues that "under current formulations, similar misogynist discourse is designated as belonging to the field of antifandom" (183), and Gray's analysis of the Omarosa campaign—which he theorizes as antifandom—concur. Gray (2005) notes that many of the commenters referred to Omarosa using such derogatory terms as "baboon," "Bitch," "Mrs. WorldBitch," and "Crazy Bitch," as well posting "pseudo 'revenge' or punishment fantasies" such as "Bring on the Terminator! This bitch needs to be taken down" (852). Gray concludes that these posts' "frequent aggressive tone, and penchant for racist and sexist terminology ... reveal a dire need for a social-psychological examination of textual hatred" (852). Gray (2003) also frames the death threats against Salman Rushdie as antifandom, writing that the author "will forever be in danger because of a strong antifan reaction to his novel *The Satanic Verses*" (73). Gray raises an interesting point here, neglected by many in studies of antifandom thus far, which is: how closely is antifandom linked to religious or political intolerance? Rushdie's *Satanic Verses* was condemned by its critics for being blasphemous and the *Harry Potter* series of books have similarly been

condemned by the Christian church for promoting witchcraft. Thus, the discourses evident in Gamergate do appear to have antecedents in antifandom. Jane (2014) does, however, raise a valid point in questioning whether terming these antifandom negates their impact:

[Gray] also writes that, ‘a particularly extreme example of the “productivity” and depth of textual engagement of antifandom’ is that ‘numerous artists worldwide face death threats’ (2005: 842). One may wonder, however, whether designating death threats as a “strong”, “heightened”, or especially productive antifan reactions risks minimising the seriousness of this phenomenon, given that what is at stake is not a crusade to terminate a television series but campaigns to end human lives. (184)

Jane (2014) proposes that campaigns such as Gamergate can be considered “e-bile” and suggests that, “While it has similarities with the antifan discourse Gray examines from the TWoP website, it has some important differences which demonstrate that antifandom in online domains is changing both qualitatively and quantitatively” (185). Antifandom has existed within and alongside fandom for many years, certainly predating the Internet, as Gray notes: “think of the *Star Wars* fan who hates *Trek*, since his galaxy isn’t big enough for both franchises, or of X-Philes who hated the addition of the Terminator in the final seasons” (quoted in Jenkins 2010). Yet antifandom in the age of social media has changed in similar ways that fandom has. Antifans have far more access to celebrities and their families via sites such as Twitter, and Jane (2014) suggests that antifans are also more likely to target ordinary people now than they ever were previously. Connecting these two points, she argues that “antifan discourse online has become far more hyperbolic, threatening, and misogynist in nature. We can see, therefore, that antifan activity on the Internet is transforming into a very different beast” (185). Yet, I would argue, this activity still remains antifandom, albeit antifandom fueled by political, cultural, and/or religious intolerances rather than dislike for a text.

Antifandom online is thus shifting and changing, and is using different tools to frame itself. Racism, misogyny, and homophobia are becoming more prevalent among antifans, and the Gamergate controversy as an example of antifandom demonstrates this. Indeed, a desire to demonstrate power over women like Quinn, Sarkeesian, and Wu through the use of sexual threats was used by many involved in Gamergate, and rape threats against female and feminist gamers were markedly higher than against E.L. James or Leslie Jones. The strategies used by Quinn, Sarkeesian, and Wu—along with their many supporters—also differed in key ways from those implemented by James and Jones. Given the nature of the threats, both the police and the FBI were involved in investigating the Gamergate community, and Sarkeesian and others offered a financial reward for information leading to the arrest of the perpetrators. At the time of writing, however, the reward has not been claimed and no arrests have been made or charges filed.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have traced antifandom from textual dislike to hatred expressed at groups of people. In this sense, I have attempted to demonstrate the ways in which antifandom has shifted over time and the ways in which antifandom is being expressed on the Internet. Chin (forthcoming) notes that “social media networks are also utilized to express dislike and hate, as opposed to merely being used to express fans’ love for a text” and this is clear in the three case studies examined in this chapter. Social media—Twitter, YouTube, and Reddit, respectively—enabled antifans more intimate contact with the antifan object as well as a means to communicate with other antifans far more easily. I have also tracked, in this chapter, the reasons behind antifandom. From

the moral text antifandom of *Fifty Shades* readers to the misogynistic vitriol espoused by Gamergaters, antifandom comes from a myriad of reasons and is exhibited in various forms, practices, and behaviors. Antifandom is thus far more complicated than has been previously theorized, and expresses itself in a variety of ways in the digital age.

It is also important to note, however, the pleasure antifans get from engaging in digital dislike. Gray (2005) writes: “Particularly in cases such as this [the anti-Omarosa campaign], where the anonymity of TWoP allows something akin to an e-lynch mob mentality to bubble to the surface, notably darker dimensions of antifandom emerge, as does the role of pleasure in textual hatred” (852). Indeed, in some cases like responses to the *Ghostbusters* remake, antifans took a great deal of pleasure in hating the film. Springer (2013) suggests it is striking “that today some people *embrace* being a hater, dishing out the hate, participating in ‘hateration,’ and/or drinking the ‘hater-ade’” (62). Yet antifans have always found pleasure in disliked texts, whether that be through reciting favorite loathed passages of texts (Harman and Jones 2013) as a form of hate-reading, hate-watching (Gilbert forthcoming) or snarking on a text. As Haig (2014) notes,

When one enjoys junk food, one doesn't engage in a critical analysis of it. You know it's bad for you and take pleasure in it, but engaging in a detailed analysis of its dietary shortcomings isn't part of the pleasure. This is what seems to me to be distinctive about *Twilight* snark: the criticisms aren't incidental to the pleasure taken in the texts; they appear, in large part, to constitute that pleasure. This form of critical fandom does not simply recognise *Twilight* as rubbish and enjoy it in spite of that recognition; the recognition itself and the analysis, discussion and parody that it permits, provide much of the fans' pleasure. (15)

This is certainly evident in some antifan comments to the *Ghostbusters* trailer, where antifans engaged in a campaign to reach one million dislikes and posted messages of encouragement to persuade others to hit the dislike button. Reaching a million dislikes would have little impact on the film. Although some viewers in two minds about the film may be put off by the amount of dislike on the trailer, they decide not to see the movie, by the time the trailer reached a million dislikes, the film had been out for some weeks and had already been seen by millions more movie-goers. Yet antifans found pleasure in the campaign, and in achieving the goal itself.

What these examples have also demonstrated, however, is the need for fan studies to engage more closely with practices of hatred and dislike. Dunlap and Wolf (2010) argue that “the future of fan culture studies must be prepared to look at realistic fan practices,” which includes both “good” and “bad,” “positive” and “negative” emotions (281), and Jane (2014) argues that ethical questions also arise in analyzing hatred and dislike through the lens of antifandom. She writes:

Ethical questions arise – in a meta sense – about the appropriateness of using a term such as “antifandom” to refer to hateful discourse which involves: excessively threatening, violent, or sexually violent rhetoric; attempts to incite violence or criminal action in the real world; and/or the causing of harm to “ordinary” people or vulnerable groups. As with debates involving related issues such as hate speech and hate crimes, definitions are likely to be contested and one category of discourse may overlap with others. Certainly the case study of vitriol targeting cheerleaders demonstrates that it is quite possible for antifan discourse to intersect with those domains of speech and acts which might otherwise be designated as “sexism” or “misogyny.” (186)

Of course, statements expressing dislike of a person or text can be categorized as violent rhetoric *and* antifandom—the inclusion of one does not negate the other, which is why I have argued for including Gamergate as an expression of antifandom. Jane (2014) does, however, acknowledge that:

There *are* a number of significant contemporary contexts in which labelling a vitriolic text as, first and foremost, an example of “antifandom” may risk downplaying its force, potential ramifications, and ethical questionability. It would be both odd and disturbing, for example, if racist hate speech was described as the active audienceship of antifans of African Americans, or if Internet trolls who threaten feminist bloggers with rape online were classified as antifans of gender equity and consensual sex. (186)

As more ways of expressing hate of a text, person, or community appear online, fan studies scholars have to work in more interdisciplinary ways to theorize them. But fan studies scholars must also engage with the attempts the objects of antifandom make to deal with these responses. As fans and antifans have increasingly more ways of engaging with celebrities, damage control and ways of keeping safe online also become more critical, and engaging with these in the fourth wave of fan studies becomes increasingly important.

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Chapter 27

Red Pillers, Sad Puppies, and Gamergaters: The State of Male Privilege in Internet Fan Communities

Katie Wilson

The global-social nature of the Internet has unquestionably made it easier for groups of people to congregate around common interests and ideas. In fan studies, scholars often focus on the impact that the Internet has on creating and strengthening fan communities, allowing fans to create, share, and connect in an affirming way (Jenkins 2003; Hellekson and Busse 2006; Booth 2010). Yet for all the good that the Internet provides fans, it is far from utopian. In 2014 and 2015, fan communities both online and offline were infiltrated by the growing grassroots men's rights and neomasculine activist groups, which like fandom, utilize the Internet to create large and active communities. One of these communities is Return of Kings, a neomasculine blog created by Daryush "Roosh" Valizadeh in 2012. The blog, which boasts over 6,000 email subscribers, 10,000 Facebook followers, and one million unique visitors each month, published an article in 2015 entitled "How Patriarchy Will Return." In the article, author Valizadeh saw the events of 2015 as a sign of a cultural shift. He credited the rise of Internet communities with the start of a culture war that would ultimately lead to a victory for men's rights activists. The war itself is a battle against social justice, something that men's rights activists see as acting in opposition to the "natural" male dominance. Valizadeh highlights four major culture battles that happened in 2014 and 2015 which signal this patriarchal return: (1) Gamergate; (2) an unsuccessful attempt to ban Valizadeh from Canada; (3) the popularity of a meme known as "cuckservative"; and (4) the events at the 2015 Hugo Awards at Worldcon (Valizadeh 2015).

Valizadeh's observations demonstrate a strong connection between the men's rights movement and fan communities. While Valizadeh and other activists attempt to disrupt social justice initiatives in many communities, their great victories in 2014 and 2015 were in fan communities. This begs the question: Is there something innate about fan communities that cultivates men's rights activists? Understanding the motivations of these activists and the appeal that these groups might have for fans will bring us closer to an understanding of the overlapping space that men's rights and fandom share.

A Brief History of Men's Rights Activism

Men's rights activists function under the core belief that social justice initiatives are created by feminists and special interest groups to unnaturally dominate men (see Jones's Chapter 26 in this volume). Their founding document, *The Hazards of Being Male: Surviving the Myth of Male Privilege* by Herb Goldberg (1976), outlined the belief that it is men rather than women who are oppressed in modern society. It is the men's rights activists' belief that feminism is to blame for this shift in the natural order and that the only cure is a return to a traditional form of masculinity (Fox 2004). The history of the movement can be broken up into three parts: (1) the proto-men's rights movement; (2) the original men's rights movement; and (3) the modern men's rights movement.

The proto-men's rights movement emerged as women around the world were gaining their right to vote. Notable early organizations were London's The League for Men's Rights and Vienna's the Federation for Men's Rights, both founded in 1926. These early organizations were formed with the purpose of "combatting all excess of women's emancipation," focusing on issues regarding divorce and paternity (Lynn 2014; Smith 2016). The issue of paternity carried on until the 1960s and 1970s, when men's rights activists developed into the original men's rights movement as a reaction to the second-wave feminist movement and the military draft of men into the Vietnam War. The National Coalition for Men (NCFM), founded in 1977, touts itself as the "oldest men's group committed to ending sex discrimination" (NCFM 2016). The organization originally focused on what they considered unfair divorce laws which disproportionately favored wives, but the organization has changed in recent years to target the perceived problem of false rape accusers. This is a major issue of the modern men's rights movement, which has none of the pretense of gender equality that the earlier versions of the movement held. According to a 2014 Vice report:

The most common concerns of the MRM [Men's Rights Movement] include:

1. The family court system, which activists say frequently forces men to pay too much alimony while not considering their feelings when awarding the custody of children.
2. Government programs that assist only women rather than both genders, especially those that give aid to female victims of sexual assault—MRAs claim that men who suffer the same abuse are often ignored.
3. The right to opt out of raising a child, since, some MRAs say, women can opt out of a pregnancy.
4. False rape accusations, which MRAs think don't get enough attention from a culture increasingly inclined to believe women who say horrible things about men.
5. Fighting back against radical feminism, the ultimate evil as far as the movement is concerned. (Lynn 2014)

The modern men's rights movement has found a new home on the Internet, with many blogs and social media sites dedicated to the movement. In addition to Return of Kings, sites like A Voice for Men and Men Going Their Own Way publish articles on advocacy, while sites like Reddit and 4Chan organize men's rights advocates into global communities.

The Internet has been pervasive for virtually half of the original men's rights movement's existence, and as such is an important factor in the way the movement is organized. The Internet is particularly skilled at connecting people with common interests. When it comes to political and social organization, the Internet allows for organization in communities that cannot organize in traditional ways (i.e., protests and group meetings, and fandom). It is also particularly suited for the fast-paced culture we currently live in, meaning that organizations can react to noteworthy events at a moment's notice (Eaton 2010). Men's rights activists take

advantage of this, rallying around trending news events and issues such as the Stanford Rape Case, the Hillary Clinton Email Scandal, and Donald Trump's "locker room talk" (Maxx 2016; Spengler 2016; Uintatherium 2016). Its ability to mobilize people from all over the world around the most current of current events, as well as its importance in cultivating fan communities, demonstrate the important role that the Internet plays in linking men's rights groups with fan communities.

The Role of the Internet

The Internet has opened new avenues for community organization thanks to its ability to connect people from different geographical locations around common interests. Communities form, based on commonality in region, race, hobbies, political views, economic factors, and skills (Halstead and Lind 2002). Before communication technologies bridged geographical barriers, where you lived was the largest factor in which communities you belonged to. But while geography does factor into our current community-building practices, studies show that we create much stronger communities with higher satisfaction when we organize around common interests (Obst, Zinkiewicz, and Smith 2001).

Roosh Valizadeh, in his prediction of the return to patriarchy, cites the Internet as a way to fill an "informational black hole left by the establishment." The reason men's rights activists are drawn to the Internet, Valizadeh (2015) claims, is "because in the past forty years the singular cultural focus has been about empowering women (providing them with benefits and privileges) while giving bad advice and withholding information from men, if not outright sabotaging them." Old media, which implied a top-down approach to sharing information, relies on the judgment and motivations of a dominant class, allowing for biases and unclear motives around the types of stories told (Althusser 2014). With old media, we were merely consumers of someone else's media. New Media, however, creates what Henry Jenkins calls participatory culture (Jenkins et al. 2009; see also Bourdaa's Chapter 24 in this volume). Through the democratic nature of the Internet, anyone with access to a computer can broadcast their message to the masses. This participation creates a sense of power and control on the part of the participant, or as Clay Shirky (2010) puts it, "to participate is to act as if your presence matters, as if, when you see something or hear something, your response is part of the event" (126). Power comes from having your voice heard, but it also comes from the old mantra: strength in numbers. By fostering communities based around similar interests or causes, the Internet provides users with a support system that bolsters rather than challenges their own beliefs, and it feels good to have your ideas and thoughts substantiated, to feel like you are part of something.

Fans, united by a common interest, work together as a community to create creative and critical texts around the object of their fandom. While fans do act as individuals within their communities, their communities also function as a unified voice with its own message (Booth 2010). Like the rest of the media, a dominant voice emerges from fan communities giving the illusion of a homogeneous group. Through microblogging sites like Tumblr, fans create their own narrative around the objects of their fandom, often coming up with community agreed upon language and storylines. For instance, in the fan community around the BBC drama *Sherlock*, the community tends to focus on the fictional romantic pairing of main characters Sherlock Holmes and John Watson. This pairing, known as Johnlock, dominates the postings on Tumblr tagged with #sherlock, creating the appearance that the entire Sherlock fandom is fixated on this homosexual relationship (see Morimoto's Chapter 16 in this volume). However, not every member of the *Sherlock*

fan community champions the Johnlock pairing. Daneel, who wrote a series of blog posts under the name “Anti Johnlock” explains the frustration of being a minority voice within a fan community:

Hi. I'm Daneel. I'm a 32-year old gay woman of color. This is my place to vent about shitty behavior from some Johnlockers. I've personally dealt with a lot of rude-ass shippers before and here I will speak out about it. I try to keep my bitterness in, but I do not always succeed. It's a flaw.

As you've probably gathered, I do not ship Johnlock. I can roll with pretty much any Sherlock ship, except that one and Adlock.

I am the voice of those who dare not speak out about these things out of fear of being attacked by Johnlockers. Since the Johnlockers won't call out others within their own ship, I will. (Daneel 2014)

Through her blog, Daneel attempted to break through the dominant messages of the *Sherlock* fan community with her own criticism of their practices (in particular, slash fanfiction and fan art). She sees this criticism as an act of bravery, and implies that she is part of a community that is forced into silence by a dominating majority. But like Roosh Valizadeh, Daneel refuses to keep silent.

Fan communities have a history of being outspoken critics working outside of the dominant ideology. Fans have the ability to see a multiplicity of meanings within a text, a trait that allows them to read the texts in ways other than the dominant reading. Fans take pleasure in alternative readings of texts as an act of rebellion from dominant ideology, and, as such, fandom can be subversive (Sandvoss 2010). Fans take pleasure in being critical of media and culture and find community through this activity. This tendency to be outspoken critics of culture creates an opening for other forms of protest. Many fan communities take part in fan activism that addresses social issues related to the fandom. An example is 501st Legion, a collection of *Star Wars* fans who cosplay as Storm Troopers while raising money for various charities, including their own non-profit “Heart of the Force” which aims to stop bullying in schools. Men's rights is just another cause that gives an outlet to fans who see a problem with society. As an often oppressed and bullied group, male fans may see their stereotypical association with feminine qualities as the reason for their oppression. Because men's rights activists see feminism as attempting to turn men weak, some male fans may find association with this sentiment and join these activist groups in fighting the social justice movements that threaten their beliefs in natural male domination and male safe spaces.

The Male Fan Identity

The image of the male fan is ubiquitous in popular culture. This character of the bespectacled, pockmarked man-child nervously waiting for autographs at a convention or milling about a comic book store is so pervasive that it is the starting point for Henry Jenkins's seminal work *Textual Poachers*. Jenkins begins his exploration of fans with a look at the 1986 *Saturday Night Live* sketch “Get a Life”, in which William Shatner berates a group of *Star Trek* fans for their obsessive tendencies. Jenkins ([1992] 2013) explains:

This much-discussed sketch distills many popular stereotypes about fans. Its “Trekkies”:

- a. Are brainless consumers who will buy anything associated with the program or its cast [...];
- b. Devote their lives to the cultivation of worthless knowledge [...];
- c. Place inappropriate importance on devalued cultural material [...];

- d. Are social misfits who have become so obsessed with the show that it forecloses on other types of social experience [...];
- e. Are feminized and/or desexualized through their intimate engagement with mass culture [...];
- f. Are infantile, emotionally and intellectually immature [...];
- g. Are unable to separate fantasy from reality. (10)

This characterization has changed very little since the 1980s. The most prevalent example, CBS's *The Big Bang Theory*, features four lead characters with similar characteristics: Spending money at the local comic book shop each week, devoting entire episodes to debating the importance of Indiana Jones, obsessing over a napkin containing Leonard Nimoy's sweat, ending a relationship over an obsession with *World of Warcraft*, struggling to talk to women, living with their parents, and believing that they are Starfleet officers while dressed in cosplay. The stereotypical fan exists across many outlets including Comic Book Guy (*The Simpsons*), Moss (*The IT Crowd*), and Dwight Schrute (*The Office* in the USA).

Beyond providing a stereotype of the fan, Jenkins's classifications show a strong parallel with historic stereotypes around women, which is odd seeing as a vast majority of popular culture fan characters are male. Fans are often depicted as mindless consumers, very susceptible to advertising and impulse. Women are seen in a similar way. *Forbes Magazine* named women the "world's most powerful consumers," making up 70–80 percent of all purchasing (Brennan 2015). Many companies try to market directly to women, working under the untrue assumption that the sure-fire way to get women to buy their product is to dye it pink. There are pink pens for women, pink earplugs for women, pink toolsets for women, and even pink laxative tablets for women. While studies have shown this color change does not in fact lure women to a product (Silverstein and Sayre 2009), the stereotype that women will impulsively buy a product based solely on its color remains. The stereotype assumes that women are consumers driven not by logic or need, but rather by an emotional trap constructed by advertisers. Fans are also seen to make purchases emotionally. Variant comic book covers and special edition exclusive collectables are often the cornerstone of fan conventions. The popular collectable toy company Funko regularly releases exclusive figurines at conventions that tend to be very similar to easily attainable figurines as a way to exploit the perceived emotional purchases of fans (see Figures 27.1–27.4).



Figure 27.1 Readily available Wicked Witch Funko Pop Vinyl
Source: popvinylns.com. Courtesy of Katie Wilson.



Figure 27.2 San Diego Comic Con Exclusive collectable Wicked Witch Funko Pop Vinyl different only in color from the original

Source: popviny.com. Courtesy of Katie Wilson.



Figure 27.3 Readily available Rorschach Funko Pop Vinyl

Source: popviny.com. Courtesy of Katie Wilson.

Fans are seen as devoting too much time to obtaining useless knowledge and place too much importance on “devalued cultural material.” For fans, this often means remembering minute details from media objects and spending much of their free time on these pursuits. The objects of fan obsession are often classified as devalued or lowbrow: video games, comic books, television shows. The stereotypical woman is also obsessed with lowbrow entertainment. Much like the pink consumer products marketed toward women, media is often marketed to women in a very stereotypical ways. Television specifically marketed to women is often overly dramatic, critically lambasted, and primarily consumer focused. This can be attributed to the



Figure 27.4 San Diego Comic Con Exclusive collectable Rorschach Funko Pop Vinyl different only because of a splash of blood on the jacket
Source: popvinyl.com. Courtesy of Katie Wilson.

rise of soap operas in the 1950s, marketed to stay-at-home women to help appease any restlessness they might feel during the day (Andrews 2012). The same style of melodrama continued into the 1980s, when the American television station Lifetime launched, marketing melodramatic made-for-TV films to a female audience under the mantra, “television for women.” Today, women are targeted with primetime soap-like series such as *Grey’s Anatomy* and *The Good Wife*, but they are also the target of reality television centered around consumerism and traditional standards of beauty such as *The Bachelorette* and *Keeping Up with the Kardashians*. These shows are often criticized as being frivolous, if not outright harmful. About *Keeping Up with the Kardashians*, one critic for the *New York Observer* wrote, “Yes, I meant it when I said this show is awful. This show gave me an infectious disease. It’s bad, in every sense of the word” (Mancuso 2015). Like fans, women are often seen as giving too much attention to these derided pieces of media. It is worth noting, however, that these assumptions around women are incorrect as more women watch *Monday Night Football* than *The Bachelorette*, and in 2013 the top three shows watched by women were *American Horror Story*, *Sons of Anarchy*, and *The Walking Dead* (Thielman 2014).

Beyond being obsessed with silly things, fans are seen as socially awkward or shy, not in control of social situations. Shyness is a trait often socialized in women. Cultural norms dictate that men are the dominant, self-assured figures, while women are more anxious or coy. In fact, young boys are often criticized more for their shyness than young girls, and thus more commonly socialized out of their shyness (Gazelle, Peter, and Karkavandi 2014). In adulthood, women face similar socialization in the workplace. Gender-acceptable behavior standards help to quiet women from speaking up in situations in which their male counterparts are often encouraged to speak up. Assertive women are often labeled as troublemakers, high-maintenance, or even bitches (Klaus 2010). Thus, men are often stereotyped as being more socially adept than women. And yet women are also stereotyped as being chatty and better at creating friendships than men. This contradiction only goes to show that the link between gender and communication is more complicated than stereotypes can allow for.

Fans are often shown as living in fantasy worlds and having strong imaginations. This aligns with another of Jenkins’s observations, that fans are often depicted as infantile. Child psychologist

Jean Piaget (2013) famously wrote that young children often have trouble differentiating reality from fiction. We see this in children's belief in ghosts, monsters, and Santa Claus. Many young children even have imaginary friends that interact with them on a daily basis. More recent research, however, discovered that children actually have three schemas for understanding reality: things that are true, things that are make believe, and things that are probably make believe but they consciously treat them as true (i.e. imaginary friends) (Sharon and Woolley 2004). This three schema approach is echoed in fan stereotypes as fans often qualify that they know something is actually fictional while giving it the same attention as something real (what Cassandra Amesley (1989) calls "double viewing"). An example of this comes from the 1999 film *Galaxy Quest*. The film features a *Star Trek* parody in which the aging actors on the fictional television show *Galaxy Quest* have to deal with overzealous fans. One such fan, teenager Brandon, is criticized by the lead actor, Jason Nesmith, for treating the show as truth. Later, Brandon confronts Nesmith, stating, "I want you to know I'm not a complete brain-case, ok? I understand completely that it is just a TV show." But when Brandon learns that his favorite TV characters have actually been transported into space and the science and technologies from his favorite show are now real, he celebrates, stating, "I knew it!" In this depiction, the fan is shown as behaving like a child, keeping the object of their fandom in an in-between schema bridging fantasy and reality.

Female identities, like fans, have often been labeled as child-like or infantile. Because women and children are historically viewed as dependent (Burman and Stacey 2010), their identities often merge in popular culture with characters such as Lucy Ricardo and Laura Petrie often being treated like children by their TV husbands. Even today television shows such as *New Girl* and *Supergirl* use the infantile noun as opposed to shows like *Mad Men* and *Last Man on Earth*. The stereotype of the woman-child or the dependent woman, paired with the childlike distortion of reality helps to associate the female stereotype with that of the fan.

Finally, fans are often seen as desexualized and feminine. It is important to note that Jenkins does not say that fans are women; in fact, there are no women in the "Get a Life" sketch from *Saturday Night Live*. Here, femininity is carefully distinguished from biological sex, with femininity being a social construct (Butler 1990). The assumption here is that the type of fans Jenkins is talking about are biological men who present as men, but have unwanted female associations. In particular, fans are classified as a certain type of feminine, de-sexualized femininity. They are not the sexual aggressors that men are expected to be, they are passive and virginal. Both of these traits are often encouraged in women as decent and traditional. While women are often situated as sexual objects, they are not often encouraged to be sexual aggressors. When they are assertive in their sexuality, they are often accused of being promiscuous or unhealthy. While the stereotype of the fan as desexualized aligns with an ideal, chaste, traditional woman, it comes in opposition to what a man should be. In fact, much of modern men's rights activism is predicated on the belief that men are naturally sexually aggressive and that rape is an accepted male instinct and should be legal in certain cases.

These stereotypes of the fan present a great contrast to the stereotype of the strong, assertive, providing traditional man. But while individual ideas of what a man should be vary from person to person, the stereotype—"an idealized mental representation of a normal case, which may or may not be accurate" (Putnam 1975, cited in Lakoff 1987, 116)—becomes a place for communities to rally around. Because the goal of men's rights activists is to return to a traditional and "normal" state of masculinity, stereotypes are a useful tool in understanding what the purest form of masculinity might be.

Theories on Gender

The beliefs of the men's rights activists are predicated on the idea that there is a natural state of gender; that the concepts of masculinity and femininity are linked directly to biological sex. Indeed, research has been conducted to prove the existence of this natural state of gender and the effect that gender has on ability. In 1889, Patrick Geddes and Sir John Arthur Thomson published their theories on sex and gender in the book, *The Evolution of Sex*. They tied the concepts of sex (the biological identity of the person based on sex organs, hormones, and chromosomes) and gender (the behavior, mood, and social role of a person) to the biological process of metabolism. They argued that men's metabolism is fast, leading them to be energetic, passionate, and generally interested in political and social issues. Women, with their slow metabolisms, are conservative, passive, and disinterested in civic engagement (Geddes and Thomson 1889). The concept of biological determinism that Geddes and Thomson argued is easily dismantled by showing that all biological women are not passive and all biological men are not energetic. Moreover, Geddes and Thomson look outside human biology to develop universal concepts of sexuality throughout their book, a tactic that is turned on them by Simone de Beauvoir, who argues that nature demonstrates a myriad of sexual expressions beyond just male and female (de Beauvoir 1949).

Today, biological determinism is not the prevailing theory on gender and personality. Judith Butler proposed the theory that gender is a social construct in her 1990 book *Gender Trouble*. This theory states that, while we are born with different sexes, humans are conditioned through their societies into performing their gender. Biological females are conditioned by the media, their families, schools, and churches to behave in a more docile and passive way; biological males are conditioned to behave in a more aggressive and dominant way. Butler argues that there is nothing inherently feminine about women and nothing inherently masculine about males. Additionally, gender is no longer considered completely binary. Trans and nonbinary identities further demonstrate that biology alone does not predispose one's gender and that there can be many expressions of gender beyond just male and female. It is from this position that contemporary gender studies operate. Yet men's rights groups still hold on to the biological determinism of Geddes and Thomson.

The Return to Patriarchy

Roosh Valizadeh predicts the "return" of a male-dominated society in five stages. The first is the "Rise of the Networks," and the ability of the Internet to connect communities and distribute information. The second is the "Seed of Resistance," where activists can use the Internet to disrupt dominant ideology with their own news and blog sites. Stage Three is what Valizadeh called the "Culture War," the stage he believes we are currently in. He cites the presence of the culture war with four case studies. The first is his own story of being banned from speaking in Canada due to his belief that rape should be decriminalized, and the court case that ultimately allowed him to enter the country. He devotes less than a sentence to this battle, moving on to what he sees as the start of the culture war: Gamergate.

Gamergate

The term Gamergate has murky origins, as it was used as a rallying point for a few different movements (see Jones's Chapter 26 in this volume). The term originated in August of 2014 when a blogger named Eron Gjoni accused his ex-girlfriend Zoe Quinn, a game developer, of trading

sexual favors for positive game reviews from critics. Gjoni's blog was published at a time when many in the gaming community were already upset by what they saw as unwarranted positive reviews for certain games, so his story helped fuel a debate on the "ethics in games journalism" (Lewis 2015). The hashtag Gamergate allowed gamers to vent about this crisis in journalism, but it also allowed them to vent about any problem they saw within modern gaming. Very quickly, the movement turned on feminist blogger and gamer Anita Sarkeesian. Sarkeesian was gaining notoriety for her vlog "Feminist Frequency," where she criticized the representation of women in video games, calling for more playable female characters and less sexualized imagery. The hashtag Gamergate, which was once about journalistic ethics, was quickly taken over by neomasculine groups who believed that video games are and should be a male space. The reality, however, is that women make up 52 percent of the gaming audience as of 2014 (Jayanth 2014).

Gamergate started as an Internet community who wanted to return to what they saw as the natural state of video games, ones that were made for men and didn't take the female player's desires into account. But the reason why Roosh Valizadeh marks Gamergate as a milestone in his culture war is that Gamergate extended beyond the borders of the Internet. In 2014 and 2015, Sarkeesian, Quinn, and other outspoken "anti-Gamergaters" were the target of real-world harassment including doxing (having personal information and home addresses published on the Internet), bomb scares, and rape threats. Quinn and Sarkeesian were both forced to leave their home due to the death threats placed on them (Dewey 2014). These real-world consequences are why Valizadeh considers this the start of his culture war. The *Washington Post* agreed, stating, "In many respects, Gamergate is just a proxy war for a greater cultural battle over space and visibility and inclusion, a battle over who belongs to the mainstream—and as such, it's a battle for our cultural soul" (Dewey 2014).

Cuckservative

The Gamergate community created Roosh Valizadeh's next battle of the culture war with the meme known as cuckservative. This pro-Donald Trump meme developed during the 2016 United States Presidential Campaign as a way to criticize conservative politicians whom neomasculine groups considered too soft or as pandering to social justice initiatives. While the meme itself exists in the political world rather than the media fan world, its roots are with the Gamergate movement. The first use of the term "cuckservative" gained viral status thanks in part to the Gamergate community (Weigel 2015). Rallying around Donald Trump, the perpetrators of this meme utilized Twitter, 4Chan, and Reddit to spread the meme (knowyourmeme.com). Trump's victory in the 2016 election not only revitalized the meme, it also gave Valizadeh another chance to claim victory.

Sad Puppies and Rabid Puppies

Like Gamergate, Valizadeh's final battle in the culture war was fought by members of fan communities. Arguably the longest-running fan convention, the World Science Fiction Society Convention (Worldcon), was founded in 1939 and is most notable for its prestigious Hugo Awards (see Hellekson's Chapter 4 in this volume). The Hugo Awards are an annual award that celebrates the best works in science fiction and fantasy across many different media types. The awards were first held at Worldcon in 1953 and have been bestowed to such influential figures as Kurt Vonnegut, Isaac Asimov, Stanley Kubrick, and Joss Whedon (HugoAwards.com). Nominations and winners are selected by members of the World Science Fiction Society, membership that is

gained by attending a Worldcon Convention or paying a minimal fee that allows for absentee voting; in other words, the fans choose who wins the coveted prize. As the years have passed, the Hugo Awards has become the top prize in literature for science fiction and fantasy works, and each year writers petition for nominations and votes from their fans.

In 2013, one such author, Larry Correia, took to his blog to ask for fan support at the upcoming Hugo Awards. Correia believed that his novel, *Monster Hunter Legion*, was better qualified for the award than previous winners had been. His issue with previous winners was that they tended to be works that, in addition to providing action and intrigue, also provided a strong social or political message. In contrast, Correia's works, by his own admission, were pure action without any deeper meaning. After explaining how easy it was to become an absentee Hugo Awards voter, Correia challenged his fans to mobilize. "Should I vote for the heavy handed message fic about the dangers of fracking and global warming and dying polar bears and robot rape as a bad feminist analogy with a villain who is a thinly veiled Dick Cheney? Or should I vote for the LAS VEGAS EXPLOSION SHOOTING EVERYTHING DRAGON HELICOPTER CHASE ORC SACRIFICING CHICKENS BOOK!?!?" (Correia 2013).

Though Correia's 2013 campaign did not garner a nomination, he attempted to mobilize again in 2014 around his novel *Warbound*. But in addition to promoting his own work, Correia created a list of his choices for nominees in each of the Hugo's twelve categories, using his original anti-message stance as a qualifier. Though his motivations are not explicitly misogynistic or right-leaning, the result is a list of works that exclude works by or that feature women, members of the LGBTQA community, and liberal-leaning authors. Correia dubbed his followers Sad Puppies, which evokes the heavy-handed pathos of the Sarah McLachlan SPCA commercials which asks for financial support for mistreated animals using sad music over images of hurt and malnourished animals. Correia joked with *Wired* magazine in 2015, "We did a joke based on that: That the leading cause of puppy-related sadness was boring message-fic winning awards ... our spokesman was a cartoon manatee named Wendell. Wendell doesn't speak English. You can see we kept this really super serious, right?" (Wallace 2015). But while the 2013 and 2014 campaigns may have been a joke by Correia, the 2015 campaign garnered a huge amount of press, thanks to its unabashed misogyny, racism, homophobia, and political leanings.

In addition to the Sad Puppies, now led by author Brad R. Torgersen, a new group known as the Rabid Puppies aimed to disrupt the 2015 Hugo Awards. Their mission statements were centered on the same premise, that otherwise impressive works were being overlooked in favor of more liberal and message-heavy works. And while Correia may have hinted at his right-leaning motivations, the new leadership behind the Sad Puppies and Rabid Puppies were not subtle about their political affiliations and social beliefs. The movement gathered so much support that most of their nominees were making the ballots and chaos erupted within the Worldcon community. Many authors declined their nominations, wishing to distance themselves from the Puppy movement. As a result, many of the Hugo Award categories for 2015 did not name a winner and the awards went unclaimed.

The 2016 Hugo Awards saw similar disruption from the Puppy movement. No longer unified, the Sad Puppies and the Rabid Puppies took different approaches to disrupting the Hugo Awards. The Sad Puppies backtracked in an effort to maintain some of the dignity of the Hugo, and rather than tell their followers which works to vote on, they published a list of recommendations. The Rabid Puppies, however, are attempting to dismantle the Hugos, nominating works not for their merit, but rather for the impact they might have on the reputation of the award. One such title, the gay erotic sci-fi adventure *Space Raptor Butt Invasion*, is of particular priority for the Rabid Puppies.

While the Sad Puppy movement started the protests at the Hugo Awards, the authors who lead the movement seem to have the best interest of the awards at heart. Both Brad R. Torgersen and

Larry Correia are well-respected authors in their field and their recent distancing from the Rabid Puppy movement shows that their intention was never to tarnish the Hugo. The Rabid Puppy movement has vocally aligned themselves with another organization: men's rights. Vox Day, the leader of the Rabid Puppies, has been outspoken about his hatred of social justice warriors, his belief that rape is sometimes permissible, and his conservative political leanings. Using similar language and outlets as the men's rights activists, Day and his followers have firmly aligned themselves with the men's rights movement. In 2016, the Rabid Puppies successfully got 64 out of their 81 nominations on the ballot, again rallying their absentee voters. But 2016 saw a "resounding defeat" of the Sad and Rabid Puppies when only two categories saw "no award" winners and women writers dominated in their categories (Barnett 2016).

Conclusion

The men's rights movement has a name for people whose eyes have been opened to what they consider the reality of modern culture. Men and women who agree that men are the oppressed gender in modern society are said to have "taken the red pill," an image that comes from the 1999 film, *The Matrix*. In the film, main character Neo is enlightened to the truth of the world by choosing to take the red pill over the blue pill; he sees that the world that he always believed was true was actually a reality constructed to make him and others like him submissive. Even this allegory is rooted within a fan practice, as fans often find ways of using vocabulary and concepts from the objects of their fandom in their everyday lives. While the motivations for individual fans' decisions to take part in men's rights activism could only be obtained through an ethnographic study, four factors arise from a close reading of the publications and events surrounding the Gamergate and Hugo Award scandals.

First, fan communities are as diverse and unstable as any other community. While united by common interests, fans face infighting and conflict as readily as any other group. Much of the fighting around Gamergate and the Hugo Awards centered around the place for social justice within fan practices. This is a form of task conflict, in that fans are unable to agree on their mission or how they should behave. Like other communities, fan communities develop dominant ideologies that can never speak for the multiplicity of beliefs of their members. These dominant ideologies create places of oppression, or perceived oppression, that lead to conflict and demonstrations. Gamergate and the Hugos show us that within fan communities, super-conservative ideologies are the minority, causing those members to speak out for their beliefs.

Second, the Internet gives the minority members of fan communities a way to rapidly connect with each other in order to mobilize. The three-year escalation of the Puppy movement demonstrates that one blog post can start a revolution. Very little planning or organization needs to occur to enable the Puppies to pool their votes for Hugo nominations; one blog post will do.

Third, Internet media fandom on mainstream websites tends to skew toward liberal politics. The complaints of Gamergaters and Puppies tend to revolve around a dislike of so-called "social justice warriors," who campaign for rights and equalities for marginalized members of society, including women, people of color, and members of the LGBTQA community. Because the men's rights movement holds traditional conservative beliefs, it offers a community for like-minded conservative fans.

Finally, the historical bullying of male fans, both in real-life situations and in media representations, is tied to a stereotype that fannish activities are innately feminine. Because it operates on the premise that men have been oppressed by the feminist movement in order to make them submissive, the men's rights movement gives male fans who have been bullied a reason for their maltreatment. Rather than do the cliché geek-to-chic makeover and abandon their fan identities in favor of

greater mainstream acceptance, men's rights activism allows men to place the blame on something out of their control, to place the blame on a greater cultural issue. Even though the stereotypes around both women and fans are not entirely accurate, the stereotypes still exist and are exploited by men's rights activists as a way to organize.

But however righteous men's rights activists believe they are, their problematic teachings work in opposition to the sociological consensus on gender equality. The truth is, men still maintain the dominant position of power within our society, ruling our countries and running our major corporations. Women are still subject to unfair wage gaps, outdated laws regarding domestic violence, and regulations over what they are legally able to do to their body. Men's rights advocates believe that men are naturally aggressive, and that they are oppressed into acting docile. They believe that if a man acts in violence toward women, it is typically at least partially the fault of the woman, because she failed to take into account the naturally violent side of masculinity. Because of this, the battles of Gamergate and the Hugo Awards tend to take chilling and violent turns. In a culture that does not blame men for violence, men are cheered for making graphic rape threats toward women they disagree with, they are encouraged to harass women until women fear for their lives, and they have no qualms about publishing the personal and private information of their targets online so as to encourage even more harassment.

There is no simple answer to how to address the rising number of fan communities infiltrated by men's rights harassment, but it seems to boil down to removing the fear from the situation. If we remove the fear of feminism, we may take away the activists' distrust of women. If we remove the unease that comes when a man is labeled as feminine, we might bridge a gender divide. But most of all, if we remove the idea that fear and hate can lead to progress, we may start to engage in productive debates that ensure the safety and integrity of our communities.

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Chapter 28

“Fate Has a Habit of Not Letting Us Choose Our Own Endings”: Post-object Fandom, Social Media and Material Culture at the End of *Hannibal*

Rebecca Williams

Fan studies has recently turned its focus to periods of transition and change within fandoms and how individuals deal with the potential ends of favorite objects (Bore and Hickman 2013; Chin 2013; Whiteman and Metivier 2013; Jones 2014a, 2014b). My own work in this area has focused on how fans respond before, during, and after television programs cease airing, exploring these latter periods as examples of “post-object fandom” (Williams 2011, 2015). This chapter will offer an overview of work on endings and post-object fandom by situating previous studies within the context of our understandings of fans’ emotional and affective attachments, their fan self-identity and narratives, and their engagement with the producers of favorite fan objects. However, the chapter also offers new avenues for research into fandom and endings or periods of transition. It focuses on fan practices after the final episodes of the television series *Hannibal* on its original US network NBC. In June 2015, series creator Bryan Fuller announced that the show had been canceled by NBC, but both Fuller and the show’s production company De Laurentiis Productions expressed hope that the series would continue elsewhere. Fans and producers participated in the #saveHannibal campaign via social media while also encouraging alternative companies such as Netflix, Amazon, and Hulu to save the show. As fans prepared for the airing of the season three finale on August 29, 2015 they remained unsure whether the show would return or whether this episode was, in fact, a *series* finale. Fans were thus moving into a period of “interim fandom” since they were uncertain “whether to grieve or mourn the passing of a favorite series or to keep their hope for a return alive” (Williams 2015, 191). This chapter explores how *Hannibal*’s uncertain ending offers a development of previous work on fan endings and post-object fandom. While many fans are usually aware of the finality of a television series when it airs its last episodes (notwithstanding future revivals, as in the case of shows such as *Twin Peaks*, *The X-Files* or *Heroes*), fans of *Hannibal*—referred to as Fannibals—found themselves in a more precarious situation, unsure if the show would return at all and, if so, when.

This chapter considers how fans reacted to this uncertain ending by considering the material practices of fans who bid on and purchased props and memorabilia from the show in an auction after *Hannibal*’s final episodes on NBC. Previous studies of fandom and endings have emphasized fans’ textual responses and discussions, whether recorded in surveys or online via tweets, message boards or other sites, following a broader trend within “fan studies that privilege[s] textual over tactile engagement” (Rehak 2014, para. 1.4). As Matt Hills (2014) argues, “Fandom’s predominantly

material cultures seem to have gone missing in much scholarship, perhaps because they are assumed to be too close to the commodity fetish of merchandise” (para. 1.3). This chapter thus offers an original contribution to work on fandom, endings, and objects by exploring how fans can work through reactions to periods of ending and transition and continue their “post-object” or “interim fandom” (Williams 2015) through material practices (see Geraghty’s Chapter 10 in this volume). It brings together work on fandom and endings with studies of materiality and object-oriented fandom to further our understandings of both by considering the material practices that fans can engage in during periods of post-object or interim fandom. Focusing on the opportunity to bid on and purchase props and costumes from the series in a 2016 auction, the chapter considers these “materialities of fandom” in “specific configurations of place, purpose, and performance” (Rehak 2014, para. 1.3). Alongside broader observations on the auction (in which I actively bid on, and won, items), the chapter draws on data collected from a survey completed by 10 fans who took part in the auction in 2016. While the number of survey responses is relatively small, the views expressed by those who completed it offer some broad insights into this aspect of fan practice in a period of post-object fandom. Those who completed the surveys agreed to a range of ethical considerations including being anonymized. The chapter also draws on the broader discussion taking place on Twitter under the #Hannibalauction. Although “Twitter conversations (excluding protected accounts) are public to anyone who looks” (Yardi and boyd 2010, 1), individual tweets by fans are not reproduced here, nor are any usernames or other identifying features (e.g., time or date) given. Instead fans’ tweets are discussed in more general terms to highlight common themes or fan discourses and practices while seeking to maintain the privacy of those who posted under the #Hannibalauction hashtag.

The arguments made here establish the importance of studying post-object fandom in all its forms. Drawing on the case of *Hannibal*, the chapter explores how we can understand fan responses in periods of interim fandom, when fans resist the threat of an ending, and how they can draw on a range of material practices in this period of uncertainty about a return.

***Hannibal*, Endings and Transitions**

Hannibal offers an opportunity to examine how fans offer resistance when threatened with the cessation of a favorite series and how they may continue to hope for the continuation of that text. Examining the series allows “understanding of ruptures/endings as ongoing, constant and generative of subjectivity” (Whiteman and Metivier 2013, 294) since “the end points of texts (and whether these endings are defined by scholars, the TV industry or fans themselves) are subject to negotiation and are not always, ... clear-cut” (Williams 2015, 8). Given the uncertainty about *Hannibal*’s potential return on another network or platform (such as Netflix), the series also demonstrates how the already well-established relationships enabled fans and the show’s producers, writers, and other staff to come together to protest the cancellation and seek other opportunities for continuation of the series.

Hannibal (2013–2015) ran for three seasons in the USA on the mainstream network NBC. Conceived and developed by Executive Producer Bryan Fuller (who had already enjoyed limited success with cult series such as *Pushing Daisies* and *Dead Like Me*), the show adapted Thomas Harris’s successful Hannibal Lecter novels *Red Dragon*, *Hannibal* and *Hannibal Rising* (the series was unable to use Lecter’s most famous story *The Silence of the Lambs* due to issues over copyright ownership). Each of the four Lecter novels had already been adapted for film in *Manhunter* (Michael Mann 1986), *Red Dragon* (Brett Ratner 2002), *Hannibal* (Ridley Scott 2001), *Hannibal Rising* (Peter Webber 2007), and *Silence of the Lambs* (Jonathan Demme 1991), which won five

Academy Awards and starred Jodie Foster as Special Agent Clarice Starling and Anthony Hopkins as Hannibal Lecter. Given the cultural ubiquity of Hopkins's performance (a character he returned to for both *Hannibal* the movie and the remake of *Red Dragon*), the attempt to take the role to television and to adapt the series for the small screen was risky. However, Bryan Fuller—who has described *Hannibal* as his own fan fiction about the world of Lecter (Torrey 2015)—offered the opportunity for the show to do something different within the well-established narrative universe. Fuller's key conceit was to have the series begin before Lecter was imprisoned and to flesh out his relationship with FBI Special Investigator Will Graham who was responsible for capturing him several years before the start of the *Red Dragon* novel. Fuller envisioned a scenario where the two men were friends and colleagues, with Lecter helping the FBI solve crimes and acting as Graham's psychiatrist before the eventual revelation that he was the serial killer that Graham was hunting (Sepinwall 2013). The series' final episodes dealt with the attempts to catch the serial killer known as the Red Dragon. The last episode ended with Hannibal and Will killing the Dragon together, Will accepting his inner 'dark side' and that he was capable of enjoying violent and murderous acts, and throwing himself and Hannibal off a cliff. The series thus ends with a literal cliff-hanger although a post-credit sequence suggests that both men have likely survived the fall.

In addition to offering an "affectionate remix of elements from Thomas Harris' novels ..., as well as from previous adaptations of those works" (Torrey 2015), Fuller and the cast and crew on *Hannibal* formed strong relationships with the series' fan base. Many of these fans were female and appreciated the series' representation of strong characters including Caroline Dhavernas's Alana Bloom ("gender-swapped" from the male Alan Bloom of the novel *Red Dragon*), Gillian Anderson's portrayal of Lecter's psychiatrist Bedelia du Maurier, and Katharine Isabelle's Margot Verger. The series also offered a range of characters across a spectrum of sexual identities, attracting particular attention to the central relationship between Hannibal and Will Graham—nicknamed Hannigram by fans—which has been read variously as a "bro-mance," an intense friendship, and a romance (Torrey 2015). The series was also keen to engage with its fandom through social media channels where "*Hannibal's* producers and cast members, led by Fuller ... frequently used Twitter to encourage fan activity, including regularly live-tweeting episodes; re-tweeting fan art and GIFs; and giving fans access to script pages, production details, and set photos" (McCracken and Faucette 2015). This sense of community and a reciprocal relationship between fans and producers is not limited to *Hannibal*; indeed, the topic of fan/producer relationships has long fascinated a range of fan studies scholars since digital media has created more opportunities for interaction via message boards, blogs, and social media. When *Hannibal's* cancellation was announced, both fans and production personnel used social media sites, especially Twitter, to protest the decision and campaign for a potential reprieve. For example, both the shows' production company and showrunner tweeted using the #saveHannibal hashtag:

@DeLaurentiisCo Lean in for a #Fannibalhug (Our hugging room is vast even by medieval standards) and then tweet/retweet/screen #SaveHannibal. Love you guys!
12:09 am – 23 June 2015

Bryan Fuller @BryanFuller WE HAVE 10 EPISODES OF #HANNIBAL TO WATCH ON NBC THURSDAYS. LET'S WATCH TOGETHER AND SHOW HOW STRONG THE #FANNIBAL COLLECTIVE CAN BE. 11:14 PM – 22 Jun 2015

Bryan Fuller @BryanFuller ALSO, #SaveHannibal 11:16 PM – 22 Jun 2015

The involvement of producers and cast in an effort to save a series may still be relatively unusual, but the end of *Hannibal* offers just one example of how fans react to the cessation of a favorite series. Fan studies is paying greater attention to periods of change and transition within

fandom and how fans react to the cessation and potential resurrection of beloved texts and objects. For example, Harrington, Bielby, and Bardo (2011) have focused on periods of transition and change, drawing on theories of the “life course” to consider “how fan objects and experiences become situated in life trajectories, the transformations of fandom over time, and the particularities of fandom in later life” (569–570). Their work has been crucial in calling attention to how “Media texts and technologies ... give structure and meaning to our lives as they unfold” (Harrington and Bielby 2010b, 431) and how the process of “autobiographical reasoning” has been employed by fans to formulate a “life story or narrative identity that emerges through autobiographical reasoning [and] reveals continuity over time while also manifesting change” (Harrington and Bielby 2010a). Such work is instrumental when considering how fans react to the endings of TV programs such as *Hannibal*, how they work to maintain or renegotiate their self-identities to cope with these endings, and how these identities may be both congruent and allow for transformations of the self. Studies of “lifelong fandom” (Stevenson 2009) and “enduring fandom” (Kuhn 2002) have also focused on the processes of aging across one’s lifetime. For example, Stevenson (2009) considers how lifelong male fans of musician David Bowie found that their fandom “helped them to construct a sense of themselves across time ... many of the men suggested that they turned to Bowie in times of trouble and personal uncertainty” (85). Many of these fans returned to Bowie’s music over time, sometimes with lessened interest in the artist but always certain of the ability to draw on him as a “symbolic resource” when needed (85–86).

Similarly, work examining fan reactions to the loss of fan objects, whether the deaths of favorite celebrities, the ending of a television series, or the break-up of a band has offered opportunities to explore fan reactions before, during, and after these moments of cessation and how they make sense of such events. For example, Goh and Lee (2011) studied how fans on Twitter discussed the death of singer Michael Jackson, but concluded that the platform was used more “for disseminating (mis)information ... rather than as one for grieving, at least in the case of Jackson” because “Twitter’s design as a micro-blogging service makes it difficult to create threaded discussions where rich conversations over a particular topic may occur” (441). In contrast, other studies have argued that other online spaces such as message boards offer more useful sites for fan grief and commiseration; for example, Radford and Bloch’s (2012) study of reactions to the death of race car driver Dale Earnhardt, Sr. found that message boards allowed fans to draw on different “coping mechanisms used to respond to the grief, and the role that products play in minimizing the loss” (138).

Alongside work on reactions to celebrity deaths, much work in this area has focused on responses to the endings of television series and explored how fans respond to these. Writing about the sitcom *Friends*, Eyal and Cohen (2006) and Lather and Moyer-Guse (2011) draw on Horton and Wohl’s (1956) theory of parasocial interaction to examine fans’ attachment to characters, arguing that both temporary and permanent loss of contact with those characters can lead to a form of “parasocial breakup” (Cohen 2003) while Amanda Todd (2011) drew attention to the series’ finale as a media event “[whose] self-referential plot framed the finale as part of life experience, fans were not just watching the end of a show, they were saying goodbye to *Friends* along with millions of other viewers, experiencing the sadness that the characters expressed” (859).

There has also been study of how fans continue their fandom after a series ends. Bertha Chin (2013) considered the “post-series fandom” of *The X-Files* and the relationships between fans and the show’s Executive Producer Frank Spotnitz while Bethan Jones (2014) explored fan use of social media after its original cancellation. Fans’ creative practices after the cancellation of television series have also been examined. For instance, Musiani (2010) discusses how fans of the show *Earth*

2 used fanfiction to cope with the end of the series while Bore and Hickman (2013) considered how fans sought to creatively continue the narratives of the canceled series *The West Wing* via fictional Twitter accounts for each character. Given television's relationships with the everyday routines and rhythms of our daily lives, it is perhaps unsurprising that most of the work conducted on fandom and transitions and endings has focused on TV shows. My own work on post-object fandom has also focused on television, arguing that these endings can pose a threat to fans' sense of self-identity and self-narrative and their trust or "ontological security" (Giddens 1984). As sociologist Anthony Giddens (1990) argues, ontological security refers to

the confidence that most human beings have in the continuity of their self-identity and in the constancy of the surrounding social and material environments of action. A sense of the reliability of persons and things, so central to the notion of trust, is basic to feelings of ontological security. (92)

Thus, when beloved fan objects end, fans must work to cope with the potential threat they may feel to their sense of fannish self-identity and their trust in the object itself. Broadly, fans tend to react in three main ways:

Some react in terms of grief and sadness and respond by reiterating their attachment to their fandom, offering lengthy rationales for their interest in favoured shows and vowing to continue their involvement. Others concede that while programmes ... once had an important place in their lives, this will necessarily change as new episodes of a show cease to be produced. Finally, many fans reject favourite shows, expressing relief at their demise and critically evaluating their final episodes. (Williams 2015, 197)

This expanding body of work suggests that there is much to understand about how contemporary media fans respond to such periods of transition, change, and ending. Such reactions allow us to explore how fans draw on mediated texts to help develop and reiterate their own sense of self-identity via their attachments to specific programs, films, or characters. They also enable consideration of how distinctions are made when fan objects end, with different groups of fans seeking to privilege their own interpretations and viewpoints over others, allowing exploration of forms of "antifandom" (Gray 2003; see also Jones's Chapter 26 in this volume) by considering how people who once were fans of a text might welcome and celebrate its ending (Williams 2015).

However, fandom does not simply cease when a show airs its final episodes. Fans continue to discuss, produce, and display their fandom in a range of ways while also working to cope with changes to their fan identities and communities in this period of post-object fandom. Furthermore, some fan objects do return, whether via the reforming of a defunct band or the return of a television series such as *The X-Files*, *Heroes*, or *Twin Peaks*. In some cases, fans are uncertain whether their fan object has ended or not; for example, the television series *Torchwood* has not been officially canceled but further series are not currently planned (Williams 2015, 190–194). *Hannibal* is in a slightly different position; canceled definitively by its original network NBC but with the possibility of a new series on another network or platform frequently reinforced by its producers, cast, and fans. We can "view such periods as 'interim fandom' when fans assume that their fan object is dormant and must readjust or negotiate this when the object becomes active again" (191). *Hannibal* fans cannot currently entirely mourn the end of the series since it occupies a liminal place as an 'undead' text which has—at present—ceased to produce new episodes but which offers the potential for a revival, as well as opportunities for fan engagement and forms of material fan practice and the ongoing negotiation of "smaller endings" (Whiteman and Metivier 2013, 292) that these offer.

Material Fan Practices in Post-Object and Interim Fandom

While the final episode of NBC's *Hannibal* itself functioned as one form of ending, fans continued to both hope for a revival and focus on the endurance of *Hannibal* in other ways. For example, the release of the season three DVD and Blu-ray box set was eagerly awaited due to its wealth of special features, and many fans also looked forward to an event auctioning off props and costumes from the series in April 2016. Bob Rehak (2014) has argued that the "materialities of fandom" include objects such as "sports memorabilia, music collectibles, and theatrical props [which] all constitute meaningful bridges between the abstract semiotics of the screen and the lived, tactile experience of audiences" (para. 1.3). Indeed, fandom has long been associated with the purchasing of merchandise although such practices have tended to be devalued and associated with the "taint of consumption and consumerism" (Hills 2002, 6). However, more recent work has begun to interrogate "the material practices of fandom through craft, commodity, collection, and curation" (Rehak 2014, para. 1.4).

In December 2015, the online auction house Propstore announced that they would be hosting an official sale of props and costumes from all three seasons of *Hannibal*. Beginning on Monday, March 21, 2016 and with lots ending at different points across the week commencing Monday, April 4, the auction featured over 1,200 pieces of memorabilia from the series. These included iconic outfits, letters and papers, artwork, and furniture and more unusual lots including prosthetic body parts, a full-scale coffin, and a bathtub. Media-related auctions are not new; for example, Josh Stenger (2006) has discussed the 2003 post-series auction of props and costumes from *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and Propstore had previously hosted a *Hannibal* event in June 2015 while the show was still airing. Equally, purchasing official or unofficial merchandise is a common element of fandom as fans seek out a range of objects to signal their devotion. Owning such objects can grant forms of status and privilege within a fan community but also reflects a sense of self-identity and personal history since, "In the [fan] collection ... we see personalised depictions of history – mirrors to the self. Objects therefore embody memories of things past and inform activities and what you do with the collection in the present" (Geraghty 2014, 4).

The opportunities afforded by screen-used prop auctions are not always positive, however. For example, Matt Hills argues (2014) that while such items "might be viewed as the very apotheosis of fans' material culture," they can also "present problems of physical condition, exhibiting wear and tear or the deterioration of perishable build materials" (para. 3.3). Thus, "Although these items carry historical authenticity, they may no longer convey visual authenticity" (para. 3.3). Stenger (2006) also points out that auctions may go against the communal and democratic values of both specific fan cultures and fandom in general; in relation to the *Buffy* auction he identifies "the conflict between the egalitarian model of community idealized by the [series] and aspired to in countless online fan spaces versus the explicitly competitive and hierarchical structure of the auction" (27). These issues were also visible within the post-series *Hannibal* auction and fan debates over the relative worth and value of specific lots were common online, as were occasional post-auction rebukes to fans who posted photos of themselves wearing costumes from the series and were seen to be "disrespecting" or devaluing the items. However, what interests me here is how the post-series *Hannibal* auction, and its offering of a chance to own items used in the show itself, presented fans in the post-series context with an opportunity to draw on material and object-focused practices to deal with the cessation of the central text.

The desire to acquire or draw on already-owned memorabilia when faced with a loss has been considered in relation to celebrity deaths and subsequent fan responses. For example, as noted above, Radford and Bloch (2012) consider the importance of material objects to fans of Dale Earnhardt Sr. who talked about "wearing Earnhardt clothing, owning signed pictures, or model replicas

of his cars” and who were “using products to hold on to his memory and refute his death” (149). Such fan behavior suggests that material goods hold specific meaning for fans which can become *more* meaningful after the loss of the fan object. Radford and Bloch (2012) further argue that: “Following the death of a loved one, an individual also may feel a loss to their extended self ... and consumers try to compensate with the acquisition of material goods ... Material objects, places, or activities associated with the deceased become means of enhancing memories” (149). We may draw a cultural distinction between the perceived importance and impact of the death of a relative or friend and the end of a TV series such as *Hannibal*. However, prior research indicates that fans do respond deeply to such events, discussing these in terms of grief, mourning, and affect (Williams 2015, 204). Indeed, as Harrington (2012) points out, academic work on the ending of television programs “employs a *discourse* of death and dying in its consideration of textual mourning, legacy, resurrection, afterlife, the narrative undead and so forth” (580). Given the importance of material objects to fans, and their often intense reactions to endings or periods of uncertainty, it stands to reason that they may turn to these objects for solace and comfort during these times. Fans who responded to my *Hannibal* survey reflected on the impact of the end of the series on their desire to win items in the auction:

I’m not a fan that collects a lot of material things, my fandom is very much online but the end of the show definitely made me consider it a lot more—but I was only interested in owning items that were visually from the show. (Respondent 5)

Made me want something all the more since there’s no new props in the foreseeable future. (Respondent 9)

I don’t know that it increased my desire to own something from the show, but when they had the first prop auction, I looked through the lots and didn’t see anything that particularly appealed to me, so I didn’t take part. I suppose I was thinking there would be plenty of future opportunities... I regretted that a lot once the show was cancelled, and definitely *had* to have something from this auction. (Respondent 3)

Since there is no guarantee of future episodes or props, the number of attainable items linked to the series is finite and, for these fans, the ending of the series increases the need to own something associated with it.

The *Hannibal* auction was announced several months before it began, offering fans something to look forward to after the series finale. It also presented the opportunity to own a tangible piece of the series’ history through the acquisition of physical objects, allowing fans to possess favorite items. In so doing, fans are able to re-articulate their fan identities and make clear their preferred elements of the text by selecting to bid on items from specific episodes or associated with particular characters. The potential to literally possess—to touch—objects worn by the actors or used on-screen offers an opportunity for disappointment about the series’ ending to be warded off (albeit temporarily) as well as allowing fans to engage in meaningful acts of commemoration. This recourse to material objects offered by the *Hannibal* auction allows some fans to draw on those which are “of particular significance ... those goods that are imbued with some shared contagion, that is, items that represent some significant event for the fan” (Radford and Bloch 2012, 151–152), such as important scenes, characters, or moments from the series. Each prop serves “as a metonymy for the entire franchise, allowing the buyer to cross the line from viewer to part owner” (Stenger 2006, 32). However, while the props were available to bid on, they continued to offer the promise of ownership for all but, once the auction ended, those items move from being potentially the property of any (and, therefore, *all*) fans to being objects owned by individuals. Indeed, one survey respondent referred to the notion of the fans becoming “caretakers” of the

props as “fascinating reframing of an inherently individualistic, competitive activity as a furthering of communal activity” (respondent 2). Such tensions were made manifest via the practice of fans posting images on Twitter of their “unboxings” of the props as they arrived at their homes and, in many cases, posting photographs of themselves wearing costumes from the series. Some fans posted about their feelings of “guilt” about wearing the clothes while others more unapologetically announced their intentions to do so. Survey respondents were largely supportive of people who chose to wear the clothing they had won, commenting “Good for them! They own it now, so they should be able to do what they want with them” (respondent 2) or “it’s their choice” (respondent 8). However, some were more reticent, offering caveats about where and when they would wear their own items:

I absolutely tried mine on when they arrived (Hugh Dancy is so teeny!) but I would be afraid to wear them out and about or even eating in them. (respondent 3)

I think it’s cool, but if I were them I wouldn’t wear them. I would display them somewhere in my home and keep them there. (respondent 4)

I wouldn’t do it—I decided right off the bat not to bid for clothing because I wouldn’t know how to store it and *certainly* wouldn’t wear it -, but if that’s what people want to do with their wins, I don’t have a problem with it. Treating them as precious exhibits or putting them to use are both valid approaches, [in my opinion]. (respondent 6)

The wearing of items of clothing won in the auction may also threaten to detract from the uniqueness of the item since something that was special because it was previously worn only by actors such as Mads Mikkelsen or Gillian Anderson may lose some of its “aura” (Benjamin 1969) since it has now been worn—and used—by someone else. The concept of the costumes as wearable items of clothing appears to be relatively unique to the *Hannibal* auction; in the case of the 2003 *Buffy* auction, lots were accompanied by a legal disclaimer which warned: “[Items] are not to be used for their seemingly functional purposes and are only intended to be sold as collector’s items. DO NOT use any items purchased through this Auction for any functional use” (Stenger 2006, 38). How the use of any item could be policed after it has been purchased is unclear, but it is interesting to note the tendency among *Hannibal* fans to display their acquisition of costumes on their own bodies. Echoing other forms of displaying one’s fandom on the body, such as tattoos (Jones 2014b), the wearing of actual clothing from a beloved series such as *Hannibal* makes manifest one’s connection to the show. This may be linked to the series’ own focus on the body and materiality, especially its emphasis on Hannibal’s taste in fashion, art, and music, the aesthetics of death via elaborate murder tableaux (see Ndalianis 2015), and its “visually excessive representation of food preparation and consumption” (Fuchs 2015, 107). The show’s content—and its preoccupation with materiality and the bodily—may thus work to direct which props fans most respond to and seek out. Furthermore, Stenger (2006) argues that clothing is especially appealing to fans since it allows

rich opportunities for fantasy production and role-playing, as well as for the focused fetishization of characters and actors. Closely linked to gender identity and sexual desire, to the authentic and the performative, the body and the gaze, these items promised the chance to close . . . the distance between fan, character and actors. (33)

Once a series has ended, fans can further maintain their ties to that show by taking elements of it into their “selves.” Wearing the often iconic outfits seen on-screen in *Hannibal*—albeit temporarily—allows fans to feel closer to the characters and those who play them, bringing elements of a beloved narrative world and its inhabitants into fans’ own spaces and, in some cases, quite literally into and onto “themselves.”

Displaying material objects on one's own body also functions to accord these fans' status and levels of subcultural and, in many cases, economic capital (see below) but it also allows them to share their experiences of receiving, owning, and using these items by posting images of the delivery boxes, the packing materials and, eventually, the props themselves under the #Hannibalauction hashtag on Twitter. In her discussion of the unboxing of subscription "geek boxes," Bethan Jones notes that

by photographing the contents as I unbox them, filtering them and posting them to Instagram I'm also performing that [geek] identity for others to see, and connect with ... I'm not writing fic or making fan art – I'm simply cataloguing what I've bought – but I'm doing so in a community of other Instagrammers who also identify as geeks and take part in conversations on the same hashtag. (Jones 2015)

Similarly, fans who circulate their photos (or, in some cases, videos) of unboxing their auction wins, and who describe their experiences and practices online, position the objects bought in the auction as both individualized (as "mine," as something that can be worn on "my body" or displayed in "my home") and as communal, as a shared experience with other fans (e.g., via the circulation of photographs on Twitter, sharing their reactions to seeing and touching and, in some cases, smelling the objects for the first time). Indeed, "new technologies allow fans to share and display their collections – symbols of subcultural hierarchies and their economic investment in a text" (Geraghty 2014, 8) as well as sharing their own stories about why certain objects are important since "personal histories become embodied in the collected objects of popular culture" (4). The sharing of images and reactions to unboxing the items online allows fans of a currently canceled or dormant show to continue to articulate their connections to that series, posting details of why specific props or costumes were of importance to them and sharing information about their desire to own those particular items. In so doing, fans can continue to maintain their fannish identities via self-narratives, linking their auction purchases and acquisition of material objects to their own memories of *Hannibal* and their favorite moments.

Indeed, fans often work to intertwine their own memories and life histories with that of the narratives of a favorite show when a series comes to an end, responding "through a 'reiteration discourse' in which they rearticulated their reasons for their love of the show, often through lengthy postings of stories about the show's impact on their lives" (Williams 2011, 267). The *Hannibal* auction offers another avenue for such self-narrativization, it allows fans to reiterate their attachments to the series—and potentially their own personal histories—via the choice of specific props on which to bid. For example, one survey respondent reflected on their own history in relation to *Hannibal*: "This show really means a lot to me and the auction came at a perfect time in my educational career. I'm graduating from art school in less than a week and Bryan Fuller's works (especially *Hannibal*) have always been very influential in my pieces" (respondent 10).

The use of material objects in this way offers fans another way to cope with any threats to their fandom and ontological security at the end of the series since "once a sense of trust in a beloved fan object is undermined, [this sense of security] may be threatened and a fan's self-narrative must be reworked in order to cope with this disruption" (Williams 2011, 273). Therefore, in addition to wanting to own the most iconic or "instantly recognizable, narratively significant props" (Stenger 2006, 31), fans can also seek out more minor items which best display their own investments in the series and which can reflect identity and belonging (see Woo 2014). The auction was described as allowing "the 'Fannibals' be the caretakers of these items for the future" (Thompson 2016), but it also provides a relatively unusual example of another form of ending within the realm of

post-object or interim fandom—if iconic props and costumes have been sold, the prospect of a return for the series in its familiar form seems less likely, thus potentially causing fans to deal again with feelings of insecurity. Survey respondents commented:

I didn't connect the two things [the ending and the auction]. Now I'm sad... When you put it that way I guess it does seem like it's unlikely that the show will be revived since they're trying to get rid of stuff, but they can always make new ones. (respondent 4)

A little less [optimistic about a resurrection for the series], but I don't think there's actually a connection. Other than Will's glasses and Bedelia's legless dress, I don't imagine they'd have used many of the auction items in a new season—most of it was single-use stuff anyway. On the other hand, I don't really believe that the enthusiastic response to the auction will prompt a network to pick up the show either. Unfortunately. (respondent 3)

A little less since selling things made cancellation seem more real. Bryan, Hugh, and Mads' optimism has helped though. (respondent 2)

Here, potential anxiety about the finality of the auction is tempered by recourse to other reassuring factors such as the positive comments from the cast and crew regarding a return for the series, the possibility of creating new props, and the likelihood that any resurrected version of the show wouldn't require the items that had been sold. Here, these fans work to negotiate the possibility of both the return of the series and the potential implications that the auction has for this.

It must be noted that the opportunities for engagement with the material cultures of fandom offered by the *Hannibal* auction are not available equally to all fans. While some of the lots attracted bids under \$100, many more were sold for hundreds or even thousands of dollars. Furthermore, to enter the auction fans had to register with a valid credit card and a form of identification such as a passport or social security number and be pre-authorized to bid on the items for sale. Such measures inevitably preclude younger fans with little disposable income or access to a credit card as well as those older fans without the financial means to participate. Survey respondents themselves reflected on this aspect of the auction:

It left out many fans who don't have money. Many items went to a well-heeled bidder, which is disappointing for fans with smaller means. The auction wasn't run well and the site needs to improve. (respondent 3)

I'm kind of fascinated by how much money some Fannibals were able to spend on this stuff—I can understand *wanting* it that much, but am surprised so many could afford it. On the other hand, I also feel sad that there were probably plenty of avid fans who were completely priced out of everything. Looking through the lots before the auction, I thought there was a good range of bigger/showier and smaller lots, but seeing how things went I can't help but feel that breaking some items up into more, smaller lots would have been better and given more folks a chance to win something. Or maybe they'd just all have gone for separate insane prices... (respondent 2)

I did bid, but got outbid almost straight away—couldn't afford the prices to get something I would really want to own. (respondent 2)

Such comments suggest that some forms of object-oriented fan practice are exclusionary and that not all fans are able to negotiate their responses to the ending of favorite texts through these means. Indeed,

Given the prohibitive cost of many items, [fan] auction[s] dramatically altered the currency by which one demonstrated one's fan devotion. Fans [can use] a range of strategies to reconcile the fact that, in the space of the auction, one's bank account trumped one's love for or knowledge of [a] show, its characters, or even its fans. (Stenger 2006, 38)

However, this hierarchy predicated on forms of economic capital does not detract from the usefulness of looking at material cultures more broadly. Indeed, fandom has always been positioned between poles of resistance and consumption and, as Sandvoss (2005) argues, “Fans give their consumption an inherently private and personal nature that removes their object of consumption from the logic of capitalist exchange” (116). Rather, it is useful to look at the range of material practices undertaken by fans of *Hannibal* in a period of post-object or interim fandom which necessitate varying levels of economic and subcultural capital as well as affective investment.

Conclusion

At the time of writing, it is over two years since the final episode of *Hannibal* was aired. Despite this, fan campaigns for its return continue with a fairly scheduled roster of events such as re-watches of episodes and live-tweeting events that encourage fans to contact potential networks and platforms who could resurrect the series and produce new episodes. The cast and crew encourage fan hopes for a revival, responding positively to questions from interviewers and fans alike and continuing to assert that a return for the show is possible and desired. The series is dormant but not extinct and fans continue their practices and attachments in this uncertain period of interim fandom. Indeed, as this case study of *Hannibal*'s ambiguous end makes clear, there is still much to research in terms of how fans react to periods of change, cessation, and ending. It may be that, in the current media climate, no text can ever be presumed truly “dead”; no television series is fully over while the potential for resurrection still exists. At present *Hannibal* exists as a form of “zombie text,” canceled by its network but not yet dead and buried by those fans who seek its return and who continue to campaign for that.

At the same time, fans with the necessary levels of economic capital can engage in a range of material practices that bring them closer to the show and help them come to terms with its (possibly temporary) absence. This chapter concurs with the assertion that fan studies has often sidelined “the material, physical dimension of fan culture, despite its clear importance to many fans” and concurs that “Fandom is about more than reading and writing; it also about touching, smelling, controlling, and collecting the objects of fandom” (Hoebink, Reijnders, and Waysdorf 2014, para. 4.6). Exploring the uses that fans make of the material cultures of fandom as (and after) favorite fan objects “end”—or how they draw on object-oriented practices when an object returns—offers one way to broaden our understanding of both fandom and materiality and periods of ending and transition. When “a celebrated person dies, surviving artifacts often become especially revered. In the case of religious figures, the faithful have long sought to possess or be in close proximity to sacred relics” (Radford and Bloch 2012, 138) and fans of dormant TV programs often respond in a similar way after that text ends.

As a dormant series with fans in what may eventually be revealed to be a form of interim fandom, *Hannibal* shows the complexity of cancellation in the current TV landscape. Until the series returns or is definitively killed off, the characters of Hannibal and Will are narratively trapped in the liminal space between the clifftop and the ground. Only time will tell whether the fan/producer campaigns to revive the series will succeed and fans will move from the current period of post-object and interim fandom into one of revival and resurrection, once again negotiating their fan identities and narratives and engaging with the material objects of fandom to do so.

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Part V

The Future of Fan Studies

Chapter 29

Understanding *Which* Fandom? Insights from Two Decades as a Music Fan Researcher

Mark Duffett

As researchers, when we study media fandom, are we all studying the same thing? If we have a shared object now, does that mean our traditional disciplines no longer matter? Twenty years ago, Clifford Geertz published an academic memoir called *After the Fact*. Its subtitle said, “Two Countries, Four Decades, One Anthropologist.” Geertz’s (1995) book discussed his insights from forty years as a professional scholar. At the time his memoir appeared, I embarked on a PhD exploring the cultures and meanings made by Elvis Presley fans. In the two decades since, my career has taken me to a place where I wrote a book introducing the field of fan research, called *Understanding Fandom* (Duffett 2013a). Following Geertz, this chapter aims to map my academic journey and offer some pointers about how fan scholarship could develop. As part of that mapping, I will be citing my own work and reactions to it.

In a Part in this volume on the future of fan studies, it seems egocentric to concentrate on insights from one academic trajectory. Writing with a personal voice is one thing, but repeatedly referencing one’s own publications, especially given associated connotations of self-publicity and narcissism, is generally taken as a significant *faux pas* (see Kassabian 2013, 8). There is, however, a rationale here: The field of fan studies has historically been dominated by scholars from television studies and new media. With some exceptions, the field has, relatively speaking, neglected fandom for other media forms, and has only addressed music lovers in particular ways. In twenty years, one thing I have learned is that fandom scholars study an interdisciplinary object from positions that are partly shaped by the concerns, boundaries, and sub-divisions of existing disciplines. This raises some key questions: How different is music from other media forms? To what extent does that matter? Is music fandom innately different from the other kinds that have dominated fan studies? Or is this simply a matter of separate disciplinary traditions? It would be immodest to attempt to speak for the whole of fan research and its future; we should recognise that our academic traditions shape the discussion by creating some inertia. After considering some general questions, this chapter offers a kind of career autobiography in order to explore how disciplinary boundaries have influenced my own research trajectory. It then surveys responses to my textbook *Understanding Fandom* (2013a). I offer local indications of what the future might ideally be like for me, and perhaps for the more general area of music fan research.

To What Extent Can We Understand Fandom as One Object?

At a conference in Moscow on the subject of participatory culture in May 2016, I presented a paper on fan activism. My talk was about soul fans who posted YouTube links featuring Curtis Mayfield tracks on Twitter to protest the injustices of the Ferguson inquiry (see Duffett 2016b). More than one member of my audience picked me up for not considering the special difference that music made to my particular case. If my talk had been on activist TV or cinema fans, I suspect the issue would never have been raised. There is a widespread perception that music is unique as an art form that works on listeners' emotions in a different way to both rational argument and audio-visual representation. Pop music is often supposed to have special qualities due to its tendency to move body and soul. In a recent introduction to a special issue of *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, editors Jeanette Bicknell and John Andrew Fisher (2013) said, "Given the representational content of vernacular song, the primary intention of such songs is usually to elicit a combination of emotional, intellectual and bodily experience" (3). If such music automatically creates "bodily experience," then it can be framed as primal and seductive. Such ideas romanticize music as an object, occasionally at the expense of considering the cognitive faculties of its audience. From this perspective, when we watch something as multi-layered and complex as a TV show or film, we are considered in some sense to be critically judging it, leading scholars like Henry Jenkins to claim, "Fandom is a born out of fascination and some frustration" (in Jenkins, Ito, and boyd 2016, 14) and that fans wish to alter parts of the text to suit their desires. Popular music, on the other hand, comes from a field that always had relatively low barriers to entry—one that is associated with *songs*: immediately appealing audio texts that are comparatively simple in form, quantitatively over-produced, and made prominent—in part—by competitions based on audience approval (radio formats, charts, or TV talent shows). Individual interest in music is readily associated with ownership and ego, as reflected in the title of Cavicchi, Crafts, and Keil's book *My Music* (1993). Indeed, because music itself is assumed to be a combination of sounds that are harmonious and pleasing to the listener in question, we might say that *imposed* pop music eventually becomes something else: noise (see Johnson and Cloonan 2009).

Fans abet these assumptions by talking about how particular songs "speak" to them. The politics is not so much about "fascination and some frustration" but approval and adoption, or rejection and renewal. When added to the idea that fans are dedicated enough to make themselves visible by supporting live music, what it creates is the idea that music fandom enters the public sphere more closely tied to affect than other types of media fandom. Pop fans are presented as emotional or excited. To borrow Marshall McLuhan's term, the mainstream media tends to portray engagement with music in particular as a kind of "hot" fandom based on consumer sovereignty: a reflection of heightened emotion expressed either directly ("screaming fans") or displaced onto the obsessive pursuit of practices like record collecting, pilgrimage, or subcultural membership. Music fans themselves draw on this popular conception too, as it is the interpretive resource most readily available to them.

The history of fan research has been about adopting specific interpretative frameworks. Participatory culture is one of the most advanced frames currently available. Yet, like the others, it understands fan activity only in a certain light as a perspective through which particular aspects of fandom can be made more visible. From a transformative works position, music does not have to be treated much differently to other inspirations for fan practice. Lucy Bennett (2014), co-founder of the Fan Studies Network, provides an example of a new generation of music fan scholars. Whereas my start was in geography, moving into popular music research (and teaching media and film studies, as discussed below), Bennett's first degree was in journalism, film, and broadcasting. While *Starlust* (Vermorel 1985) guided my initial music fan research, Bennett's primary

inspiration was taken from *Textual Poachers*, which she read as an undergraduate (2014, 6). Her PhD applied a participatory culture framework to look at the split between various types of fans in relation to their different approaches to pre-release tracks from a new REM album (see Bennett 2012). While in my early career I published almost exclusively in journals such as *Popular Music* or *Popular Music and Society*, Bennett's work has appeared in other places such as *Transformative Works and Cultures*, *Participations*, and *Celebrity Studies*. What interests me about her excellent scholarship, along with similar examples, is that it seems to operate from the broad assumption that music fandom is simply media fandom: something to be viewed, primarily, through the lens of digital technology, transformative works and participatory culture, rather than any medium-specific concern that might situate pop as different to television, film, comic consumption, or gaming. Such work implicitly raises the question of whether music fandom is a unique object, or whether it simply appears so by dint of traditional disciplinary divisions—boundaries that have, seemingly, long since been swept away by social media and fan scholars approaching transformative work as their object.

The recent flurry of work on music fandom within the area of fan productivity might suggest that music, as a form, is simply grist to the more universal practices of participatory culture—whether fan art or fan activism—and that the only reason it was neglected until recently was that, due to their own disciplinary backgrounds, fan studies researchers did not have ready examples to hand. There are, however, important qualifications to such a claim. One reason to challenge the idea that music lovers are just another set of media fans is the different tradition from which they come. The distinction between non-participatory (passive, conformist) culture and participatory (active, transformative) culture often seems to make only limited sense. Many of the practices that fans constantly pursue—whether listening, screaming, dancing, record collecting, discussing music, or wearing t-shirts—seem to integrate participation and consumption in ways that are routine and invited. Other communal forms of activity—such as bootlegging, drug taking, and file sharing—are pervasive and routinely illicit. Of course, participatory culture necessarily asserts a logic that appears topsy-turvy in comparison to existing popular thinking, but where medium-based differences really matter is that attention to specific musical cultures and moments that help reframe debates arising elsewhere about how to see fandom. For example, spectacularly 'creative' music fan practices—music creation, music criticism, fanzine writing, fanfic writing, fan art—have long been pursued by music fans and routinized both outside of and within various kinds of commercial context. It makes less historical sense there to talk about it as 'fanagement' or view fan productivity as exploited affective labor.

Popular music is an extremely diverse field, containing fans who can have very different objects, characteristic tools and practices, social identities, generational affiliations, notions of cultural capital, and so forth. The most obvious example of a creative, politicized, pre-Internet participatory culture in popular music—punk fanzine writing—occurred within a community of subcultural enthusiasts who saw fandom itself as passive and an act of complicity with the music industry. In contrast, my own fandom for the post-punk group Magazine, for instance, was relatively intellectual, yet not based on transformative activities. It combined listening, record collecting, accumulating expert knowledge, and discussing songs with my brothers. I never joined a community, made music, art, or fiction because of it (see Geraghty 2014). My interest in recordings was both intellectual (exploring creative wordplay) and musical (listening for pleasure). Outside of my family, I did not know anyone who shared an interest in the group. By and large, it felt like a private and personal activity, something that was simply 'mine.' Investigating Elvis, however, I discovered a very different—but no less valid—form of music fandom. It was communally pursued and star-orientated. Participatory culture can address such diversity, but only by thinking about practices.

Apart from tribute artists, the Elvis fans I talked to when pursuing ethnographic research for my PhD did not create their own spectacular musical performances. In a recent call for papers for a special issue of the *Journal of Fandom Studies*, however, Jessica Getman and Aya Hayashi (2016) argue:

Music operates simultaneously as an object of, an accessory to, and a production of fandom. Though this phenomenon has been addressed by scholars such as Henry Jenkins, Solomon Davidoff, and Mark Duffett, the use and production of music remain a relatively ignored area of research within the field of fan studies. This leaves a wide variety of important fan practices unexplored, including music-making (filk, geek rock, wizard rock, fanvids, and cover bands), the hybridization of media in fan creations (i.e., music in fan fiction, music in fanvids, and music in LARPing and Cosplay), fan performance and recording practices, and music-making as a community-building exercise within fandom, to name a few.

Getman and Hayashi's claims need a little qualification, but their argument is broadly valid. The processes by which music fans produce their own music have not been addressed in my own work. Part of the reason for that is disciplinary: popular music studies emerged, in part, from sociology and cultural studies, not musicology, and therefore, despite examining various topics that begin to erode the distinction, researchers reproduced a separation between the text and audience. From a participatory culture perspective, music making may be the most evident form of transformative work practiced by music fans, as many of them are inspired to become musicians. From a neo-Durkheimian perspective, fans do not just have the option of making their own music or engaging in "everyday music making" of the kind discussed in Tia DeNora (2000), but may also work to affirm the distinctions—measured both in terms of musical talent and (in their eyes, consequent) popularity—between themselves and their favorite professional musicians, even as the Internet appears to reduce that difference by allowing stars to become more visibly responsive and fans to broadcast themselves. Despite the consequent emergence of new forms of micro-celebrity, performers like Lady Gaga attest that stardom is not entirely dead, but expressed, instead, in more ways than during the pre-Internet era. In relation to Getman and Hayashi's (2016) claim, at the level of fan activity, distinctions between musical and non-musical practices are arguably themselves blurred. One good example of this is listening, which, depending on one's viewpoint, can be seen as "musical" (because it completes music and involves skills of timing and empathy) or "non-musical" (contemplative and unable to make a sound), and, equally, conformist ("passive" consumption) or political (based on certain ethical practices, including cross-racial empathy); indeed, this audience practice seems open to almost any perspective from which it can be addressed.

Music fans, in effect, "make music" when they play records, clap, heckle, or sing along. Musicality is therefore not a distinct practice isolated to particular individuals, but a skill that is distributed across humanity and constantly actualized in the processes of everyday participation. Unfortunately, however, given pop's place in the public sphere as an alibi for the residual ideology of the mass culture critique, such thinking stops many people from seeing it that way. One avenue for future research that I therefore find productive is the application of participatory culture approaches, not so much to political activism—although I agree that is useful—but instead to those fan practices that appear ordinary and non-resistant, to the extent they barely appear to warrant critical analysis. Henry Jenkins recently explained:

I have no problem with thinking of selfies (or participating in online forums, regardless of topics) as "ordinary" forms of participatory culture. I don't think the term refers simply to subcultures structured around specific forms of participation; it would certainly include more routine practices like taking selfies, though to be participatory these activities have to involve meaningful

connections to some larger community (even if only the cohort of classmates at the school). (Jenkins, Ito, and Boyd 2016, 10)

What is interesting about this is that perhaps “meaningful connections to some larger community” should sometimes be fan-defined rather than researcher-defined. In this sense, the participatory culture paradigm is not necessarily an end in itself, but a useful tool for rescuing the image of media fandom, specifically here by focusing on pop fandom—a form that is more open than others to mass culture criticism. The issue of pop’s presentation is also what has, historically, separated it as a ‘different’ kind of fandom: seemingly not text-based (although fans love classic albums), appearing more emotive, more celebrity-orientated, etc. Such facets connect with much older concerns about music as an elementally different media form which (supposedly) works on the body, not the mind. Pop music (as opposed to both, say, contemporary TV series and other music genres) is, I would further suggest, therefore at the forefront of struggle precisely because it becomes drawn into the public sphere primarily through emotive or consumptive practices rather than, say, connoisseurship or engagement with cult objects.

So, should we ignore fan productivity in relation to music fandom? Consider research emerging from other ethical frameworks, such as Erica Doss’s *Elvis Culture: Fans, Faith and Image* (1999) and Jennifer Otter-Bickerdike’s more recent, *Fandom, Image and Authenticity: Joy Devotion and the Second Lives of Kurt Cobain and Ian Curtis* (2014). As their titles suggest, Doss’s book looks at Elvis fandom and Otter-Bickerdike’s explores the afterlife of two dead indie singers in relation to their fan communities. Doss’s work broadly pursues a religious framework; Otter-Bickerdike’s adopts a broadly Frankfurt School perspective. Both books make only passing reference to *Textual Poachers*: Doss (1999, 265) calls it one of “the best critical accounts on fandom,” while Otter-Bickerdike bizarrely claims that the book “simultaneously draws parallels between ... capitalism, worship and fandom” (59) and “highlights the devout dedication of such participatory culture, a description which could interchangeably apply to any typical organized practice of worship” (60). Because of their theoretical and methodological assumptions, Doss and Otter-Bickerdike struggle to find empathy with the communities they discuss. A participatory culture approach would have restored the position of the fans portrayed, by showing how they forged communities of practice in which fandom acted as a vehicle for individuals to empower themselves.

If we accept that participatory culture is a useful paradigm, not just for describing fan activity but for restoring dignity to our understanding of fandom, what might its limitations be in relation to music? Evidently, like other forms of fandom, we can put music fans on a continuum. Older music fans are often associated with amassing collections or expertise, neither of which are seen as spectacularly creative as making fan art or fanfic. If we make a distinction between “ordinary” (consumerist) music fan practices and spectacular (or typical) fan productivity, then all fans occupy different places on the spectrum. To take fanfic as an example: some people never write it, others write it primarily to align their primary interest with their creative gift (in effect, bringing their talent to their fandom), while others still use their media fandom only as a premise for a creative practice which is central to their daily lives. Transformative works approaches prioritize those who register further along the continuum, but it is clear that not every music fan is in that place. How are we to understand such fans if we explicitly or implicitly marginalize the “less productive” individuals? One way around this dilemma is to recognize that participatory culture is not about who fans are (although the paradigm exposes some dimensions of their role), but rather considers what they and others do. This means that music fandom is a test case: a place where, in order to subvert the lingering, questionable, popular mythology of the mass culture critique, we urgently need to do work to frame ordinary music fans as participatory ones. In other words, it may be

possible to take “routine practices”—whether t-shirt wearing, paying attention to texts or performances, autograph hunting, or whatever—and, rather than just looking for their use in “political” contexts (though that is also valuable), think about the way they reveal the cultural politics of fandom itself. In that sense, participatory culture perspectives allow us to restore agency and political process to fan practices that have previously been seen as passive, conformist, or simply consumerist. It is important to return to the most banal of fan practices—screaming, autograph hunting, wearing t-shirts, etc.—and reframe them as participatory culture, not necessarily because they are “political” beyond fandom, but because they actively help to maintain fan communities, and that itself is a certain kind of community-building political practice. The added bonus of this approach is that, as fan scholars, we get to further challenge the mass cultural perception of fandom, which specifically alights upon consumerist, banal, or invited fan practices as somehow indicative of the passive nature of fandom. In a recent study of music fan screaming (see Duffett 2017), I began to think about how the assumptions of participatory culture might provide a productive frame for seeing such a “routine practice.” Rafal Zaborowski (2016) has also explored dancing with glow-sticks as an example of “ordinary” participation. There is, undoubtedly, more exciting work to come on the most supposedly banal popular music fan practices.

Academic Disciplines and Research Trajectories

In the previous section I suggested that although we need to become more aware of both our existing disciplinary interest and the specific fannish object, we can still mutually benefit, as fandom scholars, from a nuanced communal discussion. To do this, we may need to be more aware of our own particular trajectories. All scholars are, in part, products of the circumstances that shape them. My aim in this section is to write an academic autobiography of sorts to explain how my own research in particular has developed.

The disciplines that shaped my academic career have informed my perspective on fan studies. In 1991, I received a first degree from Oxford University in the area of geography. Those were exciting days. I attended seminars by the much-celebrated Marxist David Harvey, who led the geography department with purpose and wrote *The Condition of Postmodernity* (1990) while I was an undergraduate. Harvey’s work treated ordinary people with dignity and respect. His Marxism showed how ethical principles could inform theory; he began from an impulse to care about others who were less fortunate, who lacked economic resources and political representation. However, I also grew up in the glossy and literate 1980s, between the birth of MTV and the Internet era, a time when understanding popular music’s subcultural history was important. At that point, anyone following pop knew about a continuous tradition from Elvis to rave, and that it had a mainstream or “center” (represented in the UK by the long-running BBC1 chart show *Top of the Pops*, which aired weekly from 1964 to 2005). My own music fandom began with Howard Jones and Heaven 17, then I graduated from pop to rock, and on to post-punk, where I became fascinated with Howard Devoto’s band Magazine. I discovered the group toward the end of the 1980s and, for a while, became a “100%er” (someone who would not buy any other music). My fan activity mainly consisted of traveling to independent record shops across Southern England and buying 12” singles that had been kept pristine for almost a decade. My two brothers were less dedicated, but also Magazine fans. When Howard Devoto formed Luxuria at the end of the decade, on one occasion we saw him perform.

After Oxford, I moved to the University of British Columbia in Vancouver. The geography department there had links with my old one. As postgraduates we were encouraged to circulate. I had already formulated a plan to study popular culture, but there was, at that point, no significant cross-over between geography and popular music studies. Despite the confines of my background,

without disciplinary support, I was getting to grips with popular music studies. For my MA thesis, I looked at Canadian national identity and music industry policy (see Duffett 1993, 2000).

In the mid-1990s, after leaving Canada, I briefly worked as a telemarketer for Sony Music, then ventured back into academia. I became a doctoral student at the University of Wales in Aberystwyth, joining its geography department, because that was the only way that I could get both a place and funding; my background in geography began to feel entrapping. For my PhD thesis, I looked at the relation between Elvis Presley and his fans. I had not heard of Henry Jenkins back then. Ideas like textual poaching did not register.¹ Nevertheless, I wrote to Julie Mundy, who ran the Elvis Fan Club of Great Britain at the time, and was given permission to participate in a week-long 1996 Elvis fan convention (see Duffett 2001). I was not an Elvis fan at the time, let alone an aca-fan. I was simply a popular music researcher interested in studying fandom. Elvis, I surmised, would make a good case study. He had the most loyal and prominent music fan following.

Before pursuing fieldwork, I was rather stuck for a theoretical frame. My first thought was to consider fandom in relation to gender. When I attended social events and interviewed Elvis fans, I began—in part, perhaps, influenced by the Marxism from my Oxford days—to think about stardom and power. The mass culture critique had, in a sense, already created a shared mythology within which everyone could talk about music fandom (see Duffett 2014a). One of the books that most influenced me at that point was Fred Vermorel's controversial fan mail compilation, *Starlust* (1985). Vermorel gleefully used mass culture stereotypes in ways that both courted controversy and began to unsettle them from within. Appropriating fan voices for his own ends, he presented music fandom in ways which began to expose it as a structure of feeling. Vermorel showed the fans felt both overwhelmed and empowered, so I started to read about social power in work by writers like Michel Foucault ([1976] 1998). Foucault's view of power as something constantly negotiated was helpful, but there was no way I could easily apply his thinking; ultimately, he saw power as a matter of domination. From my perspective, celebrity fandom seemed closer to a "win-win" scenario: consented inequality, if you like.

During my PhD I also became familiar with work by scholars such as John Fiske (1993) and Harrington and Bielby (1995). My interest was not so much in how fandom got used as a vehicle in people's lives, but rather on the meaningful ways that people engaged with Elvis as a focus of their attention. In the end, I created an empirical PhD which centered on the idea that Elvis fans offered their hero their collective attention in ways that, to them, amplified the immense thrill of his performance (see Duffett 1998). Fans rated Elvis as a person of immense social importance and became highly excited just by the thought of him offering his attention in return. At the time, I was going on what fans had told me and had no clear theory to use. My work examined the way that shared assumptions about Elvis, his talent, and consequent social worth, created a structure of feeling—a realm of affect which I have since described as a "knowing field" (see Duffett 2013a, 161–163)—that was understood collectively by his fans. This was very different from seeing Elvis solely as a fantasy figure based on fan ontology (parasocial interaction or deification), or seeing Elvis fandom simply as a premise for fans to create their own products (transformative works).

Following my postgraduate days in Aberystwyth, I got a full time teaching post in 1999: the media department of the University of Chester was where I have stayed ever since. Studying in a particular area is a form of personal branding. I was pleased to be able to make a clean break from geography and transition into media studies—a process that I had not found easy. I should note, however, that to begin with, almost all staff I teach alongside at Chester did not begin their academic careers in media studies—a discipline that was often populated by "outsiders" in the 1990s. It was at this point where I found myself able to analyze and teach with the work of both Henry Jenkins (1992) and Daniel Cavicchi (1998). My first fan culture course ran for over a decade and was not confined to music fandom. Students enjoyed it because it met them where they already were (as fans), and used that as an entry point into relevant cultural theory. In the early 2000s, fan

studies moved forward in great strides, with Matt Hills (2002) adding to our understanding of fan communities and aca-fandom, Cornel Sandvoss (2005) thinking about fans' self-understandings, and scholars like Karen Hellekson and Kristina Busse (2006) working closely on fanfiction. In that decade I had been publishing on popular music, with the journal *Popular Music and Society* offering a home for much of my work (see, e.g., Duffett 2003, 2004). I was also attending more Elvis conventions and presenting at events staged by the International Association for the Study of Popular Music.

Fellow popular music researchers usually saw themselves as sociologists or musicologists. They had an awareness of cultural studies, but hardly any considered fandom as an object. There was almost no research on the transformative works paradigm. Daniel Cavicchi had published on fandom, but most music researchers were more interested in talking only about associated forms of identity (subcultures, scenes, tribes) or audience practice (listening, record collecting). It is only in recent years that any change has begun to happen.

Nine years after I started publishing on Elvis fandom, a peer reviewer who examined an article that I had submitted to *Popular Music and Society* on heckling (Duffett 2009) wrote a report saying my ideas about fandom resembled Émile Durkheim's ([1912] 2008) theory of totemic religion. That was revelatory to me, and slightly awkward since I had previously argued that religious analogies had been used to stereotype fandom (see Duffett 2003). Nevertheless, I had, at last, discovered a theoretical frame through which to connect insights emerging inductively from my primary research. Attention to totemic theory has shaped the direction of my enquiry in recent years. According to Durkheim ([1912] 2008), totemism is the means by which individuals simultaneously connect to their society and also repress that connection from their explicit understanding. When individuals pay attention to a totem, he, she, or it incarnates a powerful force that can alter their emotions. While Durkheim mainly talked about "primitive" religions, for me, the totemic mechanism in his work does much to explain music celebrity fandom's affective basis. In other words, I think that many forms of celebrity fandom are based on the combination of processes that go on in the heads of individual fans and are manifest socially. A combination of tacit assumptions—about the emotional appeal of a particular performance, about the social worth of the musician based on his or her talent, about the collectivity of the fan base—makes the individual's fandom possible and satisfying, and gives him or her a reason to reach out to fellow members of the fan community. From this foundation, my work has explored various aspects of totemism as an interpretative framework for understanding fandom, including, for instance: historical moments of celebrity music fandom (Duffett 2016c); the way that fans follow totemic assumptions and yet are not "religious" in any traditional sense (see Duffett 2012a, 2015); and the way that concert promoters struggle with fans despite sharing a common frame (Duffett 2012b). There is more work to be done in these areas.

Understanding Fandom and Its Reception

As someone working in both popular music studies and fan studies, one of my concerns had been to draw the two fields closer together and create a dialogue between them. To this end, I invited Matt Hills to be the keynote speaker at a June 2010 symposium in Chester on popular music fandom. He suggested that I should write a textbook on media fandom, as a way to both critically survey fan studies, and to integrate insights that had been emerging from my articles in *Popular Music and Society* over the years. It was through our initial dialogue that *Understanding Fandom* (Duffett 2013a) came about, with Hills kindly agreeing to write a Foreword. Supported

by the skills of my associates at Bloomsbury, the book was a great success, even inspiring some people outside of academia. For instance, Rhonda and Amanda, two Duran Duran fans, who have a blog called “The Daily Duranie,” wrote:

Currently I’m reading a book called *Understanding Fandom*, by Mark Duffett. The thing about Mark’s book is that unlike all of the other books I’ve ever read on the subject, he talks a lot about music fans. I love this because it translates extremely well to what Amanda and I have written and experience on a daily basis.

This was especially gratifying to read because the “daily Duranies” were veteran fans. In a previous post, Amanda explained that she had followed her band for three decades. *Understanding Fandom* sold over a thousand copies in its first year, which was well above average for an academic publication. I was aware, however, rather than my own ideas, sales were based on fan studies becoming such a growth area.

Understanding Fandom prompted a range of broadly positive responses from reviewers; some raised or implied methodological questions about music fandom. Henry Jenkins prefaced his interview with me on his blog by saying he was using *Understanding Fandom* as a core text in his graduate seminar, adding, “I did not always agree with what he had to say about some key issues in the field, but I was glad he was pushing the discussion to the next level” (see Duffett 2014b). In her review of the volume for *Transformative Works and Cultures*, Suzanne Scott (2015) began with a mention of *Textual Poachers* (Jenkins 1992) and *Fan Cultures* (Hills 2002), then added:

Mark Duffett’s *Understanding Fandom: An Introduction to the Study of Media Fan Culture* endeavours to be a spiritual successor to these two books while simultaneously training its focus on two historically under-theorized components of media fandom: music fandom and celebrity ... There is a fascinating book within *Understanding Fandom*, in which Duffett’s scholarly investment in music fandom (most recently as the editor of the 2014 anthology *Popular Music Fandom: Identities, Roles, and Practices*) is mobilized to critically re-examine and reimagine the theoretical preoccupations of fan studies through an analysis of music stars and fans ... Duffett’s own intervention and critical voice come through most forcefully in his discussions of music fandom, and I look forward to reading more from him on this topic.

She also explained:

Duffett’s pointedly flexible definition of “media fandom” as “the recognition of a positive, personal, relatively deep, emotional connection with a mediated element of popular culture” (2) and his stated desire to move beyond the televisual, textual, and transformative preoccupations of fan studies suggest the book’s conceptual placement in the ... category of fandom research.

Scott correctly points out that I wanted to say fan studies was not the only academic research on media fandom. While *Understanding Fandom* was critical of some central writing in fan studies, in many ways it aimed to augment that area of discussion to it rather than placing itself outside.² Reviewing the book on her own site, fandom scholar Nicolle Lamerichs (2014) said: “When reading the book, I often felt that a slightly different handbook – perhaps focused solely on music audiences – would have been more compelling. The arguments on music fandom clearly appeared to be Duffett’s forte.” It would be going too far to say that such reviews located me, as *Understanding Fandom*’s author, of “driving disciplinary vehicles for which I have no valid license” (Tagg 2011, 7). Nevertheless, to me some of the comments from these fan studies researchers could, perhaps, be read as registering slight discomfort over the project of integrating music fan research into work on other forms of media fandom.

Reviews from scholars experienced in popular music studies took a different form to those from fan studies. Fellow music fandom scholar Daniel Cavicchi (2015) gave a very positive review in the journal *Popular Music*. B. Lee Cooper (2015), meanwhile, said in a review for *Popular Music and Society*:

Duffett is determined to overthrow the narrow, negative viewpoints of the past by highlighting the clever, positive, and revealing insights of contemporary scholars like Henry Jenkins (*Textual Poachers*, 1992), Matt Hills (*Fan Cultures*, 2002), and Daniel Cavicchi (*Tramps Like Us*, 1998). It is regrettable, though, that the author elects to ignore the dark side of mediated fandom that has emerged during the 21st century. Most readers will recognize these crucial omissions and wonder why Duffett dodged them. The harmless nature of fan affection for Marilyn Monroe, Elvis Presley, Mr. Spock, or Harry Potter pales in comparison to the insidious slanders and vicious mythologies being perpetrated on their public followers by Rush Limbaugh, Jerry Falwell, and numerous other radio/TV pitchmen of gloom and doom. From right-wing dittoheads to Moral Majority stalwarts, the expansion of this kind of unthinking, uncritical, emotion-driven, mediated fandom across the United States threatens reasoned political compromise, separation of church and state, religious toleration, and sane foreign policy analysis. These intense, syndicated levels of radio- and television-based fandom obviously warrant Duffett's consideration, particularly since they challenge his revisionist hypothesis. Yet throughout his text he curtly dismisses them in favor of safer, less controversial topics like Doctor Who, Woodstock nation, graphic novels, and Star Trek. (110)

There is something in what Cooper is saying: *Understanding Fandom* aimed to treat media fans with dignity and respect by addressing some popular misconceptions. However, in suggesting that the book ignored the “dark side of mediated fandom,” Cooper slips from pinpointing fans to talking about *fanaticism*. He also embraces the ideas of the mass culture debate (“unthinking, uncritical, emotion-driven, mediated fandom”)—thus arguably in his (un)awareness, registering a distance between popular music studies and fan studies. Just as *Understanding Fandom* was being published, work on political fan cultures was beginning to appear (see, e.g., Sandvoss 2013). In that sense, although Cooper directed his complaint against what he saw as “Duffett's preachments about rational populism and group optimism” (111), such terms might just as accurately have been used to describe the participatory culture approaches that *Understanding Fandom* aimed to critically explore.

Since the publication of *Understanding Fandom* in 2013, some progress has been made in the aim of drawing fan studies and research on popular music fans into a closer dialogue. In the conclusion of his recent piece, “Fan Studies as I See It,” Henry Jenkins (2014) added “a call to expand the range of fandoms we study and to promote greater dialogue with those who study soap opera, sports, celebrity and popular music fandoms” (101). Meanwhile, Daniel Cavicchi's excellent *Tramps Like Us* (1998) has been read far beyond popular music studies, and has since appeared in the bibliographies of many fan studies and associated pieces (e.g., see Crome 2015; Williams 2015; Barker et al. 2016). Both I and others have also been able to oversee various books and edited journal special issues featuring articles that merge fan studies and popular music studies (see Duffett 2014a, 2016a; Duffett and Zwaan 2016; Getman and Hayashi 2016). Experienced fandom researchers like Matt Hills and Cornel Sandvoss have begun talking about music fandom (in Duffett 2014a). Experienced popular music studies scholars like Ian Inglis have started to discuss fandom (see Duffett 2016a). Very few writers have a solid grounding in *both* popular music studies and fan studies; part of the issue with pursuing such work to a high level takes a degree of awareness in two academic fields.

Conclusion

By telling my own story, I have suggested several things. Although media fan researchers claim to unite around a shared, transdisciplinary object, that object—not least because of our own academic trajectories—may not be quite as shared and transdisciplinary as we imagine. Not only has participatory culture and television fandom set the *de facto* zone from which the other forms of fan scholarship depart, but in recent years online fandom has been dominant as an extension of such concerns. Just as disciplines shape our work, they also mean that we tune out certain voices. Those who find themselves with interdisciplinary objects can either feel a certain resignation—their work, in effect, doubly marginalized—or instead see themselves as translators, creating exciting new forms of conversation that have the potential to rejuvenate multiple areas precisely because other researchers have innovated only within the prescribed limits of the dominant paradigm. Current work misses a vast swathe of topics that, as fan researchers, we could be investigating. I have highlighted some of these elsewhere (see Duffett 2016a, 3); they include attention to the histories of fan communities as living cultures, loyal followings associated with waning fan bases, the study of children as fans, issue of race and disability, and geographically situated fandoms. To this list, I would add the way that celebrities can use their voice as fans themselves within the public sphere (see Duffett 2016b). This raises further questions: if there is, inevitably, more than one future for fan research, what can we do to maintain those *interdisciplinary* connections that could really transform our understanding?

I would like to finish by thinking about One Direction as a hypothetical instance of a certain kind of “hot” media fandom. Under the mass culture critique, female fans’ interest in the group would have been described through a set of interpretive frames, none of which can be proven, but all of which point to a certain view of such fans. These frames include the idea that the group’s fans are, individually, living in fantasy and have lost their autonomy (parasocial interaction, pseudo-religious worship, addiction); are collectively sick and obsessed (sexual repression, mania, hysteria, obsession); victims of commerce without any agency (contagion, consumerism). Attention to participatory culture flips the script. It looks at the way such fans use opportunities to form networks that: express their collective intelligence (Bennett 2012); enable their individual creativity (Bennett 2014); help them to educate themselves (Korobkova 2014; Booth 2015) and to discover their civic power (Brough and Shresthova 2012). As a fan scholar, I have no problem in conceiving One Direction fans as such. As someone researching popular music culture, however, I cannot see that these transformative practices provide an adequate explanation for fans’ reasons for loving One Direction. To put it another way: everyone is creative to some degree. Some people participate in fan communities to express their creativity. Expressing creativity, though, seems an inadequate explanation for why individuals get passionate about One Direction or unite with their fan base. Durkheim’s notion of totemism has its limitations, but it gets me nearer to answering such questions. Drawing inductively on the language of the fans, it locates the affective resources that help to send them on their journey. These resources may not (or no longer) be needed by, say, the media fans who have since 2010 used the TV series *Supernatural* as a premise to create their own world of fanfic, the Omegaverse (Busse 2013). Even within popular music, not all fans are totemic in orientation, but my point is a wider one: if we are to challenge mass culture thinking *across all areas of media fandom*, then we need to find tools that *both* explain fan motivation and demonstrate fan agency.

Notes

- 1 Daniel Cavicchi's Springsteen fan ethnography, *Tramps Like Us* (1998), for example, mentions *Textual Poachers* only twice in passing—on pages 7 and 41—when it discusses fan research outside of popular music. We have to remember here, too, that the Organization for Transformative Works only emerged in 2007 when online fans wanted to archive what they had produced. The *de facto* fan studies journal, *Transformative Works and Cultures*, emerged a year later. So, despite Jenkins's pioneering work, fan studies as we currently know it, is, still relatively nascent.
- 2 The concepts from my previous work that *Understanding Fandom* (2013) presented were arguably transferable to different types of fandom and complementary with transformative works approaches: a modified, neo-Durkheimian notion of totemism (150), the concept of "imagined memories" (229) and a borrowing of the idea of the "knowing field" (161–163; also see Duffett 2010, 2016b).

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Chapter 30

Implicit Fandom in the Fields of Theatre, Art, and Literature: Studying “Fans” Beyond Fan Discourses

Matt Hills

In this chapter, I am interested in unsettling where and how we look for fandom, expanding the range of cultural objects that we presume fandom can emerge in relation to. My expansionist project seeks to deliberately challenge problematic cultural limits to discourses of fandom, exploring the possibility that fan practices may be occurring even when people do not self-describe as fans (see Pearson’s Chapter 31 in this volume). For instance, theatre practitioners and dedicated audiences may profess to “love” theatre (Hurley 2010, 1), yet fandom is not a prevalent discourse in relation to “legitimate” theatre (Barrett 2016, 127), instead typically centering on musical theatre. By contrast, fandom is often othered within the “legitimate” theatre world and presumed to exist elsewhere – around popular culture such as television/film celebrities—meaning that media fans intruding on the theatre world allegedly do not behave appropriately (Trueman 2014).

Theatre is not alone in displaying such exclusionary discourses. Similar arguments can be made in relation to “art fans” and “literary fans.” I want to consider why fan studies has largely failed to engage with “high cultural fandom,” restricting its attention to pop-cultural objects and fan cultures. This is not merely a disciplinary problem that further work in fan studies can address by itself, however. Precisely because fan studies’ failure to investigate high cultural fandom has been mirrored by theatre studies’ relative silence on fan(-like) activities, as well as fandom having a marginal presence in art and literary theory, what we encounter are *mutually reinforcing interdisciplinary discourses of exclusion*. Fan studies needs to open up new dialogues with theorists of theatre, art, and literature to adequately address fandom outside the parameters of popular culture (see Turk’s Chapter 34 in this volume).

I will begin by returning to arguments around fandom and cultural distinction set out by Joli Jensen (1992). This will enable me to argue for the study of “implicit fandom,” i.e., kinds of fandom operating through the practices of the “connoisseur” or “aficionado” but not using discourses of fandom. Having defined implicit fandom as an intervention in forms of cultural power and distinction—acting as a symbolic challenge to the othering practices of “legitimate” cultural capital versus devalued “fan cultural capital”—I will then consider theatre, art, and literary (implicit) fandoms, before concluding with a discussion of Jonathan Franzen fans.

First, though, why has fandom only been analyzed as pop-cultural in fan studies? It would seem that fan studies has reinforced the same hierarchies of passionate culture (“legitimate” versus “fannish”) as scholars working with the cultural capital of theatre, art, and literature. Opera is

arguably somewhat more hybridized in its cultural-discursive positioning between cultural capital and fan cultural capital, but I will address this and “musical theatre” below, along with the possibility that attitudes to “arts fans” (Conner 2013, 3–4) are undergoing generational and media-technological shifts.

Fandom by Any Other Name: Implicit Fan Practices and Field Theory

The study of fandom has long been sensitive to the cultural hierarchies that can act upon how and where fandom is said to operate. Writing in 1992, Joli Jensen cautioned against the separation of fans and “more reputable ... patrons or aficionados or collectors ... [T]hese respectable social types could also be defined as ‘fans,’ in that they display interest, affection and attachment” (9–10). Exploring the discursive cleavage of popular cultural “fans” from high cultural “aficionados,” Jensen argued that:

The objects of an aficionado’s desire are usually deemed high culture: Eliot ... not Elvis; paintings not posters ... Apparently, if the object of desire is popular with the lower or middle class, relatively inexpensive and widely available, it is fandom ...; if it is popular with the wealthy and well-educated, expensive and rare, it is preference, interest or expertise. (19)

Jensen (1992) also argued that modes of engagement have been assumed to distinguish “fans” and “aficionados”: where fandom involves “an ascription of excess, and emotional display,” the affinity of an arts patron “is deemed to involve rational evaluation, and is displayed in more measured ways,” such as applause after a play. These cultural assumptions “are based in status (and thus class) distinctions” (20), but in actuality the lines between fannish “emotion” and the aficionado’s “reason” are insistently crossed—both involve the regular, emotionally-committed consumption of cultural artifacts, resonating with Cornel Sandvoss’s (2005) definition of fandom (8).

The first edition of *Fandom* revisited Jensen’s challenge to pop-cultural fandom’s separation from high-cultural connoisseurship, featuring chapters by John Tulloch (2007) and Roberta Pearson (2007) on fans of Chekhov, Shakespeare, and Bach. As Tulloch noted:

The academic literature on fandom is both extensive and central within popular cultural studies. Yet there is little comparable analysis of fans of high-culture ... forms ... [For example, in theatre/performance studies] audience studies ... have tended to remain a marginal activity, and where these have existed ... they have not engaged with theories of fandom. (110)

This is a curious outcome, as 1990s and 2000s fan studies certainly could have pursued further analyses of “high-culture” fandoms. For a series of reasons, however, this did not occur with any regularity (Jensen 2014, 211). First, the cultural studies’ roots of fan studies meant that it was invested in revaluing stigmatized expressions of media fandom. Rather than reading connoisseurship as fandom, its priority was very much to engage with culturally present discourses of fandom (Jenkins 2013). Jensen’s arguments about the potential equivalence of fans and aficionados therefore fed into this “(re)valorization of fandom” narrative instead of generating research interest in how high culture attracts its own fan-like consumers. (Relatedly, fan studies’ dissections of popular culture tended to assume its numerical “popularity,” i.e., far more people have watched *Star Trek* than seen *Hamilton*. However, Stacy Takacs (2015) has addressed the fallacies inherent in attempting to delineate “popular” culture quantitatively (4)).

Furthermore, scholar-fans have often brought specific fan identities with them into their analyses, thus focusing on media fandoms they are already familiar with, rather than investigating cultural phenomena where fan discourses are structurally absent or excluded. As a result, fan studies to date has generally constrained itself to the study of self-declared and pop-cultural fandoms. It has tacitly reproduced logics of distinction that nominate specific pop-cultural phenomena as “fandom” and exnominate fandom in relation to high cultural domains. Fan studies has largely, and unfortunately, surrendered an additional critical dimension whereby it could challenge and polemically destabilize high culture’s typically exclusionary stance on fan discourses.

I want to pursue this road not taken, this new direction, using a concept of “implicit fandom.” The term is adapted from Edward Bailey’s (1998) work on implicit religion (and should not be taken to indicate any equation of religion and fandom). Bailey argues that to restrict the study of religion to its normative discursive practices is to surrender “the possibility ... of ... wider public understanding and dialogue” (17), as well as failing to see how religiosity may be experienced in a far wider range of activities than is commonly supposed (4). Of course, he is alert to the difficulty that “a person who says, ‘I am not religious,’ may resent being described as being religious, even ‘implicitly’” (14), although I have argued that the value of implicit religion lies “precisely in *not* mirroring ... prior commitments and ideologies, and in potentially outrunning denotations of ‘religiosity’” (Hills 2015, 576). Likewise, implicit fandom proffers a similar value for analysis, evading fixed meanings of fandom and their propping up of prior cultural hierarchies. Rather than “aficionados” arguing they are not fans presenting a problem, however, I would argue that asking people to think more carefully about why they do not self-declare as fans could actually be useful in terms of de-naturalizing cultural distinctions. Indeed, some high-culture consumers who have previously excluded fan discourses may even begin to apprehend their theatre, art, or literary passions as versions of fandom after all. Rather than contrasting top-down fan studies (where definitions of fandom are analytically imposed) to bottom-up fan studies (where fandom is self-reported and self-analyzed), implicit fandom is more concerned with bringing these dimensions into critical dialogue. At the very least, as a result of theorizing implicit fandom, fan discourses can be analytically introduced into cultural domains where they have previously not been welcome, challenging problematic forms of cultural distinction as well as lending support to generational developments around fandom, social media, and the arts.

In short, fan studies has adopted a specific position in relation to the Bourdieusian “field” of fandom, while theatre studies, along with art and literary theory, have tended to occupy mirroring positions in their fields. The results have been an overarching split between fandom—viewed as belonging to popular culture—and “sacralized” high culture (Levine 1990, 168) studied as a matter of expert interpretation.

The sociologist Pierre Bourdieu introduced field theory as a way of analyzing struggles over status that occur in different areas of culture, arguing that fields were bounded spaces with their own distinct forms of recognition (see Chin’s Chapter 15 in this volume). Fields have their own specificity and are always competitive arenas, with participants tussling over field-specific legitimacy. Bourdieu (1996) considered the literary field in some depth, though he paid less attention to theatre (Shevtsova 2002, 36). Consequently, the theatre field has only been subjected to rigorous Bourdieusian analysis more recently (Chong 2013).

A crucial aspect of Bourdieu’s field theory is that he distinguishes between “autonomous and heteronomous positions within fields” (Phelan 2014, 94). As Ken Gelder (2004) says, the “term ‘field’ expresses the sense that these quite different cultural-social positions are nevertheless always *in relation* to each other” (13). By the “autonomous” or restricted mode, Bourdieu means “art for art’s sake,” produced for a small audience of fellow producers, whereas the “heteronomous” mode

of cultural production concerns cultural artifacts that are created for an undifferentiated mass of consumers. Though it may be tempting to read these as a binary, Bourdieu is insistent that

One should beware of seeing anything more than a limiting parameter construction in the opposition between the two modes ..., which can only be defined in terms of their relations with each other ... [O]ne always finds the entire range of intermediaries between works produced with reference to the restricted market on the one hand, and works determined by an intuitive representation of the expectations of the widest possible public on the other. (1993, 127)

For my purposes, the greatest difficulty of field theory is that it conflates logics of consumption with those of cultural production—one is either part of an undifferentiated mass of consumers or part of a (consuming) collective of peer-producers. There is little sense that “autonomous” or “heteronomous” positions within a field of cultural production may be complicated by consumers’ position-takings. As Bridget Fowler (2000) points out, “Bourdieu’s thesis ... has ... ignored ... differentiated responses to popular culture” (15) as well as “sacralized” culture, assuming that consumption is pre-programmed by production. Indeed, Milly Williamson (2005) has suggested that we should analyze media fandom itself as variously autonomous/heteronomous:

Fan culture is influenced by the two opposing sets of values that dominate the cultural field and fans take positions in line with either set of values. Therefore fandom is shot through with conflicts that emanate from this struggle and it has its own drive towards hierarchization based either on heteronomous or autonomous cultural values. (117)

Such an argument, where fans can adopt different position-takings in a field just as much as established, official media producers, means that Bourdieu’s “parameter construction” needs to be complicated and divided into a quadrant of possibilities rather than two modes of production. This produces the following:

- *Autonomous-autonomous* positioning (or autonomous²) broadly corresponds with “art for art’s sake” styles of production opposing or ignoring any wider market—styles of production that are then consumed by like-minded audiences who, in turn, perform their niche, knowledgeable specificity. Such cultural artifacts would carry the highest levels of field-specific reputation or “symbolic capital,” being marked out by their “purity” and “authenticity” within the field.
- *Autonomous-heteronomous* corresponds to cultural products intended for a specialist audience that nevertheless find themselves unexpectedly consumed by a “mainstream” consumer market. Such cultural artifacts would be marked by the taint of “too much popularity” or “selling out,” and would thus be recontextualized as akin to hybridized intermediaries seeking to combine aspects of autonomous and heteronomous production, e.g., “legitimate” theatre utilizing TV celebrity casting; “blockbuster” art exhibitions aligned with celebrity artists; prize-winning “literary fiction” linked to mass-media dissemination.
- *Heteronomous-autonomous*, by contrast, represents a mode of cultural production intended to be highly commercial but which is embraced and consumed by a neo-cognoscenti that takes on its own cultural differentiation. The social emergence of fandom achieves this in relation to pop-cultural forms, meaning that texts such as *Star Trek* and *Star Wars* are culturally elevated as a result of the enduring fan knowledge they sustain, and the ‘classic’ status they take on. In such instances, autonomous fandom—interpreting for the benefit of like-minded fans set apart from market considerations—can represent a badge of honor rather than a cultural taint.

- Lastly, *heteronomous-heteronomous* (or heteronomous²) represents commercial culture consumed precisely as commercial culture, and hence without an audience intent on separating its productivity from market forces. This is not to say that heteronomous² artifacts will lack fandom altogether. Rather, heteronomous fans will happily act as consumers of merchandise; attend highly corporate convention events; pay inflated sums of money for autographs and “photo opportunities” with celebrities. Such artifacts take on the most visible commercialism within their field. There is no question of selling out; such culture *sells through from production to consumption*, being resolutely at ease with neoliberalism’s legitimation of market-based identities.

I will apply this four-part model to theatre and art “fans” in the next section, but it is worth noting that work on “legitimate” culture has tended to focus on the autonomous² quadrant, thus neglecting audience studies (Freshwater 2009) and focusing instead on academic readings of theatre/art as “expert” responses. By contrast, fan studies has predominantly focused on the heteronomous-autonomous quadrant, tackling “autonomous” fans of popular culture, and thus celebrating the “authenticity” of communal fandoms which distance themselves from the market. The heteronomous² sector has been profoundly neglected across the board. Even fan studies seemingly only becomes interested in commercially-oriented fans when they are “cult collectors” rather than routinized purchasers of official merchandise (Geraghty 2014). And theatre studies has so profoundly neglected consumer audiences for commercial theatre that studies of “mainstream” theatre audiences published in 2016 are breaking new ground (Davis 2016; Heim 2016a, 2016b).

Bourdieu’s (1993) model emphasizes how there is no single thing that it makes sense to theorize as “theatre” (126), or indeed art or literature. We need to consider *what kind of theatre, art and literature*—placed in what manner within the relevant field and inter-field relations—and what kind of autonomous/heteronomous fandom we are addressing. Any cultural artifact, e.g., a play, painting, novel, or TV show, can occupy different field-based positions simultaneously as a result of varied audience practices (and though I have analytically placed these into autonomous/heteronomous categories, there will also be a range of gradations on the side of consumer activities, just as there is for cultural producers).

Implicit fandom tends to be present in the autonomous² quadrant of a field of cultural production and consumption, where discourses of fandom are displaced by sacralized performances of “legitimate” expertise (Stewart 2010, 135–136). Fan studies has, however, neglected the analysis of autonomous² cultural factions (and heteronomous² positions) in favor of characteristically valorizing heteronomous-autonomous fandoms which self-define as fan communities resistant to market forces. In order to reclaim implicit fandom, and to challenge mechanisms of cultural reproduction which specifically silence fan discourses around “legitimate” culture and its “autonomous” audiences, I will now focus on how fandom has been discursively policed in relation to theatre and art.

“Theatres Need... Fans,” or, the Tate Modern as “Cult Entertainment Megastore”: Theatre, Art and Implicit Fandom

There are, of course, self-declared fan cultures for theatre—witness the first BroadwayCon in January 2016, run by the same management company as LeakyCon (Stein 2015, 171). But self-identified “theatre fans” tend to cluster around commercial musical theatre, placing these audiences in the heteronomous-autonomous sector, and making their cultural positioning homologous to the kinds of film/TV fandom explored in fan studies. Theatre studies has not been completely

oblivious to the presence of fan discourses, even if fandom has remained marginal in the discipline. It has cropped up in analyses of “stage door meetings” between fans and performers (Wolf 2011, 231), or in discussions of musical theatre fans’ social media use as a blurring of text and everyday life (Lonergan 2016, 75), as well as in “Rentheads” blurring of the production and their real-life contexts (Jensen 2007, 175–176). And as audience studies has developed in relation to theatre (Bennett 1997), then researchers have begun to consider fan studies’ perspectives, with Kirsty Sedgman (2016) presenting at the 2016 Fan Studies Network symposium, and Caroline Heim (2016b) publishing on “Broadway theatre fans.” Indeed, Heim argues that the Broadway musical *Hamilton*

has some of the largest numbers of contemporary [theatre] fans. These fans form part of a “hamdon”—a community of *Hamilton* fans. Hamdon members, many who have not even seen the sold-out musical, regularly communicate ... their interpretations of the production from the vast research they conduct ... Fan fiction and fan art continue the narrative of the production, extending the theatrical event ... digital[ly]. (50)

And outside musical theatre, immersive productions such as those staged by Punchdrunk have also attracted self-identified fans. Agnes Silvestre (2012) analyses fan activity around Punchdrunk’s New York production of *Sleep No More*:

[I]t has acquired a cult following of “superfans” who attend ... repeatedly and extend the experience online. One superfan ... travels in from out of town to see all the weekend shows – up to 12 hours of SNM in two days. Another superfan ... has attended the show 37 times and counting, and runs a blog ... where fans share their experiences of the show, confess crushes on performers, and post fan-art and fanfiction. (see also Alston 2016, 136)

Rather than celebrating this heteronomous-autonomous emergence of Punchdrunk fandom, Silvestre condemns it as part of *Sleep No More*’s consumerist interpellation of audiences: “the only agency granted to me is the capacity to consume” (2012). Rose Biggin’s (2015) analysis offers more positive findings, considering fan studies as “a relevant context for [interpreting] Punchdrunk’s fan mail ... as well as the more explicit fan activity accommodated by the company’s later shows *Sleep No More* (2011–) and *The Drowned Man* (2013–4)” (303). Biggin notes how a Punchdrunk immersive show can be continued online, with theatregoers seeking to piece together information about what they might have missed (309).

Biggin (2015) is also careful to state that “the comments discussed in this article may have been made by one-off visitors to Punchdrunk’s website who would not necessarily self-identify as fans” (314), but her analysis of Punchdrunk “fan letters” nonetheless shows that attendees are frequently invested in continuing their heightened theatrical experiences, as well as combining intense feelings of “immersion” with detached interpretation (316). These attributes are common in media fandoms, whether they involve the “collective intelligence” of fans piecing together information as a community (Jenkins 2006, 26), or the use of online platforms to engage in participatory cultures of analysis.

Typical theatre audiences might be thought of as well-educated and older, with a taste culture that opposes legitimate theatre to devalued media such as television (Stewart 2010, 87). But such “highbrow” cultural capital (Savage 2015, 112) which actively others popular culture and media celebrity has been subjected to a generational destabilization according to Mike Savage’s recent study of cultural distinction and class in the UK. On the basis of empirical evidence, Savage (2015) argues that

[T]here are two modes of cultural capital, one which we term 'highbrow' and the other 'emerging'. The former is more established. It is ... institutionalized in the educational system, via art galleries and museums and such like – but it is also an ageing mode of cultural capital. We are witnessing the rise of a kind of 'hip'... cultural capital associated with younger people. It too has its own infrastructure – social media. (113)

And although this “emerging” cultural capital tends to be “much less active in the world of ‘highbrow’ culture” (112), it isn’t about liking pop culture *per se* rather than “high” culture, being concerned with ranging across cultural forms “and displaying one’s careful selection of ... the ‘very best’ of popular culture” (115). Similarly, other major studies of culture and distinction in the United Kingdom have, *contra* Bourdieu’s work (1986), emphasized different orientations to cultural capital, contrasting “legitimate” or “snob” culture to educationally validated cultural capital and a capacity “to appreciate different cultural genres irrespective of their classification as ‘high’ or ‘low’” (Bennett et al. 2010, 30–31). Savage’s work does not validate a “cultural omnivorousness” thesis, but it does suggest that generational changes in cultural consumption have become articulated with a “digital habitus” normalizing the routine use of Web 2.0, even—or especially—at live cultural events such as theatre shows and art exhibitions (Richardson 2015). For younger theatre audiences, then, blogging about shows they love (Fricker 2015) is not an unusual practice, nor is participating in forums such as Theatreboard or tweeting theatre reviews (Heim 2016a, 103). Some bloggers such as Matt Trueman have moved into professional careers as critics, following the trajectory of “professionalised fans” (Hills 2002, 39–40).

But even tweeters, bloggers, and forum posters may not self-identify as “theatre fans” (for a contrast, see Copp’s Chapter 12 in this volume). Martin Barker’s (2013) analysis of audiences for livecast theatre and opera indicates a significant distinction between the two media: opera lovers frequently self-described as “fans,” whereas theatre lovers did not (34). Opera is perhaps more clearly marked by emotional “excess,” lending itself to expressions of fannish attachment (Benzecry 2011, 5), whereas respondents discussing theatre in Barker’s (2013) study were “more likely to single out the *company* (‘We love NT productions’) or *Shakespeare*, or to make a point of saying that they liked *good quality theatre* (‘Heard it was a good production’)” (34). Barker attributes this to the “insistent differentiation of serious theatre from West End popular shows” (34) that has marked the field of theatre; in other words, these audiences are aware of autonomous/heteronomous tensions within the theatrical field of cultural production and consumption. Theatre fandom is thus discursively silenced, or rendered implicit, as a result of its projection on to only one kind of theatre—the West End/Broadway musical—while “serious” theatre is not felt to be an appropriate object for alignment with fan discourses. Matt Trueman (2016) has criticized this discursive policing, arguing that legitimate theatre should strive to be articulated with fan discourses and experiences:

Theatre rarely lets us be fans – at least, not under normal conditions. It’s too – what – polite? Intellectual? Removed? It wants to say something and it asks us not to join in, but to listen. Yes, you get *Game of Thrones* fans piling into *Doctor Faustus*, but that’s not the same. ... No-one screams for their favourite soliloquy.

Of course, infamous Shakespearean soliloquies may well have their fans, but even here the audience’s appreciation is appropriately interiorized rather than expressed via “screams” of fan passion. In place of such sacralized detachment, where theatre audiences are disciplined into behaving appropriately (Kershaw 2001), Trueman suggests that “theatres need to forge fans” instead of being “sniffy” about “Whovians, Sherlockians and Potterfiles squished together at Stage Door for

a signature and a selfie with their idols ... [and a]bout the ‘overexcited Hobbit fans ruining Martin Freeman’s Richard III’ with... entrance applause and other breaches of theatre etiquette.”

Such anxieties over media celebrity and fandom are evident at the Theatreboard forum, despite its place within a theatre-oriented participatory culture where implicit fans discuss booking play tickets on the day of release, look forward to new shows as soon as they are announced, and share reviews of productions they’ve attended. Such practices are remarkably akin to those exhibited by media fandoms. Predictably, the board is divided into sections for “Plays” and “Musicals,” and when one poster refers to Maxine Peake’s performance as Blanche DuBois in *A Streetcar Named Desire* as taking “the Gillian Anderson character” (Poster 1)—*The X Files*’ star Anderson having played DuBois in a prior Young Vic production—they are immediately slapped down by other members. Responding posts queried sarcastically whether Gillian Anderson was playing Scully in the production, or simply expostulated “‘The Gillian Anderson character’? Good grief!” (Poster 2).

And in a thread discussing David Hare’s *The Red Barn*, several posters focused on the physical appearance of actress Elizabeth Debicki who appeared naked on stage in one scene. Here, the autonomous² “Plays” section of Theatreboard seemed, for some, to be in danger of descending into the more explicitly fan-oriented (or heteronomous²) tone of the “Musicals” subforum:

I would say comments of this type re either sex are unacceptable ... [S]urely most of us are interested in whether the play or show is any good as a whole? ... This is particularly noticeable in the Musicals section, where it is common for even preliminary posts – i.e., when a show has only just been announced or rumoured – to relate only to comments on the physique of (possible) cast members. This unwelcome emphasis is prevalent enough in the other section; I do hope it doesn’t spread to this one, too. (Poster 3)

For Lynne Conner, it is the history of “legitimate” culture’s sacralization (Levine 1990) that underpins the othering of fandom evident in this kind of assertion. Sensual dimensions of fandom should supposedly have no place in tutored audience responses. Although Conner (2013) suggests that “audience members ... have gained an increased presence in the arts sector in recent years – empowered by social media platforms ... that by their nature facilitate discursive practices in an unusually democratic ... manner,” (72) this digital participatory turn remains in tension with powerfully established cultural norms of sacralization (Conner 2016, 4). The sacralization ethos of the arts tends to impede “the free-form exchange of taste and talk that characterizes ... audience behavior [and thus fandom in] ... sports, television and new media [contexts]” (Conner 2013, 147). Therefore, however much implicit fandom can be aligned with generational shifts in the orientation to cultural capital, along with the rise of digital platforms, it remains implicit rather than explicit as a consequence of discourses of “sacralized” high culture that exclude fan-nish self-performances.

“High cultural” fandom is rendered even more implicit in the field of art when compared to the theatre field. In *Distinction*, Pierre Bourdieu (1986) argued that “the role of the ‘fan’” in relation to popular culture, and thus its associated discourses, means being “locked in a ... spurious participation which is merely an illusory compensation for dispossession by experts” (386). And much like the theatrical field, the field of art is marked by performances of expertise rather than fandom (Pearson 2007, 98–99).

However, the structuring exclusion of fan discourses is arguably stronger in the art field than in the theatre world due to art’s contemporary status as a powerful marker of “highbrow” cultural capital. In their analysis of cultural distinction in the UK, Tony Bennett et al. (2010) note the “distinctive properties of the visual art field as the most exclusive of all the areas of cultural practice that we explored” (115). Respondents who could not display any meaningful knowledge

of art when shown a number of paintings by Turner and Warhol proved to be extremely defensive about this state of affairs, exhibiting a profound sense of exclusion (Bennett et al. 2010, 116). By contrast, “confident amateurs,” who were able to embody highbrow cultural capital, proved to be “mostly knowledgeable about the painter or the paintings, and offer[ed] engaged stories about their own involvement or reactions ... expressing some intense involvement with visual art” (116). Bennett et al. do not align this established cultural capital and expertise with any kind of fandom, despite the emotional “intensity” of involvement and the importance of attending museums.

The theatre field may uneasily seek to separate legitimate/musical sectors, never quite being sure what to make of “autonomous” fandoms for West End or Broadway shows that culturally elevate and (re)valorize these heteronomous productions, but the current art world confronts an expansive autonomous-heteronomous group of institutions and events which seek to popularize modern art, thus potentially blunting its exclusivity. Julian Stallabrass (2006) has coined the term “high art lite” to contain this conceptual matter out of place, as art’s high-cultural status is threatened by a mass (middle-class) audience:

The very novelty of this new scene, that contemporary art should be popular and that it should circulate in the mass media, goes some way to explaining high art lite’s durability. It was the first tendency to break through to the wider audience being prepared by higher education, the transformation of the middle class and the marketisation of the museum. (303)

The impact of neoliberal arts policies on museums means that they are under pressure to expand, either by physically extending their space or by reaching larger audiences via “blockbuster” exhibitions (Bunzl 2014, 12–13). Such blockbusters “seek to combine popular appeal with the exclusivity of artistic capital derived from the fine art field” (Grenfell and Hardy 2007, 105), but much like Stallabrass’s “high art lite,” the art “blockbuster” also seeks to contain the threat of autonomous-heteronomous position-taking. This preserves the purity of an autonomous² sector, keeping “highly consecrated cultural capital” distinct “from large-scale economic capital from visitors” (105).

Some writers, such as John A. Walker (2003) in *Art and Celebrity*, have denied that art can have fans, arguing that unlike fan studies “in particular realms such as sport, movies, rock music, science fiction and comics,” the “audience for fine art tends to be smaller and older than for popular culture and therefore such phenomena as screaming teenage fans and groupies are not so evident” (19). This is an oddly dated and problematic image of fandom, but Walker’s argument in defense of art’s exclusivity barely seems sustainable—on what scale can the number of attendees at London’s Tate Modern, or the Royal Academy, possibly be considered “small”? Walker also argues that fandom is active and empowering, whereas in the art world “[p]ower ... tends to reside with dealers, curators and collectors rather than the gallery-going public” (19). By Walker’s reasoning, there can be no fans among the art-loving public. Such an argument seems based on a misreading of fan studies’ work, however, since fans have not been theorized as “powerful” *per se*, but rather as subject to industrial forms of power that have to be negotiated (Jenkins 2013). As if aware of the unsustainability of his own position, Walker (2003) concedes that “artists such as Tracy Emin have developed a cult following among ... art students.” But even this acknowledgment maintains implicit fandom, since fannish practices are safely aligned with the “properly” developing educational capital of “art students” as well as being exnominated via “cult” as an alternative term.

The strange outcome of Walker’s discursive policing of art fandom is that while artists can draw on concepts of celebrity and fandom in their work, artists who become celebrities must presumably do so without inspiring a fandom. These artistic celebrities-without-fans may host

book signings, e.g., Grayson Perry and Marina Abramovic at the Tate Modern, or Michael Craig-Martin at the Serpentine Gallery, while publishers and bookshops might sell pre-signed books. Yet on Walker's account, those who attend a signing to get a personally dedicated book cannot be viewed as fans, despite the fact that such signings are a staple element of commercially-targeted fandom, whether at conventions or in-store.

The Tate Modern has acted as an emblem of contemporary art's autonomous-heteronomous positionings. Analyzing the UK art field, Michael Grenfell and Cheryl Hardy (2007) suggest that at the Tate Modern "the consecrated cultural capital of the French avant-garde combines with symbolic capital from a more recent, restricted field [of installation/modern art and sculpture], but contrasts with the large-scale audience attracted by the spectacle and novelty of the building itself" (91–92). In this formulation, "proper" cultural capital is maintained as the preserve of the building's artistic contents, while touristic or fan cultural capital is supposedly directed only at the spectacular building.

It has taken an iconoclastic celebrity-artist, Grayson Perry, to challenge the forms of cultural power that exclude fan discourse from art's consecrated realms of cultural capital. Perry (2014) refuses to recognize art fandom as implicit, and thus as discursively silenced, by provocatively writing that his "nickname for the Tate Modern is the cult entertainment megastore. This comes from a shop that sells comics and film merchandise ... called Forbidden Planet" (88). Such a challenge to cultural hierarchies—equating a major art museum with stores selling fan-targeted merchandise (Geraghty 2014, 159)—is somewhat akin to Matt Trueman's discussion of theatre fans (2014). Both Trueman and Perry are attempting to break down divisions between participatory culture focused around popular culture and that which is centered on "high" culture (Simon 2010). Both writers aim to make implicit fandom explicit, even if only momentarily and playfully. Perry also alludes to the "game" of cultural distinction: "if Lynda Snell [a character in the BBC radio drama *The Archers*] is a *fan* of contemporary art, then the game is won, or lost, depending on how you look at it" (2). This emphasizes that the naming of fandom in relation to art is no trivial matter: to "lose" means viewing art's cultural capital as irredeemably degraded, whereas to "win" means, as I am arguing here, contesting power relationships that have exnominated art fandom to date, rendering its practices implicit and lacking in discursive support.

Thus far, I have focused on the fields of theatre and art. In the closing section, I will address how fandom has been acknowledged in relation to specific literary figures, concluding with a brief case study of the acclaimed American novelist Jonathan Franzen and implicit Franzen fans.

Literature and (Implicit) Fandom, or, from Janeites to Jonathanites

The historical literary field has been theorized by Pierre Bourdieu (1996), but its contemporary form has seen a significant blurring between heteronomous and autonomous parameters—perhaps more so than in the fields of theatre and art—with the result that a new "literary middlebrow" (Driscoll 2014, 17) can be discerned wherein high and popular culture thoroughly intersect (see also Edwards's Chapter 3 in this volume). This suggests that the binaries of "literary" and "popular" fiction are increasingly unsustainable (Gelder 2004, 24), partly as a result of commercial forces (and media capital) reconfiguring the field through "literary celebrity" (Moran 2000; Glass 2004). The literary autonomous-heteronomous quadrant has generated movements from "high" modernist writing to (popular) iconic status (Silver 1999, 76), while the heteronomous-autonomous sector has witnessed a proliferation of "genre" writing that is (re)valorized by knowledgeable fandoms. But a number of literary phenomena have rendered especially visible the collapsing together of heteronomous and autonomous poles, making literature fandom explicit and self-identified in such cases.

First, there are canonized writers such as Jane Austen who have pop-cultural fan followings (again, see Edwards's Chapter 3 in this volume). As "it is possible to read Austen in ways that transgress the boundaries of properly literary reading, it must follow that the location of those limits is far from being ... fixed" (Lynch 2000, 8). Austen operates within contemporary culture both as a literary figure and "a brand, ...the name of which accrues interest from circulation alone" (Harman 2009, 244). Even theorists who read "Literature" and "popular fiction" as marked by autonomous-heteronomous distinctions are compelled to concede Austen's liminal positioning as "popular Literature" (Gelder 2004, 11). In *Everybody's Jane*, Juliette Wells (2011) defines Austen's readers as follows:

I will refer interchangeably to those who read for pleasure as "amateur readers" and "everyday readers"; if I am placing emphasis on forms of interpretation that take place outside scholarly norms, I will refer to "non-academic readers" ... I will refer to "Austen fans" or "Austen lovers" when I wish to include, as well as readers, those who are interested in films and popular works derived from Austen's novels. (11)

Today's Austen fandom has also been viewed as shaped by digital culture, with "the electronic and web provenance of all this fannishness" (Mirmohamadi 2014, 3) displacing 'purely' autonomous literary appreciation (Yaffe 2013, 113). The current existence of Shakespeare fandom, and its relation to digital media, has similarly been explored. However, "present-day responses to Austen are affected very differently by gender than are present-day responses to Shakespeare" (Wells 2011, 16), with Austen fandom being highly gendered as feminine, and thus more significantly aligned with popular culture rather than with (problematically) masculinized 'high' culture (Silver 1999, 119–212). The fan moniker of "Janeites" implies "a reading situation in which writer and fan will be on a first-name basis [and works] to highlight the author's gender and to imply that the reader's is the same" (Lynch 2000, 14). By contrast, the term "Shakespearean" is less intimate or emotionally close, belonging to "a chillier idiom" (14). Deirdre Lynch (2000) argues that explicit Shakespeare fandom, gendered as masculine, is more culturally secure and is not used within attempts to devalue the Bard: "Shakespeare fans ... can act like fans, parading through Stratford-upon-Avon every April 23rd ..., and not put at risk the plays' claims to be taken seriously. No one, it seems, feels compelled to take this cult audience to task for their excesses" (10).

A further difference between Austen fandom and Shakespeare fans relates to how these literary works are first encountered:

A crucial difference between Shakespeare and Austen lies in how their audiences encounter their works. In our era ... young people do not typically elect to read Shakespeare on their own ... In contrast, while Austen's novels certainly continue to be taught at all levels around the world, many fans and authors of Austen-inspired books remember first encounters with her works that took place outside the classroom. (Wells 2011, 17)

The fact that Shakespeare is read as part of UK schooling makes this both a part of literary culture (more so than being a "theatre fandom," though this is certainly possible), and a component of educational capital. Being consecrated within taught cultural capital means that

Shakespeare, as the icon of high or "proper" culture, seems to stand apart from popular culture ... This drive to keep Shakespeare and popular culture apart is shared both by those who lament that popular culture has been displacing our cultural heritage, and by those who champion popular culture as the people's alternative to an elitist canon. (Lanier 2002, 3)

However, as with the emergence of a “digital habitus” that has reconfigured theatre attendance (Richardson 2015), as well as intensifying Austen fan culture, Shakespeare fandom has also been further enabled by digital platforms. Douglas Lanier (2002) has analyzed “the appearance of Shakespeare fan fiction” (82), distinguishing two types. One involves revising Shakespeare’s work to explore relationships not examined in the source material, e.g., a homoerotic romance between Rosencrantz and Guildenstern (Lanier 2002, 83), and hence is similar to types of media fanfic identified by Henry Jenkins (2013). The second type involves regnerification, e.g., “Macbeth in the style of pornography and action movies” (Lanier 2002, 84), resembling a mash-up of high and pop-cultural forms.

Stephen O’Neill (2015) explores related terrain in his analysis of fan-made YouTube videos, noting that “Shakespeare texts are one among a diffuse set of cultural references to be remixed ... YouTube Shakespeare videos... frequently involve a derivative familiarity with a text rather than a full knowledge of it” (40). Such participatory culture “might be more concerned with a particular actor than with Shakespeare” (40), with a fan’s personal investment in Benedict Cumberbatch or David Tennant being performed just as much as “Shakespeare’s cultural valency” (39). This multiple intertextuality—which could also include auteur directors, e.g., Baz Luhrmann’s *Romeo & Juliet*—does not erode Shakespeare’s cultural distinction, however, since such vidding operates within the “differently distributed fetish communities” of a Shakespeare industry composed of “discontinuous and only sometimes intersecting conversations or crowds that converge on variously mediated forms of Shakespeare texts” (Burt and Yates 2013, 2). Shakespeare oriented via media celebrities and auteurs offers an autonomous-heteronomous recontextualization of the Bard, to be sure, but Shakespeare’s autonomous² value remains sufficiently potent that “Shakespeare’s ‘high’ cultural status [can act as a] resource which mass producers ... invoke and manipulate ... [O]ne ... long-lived paradox of the Shakespeare trademark is that it is popular culture’s favorite sign of high culture” (Lanier 2007, 95).

The shifting terrain of a “digital habitus,” articulated with multiple intertextualities and participatory cultures, suggests that fan studies should no longer be drawing on a restricted view of “highbrow” cultural capital as resolutely opposed to fan cultural capital (and hence as irrelevant to the study of fandom). Instead, fan practices of “emerging” and generational cultural capital are becoming ever more apparent in relation to the digital afterlives of Austen and Shakespeare.

Explicit literary fandoms have tended to be analyzed in relation to a small set of writers at the intersection of autonomous and heteronomous position-takings. However, implicit fandom can also emerge in relation to writers positioned within the new literary middlebrow, given that this is a commercial culture marked by celebrity and mass mediation that simultaneously combines “veneration for elite culture” (Driscoll 2014, 21) with a “personal, affective framework of ... reading ... [that is] *amateur*” rather than academic (Driscoll 2014, 36). The literary middlebrow therefore seeks to display consecrated cultural capital—i.e., it discursively excludes fan cultural capital—at the same time as carrying out fan(-like) practices. A good example of this is the forum dedicated to author Mark Z. Danielewski’s output, where dedicated readers analyze his work. Yet when Bronwen Thomas (2011) asked posters if they thought of themselves as fans,

[U]sers tended to be critical and questioning of the terminology itself, and wary of being labelled ... For example, John B ... remarked that “Fan’ is a strong word” (9 July 2009) ... Meanwhile Norkhat (21 July 2009) seemed surprised to find the term “fan” being used at all in the context of literature, but concluded on reflection that his behaviour “pretty much makes me a hardcore fan.” (87)

Thus, fan discourse is not securely used on the MZD forum, instead becoming a matter of dispute due to its general exclusion and policing.

Jim Collins (2010) has analyzed a similar scenario to that set out in Driscoll's (2014) study. He, too, discerns the rise of a new category of fiction that valorizes cultural capital and "good" taste but which is, at the same time, commercialized and "works like genre fiction for its devoted audience" (246). Fan discourses are not usually deployed by these popular-literary devotees, but Collins (2010) argues that "Lit Lit" (a genre category just like Chick Lit) generates what is really "pure fan talk" among "passionate amateur readers" (262).

Both Collins and Driscoll analyze the US novelist-celebrity Jonathan Franzen as a leading participant in "[p]opular literary culture" (Collins 2010, 265) and the new "literary middlebrow" (Driscoll 2014, 69). As Driscoll puts it, in terms of field theory:

Franzen is ... an unusually mobile literary figure. His early, postmodern novels earned him field-specific prestige (for example, he was named one of *Granta's* best young American novelists in 1996); the publication of *The Corrections* turned him into a major prize-winner who sold a lot of novels ... Franzen's position in the literary field puts him in a ... complex relationship with the middlebrow. (69)

Described by *Time* magazine as a "Great American Novelist" (Weinstein 2016, 1), Franzen has repeatedly sought to position himself and his work as autonomous² (i.e., as purified 'high' culture requiring a knowledgeable reader wielding "highbrow" cultural capital). He rejected the imprimatur of Oprah Winfrey's Book Club in the US, effectively othering this as commercial, mass media culture—i.e., as a heteronomous threat to his field position. But while he opposed the promotional machinery of Oprah Winfrey's endorsement, Franzen's novel *The Corrections* (2001)—much like *Freedom* (2010) and *Purity* (2015)—adopted a psychological realism focused on family relationships as well as being accessibly plot-driven. Indeed, *Purity* is particularly marked by narrative drive, seeking to uncover exactly how the main characters are related, and what secrets they are hiding. Although literary scholars have described Franzen's turn away from postmodernism as "post-postmodern" (Burn 2008, 20), or as moving from an omniscient authorial frame to a more empathetic engagement with characterization (Weinstein 2016, 224), cultural studies-indebted theorists have suggested that Franzen's later novels adopt the emotional orientation of "chick lit":

It is now clearly possible for "high" artists such as Jonathan Franzen to appropriate the forms of mass culture formerly stigmatized as "chick lit" ... [I]n Franzen's conflict with Oprah, such popularization appears to represent a threat to the privilege of the elite cultural producer, and ... [a gendered] "anxiety of contamination" ... has not diminished. (Fitzpatrick 2006, 219)

Franzen's anti-book club stance distanced his work "from the contaminating otherness of the [feminized] masses and ... retreat[ed] into the purity of universal masculinity" (219). It is ironic that Franzen dissects the many ways in which "purity" cannot be attained in his most recent (2015) novel (Finch 2016), given that his position-taking in the literary field seems ideologically aimed at upholding an autonomous² purity at odds with his objective position as a celebrity-novelist (Glass 2004, 6–7). Yet Franzen persists in seeking to defend established, generational "highbrow" cultural capital against emergent and more social media-based cultural capital. He has become known for his anti-Internet arguments, and Geert Lovink (2016) curtly notes how "Franzen's critique of participatory net culture stands out for being adamantly non-participatory ... [H]e tends to dump his material [e.g., in newspaper articles] and run away back to the security of his one-way regime" (132).

Franzen's pursuit of 'high' cultural purity therefore extends to the adoption of "old school" media tactics that are resolutely about one-to-many broadcasting (Lovink 2016, 145). If fandom

is, almost by definition, a matter of participatory culture, then Franzen has adopted a position opposed to the very practices of fandom, let alone its discourses. As Jim Collins observes, “radically different kinds of reading communities” are envisioned by fans and by modernist writers. For the former, “reading is a *social* act in which the talking about a book together is one of the preconditions for pleasurable reading,” whereas as “a social-isolate reader, Franzen had no need for such a community, because such interaction is at best superfluous, and at worst, destructive of his oppositionality” (Collins 2010, 108). Local book groups that meet face-to-face, as well as online reading groups, may not seem as obviously counterposed to Franzen’s oppositional stance as Oprah’s Book Club. Yet as Elizabeth Long (2003) has noted of women’s reading groups, they act like “poachers on the fields of legitimate culture. They raid books for what they find interesting to discuss, and ... are not afraid to find ... critically acclaimed books sadly wanting” (220), meaning that such everyday communal interpretation remains a potential threat to Franzen’s bid for ‘high’ cultural authenticity. Rather than respecting literary or autonomous² values, Long argues that women’s book clubs are “stubbornly attached to reading as ‘equipment for living,’” parsing even “great” literature for its connections to everyday life instead of viewing it as transcendent or as possessed of (field-specific) literary “purity.”

Consequently, Franzen seems to have no investment in interacting with a community of fan readers, nor even in imagining such a community, and he has admitted to responding “in kind” to different “kinds of readers in signing lines” (pro- and anti-Oprah Book Club folk), basically telling them what they want to hear (quoted in Collins 2010, 109). This imagines and performs his interaction with readers as entirely individualized. And yet the importance of signings remains testified to here (Moran 2000, 154), just as Beth Driscoll (2014) has argued that “Signing is a tangible, personal act which adds meaning to the object of the book ... Further, it is a pretext that enables an audience member to have a moment of closeness with an author ... [S]ignings ... enable intimate, if ephemeral, connections that key into the emotion of the new literary middle-brow” (168). Those attending a Franzen signing—or even purchasing a signed first edition of *Purity*, made commercially available by Fourth Estate in the UK—may thus feel a connection to Franzen, but this is necessarily a socially-isolated or individualized fandom, resonating with this description in *Freedom*: “serious fans always need to feel uniquely connected to the object of their fandom; they jealously guard those points of connection, however tiny or imaginary, that justify the feeling of uniqueness” (Franzen 2010, 137).

Despite Franzen’s anti-social media stance, he has an “official Facebook page... managed by his publishers Farrar, Straus and Giroux and Picador USA,” which has been liked by 50,606 people as of November 13, 2016. It is notable that rather than cohering as a community, the Facebook group is marked by individual posters responding to their projected versions of Franzen, e.g., “Oh how I love the way you write” (Poster 4), or “Thank you, Jonathan Franzen! That was incredible!!” (Poster 5). As Lovink has suggested, such posts indicate that “content providers ... *invite us to speak out at – but not so much speak to – others*” (2011, 52–53, emphasis added).

As such, “Franzen fandom” remains implicit, disarticulated from fan discourses as well as typically cut off from communally-structured participatory culture. Having said that, there is a Franzen-related Tumblr, billed as “[o]bsessively blogging about Jonathan Franzen via a medium he probably hates even more than Twitter,” and including Franzen art and GIFs (<http://franzensfreude.tumblr.com/>). This testifies to the way that Tumblr, like YouTube vidding, sustains “crossing fandoms” (Booth 2016) that stitch together the likes of Jonathan Franzen, *BoJack Horseman*, and *The Simpsons*, modelling the “multifannishness ... [and] fluidity of millennial fan culture” (Stein 2015, 171).

Franzen fans can perform their “serious ... connection” to Jonathan through fragmentary expressions of Facebook gratitude and in brief exchanges at signings. We might dub this

individualized band of “quality consumers” (Collins 2010, 266) “Jonathanites,” given Lynch’s (2000, 14) argument about the gendered naming of Austen fans. High-cultural implicit fandom is marked here by intimate “points of connection” that are experienced as personally meaningful acts that nevertheless cannot be separated from accumulated cultural capital (which is anything but rational, disembodied, and detached). Such experiential cultural capital cannot be divorced from fannish practices, even if discursive policing seeks to make it so (and while Tumblr is used to contest “proper” separations of texts, media, and forms).

Conclusion

In this chapter I have argued that although fan studies has had specific disciplinary reasons for othering ‘high’ culture in favor of studying pop-cultural media fandoms—just as theatre studies, art, and literary theory have frequently othered fandom as pop-cultural rather than “highbrow”—such mutually reinforcing interdisciplinary exclusions are no longer tenable. The rise in arts-based participatory culture (Simon 2010; Conner 2013), linked to generational shifts in “emerging” cultural capital and a “digital habitus” of social media use, means that fandom is becoming explicit and self-identified around forms of theatre, art, and literature, requiring new directions in fan studies’ work such as theorizing implicit fandom. Here, fan practices are carried out, sometimes within participatory forums and sometimes in highly individualized and non-communal ways, *without the validating support of fan discourses* (which remain structurally silenced and excluded, especially in relation to autonomous² distinctions in these fields). The fact that these fannish experiences are individualized does not automatically make them non-fandom or “not fandom,” and we need a more generous interpretation of what can be perceived as fan activity in order to challenge field-based power relationships that have persistently othered fan identities in relation to “highbrow” cultural capital. Theorizing implicit fandom has also meant reworking Bourdieusian field theory to include consumers’ position-takings, otherwise presumed to be entirely readable from cultural production.

Exploring fans beyond fan (studies) discourses opens up ways of expanding fan studies, moving into new interdisciplinary dialogues. Rather than (re)valuing and studying fandom only where it is discursively present, we can argue for its relevance in relation to the structuring absences of “legitimate” culture (Jensen 1992, 2014).

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Chapter 31

Janeites and Sherlockians: Literary Societies, Cultural Legitimacy, and Gender

Roberta Pearson

This chapter continues the exploration of fan studies and cultural hierarchies that I began in 2007 with the article “Bardies, Bachies, Trekkies and Sherlockians” in *Fandom: Identities and Communities in a Mediated World*. That article speculated about the limits of fan studies, asking why it is that the field “has extensively engaged with the popular [but] has almost entirely refused to engage with the high” (Pearson 2007, 99). While Google Scholar tells me that the article is among the more widely cited of my publications, my fellow fan studies scholars have yet to broaden their remit to the study of canonical literature, classical music, or, indeed of Sherlockians—the field still primarily focuses on popular culture (although see Edwards’s chapter in this volume). However, there is at least one exception; rather to my embarrassment, I have finally taken note of a 2005 article that does engage with high culture authored by well-known fan studies scholar Will Brooker. Brooker’s ethnographic study of the Lewis Carroll Society (LCS) investigates the blurred boundaries between the attitudes and practices of a group of high culture enthusiasts and those of a media fandom. Brooker concludes that “the LCS operates in very similar way to other fan groups, yet with some intriguing differences,” particularly with regard to cultural power and legitimacy (Brooker 2005, 86). Literary societies constitute valuable sites of exploration for those concerned with challenging the distinctions between the attitudes and practices of those who self-identify as “enthusiasts,” “devotees,” “aficionados,” “cognoscenti,” and “connoisseurs,” terms frequently related to the enjoyment of high and sometimes middle-brow culture, and those who self-identify as fans, a term strongly associated with popular culture in both academic and journalistic discourse. This chapter extends and complicates Brooker’s investigation of the differences and similarities between literary societies and other fan groups; in doing so, it focuses particularly upon cultural legitimacy and the effect of gender upon external perceptions and internal divisions. It takes as its primary case studies the Baker Street Irregulars (BSI) and the Jane Austen Society of North America (JASNA), although contextualizes them respectively within the broader Holmes and Austen fandoms.

Founded in 1934, the BSI is an international (albeit US-centered) association of Sherlock Holmes enthusiasts. It describes itself as “part literary society, part social group, and part source of whimsical entertainment.” Importantly, “one does not join the BSI. One is invited to join ...” with membership bestowed upon “generally accomplished adults” who have a record of “significant accomplishment” (“A Brief History”). Susanne Raga notes that members past and present

have included Pulitzer Prize winners, teachers, doctors, lawyers, judges, eminent, authors Isaac Asimov and Neil Gaiman, and, in an honorary capacity, US Presidents Harry Truman and Franklin D. Roosevelt (Raga 2016). While the BSI is exclusive, with current membership numbering around 300, JASNA is open to all. Founded in 1979 and comprised of over 5000 members and more than 75 regional groups, JASNA “is dedicated to the enjoyment and appreciation of Jane Austen and her writing” and draws its members “from all ages and all walks of life” (“Welcome to JASNA”).

There are many other literary societies aside from the BSI and JASNA; the UK Alliance of Literary Societies website lists 114 members (“Our Member Societies”). Why then choose Austen and Holmes societies as my case studies? Raga (2016) opines that the BSI is “arguably the best known ... book club around.” It is also the one best known to me. While not a BSI, I am a life-long Sherlockian and have been a member of The Adventuresses of Sherlock Holmes (the formerly all-female distaff complement to the BSI) since the early 1980s. My personal experience gives me insider knowledge of the Sherlockian community both prior to and after the recent boom in media adaptations, most prominently *Sherlock* (BBC 2010 to present). While I was formerly the only fan studies scholar to have written about Sherlockians before *Sherlock*, at the time of writing I am co-editing a special issue of the *Journal of Transformative Works and Cultures* on the traditional fandom that includes several essays upon which I draw below. Although I lack personal experience of Austen fandom, informing this chapter are several monographs and essays by literary scholars that deal in part with Austen fans in general and/or JASNA in particular; no other literary society or literary fandom has attracted such sustained academic attention, albeit just not from fan studies scholars.

Several other factors justify the choice of case studies. Both the Austen novels and the Holmes stories have frequently been adapted across a range of media, making them more culturally pervasive than the majority of authors and texts celebrated by most other literary societies (e.g., Franzen fans in Hills’s Chapter 30 in this volume); space limitations prohibit the inclusion of the obvious exceptions on the UK Alliance website, the Tolkien and Dracula societies, and the Dickens Fellowship. Aside from this commonality, however, the two societies are otherwise quite dissimilar. First, the Austen and Conan Doyle texts have different cultural valuations, the former placed higher in the cultural hierarchy than the latter. Since the establishment of novel studies in the 1940s, Austen’s works have been accounted among the most canonical of texts and are considered “serious” literature. Yet her works’ cultural pervasiveness makes Austen, as Deidre Lynch (2000) puts it, “a crossover phenomenon. Austenmania straddles the divides between high and low culture, and between the canon and the Cineplex ...” (5). The Holmes stories originated in the industrial popular culture of the late nineteenth century and have never achieved canonical status in the academy. Scholars have discussed Arthur Conan Doyle’s role in the emergence of the popular mystery/detective genre but this firmly categorizes the Holmes stories as popular fiction rather than “serious” literature. Second, JASNA coheres around Jane Austen, the author, while the BSI coheres around Sherlock Holmes, the character. The latter’s orientation toward character rather than author underpins the BSI’s most distinctive practice, the Great Game, playful pseudo-scholarship predicated upon the assertion that Holmes was a real person not a fictional construct. Third is the different gender composition of the two societies. The BSI was originally all-male but gender tensions have persisted even after the admission of women in 1991. Emily Auerbach (2004) says that the fact that “women far outnumber men as Jane Austen society meetings” reinforces the widespread cultural perception that Austen’s appeal is restricted to females (283).

Brooker (2005) argues that the LCS resembles other fan groups with regard to their “community bonding, dedicated immersion in specialist arcana [and] pilgrimages to geographical locations [associated with the author or texts]” (861). In this regard, JASNA, the BSI, and related literary societies such as the UK’s Jane Austen Society (founded in 1940) and the Sherlock Holmes

Society of London (founded in 1951) resemble both the LCS and each other. JASNA claims that “enjoyment of Austen’s fiction and the company of like-minded readers” unites its members (“Welcome to JASNA”). Mary Ann O’Farrell (2009) says: “With their teas and balls, dance classes and conferences, the Jane Austen clubs and societies ... have long been organized around a celebration of face-to-face sociability” (481).

The BSI readily admits to being “part social group”; a shared passion, frequently displayed in face-to-face interactions, unites both the Irregulars and the Sherlockian community as a whole. After years as a solitary fan, attending my first *Adventuresses of Sherlock Holmes* event felt like coming in from the mundane and entering a warm and welcoming group of potential friends with whom I already had much in common. Janeites and Sherlockians both revel in immersion in specialist arcana, as articles in the latest issues of JASNA’s and the BSI’s publications attest: Carrie Wright (2015) discusses Austenian jewelry while David Marcum (2016) identifies the house in which Holmes lived before moving to Baker Street. Sherlockians take pleasure in visiting physical locations associated with their beloved character. For example, The Sherlock Holmes Society has frequently traveled to Switzerland’s Reichenbach Falls to enact Holmes’s final struggle with his nemesis, Professor Moriarty. Janeites, like Sherlockians and the characters in *The Canterbury Tales*, also “longen” to “goon on pilgrimages.” For example, the annual general meeting of the Jane Austen Society takes place at Chawton House, the former home of Austen’s brother Edward.

The above has established parallels among the LCS, the BSI, JASNA, and other fan groups. The BSI’s and JASNA’s close resemblance to other fan groups points to the value of expanding fan studies beyond its traditional remit of the avowedly popular; the attitudes and practices of fandom are more widespread than accounted for by fan studies. The rest of this chapter addresses the ways in which the BSI and JASNA differ from each other and from the LCS with regard to external perceptions and internal divisions related to cultural legitimacy and gender. These differences among the literary societies also underline the value to the field of an expanded remit. While the Janeites cohere around culturally valorized texts, the media tend to devalue them by virtue of gender; by contrast, the BSI coheres around less valorized texts, but the media have often celebrated them, sometimes implicitly by virtue of their gender and social position. Issues of cultural legitimacy and gender play out in nuanced and opposing ways on the different levels in the cultural hierarchy in which people enact fannish practices and attitudes.

Janeites

Brooker (2005) establishes equivalences between the LCS and other groups, but also speaks of the “intriguing differences” between them in terms of cultural power and legitimacy. In contrast to the groups considered by fan studies scholars, the LCS has “a significant cultural voice” manifested in their publications’ inclusion of Carroll scholars, their regular consultation by journalists and their invitations to “shape the discourse on heritage sites” associated with Carroll (862). JASNA also engages in activities perceived as more culturally legitimate than those of self-identified fans of popular culture. O’Farrell (2009) says that the UK, US, and Australian Austen societies undertake “the public missions of education, preservation, archival development, and scholarship through conferences, lectures, tours [and] publications ...” (481). Austen’s centrality to the literary canon gives JASNA stronger links to academia than the LCS. While Carroll’s respectability as a minor member of the canon may attract some academics to the LCS’s publications, there are simply more Austen than Carroll scholars seeking publication outlets. As for the BSI’s publications, former editor of the *Baker Street Journal*, Phillip Shreffler said: “the Grand Game ... never sought academic approval and was never intended to be academically considered; it is a parody of scholarship and always has been ...” (Faye 2013a).

JASNA describes its annual peer-reviewed journals, *Persuasions* and *Persuasions On-Line*, as “preeminent sources for Austen studies, featuring essays about Jane Austen’s work and world” that address “both academics and general readers who wish to learn more about Jane Austen and her writing” (JASNA Publications). Indeed, professional academics or those with academic qualifications authored thirteen of twenty articles in the latest issue of *Persuasions Online*. But while many academics publish in JASNA’s journals, others may avoid associations with the Janeites. Lynch (2000) says that “to academics, many present-day Austenian cultures of appreciation appear alarmingly ready to cast engagement with the texts as just another ritual of appreciation, one only moderately more important than the others” (115). The tensions between Janeites and academics may arise from the fact that for the former, “Austen represents domestic privacy, leisure and sometimes shopping” while for the latter she represents “career and a connection to the public sphere” (113). Gender prejudices are clearly a factor in negative evaluations of Janeites: domestic privacy, leisure, and shopping have traditionally been connoted as female, while career and the public sphere are connoted as male. Lynch does not make the connection, but Janice Radway (1984) argues that female readers of romantic fiction are frequently motivated by the desire for domestic privacy and leisure, a desire that they seemingly share with Austen fans. Lynch (2000) does, however, tellingly observe that “Shakespeare fans ... can act like fans, parade through Stratford upon Avon every April 23rd sporting sprigs of rosemary” and not be taken to task “for their excesses and their failure to blush over them” (10).

Male and female Bardies can march through Stratford without fear of ridicule. By contrast, Austen fandom’s female composition and sensibilities can elicit outsiders’ derision. Lynch (2000) says that the term “Janeite” connotes:

the reader as a hobbyist – someone at once overzealous and undersophisticated, who cannot be trusted to discriminate between the true pleasures of *Emma* and the erzart pleasures of *Bridget Jones* or Barbara Pym or a Regency romance ... This figure is a soul mate to the consumer whose purchases of Austeniana – coffee mugs and Regency writing paper – help sustain ... what is a conspicuously female-centered ... gift culture (12)

This gift culture manifests itself on a JASNA webpage listing Austen collectibles offered by the society’s regional groups: “note cards, jewelry, books, music, prints, calendars, and more. Shop these pages for the perfect gift for yourself, a friend, or another literature lover!” (Holiday Shopping). The dedicated Janeite can also acquire, says Allison Thompson (2008), “coffee mugs and key chains, ‘I ♥ Fitzwilliam’ tee-shirts or ‘Jane is my Home Girl’ bumper-stickers” as well as “infants’ bibs emblazoned with Mr. Woodhouse’s imperative cry—‘Gruel!’—or a clock face bearing Captain Wentworth’s plea, ‘Tell me not that I am too late!’” While the purchase of these items is a commercial transaction, their exchange among Janeites resembles in some respects the gift culture existing in other fan communities.

Janeites’ social gatherings may also encourage external perceptions of feminine frivolity. The “Jaunt with Jane” Lyme-Regis weekend, linked to on the JASNA website, is a “fully loaded weekend of fun” that includes a dinner and Regency dancing (“Jaunt with Jane”). The Jane Austen Society website links to a “Regency Dance Experience”; the organizers urge participants to wear Regency-style dress (or, in other words, to cosplay) to discover “what it might have been like to attend a Regency dance in an historical setting” (Events UK 2016).

The Jane Austen Society website also links to decidedly worthy events such as scholarly lectures and a tour of the Chawton House library (Events UK 2016), but academic and journalistic discourse frequently focuses on the frivolous rather than the worthy. Literary scholar Joseph Gerhard (2000) writes of overcoming his aversion to sequels to Austen’s works. “I was not tempted to read any of the lot ... especially since most seem to be by Janeite enthusiasts of one stripe or

another ...” Gerhard had to conquer his prejudice “against the sort of arch and nostalgically genteel thing such a society of Austen fans turns out” (679). O’Farrell (2009) says that journalists often overlook Austen societies’ “public labors and serious purposes, emphasizing instead the lighter occasions on which readers of Austen meet for social pleasures” (481). Auerbach (2004) makes the same point. “Far more time is spent listening to talks from leading Austen scholars and biographers ... than in attending regency balls or purchasing Austen tea towels and medallions. Too often, newspaper coverage of Austen meetings ... focuses only on the fluff, not on the new ideas under discussion” (283). Lynch (2000) quotes a newspaper article announcing the formation of a Connecticut chapter of JASNA that epitomizes the journalistic emphasis upon the fluff; the reporter advised participants to come prepared to vote for their favorite character and declared that such occasions attract readers not academics (3). There are clear parallels between the infantilizing media coverage of the Janeites and that of the coverage of popular fandoms.

As the sympathetic Austen scholars cited above demonstrate, the selective perception of the academic and journalistic guardians of cultural hierarchies implicitly derogates the Janeites’ behaviors as inappropriate responses to canonical literature. O’Farrell (2009) “cannot help noticing” that “the socialized Janeite is a figure of cultural fun” (484). It seems that academics and journalists alike have implicitly equated Janeites with fan girls, who decidedly lack cultural legitimacy. Kristina Busse (2013) argues that the interests, spaces, and “primary forms of engagement” of female fans are commonly disparaged. “Affect and forms of fannish investment get policed along gender lines, so that obsessively collecting comic books or speaking Klingon is more acceptable within and outside of fandom than creating fan vids or cosplaying” (75). So much for Regency balls and Regency-style dress!

But the Janeites may themselves be internally policing inappropriate responses, a behavior that Busse argues is common within media fandoms: “Fans replicate negative outsider notions of what constitutes fannishness, often using similar feminizing and infantilizing concepts. Accusations of being too attached, too obsessed, and too invested get thrown around readily, and all too often such affect is criticized for being too girly or too juvenile” (Busse 2013, 75–76). The supposedly girly or juvenile affect of some in the community may be causing tensions among the Janeites. Thompson (2008) says that there is “a great divide” in Austen fandom between those who are “primarily inspired” by the sexy stars of adaptations (e.g., Colin Firth) and “those who ... focus principally on the books and claim ... some intellectual superiority...” Similar internal policing occurs in the BSI, but with gender differences enhancing negative affect as older male “devotees” of the stories belittle younger female fans of the adaptations who dare to enter the long-established fandom.

Sherlockians

The contemporary tensions in Sherlockian fandom can be traced back to popular and elite audiences’ reception of the Holmes character in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. From the moment that Arthur Conan Doyle’s stories first appeared in the *Strand Magazine* in the early 1890s, an enthusiastic popular fandom arose around the character. British newspapers of the period attest to Sherlock Holmes’s ubiquity in the era’s popular culture and to the presence of a dedicated readership (Boström and Laffey 2016). *Tit-Bits* magazine, the *Strand*’s sister publication, launched a cross-promotional strategy of inquiry columns, competitions, and reader-penned pastiches of the Holmes stories. These were all intended to encourage Holmes fandom among *Tit-Bits* upper-working-class and lower-middle-class readers, as well as among *The Strand*’s more solidly middle-class readers who turned to *Tit-Bits* for further information concerning the Great Detective (McClellan 2017). Of course, the historical circumstances, technology, and audience

significantly differ from those that gave rise to today's Internet-based media fandoms, but *Tit-Bits'* engagement strategies do resemble those of contemporary franchises that similarly seek to generate buzz in between franchise installments, engage consumers in their virtual worlds, and generate a top-down, producer-dependent fandom that keeps coming back for more. This early Holmes's fandom looks a lot like contemporary media fandoms but another quite distinct mode of fandom, rooted in the period's elite culture and publications, developed alongside it.

From the early twentieth century, cultural elites such as Oxford and Cambridge professors laid the foundations for the practice of droll critical commentary, the Great Game, which led directly to the organization of the BSI. The Great Game entails writing commentaries upon the Canon, as Sherlockians term the stories, predicated upon two fundamental precepts: (1) Holmes and Watson were real people; and (2) Watson wrote the stories; Conan Doyle was merely his literary agent. Rather than accepting that the Canon's many contradictions and gaps result from Conan Doyle's writing hastily to deadline without much concern for continuity, the Great Game's practitioners reason from those fundamental precepts. For example, how to explain the fact that John H. Watson's wife refers to him as James in "The Man with the Twisted Lip"? Obviously, Watson's middle name is Hamish, the Scottish equivalent of James. The Great Game's players not only retcon, but also construct elaborate chronologies of the adventures, fill narrative ellipses (e.g., chronicling Holmes's activities between his disappearance at the Reichenbach Falls and his reappearance in London several years later), and elucidate interpretive debates within the context of Victorian and Edwardian manners, mores, and history. Some aspects of the Great Game may be more transformational than affirmational (see Polasek 2017); nonetheless the media have engaged in less fan-nish stereotyping of Sherlockians than of the entirely affirmational Janeites.

Sherlockians term their light-hearted conjectures the "Writings upon the Writings," but the Great Game in some respects resembles the contemporary pan-fandom practice of fanwanking. Fanlore says that fanwank "refers to fannish justification of continuity or other errors ... Often over-elaborate and implausible, fanwanks are generally not meant to be taken too seriously, but serve merely to humorously paper over a credibility gap in the canon." The entry offers a Sherlockian example: "Watson indicates in one story that his war wound was a bullet in the leg, but in another story, he was shot in the shoulder. The usual fanwank is that he could have been shot while bending over, thus allowing the bullet to pass through his upper leg, then his shoulder" ("Fanwank," Fanlore). As the term itself indicates, many media fans judge fanwanking a tad excessive or obsessive. TV Tropes says that fanwankers "often come up with answers to questions that either make not a whit of difference in the end, or are more fun *without* an answer than with ... When the theory makes you say, 'Oh come on!,' the ... author has stepped over the line into Fan Wank" ("Fan Wank," TV Tropes). The Great Game has positive connotations for Sherlockians and, as I said above, entails more than retconning. But, whether considered good or bad, the practice of "correcting" continuity errors began much earlier than most fans and fan studies scholars have implicitly assumed and points to yet another parallel between literary societies, or at least the BSI, and other fan groups.

The speculation upon Watson's authorial shortcomings originated at the beginning of the twentieth century in the United Kingdom and the United States in articles penned by a young Cambridge graduate for *The Cambridge Review* and an American journalist for *The Bookman*, both authors pondering the good doctor's myriad inconsistencies (Maurice 1902). Ronald Knox, a young priest at Oxford, mused upon the Watsonian discrepancies at greater length in a 1911 essay subsequently published in the *Blue Book Magazine* in 1912 and then again in *Blackfriars* in 1920. Among other questions, Knox asks whether Professor James Moriarty had a brother also called James, whether Holmes attended Oxford or Cambridge, and on what dates did the stories take place? The fact that more than 100 years after Knox delivered his talk Sherlockians continue to debate these and other matters of similarly pressing import attests to his foundational status in the fandom.

By the late 1920s and throughout the 1930s culturally elite British and American Holmes enthusiasts were contributing to an outpouring of Writings on the Writings that Kate M. Donley dubs a “Golden Age” in which Sherlockian scholarship became “a trans-Atlantic fad” (Donley 2017). The 1930s alone saw the publication of numerous Sherlockian articles in respectable journals such as *The New Statesman*, *The Times Literary Supplement*, *The Lancet*, *The American Journal of Surgery*, and *The Saturday Review of Literature* (Donley 2017). More important in terms of their influence upon future generations of Sherlockian scholars, several book-length studies also appeared during this period; among the authors were Cambridge professor Sydney Roberts, British archaeologist H.W. Bell, and American literary critic and columnist Vincent Starrett.

In 1934, Bell published the first edited volume of Sherlockian essays, *Baker-Street Studies*; the book testifies to the development of a trans-Atlantic interpretive community of elite Sherlockian enthusiasts, many of whom “were linked by professional and social networks” (Donley 2017). Whereas Knox had fabricated fictitious critics to rail against, these writers knew each other, or at least each other’s Writings on the Writings, and engaged in playful debates on resolving the Watsonian inconsistencies and other matters. They were of the same class and overwhelmingly of the same gender, author Dorothy L. Sayers being one of the few female players of The Great Game in that period. Their writing acquired cultural legitimacy through being printed by the period’s most reputable journals and publishers. The popular fandom of the late nineteenth century had transformed into an elite pastime.

In 1946, Sayers commented that “The game ... was begun, many years ago, by Monsignor Ronald Knox ... Since then, the thing has become a hobby among a select set of jesters here and in America” (7). By the time Sayers wrote those words, an individual hobby had morphed into a collective activity in the formation of the BSI. Christopher Morley (1934), American journalist, novelist, essayist and poet, was prominent among Sayer’s select set of jesters, particularly in his role as columnist for the weekly magazine, *The Saturday Review of Literature*. Morley was at the center of a New York city-based proto-BSI composed of his fellow columnists and friends. But in 1934 Morley challenged his readers to solve a crossword puzzle predicated upon Sherlockian clues and promised that all solving the puzzle would become members of the BSI. A third of the successful entrants were women, but Morley’s decision to exclude them from the founding dinner created the segregation of the sexes that lasted until 1991 (Rosenblatt 2017).

As George Mills (2017) argues, the BSI was “born from a distinctive group of journalists and men of letters in a growing New York literary scene.” When Morley’s crossword puzzle and subsequent dinner expanded the membership beyond his own social circle, doctors, lawyers, and successful industrialists augmented the men of letters’ ranks. Although the BSI was founded at roughly the same time as science fiction fan clubs in New York, Los Angeles, and Boston, Michael Saler (2012) says that their high social status protected them from the “dismissive scorn commonly endured by fantasy fans ... [They] were eminent professionals who couldn’t be dismissed as maladroit teenagers, dreamy escapists, or hopeless cranks” (123). A memo sent to BSI members by Edgar W. Smith (1945), first editor of *The Baker Street Journal*, indicates the society’s awareness of and desire to preserve its culturally respectable status. “Every effort will be made to maintain a level of scholarship for the quarterly which will hold its circulation to modest figures by assuring the complete indifference of *hoi polloi*.”

But after more than three decades of basking in male camaraderie and the confirmation of legitimate cultural institutions, such as the *New York Times* (which regularly published articles on BSI gatherings and reviewed BSI-authored books), the BSI were assailed by the revolutionary tides of the 1960s. A small band of students at Connecticut’s all-female Albertus Magnus College, brought together by their shared fannish enthusiasms, including love of the Great Detective, began corresponding with eminent BSI members. But they realized that “However good we got at the game, we would never be good enough to dine with them.” In the spirit of the age, they

decided to picket the 1968 annual dinner, brandishing cardboard signs—“We Want In!” “BSI Unfair to Women!” “Let Us In Out of the Cold!” (Herzog 2009).

The protest came to nought and the BSI remained stag but the protesters subsequently formed the Adventuresses of Sherlock Holmes (ASH) as a haven for female Sherlockians. ASH was formed at roughly the same time as predominantly female fandoms formed around *Star Trek* and *The Man From U.N.C.L.E.* and media fandom entered the public consciousness (see Coppa 2006). ASH’s “Founding Mothers,” those who picketed the BSI, were themselves media fans, bonding over *Star Trek* as well as over Holmes. As Evelyn Herzog (2009) said in recounting the history of the organization to an ASH gathering, “We came to share many, many enthusiasms . . . It needn’t have been the Canon that took first place among us – had things been only slightly different this might be a *Star Trek* convention [that I’m addressing].” Had they indeed become Trekkers rather than Sherlockians, fan studies scholars would have judged the women worthy of consideration.

In 1991, the BSI’s new leader, Thomas Stix, made the unilateral decision to invest six prominent female Sherlockians, among them BSI spouse and Sherlockian author Julia C. Rosenblatt. Drawing on husband Albert’s insider knowledge, Rosenblatt writes of the divisions among the BSI concerning Stix’s decision. Those who opposed admitting women “said it was a matter of numbers, that it was simpler to keep the BSI to a manageable size if it were men only. Others wanted the BSI to be a gathering where it was always 1935.” Those who favored admitting women “saw it as a matter of social justice. It was not fair to exclude women from the self-styled pre-eminent group of Sherlockian scholars” (Rosenblatt 2017). Despite the dissenters, over the following years the Irregulars admitted more women to their ranks and the BSI seemed to have become happily co-ed.

In the twenty-first century, however, *Sherlock* caused an influx of young female media-oriented fans into the Sherlockian community and offended the sensibilities of a small number of old guard BSI who hark back to the Sherlockian Golden Age of the 1930s when the society basked in its exclusiveness and cultural legitimacy. But suspicion of young females who simultaneously embrace the Holmes texts and contemporary media culture can be traced back to the 1960s. Chris Redmond, now one of the most respected scholars among the BSI’s older generation, recounts a controversy that took place in *Baker Street Pages*, a newsletter he edited as a teenager. A teenaged girl drew comparisons between Holmes and two television programs later to become cult favorites, *The Man From U.N.C.L.E.* (NBC 1964–1968) and *Star Trek* (NBC 1966–1969). Readers’ anger at the association between Holmes and popular television was so intense that the teenager declared that she was “pulling back a little from Sherlockian activity” (Redmond 2016). But her writings offer more evidence of the new media fandoms’ overlapping with the long-established Sherlockian community.

Traditionalists took affront even from fans and fan-like behavior associated with Holmes adaptations. In 1988, *Baker Street Journal* editor Shreffler wrote an editorial bemoaning the attitudes and behaviors of newbies attracted by the critically praised British television series, starring Jeremy Brett. According to an introduction to a 2013 reprint of the editorial, “At that time, Jeremy Brett fandom threatened to overwhelm more traditional forms of Sherlockian sensibility, and Shreffler’s acute observations offered a way to think about the vast gulf between the Holmes fan and the Holmes devotee” (Faye 2013a). Legitimate Sherlockians, opined Shreffler, should be “devoted to the world where it is always 1895 and always 1934,” aspiring to “the Old World gentlemanly and ladylike milieu in which Sherlock Holmes lived and, later, from which the Baker Street Irregulars were born.” Most importantly, believed Shreffler, “The devotee is a person of language, of words; the fan is more commonly a person of half-ideas, half-expressed. The devotee is comfortable in genteel, dignified Sherlockian surroundings; the fan . . . is at home at a science-fiction convention.” Shreffler longingly looked back to the Sherlockian Golden Age in which the press had labeled “organized Sherlockians as ‘elite’” in reference to their “intellectual and behavioral devotion . . .” (Faye 2013a).

Shreffler's editorial embodies the "dismissive scorn commonly endured by fantasy fans ..." (Saler 2012, 123) and revels in the BSI's contrasting cultural legitimacy, which he perceives as threatened by the influx of newbies. But media fans achieved their own form of cultural legitimacy in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. This avid section of the audience, prone to repeat viewings of their favorite films and television programs as well as the consumption of allied products, such as books, games, action figures, and transmedia extensions, gradually grew more and more central to media industries, whose business models became reliant on the free publicity generated by fan engagement and the revenue streams generated by fan purchases. Despite this mainstreaming, however, the denigration of young, female fans has not only persisted but, in some cases, grown louder, both within and outside of fandom. I have quoted above Busse's (2013) comments concerning the fact that being "too attached, too obsessed, and too invested" is subject to criticism as "too girly or too juvenile" (6). Matt Hills (2012), too, addresses negative fan stereotypes, particularly that of the supposedly "feral" fans, a term that connotes "the wildness of untutored or unsocialized fans, unaware of long established media fandoms." Hills says that "*Xena* and "Harry Potter" have been seen as creating "feral" ... fandom in that they brought new, younger fans into media fandom and its activities" (123).

From the perspective of some older male members of the BSI, in the early twenty-first century the Sherlockian community was subject to invasion by a group of new, young, and female feral fans in the form of the Baker Street Babes, who equally embrace "the canon, film and television adaptations ... and associated topics." The Babes deserve consideration by fan studies scholars since the gendered conflicts they engendered in the Sherlockian community have clear parallels to those taking place in other formerly predominantly male fan communities such as gamers and Whovians. Established in 2011, the Babes describe themselves as "an all-female group of Sherlock Holmes fans dedicated to approaching the fandom from a female point of view ..." ("About the Baker Street Babes"). The Babes' stress upon their fannish and female perspectives distinguishes them from both the BSI and ASH. The firm and outright declaration of their fan allegiances contrasts with the BSI's self-identification as a literary society. While the Babes stress their female perspective, ASH, despite its roots in the 1968 protest, was assimilationist, its members desiring nothing more than full admittance into Sherlockian fellowship and The Great Game on an equal footing with the men. The Babes also differ from the BSI and ASH in being rooted in the attitudes and practices of online fandom, which, as young *Sherlock* fan Rebecca Stiever (2014) says:

has created a rift between the "traditional" and "non-traditional" Sherlockians – for example, those who belong to various Sherlock Holmes societies and those who belong to the Baker Street Babes ... What is it that made the "traditional" Sherlockian appreciate Holmes and are they the same things that drive "non-traditional" Sherlockians to write fanfiction, draw fan art, and create podcasts? (240)

"Traditional" and "non-traditional" Sherlockians share the same beloved object but worship him differently; to some of the former, the latter appear untutored, unsocialized, and feral.

The Babes originated with a podcast initiated by founder Kristina Manente who "wanted to give a voice to young female fans. We're poked fun at constantly by the media and those who don't necessarily understand fan culture, but while we may have quirks and in-jokes, there's an amazing level of scholarship and discussion happening" (Granshaw 2013). Each podcast draws between 5,000 to 10,000 listeners, but episodes focusing on the BBC's *Sherlock* have proven most popular, sometimes doubling the size of the audience. In a testament to fandom's current perceived value, both *Sherlock*'s producer, Sue Vertue, and PBS, the public service television network that broadcasts the program in the United States, have involved the Babes in their publicity strategies (Granshaw 2013). Members of the Babes have also appeared in the American mainstream media,

including “NBC, *The Today Show*, CBS” and “USA Today and online at FOX.” In addition to their prominent media profile, the Babes have become an integral part of the Sherlockian community, invited to the annual BSI dinner and hosting an annual ball open to all during the January weekend in New York City celebrating Holmes’s birthday (Faye 2013a). Betsy Rosenblatt, Baker Street Irregular and professor at Whittier Law School, said that the first of these balls “felt revolutionary” attracting as it did a broad spectrum of attendees including “traditional Sherlockians, fans of just the adaptations, young people, old people, pretty darn old people” (Schuessler 2013).

The Babes’ feral nature, their conspicuous divergence from the old elitist mode, and allegiance to the new practices of online fandom, elicited a backlash from a breakaway group of old guard Irregulars already disgruntled by the erosion of distinctions between their once-cherished literary society and typical fandom. Declining to attend any of the January weekend’s official activities, they instead hold meetings for a small group of the like-minded, with Jon Lellenberg, American agent for the Conan Doyle Estate and formerly the BSI’s official historian, acting as unofficial leader. *The New York Times* reported that many Sherlockians think that Lellenberg has “led a rear-guard action aimed at marginalizing ... new admirers,” particularly the Babes. Lellenberg and friends edited a pamphlet for distribution at their 2013 meeting that attacked the BSI and in particular its “embrace of the Babes.” Among the pamphlet’s authors was the aforementioned Philip Shreffler, who contributed an update of his 1988 editorial, “The Elite Devotee Redux” that the Babes obtained, scanned and made publicly available on their Tumblr site (Schuessler 2013).

According to the pamphlet’s editorial introduction, “a new fan movement” emerging in “circumstances all too similar to those that prompted his 1988 editorial” about the dangers of Brett fans, impelled Shreffler to pen his update—that new fan movement, of course, is the one centering around the globally popular *Sherlock*. Shreffler lamented “the conflation of Sherlockians as established in the twentieth century with its present practice by those whose primary adherence to Holmes is through the BBC’s *Sherlock*” He bemoaned the fact that the *Baker Street Journal* “has embraced” the term “Sherlockian fandom” and characterized as “somewhat chilling” a *Journal* editorial offering an “egalitarian ... ‘Welcome to your new home!’” to fans. (This welcome is, of course, in sharp contrast to original editor Smith’s desire to exclude hoi polloi.) Shreffler focused his ire on Babes’ founder Manente, noting that “she was somewhat fawningly feted, to our surprise and discomfort” at a BSI gathering. He particularly deprecated Manente’s colloquial and contemporary pod-cast speaking style, comparing it to a “potting shed on which is scrawled derogatory graffiti” (Faye 2013a). One wonders whether Shreffler would have attacked a young man as eagerly as he attacked a young woman; his outrage parallels that of other male fans who resent the incursion of young females into their domains.

Shreffler’s 1988 editorial did not, to my knowledge at least, elicit much push-back, but 25 years later circumstances had changed. Factors such as the admission of women into the BSI, the media’s wholehearted embrace of the Babes, and the cultural mainstreaming of fandom now rendered Shreffler’s opinions offensive to many. The new essay generated anger so intense as to find its way into the pages of *The New York Times*, in which founder of the Arthur Conan Doyle Society and long-standing BSI member Christopher Roden dismissed Shreffler’s views as “bigoted and pig-headed.” When posted on the Babes’ Tumblr, the essay “drew hundreds of links and sarcastic comments” (Schuessler 2013). Babe and self-described “silly fangirl” Lyndsay Faye (2013b) responded by pointing out that Holmes originated in and remains popular culture.

Sherlock Holmes is a *detective*, and therefore a *genre fiction hero*, who was printed in *disposable paperback magazines*, and as such belongs heart and soul to what Mr. Shreffler mockingly calls the “lightest-weight popular culture”... He was the great shame of his author’s life, the darling of *popular stage plays* and *popular films*

After the “Shreffgate” incident, as the Babes term it, founder Manente nonetheless expressed optimism about a future fandom forged by traditionalists and newbies together.

The vast majority of traditional Sherlockians are incredibly welcoming and very excited about the surge of new, young people entering into their world. There’s no right or wrong way to enjoy your love of something, and that’s something that we really want to hammer home and promote, as do, I think, most of those in the traditional world. (Granshaw 2013).

But, despite Manente’s declaration that there’s no “right or wrong way” to love Sherlock Holmes, the Babes still wanted to demonstrate their Sherlockian chops in traditional fashion; in 2012, they called for contributions to an edited collection, saying that it “would be really good to prove that we are more than just ‘silly fans,’ and that we can be just as scholarly as the big boys” (“Call for Entries” 2012).

Achieving scholarly equality required abandoning the Internet in favor of hard copy. “Established Holmesians” had “said that there was no concrete ‘body of work’ for our generation of Holmes fans, despite that it is all online. We toyed with the idea of just making a giant pdf, but instead we had an idea of making a collection of essays into a book” (“Call for Entries” 2012). Not only did the Babes edit a book, they published it with the specialized Sherlockian press, Gasogene Books, which has issued the scholarly musings of many a traditional player of the Great Game. But while they may play by the rules of the long-established fandom, the Babes have not renounced their in-your-face fangirl attitude. Manente declares in the book’s Preface,

When I was told I wasn’t serious enough to be a Sherlock Holmes fan, I felt a fire in my belly. Who had the right to say that to me? Just because I was a young woman, I was apparently invalidated as a Holmesian. I was told there was no “body of work” that proved we were anything more than fleeting fan girls. (Manente 2014, v)

The book, however, is unlikely to mollify the hard-core devotees; only one essay engages with the Writings on the Writings penned by the “Golden Age” players of the Great Game (Culp 2014). Another essay confirms the devotees’ worst imaginings of the Babe’s feral nature. Stiever, the *Sherlock* fan referred to above, admits “somewhat shamefully, that I have never read the original Sherlock Holmes short stories or novels” but that this has not stopped her “from engaging in the Sherlock Holmes fandom” (Stiever 2014, 241).

Yet Manente’s (2014) optimistic vision of traditional and non-traditional Sherlockians overcoming their differences may now be realized. Steven Rothman’s (2016) editorial in the latest issue of *The Baker Street Journal* welcomes all into the Sherlockian fold.

You are a Sherlockian if you think you are ... If you know who the unhappy John Hector McFarlane is or can name the three Garridebs, you are a Sherlockian. If you’ve made it a point to eat at Speedy’s, you are a Sherlockian. If you’ve spent too much time listening to Sherlockian podcasts, tweeting pictures of moustaches, observing Red Pants Mondays, or posting photos of otters and hedgehogs on Tumblr, you are a Sherlockian. If you’ve deconstructed Watson’s timeline in *The Hound of the Baskervilles* or pastiched an unraveling of the remarkable worm, you are a Sherlockian.

Non-Sherlockians (and my readers) will probably find most of the above impenetrable. Traditional Sherlockians undoubtedly recognize the unhappy John Hector McFarlane, a lawyer accused of murdering his client in “The Norwood Builder.” They may be able to name the three Garridebs from the story of the same name and know that Watson refers to the untold case of Isadora

Persano and the remarkable worm unknown to science in “The Adventure of Thor Bridge.” They are probably aware that Speedy’s is the café next to 221B Baker Street in the *Sherlock* series, but otters, hedgehogs, and Red Pants Mondays may baffle even those traditionalists who have embraced *Sherlock*, since they involve online practices. *Sherlock* fans delight in posting pictures of otters who look like Benedict Cumberbatch and hedgehogs who look like Martin Freeman. Even I had to turn to the Urban Dictionary to learn that Red Pants Monday “is a weekly event in the BBC *Sherlock* fandom, primarily on tumblr among shippers of Johnlock, featuring art and/or fanfiction of John Watson in a pair of red y-fronts” (Red Pants Monday).

Rothman (2016) code-shifts, simultaneously speaking the language of traditionalists and of those who, even if they haven’t read the Canon, know their otters from their hedgehogs from their y-fronts. The editorial stands in contrast to previous editors’ desire to exclude hoi polloi or Jeremy Brett fans and subtly rebukes the hard-core devotees who maintain that correctly loving *Sherlock Holmes* means playing by the rules of the cultural elites who embraced the character in the early twentieth century. The editorial also speaks to the ways in which an influx of media fans has profoundly transformed at least one literary society. My analysis of JASNA has hinted that it too may undergo a similar transformation due to a similar intake of members perhaps more familiar with, or at least more affectively attached, to the adaptations rather than the novels.

Conclusion

The chapter began by establishing the parallels between the attitudes and practices of literary societies and those of other fan groups. It moved on to an exploration of the differences and similarities between JASNA and the BSI, showing that issues of cultural legitimacy and gender play out in nuanced and opposing ways on the different levels in the cultural hierarchy in which people enact fannish practices and attitudes. The chapter shows that the insights of fan studies can illuminate the attitudes and practices of the “enthusiasts,” “devotees,” “aficionados,” “cognoscenti,” and “connoisseurs” of the canonical and semi-canonical as well as those of the fans of popular culture. I end as I began, by urging my fellow fan studies scholars to extend their remit beyond the popular; in so doing these scholars will demonstrate the value of the field’s insights to those scholarly disciplines that study high and middle-brow culture.

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Chapter 32

Porn Consumers as Fans

Alan McKee

Some porn consumers collect examples of pornography. They catalogue and organize their collections. They engage in debates about what makes for the best porn, and in doing so they form communities of consumption. In short, some porn consumers are fans. But there remains remarkably little academic research approaching porn consumption in this way. This chapter explores why this might be the case; and why taking such an approach allows useful intellectual moves for both fan studies and porn studies.

Fan studies is the study of agentic cultural consumption, that is, consumption that involves agency. You're about to read an 8,000-word chapter (including references) that explains why this insight is important. It is not, as it might first appear, tautological. We might say that, of course, all cultural consumption involves agency—the ability to “tak[e] control of events” and to “d[o] things” (“Agent” in Blackburn 2008), to make one's own choices (Archer 2000, 87)—so there's no need to state that a particular subset of academic work studies that kind of consumption. But as I will show in this chapter, it is not the case, even in the twenty-first century, that academic research across the board accepts the axiom that all cultural consumption is agentic. Neither is the insight that fan studies is the study of agentic cultural consumption a banal one. A reader might be tempted to ask, what does it matter if we believe that consumption involves agency or not? As I will show, the tradition of audience research in porn studies shows us clearly there are important consequences to taking consumption to be agentic or not—consequences that fan studies itself has been very aware of in its origins and development. This chapter takes the case study of pornography fans in order to show that much current academic research on audiences sees them as being without agency. It argues that looking at porn consumers as fans reintroduces their agency into a milieu where it has been sadly lacking. And demonstrating that this is the case allows us to make a meaningful statement about the nature of fan studies. As the remit of fan studies continues to broaden and widen, we can say of the diverse forms of work in this field that they recognize the agency of cultural consumption.

And so, to begin: how would you spot a porn fan?

Or perhaps we need to take a further step even further back: how would you spot a fan, of any kind of culture? As several researchers have pointed out, early fan studies focused on “only one, possibly the smallest subset of fan groups” (Gray, Sandvoss, and Harrington 2007, 8)—consumers whose cultural consumption practices involved clearly visible productive physical

activity, including meeting together, forming communities, dressing up, and producing their own texts in response to the culture they consumed. As Gray et al. argue, fan studies has now broadened the definition of what counts as fandom, to the extent where now even just choosing to consume a text can be counted as an example of being a fan. The object of study for fan studies now includes “regular, emotionally uninvolved audience members” (8) as well as the enthusiastic, productive, community-minded consumers who were of such interest to early fan studies. In this context, as Henry Jenkins (1997) has noted: “as fandom becomes such an elastic category, one starts to wonder – who isn’t a fan? What doesn’t constitute fan culture?” (364).

Well, we might say, porn consumption is one example of an area of practice that does not constitute fan culture. Or rather, porn consumption is not traditionally conceptualized as such. It is difficult to find academic research on porn consumers as fans. It is true that much early work on fandom included sexually explicit texts, but as the work of fan producers, not as the culture to which they responded (Bacon-Smith 1992; Jenkins 1992). In terms of work that examines the consumption of porn itself as fandom, it is difficult to find academic research. Simon Lindgren (2010) notes “there is a conspicuous lack of studies of porn audiences” (171), and only a small number of academic studies have even used the term “porn fans” (e.g., Lindgren’s own work, and Comella 2010).

Perhaps this is because the models of consumption generally applied in academic research into pornography are those of effects and addiction. It is true that many academic disciplines have taken an interest in pornography, and their approaches have been quite distinct. Film studies, in particular, has a strong tradition of research into pornography. Linda Williams’ (1999) *Hard Core* was a seminal text exploring the textual system of pornography, and its features as a genre. Tom Waugh’s (1996) *Hard to Imagine* also took a film studies approach, considering the production and circulation of gay pornography throughout its history, and his considerations of the use of those images in the formation of gay identities and communities might come close to what we would now call “fan studies.” Tristan Taormino, Celine Parreñas Shimizu, Constance Penley, and Mireille Miller-Young’s *Feminist Porn Book* (2013) ranged across a wide range of considerations, with the ethics of production and distribution as much a concern as the ethics of consuming pornography. Cultural historians have similarly made important contributions to our understanding of pornography. Lynn Hunt’s (1996) collection *The Invention of Pornography* explores how the cultural category came into being, and its relationship to aspects of modern culture. Robert Darnton’s (1996) *The Forbidden Best-sellers of Pre-Revolutionary France* provides a historical account of the political uses made of pornography. Walter Kendrick’s (1996) *The Secret Museum* focuses on the relationship between pornography as a category and class struggles in Victorian Britain. These researchers recognize that:

Sexual pleasure is a highly contested and politically fraught concept, and that media and popular culture have a long history of perpetuating deep-set gender and sexual inequities ... At the same time ... many of us create and consume media entertainment to enhance our sexual freedoms and pleasure seeking ... That is why pornography is such an important concept for anyone concerned with the role of media and popular culture in everyday life. (Sullivan and McKee 2015, 2)

But, despite this broad range of approaches from a number of academic disciplines, in terms of conceptualizing the relationship between pornography and its consumers, one academic discipline has remained central and powerful, reaching a point of normal science where hundreds of studies are conducted and articles published sitting comfortably within a stable paradigm and drawing on a familiar methodology, being the most visible to the wider public and the most popular with journalists seeking to understand pornography— this is psychology, and its exploration of the “effects” of pornography on those who are “exposed” to it.

Consumers without Agency

Psychologists have used two main approaches to produce data about the consumption of pornography: experimental studies and surveys. Experimental studies involve artificial settings where subjects are shown sexually explicit material and then their behavior is tested in some way (see, e.g., Malamuth 1981). By contrast, surveys gather data from pre-existing populations to map behavior in naturalistic settings (see e.g., Garcia 1986). With regard to experimental studies—there are no pornography fans in the laboratory. Fan studies emerged as an attempt to describe what consumers of entertainment media actually do in practice—not what entertainment producers expect them to do or government policy-makers think they should do, or what academics would like them to do. There was an ethnographic element in the original work, discovering and reporting on the practices of an observed culture (Bacon-Smith 1992, 3). By contrast, experimental laboratory work explicitly excludes agency from consideration. Just as in a physics laboratory, in the experimental psychological laboratory, object A (a bat, or a video of pregnant women having sex) hits object B (a ball, perhaps, or a 13-year-old boy) and we can be confident that the results of the impact will be replicated wherever the experiment is conducted, and no matter which bat or ball, or video of pregnant women having sex, or 13-year-old boy we use. Balls being hit by bats have no agency—and neither, in the psychological laboratory, do people watching pornography. Laboratory experiments are set up explicitly to ensure that this is the case.

The way in which this suppression of agency operates can be seen in six main ways. First, when consumers get to control their porn consumption in their everyday lives, people choose when they feel like watching pornography. In laboratory experiments, it is forced on them. Second, in laboratory experiments, the viewers are shown, without knowing what they're going to see, material that many of them find upsetting or distressing (including violent pornography). When viewers control consumption, consumers choose what kinds of pornography they are going to watch. Third, in the experiments, the people exposed to pornography have to watch it for as long as the scientists decide. Outside of the experiment, they can choose how long to watch pornography for. Fourth, in laboratory experiments, subjects are forced to watch pornography in the conditions chosen by experimenters—sometimes alone in a university room, sometimes in a group with strangers. At home, they get to choose who they are with when they watch pornography—alone, with sexual partners, or with a social group. Fifth, they can choose what they're doing while they watch pornography (commonly masturbating or having sex) (Potter 1996, 111). And sixth, when they can choose how they consume it, many people orgasm while watching pornography, and thus end the experience in a post-orgasmic state. In the experiments, the people watching the porn are not allowed to masturbate (Zillmann 2004). Unlike the example of a bat hitting a ball, which we assume will produce similar effects regardless of the social context in which it occurs, the ways in which people make meaning and take pleasure from pornography are likely to be dramatically affected by these issues of choice.

The second major approach in psychological research involves the use of surveys. Surveys do indeed seek to gather data about naturalistic consumption of pornography; and yet the gathering and reporting of this data still insist on a lack of agency, reporting on the “effects” of pornography on those exposed to it. Psychological approaches tend to assume that the most powerful effects of pornography are negative—rather than considering the wide range of ways, some pro-social, some undesirable, in which consumers might engage with the texts (Brannigan 2004, 95); and they often assume that pornography is the most important variable in producing a variety of negative social outcomes, defending this assumption by reference to previous researchers who have made the same assumption, rather than to measurements of the relative impact of parents, schooling, peers, religion, and so on (Collins et al. 2004, e280). Studies from a psychological perspective consistently confuse correlation with causality

(Collins et al. 2004, e288). Further, psychological approaches tend to homogenize pornography, treating every text as communicating the same message (Smith 2007, 19). These approaches assume that the “effects” of exposure to pornography are the same for everybody—ignoring the multiple ways in which media texts can be used by different consumers in different situations (see Bragg 2006).

At every stage in the process, agency is excluded. Consumption of pornography is something that is done to consumers—not by them.

Passive Addiction

More recently, the metaphor of addiction has become popular to describe pornography consumption—both in public debates and academic research on the issue. In his influential book *The Brain That Changes Itself*, Norman Doidge (2007) illustrates his claims that pornography makes physical changes to the brain through “The story of Sean Thomas, first published in England’s *Spectator*”:

In 2001, shortly after he first went online, [Thomas] got curious about the porn everyone said was taking over the Internet ... galleries of naked girls, of common types of sexual fantasies ... Then one day he came across a site that featured spanking images. To his surprise he got intensely excited ... “This was the moment”, he writes “that the real addiction set in ... What other kinks was I harbouring? What other secret and rewarding corners lurked in my sexuality that I would now be able to investigate ... Plenty as it turned out ...” (109–110)

As Naomi Wolf makes this argument: “What pornography does to the brain is terrible; it activates the same dopamine reaction that gambling or other addictive behaviour does. The more you masturbate to porn, the more you want to; it is desensitising, so you need more and more.” (Naomi Wolf, quoted in Wyndham 2012, 17). It is worth noting that, despite the scientific-sounding language of “dopamine” and “addiction,” this is not a scientific point of view. The concept of dopamine as an “erototoxin” was developed by anti-pornography activist Judith Reisman, who is not a neuroscientist (Pilkington 2005, 10). It has been refuted by neuroscientists, who argue that the proponents of the idea “offe[r] little, if any, convincing evidence to support their perspectives. Instead, excessive liberties and misleading interpretations of neuroscience research are used to assert that excessive pornography consumption causes brain damage” (Reid, Carpenter, and Wong 2011, 64).

More than this, though, the metaphor of addiction is important for this argument because it, once again, excludes agency. Clarkson and Kopaczewski (2013) note that a metaphor of addiction “endangers concepts of free will, agency, and responsibility” (134). Discussing the work of Carnes in developing the metaphor of sex addiction, they point out that “Ironically, despite Carnes’ work with sex offenders, his formulation of addiction absolves them of responsibility,” and go on to quote from him:

While our society is shifting to a more open attitude toward sexual expression, we still view the amount and kind of activity as a matter of personal choice. For the addict, however, there is no choice. No choice. The addiction is in charge. That addicts have no control over their sexual behavior is a very hard concept to accept when the addicts’ trails have left broken marriages and parentless children, or worse, victims of sexual crimes. (Carnes 1985, ix, quoted in Clarkson and Kopaczewski 2013, 134)

Neither of these two popular models for understanding the consumption of pornography—effects or addiction—retains any space for human agency. Pornography is something that happens to people, in these models. For researchers taking these approaches, there is no possibility of judgment or discretion. People who are affected by, or addicted to, pornography have no space to choose what they like, or how they will consume it, or what their responses will be to it. There is no space in this model for the affected or addicted consumer to engage in the practices that characterize early fan work—forming communities, engaging in debates about quality, creating their own culture in response to the texts they consume.

This is the first reason that I argue that the simple proposition that we can study porn consumers as fans is important—because it returns agency to an area of study where it has, too often, been sadly lacking. Early fan studies work was so important because it appeared in a context where mass media models of effects and hegemony still held sway. For Jenkins and Bacon-Smith to show us that consumers of entertainment consumed in ways that were unexpected, interesting, productive—indeed, that demonstrated agency—was vitally important at that time. Such claims have become less surprising now, perhaps because fannish behavior has become more visible and more mainstreamed (Jenkins 1997), indeed where it might appear that the geeks have inherited the earth (hurrah!). But in the case of pornography, an increasingly visible and enthusiastic culture of consumption has not led to widespread acceptance of the agency involved: indeed, if anything, the opposite is the case. The more we become aware of active consumption of pornography, the more we are told to worry about effects and addiction.

And so, to study porn consumers as fans—simply to consider their agency and how they express it—is, at this point in the academic conversation, a surprisingly potent move.

We could start, for example, with that most typical and essential of fan behaviors: collecting.

Fans Like to Collect

We know that fans like to collect (Geraghty 2014). Indeed, a defense of collecting is one of the key intellectual elements of fan studies (Hills 2002, 5–7). Fan studies recognizes the value of popular collecting.

And for as long as there has existed pornography as a distinct cultural category, porn fans have collected it. Walter Kendrick notes that although sexually explicit representations have existed for as long as human culture, the concept of “pornography” as a separate category of production purely for sexual pleasure emerges only in the nineteenth century. Dean (2014) argues that “pornography as a category emerges in tandem with the archive ... pornography and the archive come together as functions of modernity” (1). If fandom is closely related to “global modernity” (Gray, Sandvoss, and Harrington 2007, 9), then we can see the desire to collect, to archive, and to catalogue as both essentially Victorian, and essentially fannish.

On both these scores, Henry Spencer Ashbee was the “archetypal Victorian” (Waugh 1996, xiii). Ashbee was a pornography fan (Marcus 1969, 35). Part of a community of collectors of erotica including Frederick Hankey, James Monckton Milnes, John Camden Hotten and William Dugdale (Marcus 1969, 68), Octave Delpierre, James Campbell, and William S. Potter (Ashbee 1885, xlv, xlvii, xlix), Ashbee’s collection of pornography was vast, and because of his own fan-productions, modern readers now have access to details about his archive of erotica. Between 1877 and 1885 Ashbee curated three large bibliographies of pornography—*Index Librorum Prohibitorum: being Notes Bio-Biblio-Icono-graphical and Critical, on Curious and Uncommon Books* (Ashbee 1877) (its title stolen from the Catholic Church’s Index of Forbidden Books); *Centuria Librorum Absconditorum* (roughly translated “a century of hidden books”) (Ashbee 1879); and *Catena Librorum Tacendorum* (roughly, “a series of hidden books”) (Ashbee 1885). These have now been

scanned and are available online to every enthusiast of historical pornography, and the history of pornography. These bibliographies— self-published, as befits fan productions—describe around 350 different works of pornography (the exact number is difficult to determine: In some “notices” of writers—short biographies—he names up to a dozen titles on a single page; in other cases, he spends up to 27 pages on a single piece of pornography. The number also depends on how one counts multi-volume works, translations, and texts that consist of parts of other texts that have been cannibalized and reconstituted). For most of these works, Ashbee includes bibliographical details, information about publication history and discussions of authorship. For many, his bibliographies also contain—to reassure us that the collector was indeed interested in the material included between the covers—several pages of quotations and summaries of the filth to be found within. For example, had we any doubt as to the nature of the material contained within the publication *The Romance of Chastisement*, we can read excerpts to ensure we are fully informed:

Renardeau [the French instructress] darted her hand beneath my clothes and reported that I wore no stays. Nor do I now; my waist is naturally small, and a little stiffening in the body of the dress suffices to keep my breasts in order. Steinkopf [German teacher], who had resumed her place, and Armstrong, then laid hold of me, and despite my prayers and tears, while one held my hands above my head, the other opened my dress behind and stripped off skirt, petticoats, and drawers; then with one shameless drag she furled up my shift in front and rear, and pinned it over my shoulders. The next moment I was forced upon my knees on the block, with four hands grasping my arms and pressing my neck down. The breeze from the sky-light fanned my back, and I felt that the eyes of all present were riveted on my naked person ... Then, too, there was a thrill in a certain part, I knew magnetically, of both our persons, which every fresh lash kept on increasing. The added pang unlocked new floods of bliss, till it was impossible to tell in my case whether the ecstasy was most of pain or pleasure. (Ashbee 1877, 346–348)

The desire to collect has informed the practices of many porn fans since Ashbee, and this has proven to be a boon to researchers. Historians are well aware of the difficulty of accessing ephemeral entertainment materials, and have often found that they must turn to the collections of non-salaried collectors to find such materials. It is perhaps not surprising that much of our knowledge of pornography fans comes from historians who have accessed fan collections to conduct academic research, which is formally published, and then becomes less ephemeral. Thomas Waugh’s (1996) *Hard to Imagine*, for example, draws extensively on the collections of non-salaried pornography fans—he acknowledges “Bill, Charles, Chuck, Clarence, Dave, Dick, Don, Herbert, Jim, Lon, Paul and other sexy elder gentlemen ... all of whom gave unstintingly of their memories and images in order to prevent this history from being forgotten” (ix). Mercer (2014) similarly notes “[t]he complete absence of any institutionally-hosted porn archives in the United Kingdom” (411), related to “institutionalized concerns about the potential for adverse publicity to personal concerns about reputation and the legitimacy of the material” (411)—and thus the importance of personal collections like the one he describes in his article:

The heart of the collection consists of just over 1200 numbered VHS tapes of commercially available “mainstream” gay porn. The majority of the tapes seem to have been collected during the early to late 1990s ... The VHS collection is accompanied by a meticulously maintained, hand-written catalogue of the contents of the tapes. The catalogue provides details about video titles, directors and performers, aspect ratios, what appears to be a personal ratings system (based on stars awarded to preferred titles) and a coding system that provides instructions for the optimum television settings (contrast, colour, balance, and so on) for the best picture quality for each tape. (412)

There exists little research on the collecting practices of porn fans in a digital age: is a collection of bookmarks, or downloaded files, as satisfying as a collection of erotic books or VHS tapes? While anecdotal evidence suggests that porn fans continue to collect in a digital realm, much work remains to be done in this area.

We can say with confidence that Ashbee was a pornography fan. Indeed, more than this, he may have been an early example of that recently identified category the “pro-am” (Leadbeater and Miller 2004) or produser (Bruns 2009). As Steven Marcus (1969) argues: “We may also regard him as belonging to the group of English gentlemen-amateur scholars, private persons who turned a personal interest, hobby, avocation or mania to good account” (65). Ashbee collected porn, as fans do—and he also treated his collection as fans treat their objects of interest.

Fans Like to Taxonomize

As well as simply collecting, fans like to engage in various forms of taxonomy. We produce lists. And pornography fans do indeed taxonomize. Once again, Henry Ashbee—not only the first but perhaps the exemplary pornography fan in Victorian England—shows the way. In the first volume of his bibliography, Ashbee (1877) notes: “I had at first intended to classify my material under *subjects* but this I soon found impracticable, the titles of this kind of books being so specially deceptive” (liii), and so he settled for an alphabetical approach. By the second volume, he has overcome his concerns, which has “enabled me, without binding myself to any strict rule, or system of classification, to throw together books by the same author, upon the same subject, or of a kindred nature” (Ashbee 1879, xiii). For example, a significant proportion of this volume is devoted to a collection of anti-clerical texts, laying bare the depravity of the clergy—including such texts as *The Confessional Unmasked*, *The Cloisters Laid Open; or adventures of the priests and nuns*, and *The Nunns’ Complaint Against the Fryars*. By the third volume, Ashbee has embraced taxonomy—even if, as he himself notes: “I have not bound myself to any hard and fast rule of arrangement” (Ashbee 1885, xlv). Although formal categories are not used, the volume begins with accounts of several texts about sex and marriage, then a number addressing prostitution; later in the volume, he describes a number of bawdy periodicals. It is still the case that academic researchers do not have a definition of pornography itself, never mind a reliable taxonomy of its categories (Willoughby and Busby 2015). Nevertheless, categorization continues to be an unremarkable part of pornography consumption: one need only consider one of the many aggregate pornography hubs online that organize a cornucopia of explicit images according to a familiar series of categories—Amateur, Asian, B(ig)B(eautiful)W(omen), Big Dick and Bisexual, through Latina, Massage and MILF, to Uniforms, Vintage and Webcam (Pornhub 2016). Once again, in a simple and uncontroversial way, we see agency. The organization of texts into categories demonstrates the ability to make distinctions between different kinds of material. Pornography is not simply homogeneous. The models of “desensitisation” (Seigfried-Spellar and Rogers 2013, 1997) or “escalation” (D’Orlando 2011, 59)—whereby everybody who is exposed to pornography ends up slipping from an interest in vanilla sex to BDSM kink—rely on a belief that consumers see only two kinds of pornography—soft and hard—and cannot control their ability to slide from one to the other. The categorization work of fans, from Ashbee’s idiosyncratically picaresque approach to the familiar taxonomies of a Pornhub, gives lie to this belief.

Fans Argue about Quality

Sometimes the lists that fans produce involve judgments about quality. Fans love to argue about the best, about top tens, about the criteria upon which such judgments should be made in relation to their favored form of culture. I have written about this before: as “Jackie Jenkins” explains in relation to taxonomizing the seasons of the television show *Doctor Who*:

Nigel’s mate, James, not a [*Doctor Who*] fan, is often confused as to why we are. “When was *Doctor Who* good?” he asked ... [we explained that] “We have popular seasons, we have unpopular popular seasons, we’ve popular unpopular seasons, we’ve popular unpopular popular. There’s massive, there’s rubbish, there’s madness ... Ratings-wise, the unpopular seasons were more popular than the three popular seasons ... One of the unconscious Laws of Fandom is that you can only have three unpopular seasons at a time— with the exception of the Pertwee era, where four are allowed ... Through this reversal, the popularly unpopular popular had been sandwiched by an unconnected season popularly considered excellent ... So to answer your question, ‘When was *Doctor Who* good, save a few weeks around Christmas 1963, quite possibly never.’” “But that’s nonsense.” “No, James”, said Chas, “It’s appreciation.” (J. Jenkins, quoted in McKee 2001, n.p.)

Henry Ashbee is quite explicitly involved in appreciation. Throughout his bibliographies, even while he insists that he is cataloguing all pornographic material regardless of literary merit, he nevertheless lets us know his judgments of the quality of each piece. *Essai sur la femme, en Trois Epitres* is “entirely devoid of literary merit” (Ashbee 1877, 222). *The Crimes of the Clergy* “a very remarkable work, and if the scandalous memoirs placed on record in it are not invariably accurate they are certainly true in the main, and the book has consequently a proportionate historical value, although it is without any literary merit” (Ashbee 1879, 45). *The Mysteries of the Verbena House* is “one of the best books of its kind, and a truthful picture of what is passing around us” (Ashbee 1885, 264), and so on. This desire to judge the relative quality of texts is a fan practice that is widespread among pornography consumers—even if rarely recognized in dominant accounts of passive exposure to pornography. In a survey of 1,029 consumers of pornography in the early 2000s (McKee, Albury, and Lumby 2008), we asked a range of questions about their porn consumption—how much they watched, how they watched it, what other forms of culture they consumed. Question 25 asked ‘What do you think makes for good pornography?’ The answers to this question demonstrated that porn consumers do indeed make distinctions between good and bad porn. There are differences between consumers, but these are not entirely idiosyncratic: there are communities of consumers with particular preferences.

We offered consumers a series of tick boxes: quality of writing, good storyline, specific kinds of sex, attractive actors/actresses, good acting, enthusiasm in sex scenes, good looking bodies, good production values. Not a single consumer failed to tick at least one of these boxes—every one responded to the invitation to tell us what makes good pornography. Of particular interest in relation to this chapter was the final category: “Other (please specify)”. Of the respondents, 150 felt strongly enough about this to tick “Other,” to identify the fact that the boxes available didn’t quite match up with their thoughts on the issue, and give us more information about their view on what makes good porn.

The results are fascinating not simply for demonstrating that these respondents had thought about this issue. In many cases, there were mutually exclusive discourses of value. Some consumers insisted that there should be “no fake tits” while others enthusiastically embraced “Massive, implant enlarged breasts.” Some respondents wanted “Good looking bodies, both male and female is important,” while others wanted “non-professional models and actors.” Some think that good pornography involves “real people in real places,” while others explicitly asked for “fantasy settings.” Some people wanted actors to get straight to the sex, with no “lame story lines,” while

others want a “realistic story.” Some asked for “Straight, oral, normal intercourse,” while others wanted “Kinky and shocking” sex.

In short, it appears that among porn fans there is no final agreement about what makes for good porn. But, as I have argued elsewhere, the purpose of discussions about aesthetics between fans might not be to reach a final consensus about what is truly the best, but rather to create communities of discussion: in fact, I have argued, “the purpose of making value judgments in culture is not to speak a truth that must be heard, but to engage communities in conversation” (McKee 2007a, 211). Which raises another important point for thinking about porn consumers as fans: fans build communities.

Fans Build Communities

From the earliest work in fan studies, researchers have been interested in the formation of fan communities (Bacon-Smith 1992; Jenkins 1992). Once again, Henry Ashbee impresses as an exemplar of porn fandom. No isolated collector of pornography, he was, as noted above, at the center of a community of active consumption. He was friends and colleagues with Frederick Hankey, James Monckton Milnes, John Camden Hotten, and William Dugdale (Marcus 1969, 68)—all fans of pornography with extensive collections (Marcus 1969, 36–37). Ashbee wrote about his indebtedness to this community of erotic bibliophiles in putting together his own (fan) projects:

In another place I have indicated my indebtedness to two bibliophiles who afforded me material assistance at the outset of my undertaking. Unfortunately death has since removed both those gentlemen from among us, and I now desire to express my obligation to them in a more direct manner. A kinder hearted man, a stauncher friend, a more polished gentleman, a more amiable and entertaining companion than OCTAVE DELEPIERRE never existed ... JAMES CAMPBELL died at Crieff in Scotland, July 4, 1878, at a ripe age ... Without the advantage of an university education, James Campbell's acquirements were considerable. He read with ease Latin, French and Italian, and although not familiar with German, few erotic books in that language were unknown to him. (Ashbee 1885, xlv, xlvii)

These fellow fans shared their collections and their passions:

This leads me to the mention of two other gentlemen, whose remarkable collections were always at my disposal, and who have both been called away since the completion of my last volume ... WILLIAM S. POTTER ... [and] FREDERICK HANKEY. His collection was small, but most choice, and comprised objects (75) and books, exclusively erotic. (Ashbee 1885, xlix, l)

Communities of porn fans certainly exist in the twenty-first century. Virtually, of course, the Internet has opened up possibilities for easy community formation. Simon Lindgren is one of the few academic researchers to have used the language of “porn fan communities” to describe the practice of pornography consumption (Lindgren 2010, 172). Analyzing the discussions on “a popular mainstream heterosexual pornography message board ... with over 130,000 members” (171–172), he finds that “almost as much energy and space is devoted to cultivating the ‘We’ of the viewer collective as to discussing the female porn stars” (178). He finds that the construction of online communities has made the consumption of pornography a more social space: “The viewer position that has emerged from my analysis is definitely not that of a shamed loner. The discourse of the [online] porn fans clearly has a high degree of sociality, as well as notable elements of ... identity work. The porn audience is now increasingly social” (184).

Pornography fans also have conventions, that ultimate physical expression of community that caught the attention of early fan studies. The Adult Video News Adult Entertainment Expo “attracts roughly ... 30,000 attendees,” of whom about 17,000 are fans (Comella 2010, 288). For porn performers, the event is “hard work” (Moreland 2015, 163–164). For the fans, it is a chance to meet their favorite performers, get autographs, and be part of a community of consumers with similar interests:

Most, although certainly not all fans, are men, who travel to Las Vegas from all over the US and other parts of the world, forking over \$80 for a day pass ... and the chance to rub shoulders with industry favourites such as Tera Patrick, Jessica Drake, Joanna Angel and Belladonna. A considerable part of the Expo’s visual spectacle is designed with fans in mind: the costly mega-booths, the presence of performers, who patiently pose for pictures and sign autographs, the attention grabbing gimmicks such as girl-on-girl “make-out” sessions, the abundance of T&A, and free porn DVDs that are handed out at many booths. These strategies are all geared toward building and sustaining a loyal fan base and ... boosting future sales and profits. (Comella 2010, 289)

Some consumers of pornography like to collect, taxonomize, evaluate, and form communities. They are porn fans.

Conclusion

Fan studies is the study of agentic cultural consumption. This chapter has hopefully shown why this is a meaningful and important definition—because, in some areas of academic research into consumption, agency is still explicitly—and unfairly—excluded. It is to illustrate this point that this chapter has sought to demonstrate that it makes sense to talk about “porn fans.” As I argued at the start, this project may seem to be banal, as though it’s too obvious to even be stated. But as I argue, there are reasons why so little work exists on the consumers of pornography as fans—and that to make this claim is a useful intellectual move both for porn studies and for fan studies. For porn studies, studying consumers as fans reintroduces agency into the work of consuming sexually explicit material. That this is necessary might surprise researchers outside of porn studies, who assume that the battle to recognize the agency of consumers was fought and won in the 1980s. This is not the case: the dominant approaches to studying pornography and to discussing it in the public sphere—effects and addiction—continue to exclude the possibility of human agency in choosing what and how to consume sexually explicit materials. Simply to focus on porn fans powerfully injects agency back into the discussion.

And I think that this move is also useful for fan studies. As the object of study of fan studies expands from its initial focus on the most obviously productive and positive forms of consumption, the question remains, as I noted above, “who isn’t a fan? What doesn’t constitute fan culture?” (Jenkins 1997, 364). The case of porn fans demonstrates that we can say that fan culture is the study of agentic consumption—and that this is still a meaningful position to take. We still need to make this argument. We still need to provide evidence that consumers of culture—whether *Star Trek* or *Harry Potter* or pornography—are not affected addicts, but make sense of their consumption, and make meaning with it.

This, I think, is important. It is worth noting in passing one thing that I don’t think is important—whether or not pornography fans are genuinely resisting capitalism. I absolutely accept that fandom is “an ever more integral aspect of lifeworlds in global capitalism” and that there is a “deep-seated symbiosis between the cultural practice and perspective of being a fan and industrial modernity at large” (Gray, Sandvoss, and Harrington 2007, 9). What I do not accept is that bracketing

off fan behavior as a particular subset of cultural consumption and then demanding of it whether it “genuinely” resists capitalism—using criteria that are not applied in a similar way to the consumption of high art, journalism, or education, for example—is a fundamentally misconceived project and a dead end for fan studies (McKee 2007b).

But, as Henry Ashbee showed us at the birth of modern pornography, pornography fans do exist. They are not “addicts.” They are not “affected” by the material they consume. They are connoisseurs, aficionados, experts—who collect, catalogue, evaluate, and form communities. They are fans. Both porn studies and fan studies can learn from them.

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Chapter 33

Kant/Squid (The Fanfiction Assemblage)

Anne Jamison

Reflecting on fanfiction tends to bring out inconsistencies in the ways we think about other types of literature and popular entertainment. In part for this reason, I have found it productive to consider continuities between fanfiction and a broad and longstanding tradition of “writing from sources” that encompasses both Homer and *Pride and Prejudice* and *Zombies*: “Read in its context, among systems of stories,” I argued in my first published work on the subject (Jamison 2012), “fanfiction ‘lays bare the device,’ as Russian formalists aspired to do to literature, revealing narrative and character as a cobbled-together patchwork of preceding traits, stories, and styles.” I still believe this to be true, but fanfiction’s *discontinuities* with literary tradition should command attention in their own right as well as for the insights they offer into other literary modes or models of authorship. I have also argued that fanfiction today—understood here in the sense of digitally and communally produced and consumed transformative works—generates forms, narratives, and experiences in fiction that are inaccessible to other modes of production and consumption. For both these reasons, then, fanfiction should be read and studied in a way it still largely is not—in literary studies. A likely necessary first step would be to arrive at a definition of what fanfiction is and what precisely makes it different from other fictional modes—but that, as it turns out, is a tall order. I have seen it argued that fanfiction’s distinctive nature rests in: its means of production and distribution; the shared assumptions of the community that produces and consumes its texts; the communal nature of its production *per se*; the now instant, unmediated digital connection between text, response, and living human author; the relationship between text and source material; the relationship between fan author and source material; fanfiction’s lack of autonomy from its sources; its lack of commercial value; its repudiation of commercial value; its violation of authorial rights; its freedom of forms and formats; its thematic preoccupations; its repetitive nature; its (lesser) quality of sentence and narrative structure (see other chapters in this volume, especially those by Jenkins, Hellekson, and Harrington and Bielby in Part I, by Zubernis and Larsen in Part II, by Phillips, Chin and Seymour in Part III, and by McCormick, Stein and Bourdaa in Part IV). I have argued for many though certainly not all of these positions myself, and I find even more of them persuasive—but none exhaustively or entirely so.

While consensus on exactly where and how the line between fanfiction and other literary forms should be drawn is hard to come by, however, this difficulty does little to shake the consensus that such a distinction does, in fact, exist. That is, the term's resistance to a simple, widely agreed-upon definition does nothing to undermine the confidence with which people use it to designate a recognizable phenomenon. "Fanfiction" is used and understood to distinguish something it does not reliably name; the term often makes a claim about a text's relation to law, economics, political and cultural power, community, gender, and even quality. In all these uses, "fanfiction" is predicated on hierarchies in which it never occupies the superior position. This relational quality holds true not only as a means of distinguishing *from* other fictional modes, it is also fanfiction's *modus operandi*, which in turn affects—effects, even—the qualities and attributes of fanfiction texts and networks. Thus, literary and critical theories that challenge unitary models of art, textuality, and authorship—Barthes and Foucault are often invoked; here I am thinking through Genette, Deleuze, and Kittler—are germane to fanfiction studies. So employed, such theories do the double work of pointing out continuities and accounting for differences between fanfiction and literary history, but they reveal less about fanfiction than they do about literary texts and how the unitary model of authorship has obscured their multiple origins. Despite these theoretical interventions, this unitary model continues to hold sway in both the popular imagination and the publishing industry, where it seems almost an article of faith but might just as well be understood as a matter of convenience. Fanfiction's difference *from* publishing's unitary authorship—in which rights and royalties are easily assigned and works are readily classified—is at this point one of the conditions of its existence. This constitutive, necessary relationality gave fanfiction the advantage when it came to exploring and expanding the possibilities of digital fiction—as did the hierarchy of value that has thus far distinguished print from digital dissemination.

Historically, theoretically, structurally, and economically constrained to a position of inferiority and otherness, "fanfiction" *must* designate a difference, structurally speaking, from other modes—but as long as it does that, its potential destabilizing threat is contained and it may do what it wants. If what it wants involves tentacles and texting, so much the better—there's plenty of wriggle room under the radar for it to stretch its many, many limbs. In this vein, throughout this chapter, I count on cephalopods to bring an element central to the topic at hand but sorely lacking from discussions such as this one: just how much fun fanfiction can be. In this article, "fun" will be played by a drunken octopus, while academic discourse will be played by an anxious squid.

"Real Fanfiction" v. Ficcish Fiction

In *Fic* (2013), I introduced fanfiction as one more form of "writing from sources," a mode of composition that far predates any of our now familiar notions about originality and authorship. This line of argument has now become a ubiquitous defense of this very popular but much derided form of writing. In discussing differing attitudes to originality, source, and authorship in relation to the literary theories of Gérard Genette, for example, Barbara Bordalejo (2014) observes that the history of literature is "filled with writers who not only wrote about the same characters, but even retold the same story" (135). Remarking that Genette referred to such reworkings as "hypertext" and their sources as "hypotext," Bordalejo highlights the sometimes prescient-seeming relationship that Genette's paratextual theory bears to the digital. Genette's theory thus applied reinforces the continuity between contemporary fanfiction's networked digital texts and the webs of reference and non-authorial framing that have always shaped literary texts. That is, while Genette's frame of reference was not digital literature, much less fanfiction, his theories situate textual relationships sometimes considered as defining elements of fanfiction at the center of literary history and literary texts. Bordalejo gives the example of Chaucer, who claims in the Clerk's Tale to be retelling

Petrarch but comes closer to retelling a similar story from Boccaccio, and further notes that such borrowings would not have seemed strange to Chaucer's contemporaries and in fact are still common in commercially published literature. This latter phenomenon has recently been analyzed in Jeremy Rosen's (2016) *Minor Characters Have Their Day*, a book-length study of contemporary commercial fiction based on the minor characters of canonical works. Rosen argues persuasively for the influence of the external, extratextual force exerted by the consolidation of commercial publishing and the canon's built-in audience in shaping the rise of minor character fiction. Like their earlier forebears, these contemporary reworkings are nonetheless seen as "original," Bordalejo argues, whereas "such retellings within the frameworks of fanfiction" encounter particular resistance despite this ample canonical precedent and commercial company. Bordalejo ascribes this resistance to the fact that fanfiction "has not been placed in the authoritative position of having gone through the complete process of editing and publication," and the irony of locating the mantle of authorship in non-authorial, post-writing activities in no way detracts from the accuracy of the insight (136). This discrepancy also points somewhat uncomfortably to the extent to which "originality"—along with its connotations of value—has been conflated with potential salability. Or, in Francesca Middleton's (2016) incisive formulation:

No matter how incoherent, there is resistance of fan fiction as a commercial enterprise that marks monetary exchange ... and it becomes a boundary line between literature and fan fiction that most authors are content to see in place. This reinforces a model through which purchase is a key moment within the reading experience. Indeed, we can say that payment legitimizes a work as literary endeavor: payment is a liminal point after which a work gains the capacity to manipulate the characters and settings that make up its text. (4.5)

Even as recursion to the long tradition of literary reworkings has become a standard move in both professional and fan-authored defenses of fanfiction—so standard that if these defenses were fanfic, we'd call this move a trope—this well-established parallel cannot do away with the tendency to see fanfiction as somehow apart from what we call "literature." A recent volume of the journal *Transformative Works and Cultures* also examines various continuities between fanfiction and older forms of storytelling, analyzing earlier iterations of fanfic-like texts and practices in light of the specific historical and cultural attitudes toward texts and authorship that sometimes get elided in more popular framings of these parallels. Furthermore, if all literature ever has been doing this borrowing that we associate with fanfiction, why, then, does fanfiction seem distinct? In her essay comparing contemporary notions of fanfiction as author "abuse" to apparently similar authorial anxieties in Imperial Rome, Middleton frames the question as follows:

Fan fiction, after all, is a category of literary practice that is universally understood to be something different from other types of literary composition. But why? And how? In terms of form, one might say that fan fiction is recognizable as the transformative extension of literary work already in existence—yet this idea, of transforming and extending what has come before, is a habit that is recognizable across the entirety of ancient literary culture, with no specific term to denote it. (1.4)

I tend to approach any assertion of truths universally acknowledged with a skepticism likely conditioned by formative years spent deep in a family Jane Austen fandom, but it is incontestable that fanfiction is widely understood by both opponents and practitioners to be "something different from other types of literary composition." In this essay Middleton argues that discrepancies between ancient and modern understandings of the material text and its terms of distribution illuminate the ways in which we judge fanfiction on these terms. As Middleton also argues, contemporary notions of textuality and authorship often all but ignore the material form of the text's distribution, and the comparison to Roman authorship is valuable in part for illuminating

materiality's importance in our own judgments. The essay begs another question, however: does the widespread sense of fanfiction's difference derive from qualities that works of fanfiction hold in common, qualities intrinsic to the texts that would identify them as fanfiction, no matter the context? Or does the difference lie more in extratextual elements—what Genette would call “factual”—the conditions of writing, identity of writers, mode of distribution, or non-profit status?

“Fanfiction” is hardly alone in apparently naming an identifiable kind of writing that is nonetheless very difficult to pin down. “Poetry,” for example, which used to refer to works in verse, no longer has such an exclusive meaning, but even as its definition today varies greatly depending on who is asked, most people would still understand “poetry” to name a distinctive kind of writing. Perhaps “fanfiction” is in such a nebulous category. Terms, after all, change over time. “Fan fiction”—as the term used to be written and continues as the form preferred by academic and journalistic style guidelines if not by the broader community of fan writers—referred in the 1950s to stories written by science fiction fans rather than professional writers and only later acquired the sense of stories written by amateurs about existing works. The term's original sense of primarily distinguishing between amateur and professional status remains central to the popular understanding of fanfiction, and the science fiction community continues to award fan writing and professional writing separately while restricting membership in its writer's guild to professional (paid) writers. In this way, at its origin, “fan fiction” requires a commercial publishing industry for its meaning, and in this sense cannot apply to literary cultures before this industry's advent. I would argue, however, that the elision of the space between fan and fiction means more than orthography and actually speaks to the sense that “fanfiction” has evolved to designate a distinct mode of writing rather than simply to designate amateur status.

From the point of view of literary scholarship, certainly, defining “fanfiction” solely by its professional or amateur status is unsatisfying, in part because we would not like to defer to price point as the single defining element of a category of writing. Furthermore, the understanding that fanfiction is a mode of writing distinguished by pricing—or even by the assumptions of its writers while writing and readers while reading—rather than by intrinsic textual elements fails to account for the term's popular usage. If “fanfiction” is distinguished only by its author's non-professional status, what does it mean when people call works “ficcish” or call professionally-authored texts fanfiction and intend to communicate something *other* than an amateurish lack of quality or editing? That people can and do make such statements and be understood suggests that there *are* recognizable qualities common to fanfiction at the textual or narrative level. This kind of statement often provokes the response that such texts are not “real fanfiction” because of the conditions under which they are written and consumed. In a 2015 column for *The New Statesman*, Elizabeth Minkel addresses this question of the circumstances of production and the relationship of author to work. The occasion was the recent publication of two novels that had a fanfiction-like relationship to previous works by their authors. Rainbow Rowell's *Carry On* is based on a world and characters that first appeared as fanfiction written by the protagonist of her earlier novel *Fangirl*; Stephenie Meyer's *Life and Death* genderswaps the main characters of her bestselling *Twilight*. Minkel takes issue with the way these works were referred to as “fanfiction of fanfiction” in the media, asserting plainly that despite their orientation to other, prior texts, they are not fanfiction because “an author can't write fanfiction of her own work, even if she's a fan of herself.” The circumstances of production, including the author's relationship to financial gain and cultural power, matter, and matter so much as to be the defining factor. In other contexts, by contrast, I've seen claims of “not real fanfiction” in response to stories that *were* written, presented, and read as fanfiction but did not fulfill other criteria—they were written by people who did not love the source material, for example, or changed the characters or the setting too much, or didn't work to get the tone of the original, or criticized or failed to respect the intentions of the original author. And yet such “not real” stories would exclude much of what constitutes fanfiction today.

J. L. Austin (1962) in the somewhat ficcishly entitled *Sense and Sensibilia* would put pressure here on the qualifier “real”: we cannot understand what it means unless we understand “just what, on that particular occasion, it was on the speaker’s mind to exclude.” But what if this condition held true not just for the modifier but the noun? What if I substitute “fanfiction” for “real” in Austin’s account of “real”?:

the attempt to find a characteristic common to all things that are or could be called [“fanfiction”] is doomed to failure; the function of [“fanfiction”] is not to contribute positively to the characterization of anything, but to exclude possible ways of being not [“fanfiction”], and liable to be quite different for things of different kinds. It is this identity of general function combined with immense diversity in specific applications which gives to the word [“fanfiction”] the, at first sight, baffling feature of having neither one single “meaning”, nor yet ambiguity, a number of different meanings. (70)

Here I have done a philosophically indefensible thing: substituting “fanfiction” for “real” should not make sense as much as it does, and the sense it does make runs counter to Austin’s point about the peculiarities of the word “real.” I am a big fan of Austin (and of search-and-replace stories), but I am definitely violating the intention of his original, and, furthermore, I am writing in a professional capacity in a non-fiction genre. On these grounds and more, I could claim that what I have done here is a little bit ficcish—more ficcish than ordinary language philosophical, certainly—but it is not “real fanfiction,” and that claim would be understood. In a slightly different rhetorical mode, though, I might claim that I just “ficed” Austin and in context *that* claim would be understood—to mean I had playfully transformed his work for my own purposes, not that I had posted a new story to an Austin archive. The former usage is more restrictive—potentially excludes more, although exactly *what* it excludes from “real fanfiction” is not entirely clear—while the latter usage is more figurative and therefore more inclusive. For that reason, the latter usage is likely to irk those who would prefer to maintain clear distinctions, although, as Austin would point out, they would be unlikely to designate my figurative use as “fake” fanfiction. I am intrigued by how what Austin claims for “real”—the “baffling feature of having neither one single ‘meaning’ nor yet . . . a number of different meanings”—might interact with Middleton’s assertion that we recognize fanfiction as “something different from other types of literary production.” Part of the problem in pinning fanfiction down, this juxtaposition suggests, is not so much that the term “fanfiction” has different meanings but that it is used to designate different differences, particularly confusing if the primary function of the term is to indicate a difference rather than to designate the presence of commonly held features, as is often the case. This function would answer the question of *why* we recognize fanfiction’s difference from other forms of storytelling despite overwhelming evidence of continuity: because that’s what the term itself instructs us to do. The figurative usage above, however—that I’m “ficing” Austin—provides evidence of a more descriptive, denotative element to “fanfiction.” Figurative language relies on language users’ inherent ability to focus on the presence of common qualities (here, textual play, transformation) while automatically excluding others (here, amateur status, presence on a fanfic archive) without contradiction (we know “my love is a rose” does not mean that my love contains chlorophyll). In order for “fanfiction” to be used figuratively, then, the term must be able to point to recognizable, observable qualities.

Benjamin, Jakobson, and Cephalopods

Sometimes, the difference between fanfiction and other forms of literary production is readily apparent—at least as readily apparent as, despite certain superficial similarities, the difference between an octopus and a squid. Rather than take that analogy to the point of animal morphology,

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Characters:	An Octopus, Squid
Additional Tags:	Embedded Images
Language:	English
Collections:	Yuletide 2011
Stats:	Published: 2011-12-22 Words: 1547 Chapters: 1/1 Comments: 185 Kudos: 1749 Bookmarks: 421 Hits: 120141

Texts From Cephalopods

volta_arovet

Figure 33.1 Text from Cephalopods
Source: Courtesy of Anne Jamison.

I will instead by way of example consider volta_arovet’s story “Texts from Cephalopods,” which takes the form of a series of cell phone messages between a drunk-texting octopus and “his beleaguered friend, the squid.” Based on popular YouTube videos of, as one might expect, cephalopods, “Texts from Cephalopods” chronicles Octopus’s antics and his friendship with the long-suffering Squid as well as several encounters with other aquatic creatures (Figure 33.1). It relies heavily on images of iPhone screens, texting language, and the spelling “conventions” of drunk texts, on established straight-man/funny-man dynamics as well as on its video sources.

What in this work is a candidate for the “positive, observable qualities” the term “fanfiction” might denote? Its multimedia elements identify “Texts from Cephalopods” as a digital text, but they are hardly unique to fanfiction and thus in themselves do not distinguish this story from commercially published works of fiction, even literary fiction—Richard House’s 2013 multimedia novel *The Kills* was the first such novel to be nominated for the Man Booker prize, for example. “Texts From Cephalopods” presence on the fan-run and fan-operated Archive of Our Own, a site dedicated to hosting and preserving fanworks, however, *does* immediately identify the story as fanfiction, as do the story’s format, authorial notes, and linked sources (Figure 33.2).

Much of what identifies this story as fanfiction is what Genette would call its paratextual elements—titles, notes, formatting, tables of contents. External to what we understand to be the work and often outside the author’s control, these elements nonetheless exert a powerful influence on a text and its meanings. For example, fanfics have summaries; they often, as above, include explanatory notes, thanks, acknowledgments of story prompts or requests, and links to other stories they might themselves have inspired. They are categorized by fandom (source), characters, and often character relationships, ratings and warnings, although taxonomical conventions differ by archive. These paratextual elements help identify a work as fanfiction, and it may be that they exert enough influence to profoundly change the way a work is understood and read, much like book design, cover art, fonts, and even shelf designation affect the texts *they* present. Yet other elements of the story might resist its classification as fanfiction by some definitions: it is not tied to a large media property; it is fully readable and comprehensible without fore-knowledge of its source text; it has no dubious legal status with regard to copyrighted material, all of which

Summary:

It is a well-established fact in marine biology that the octopus is the drunk texter of the cephalopod family.

Notes:

For Stasia.

Some people have been wondering what clips each section refer to. The answer is simple: see those underlined titles? Click away and enjoy the wholesome, tentacle goodness of a stupid octopus!

Thank you all for all your kind comments! I'm glad there are many people out there who like cephalopods as much as I do. I notice I've been linked to a couple high-traffic sites, so if you notice that the images have run out of bandwidth, please drop me a comment or message about them and I'll try to get them back up. Thanks in advance, and here, have a video of Octopus as a baby.

Many many thanks to the wonderful Moonsheen, who introduced me to the joys of cephalopods and wrote some of the jokes. This has also been podficced if you like your cephalopods in audio format.

(See the end of the work for other works inspired by this one.)

Figure 33.2 Texts from Cephalopods

Source: Courtesy of Anne Jamison.

are sometimes given as defining elements of fanfiction. On the other hand, the fact that it is written and read as fanfiction based on a popular source text and that it is distributed without charge in a fan space would all qualify it as fanfiction by still other definitions. I would go further, and claim not only is it fanfiction, but that it could *only* be fanfiction in the sense that no commercial mode of composition or distribution could have produced precisely this text. It is readily apparent that “Texts from Cephalopods” is particularly tied to a specific cultural and digital moment as well as to several distinct sets of relations among media, technology, and humans. The circumstances of production have produced intrinsic textual elements that are observable even in the absence of knowledge of these circumstances. “Texts From Cephalopods” is not, for example, a novel, poem, play, short story, or even film, although it adopts elements of all of those. Formally, structurally, and in terms of its use of media, it does not fall into a known, preexisting literary genre, and commercial publishing relies heavily on its works fitting such genres. “Texts” could conceivably be published digitally as “novelty,” but such books are marketed as gifts, as objects: Amazon.com lists over 75,000 paperback and 15,000 hardback but only 1000 electronic Kindle editions, most self-published. Furthermore, the images and text- and carrier-specific formatting if not the links to YouTube would introduce intellectual property complications.

Walter Benjamin has argued that all great works of literature “found a genre or dissolve one,” but I am not sure “Texts” does either nor indeed that it participates in any way in the logic of greatness, fine art, or transcendence that seems to underlie such a statement. Rather, although fanfiction has its own genres distinct from commercial publishing (hurt/comfort, curtain fic, etc.), it is also free to ignore any genre it likes because it does not have to be marketed and sold as one, and thus its not-for-profit status produces the textual qualities that are enabled by freedom from commercial formal, stylistic, and generic norms. It is occasional, contingent, and makes no claim to be otherwise. By another highly literary logic, however—the precepts of Russian Formalism and Slavic Structuralism—“Texts from Cephalopods” violates the norm of the standard literary discourse and focuses readerly attention on its own artistic medium (the conventions of texting, the iPhone screen and its pictorial elements, its digital environment, the links to other media that form an inspiring but ultimately optional part of the story). In this way and by this theoretical framework much concerned with literariness, “Texts from Cephalopods” *is* literary, even poetic. And yet. It would not be readily identified as such, I believe, by Roman Jakobson or

Jan Mukařovský, nor yet by the broader audience of those who consider themselves to be regular producers and readers of literary and poetic texts. It is “different.”

Much like the octopus, I will return to the squid periodically, but for now want to focus not on this story’s distinctiveness nor on its continuities with other literary modes, but rather on what this story holds in common with fanfiction more generally. For example, “Texts from Cephalopods” simultaneously adheres to character and narrative and maintains independence from established commercial genres and forms, a combination of attributes that I would put in contention for one of contemporary fanfiction’s identifying elements. Its association with a collective—or rather, with various collectives simultaneously—at the level of concept and production also marks it as fanfiction. These associations leave identifying textual or narrative traces on individual texts, traces that would be absent, say, in independent experimental or amateur work that did not adhere to narrative convention whether by intention or ignorance. Texting fic, for example, is a fanfic genre with its own conventions that this story enters into—fanfic today plays with tropes (common, recognizable conventions, and devices) and does not try to hide its reliance on them. Fanfiction is further distinguished, then, by its overt, even celebratory relation to source and community. It makes no claim to stand on its own even if it could, but rather asks us to refer to material outside it, outside the textual space entirely. Alternatively, a commercially published work will be asked to “stand on its own,” no matter its relationship to source material. It will be presented as autonomous and asked to be judged in that way. Some of these distinguishing qualities would be perceivable no matter the context, but others are dependent on a text’s environment and format as fanfiction. I have argued elsewhere that *Fifty Shades of Grey*, for example, retains many of its ficcish qualities in its play with source and fanfic trope, but reformatted, removed from its fanfic context, renamed (characters and title), and presented in book form, these elements are not foregrounded and celebrated but rather hidden. This contrast helps make the case that fanfiction’s environment, format, and mode of distribution should be seen as intrinsic rather than extrinsic textual elements.

Whereas I focused above on textual and medial elements, a different analysis of “fanfictionality” might focus more intensely on the text’s social positioning and the human relationships that produced it—as Elizabeth Minkel does in her *New Statesman* essay. One such key relationship is between fanfic and authorship: Minkel’s claim that Stephenie Meyer’s and Rainbow Rowell’s transformations of their own work cannot be properly called fanfiction because “an author can’t write fanfiction of her own work.” In actual practice, that claim is not strictly true—S. E. Hinton has written and posted fanfiction for her novel *The Outsiders* but won’t say which stories, for example, and I know of several instances of television writers posting fanfiction for series after their involvement had ended or the show was canceled. But these writers were not commercially publishing these stories as authors, and they were not writing under their own names. Perhaps an *author* can’t *publish* fanfiction of her own work as a novel, but a *writer* can *write/post* fanfiction of her own work. Perhaps there is something about authorship as we understand it that fanfiction excludes.

Like many scholars and writers of fanfiction, Minkel distinguishes fanfiction as writing that takes place in a community setting, by fans and for fans, by people, furthermore, who are disempowered economically or culturally and do not make a profit from the fiction they share. The fanfic writer’s relationship to other fanfic writers and readers, on the one hand, and to money and property rights, on the other, are the defining elements of the fanfiction the ficcer produces. Big-budget television reworkings of texts like *Sherlock Holmes* and *Star Trek* are not fanfiction, then, because of their relationship to power, money, and gender—gender because, like all large media franchises to date, they are helmed by men who are given author-like credit and compensation which trump their avowed fannish adoration of their sources. It must be said that there are many profitable and respected female authors of literary adaptations—innumerable Jane Austen

adaptations (P. D. James's *Death Comes to Pemberley*) and Shakespeare (*Lear* in Jane Smiley's *A Thousand Acres*); *The Tempest* in Margaret Atwood's recent *Hag Seed*)—and that many male fans are cut off from power structures and produce fannish works. But Minkel's point stands: *only* male fans have thus far had their ficcish activities underwritten by parent corporations and become blockbuster adapter *auteurs*: as of yet there has been no female Joss Whedon, Steven Moffat, J. J. Abrams, or Bryan Fuller. For Minkel, this relation to power is definitional.

I find this argument persuasive on economic and political grounds, which in turn affect the means of production and dissemination. But it diminishes the importance of an affective relationship to source, which so many fanfic writers themselves would claim as central to their work. If a frustrated amateur writer, having noted some structural parallels, changes the names in her unpublished novel to, say, Edward and Bella and posts it to a fanfiction website despite not having much interest in *Twilight*, is that fanfiction? Certainly it *does* become fanfiction in the sense that it will be read as such and possibly interacted with by other fan writers. It enters the system. Whatever were the initial circumstances of its production, it will now be read with relation to *Twilight* rather than on its own terms. It could become be hugely popular as fanfiction (this has happened more than once). Is that originally-a-novel fic *more* fanfiction than the *Sherlock* episodes produced by the Steven Moffat and Mark Gatiss's gleeful play with source text, prior adaptation, and more than a century of the lore and language of the oldest fan community in the world—of which they are clearly long-term members themselves? I think by some definitions yes, and by some no. I also think that this multiplicity of answers is fine and is, in fact, itself definitional. Fanfiction is intrinsically multiple in a way that discomfits discursive systems reliant on stable definitions, consistent disciplinary practices, and clear lines of authorship, and ownership. Like “Texts from Cephalopods,” fanfiction is an assemblage of heterogeneous parts, each of which may raise different and even contradictory disciplinary questions and concerns. When one of these parts is held up as the primary object of inquiry, it will yield different answers from another, and this is as it should be. This is why, when asked during a panel discussion at the Fan Studies Network 2016 whether there should be a unified methodology of fan studies—wherein fanfiction studies is often categorized—my response was simply “no.” If one part or set of questions were to always be given prominence, it would lead to distortion and inappropriately fix an assemblage the nature of which is to be unstable.

Assemblage v. Authorship (Deleuze-Kant-Squid)

With “assemblage,” I draw on an aspect of the work of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (1987), an aspect that has also been influential in contemporary thinking about digital culture. One of the theory's key points for fanfiction is the idea that, as Manuel Delanda (2006) puts it in his chapter “Assemblages Against Totalities,” “a component part of the assemblage may be detached from it and plugged in to a different assemblage with which its interactions are different” (10). Assemblages are also processes, to the extent that the “component parts themselves do not explain the relations that constitute a whole,” which in turn is not simply an aggregation but “exercise of the capacities.” In more strictly Deleuzian terms, fanfiction is an assemblage in that “it is made of variously formed matters”; that works of fanfiction are “collective assemblages of enunciation” that “function directly within machinic assemblages” (7); that in fanfiction “there is a collective assemblage of enunciation, a machinic assemblage of desire” (23). With its combination of the often occulted machine workings of software and code, collective enunciation, and especially of desire—fans' desire for more story, their particular desire for the desires of fictional others, for these desires to be spoken in fiction and made explicit, the desire for these desires to be shared by other fans—this account of assemblage sounds practically tailor-made for fanfiction in its current

digital instantiation. Yet Deleuze and Guattari are making these claims about a much broader swath of cultural experience: “a book is an assemblage” (4); in fact, “literature is an assemblage” (4); and indeed, “all we know are assemblages” (22). Of course, none of these assemblages could refer to the particular assemblage of narrative and digital media that is “Texts from Cephalopods,” because digital media did not yet exist when Deleuze and Guattari were theorizing their *Thousand Plateaus*. The totalizing claims of French theory also seem unlikely to help distinguish fanfiction from all literature ever, and yet not only do I find this notion of assemblage extremely useful for talking about fanfiction, I find that it seems true of fanfiction in a way that it does not immediately seem true of “other types of literary production.” Fanfiction’s overt multiplicity, its open and gleeful acknowledgement of its many contributors and constituents, matters.

I am not in a position to argue whether or not “all we know are assemblages,” but I feel confident in asserting that even were that true of the objects of our knowledge, it is not true of how we think of them—all literature may *be* assemblage, but it does not advertise the fact. A commercially published novel is multiply produced—editors, agents, designers, marketers, literary sources, and market demands, all have their parts to play—but it comes to readers as a discrete book-shaped entity with a single authored name. It is *Carry On* by Rainbow Rowell. Its multiple influences are not readily apparent *on the face of it*. By contrast, all the popular understandings of fanfiction I’ve referred to here rely heavily on multiple relations—text to source, text to legal right, writer to writer, writer to community, fanfiction to other fanfiction—and fanfic texts themselves often announce these relationships on their front pages. This relationality—these multiple sources, influences, and participants—is something we immediately understand as intrinsic to fanfiction rather than something we might gradually become convinced of by delving into French theory or studying the publishing process. The “we” of Western reading culture, however, do not primarily think of literature as an assemblage, and while we are likely well aware that books are things that must be assembled at some point and that websites must be coded for display on complex devices, this material assemblage is not what we have in mind when we think of “literary composition,” whether digitally or codexically disseminated. For most readers and writers, the work of literary composition is the work of the author, and this way of thinking about authors and their works is conditioned by Enlightenment notions of individuality, genius, aesthetic value, and art. Fanfiction both challenges and owes its existence to these same notions.

When I teach fanfiction with sections of Kant’s *Critique of Judgment* (1987), it is not only so that students will believe they are in a real college course despite the presence on the syllabus of squid-octopus bromance and sex pollen. Kant’s *Critique* fixes as orthodoxy assumptions about artistic creation and authorship, and these same assumptions underlie fanfiction even as fanfiction undermines them. First, Kant relies on a stable distinction between fine art as opposed to other lesser art. A hierarchical distinction between official canon and fan text is central to the conception and structural workings of fanfiction. These distinctions are enshrined in copyright law and remain structurally and functionally powerful, and even where fans prefer their own versions and challenge the judgment of creators, the hierarchy remains as a foundational and organizational principal and force. Second, Kant’s understanding of fine art excludes not only attempts at fine art that achieve no more than technical proficiency but also what we would consider applied art: decorative arts, design, etc. This hierarchical distinction is intimately related to Kant’s understanding of aesthetic judgment as disinterested (in the sense that you cannot impartially judge the beauty of your house because you need it to keep you dry). Fanfiction may be many different things to different people, but disinterested is *never* one of them. Kant’s distinction also establishes fine art as incompatible with the everyday and the domestic, whereas fanfiction often displaces its heroic and extraordinary characters into “mundane” alternate universes where they make coffee and shop for curtains, and many fanfiction readers and writers are women who are normatively if not individually bound up in domestic concerns themselves.

Third, for Kant, fine art's transcendent and ineffable quality carries over into his account of artistic production as well. Fine art is produced by genius, which comes directly from nature rather than learned knowledge: "the artist's skill cannot be communicated but must be conferred directly on each person by the hand of nature" (177). Originality, paradoxically, does have a source, but the source is in "nature," which is in turn transformed by a genius also granted by "nature." What fine art explicitly does *not* do is take as its primary source or inspiration any works created by another, and it cannot be created by skills that can be learned. It is mimetic, then, but not *imitative*, a distinction that had previously hardly existed in Western thought, which until the late eighteenth century had advocated precisely that art and literature *should* imitate the great works of the ancients. Alexander Pope (1757) wrote in the preface to his own poems that "All that is left to us, is to recommend our productions by the imitation of the Ancients: and it will be found true, that in every Age, the highest character for sense and learning has been obtain' d by those who have been most indebted to them," (xv) and Milton purportedly confessed to Dryden that Edmund Spenser was "his original" (Radcliffe 1996, 29). While Kant acknowledged such imitation as central to *learning*, however, he insists this learning is not in itself sufficient: "Genius must be considered the very opposite of the spirit of imitation" (176). In this way, fine art *in its inherent originality* can be distinguished not only from competent artistic attempts, imitations of originals, and the decorative arts, but from science as well. Scientific discoveries can be replicated by following carefully articulated steps, but nothing, Kant claims, can replicate the works of genius in art. Originality—a necessary feature of fine art—is not in itself enough, however. Skills, laws, and taste are required to produce fine art since "nonsense can be original" and nonsense is (apparently) anathema to fine art. (I believe the squid would side with Kant, but that the octopus provides a fine counterexample.)

Kantian genius does not have an iPhone (Figure 33.3). Genius may, however, create models to transmit the necessary laws, skills, and taste to posterity; genius learns first by imitation but then transcends it to produce originality, while lesser art only imitates. Thus, not only *can* works of genius serve as originals from which an artist can learn taste, laws, and skills, they *must* do so—their exemplary quality is another element that defines them. Fine art cannot be a one-off; it must inspire others to follow in its footsteps. Works of fine art and their artists of genius thus create the rules that are necessary but not in themselves sufficient to produce future works of fine art, but genius cannot account for how it creates these works. The artist *himself* does not know where *his* [pronouns intentional] ideas come from, so an artist inspired by genius cannot (unlike scientists) lay out a plan that would allow other artists to produce original works of similar value. Imitation is crucial to the transmission of art and cultural norms and to education, but it cannot produce fine art which can *only* be created by genius.

As Friedrich Kittler (1992), a prominent theorist of pre-Internet networks, put it, "the author becomes God because women's pleasure supports him." A Kantian system does not encourage or sustain multiplicity, it relies on hierarchy—and as Kittler persuasively argues, this hierarchy is gendered: "If an author is defined by naming certain discourses his own, women by contrast are defined by being ... those who do not name anything as their own" because they are busy doing Genius's housework. When women write in such a system, they "constitute an innocent accident in this silenced and anonymous function" (125). Kittler quotes Thérèse Huber's own preface to her husband's collected stories, which she had "continued" (but not authored): "The girl who can write a poem should not take any more credit for it than she would for a well-prepared recipe" (126). In accordance with Kant's then recent but already influential schema, her analogy implies that she is not producing fine art because she is following the rules of others (a recipe) and pursuing a domestic, everyday, and therefore suitably feminine activity. One of the differences between fanfiction and "other types of literary production" is that it is run by those people who according to Huber "should not take any more credit" than if they had followed a recipe. Fanfiction writers



Figure 33.3 Squid lol

Source: Courtesy of Anne Jamison.

give credit freely, however, with no threat to their status because the ultimate status of author belongs to their source. They reassert that the characters are not their own, that they are “playing in a sandbox” owned by others. These fanfic writers are thus also freed from the demands of Kantian fine art and originality, much like Brentano’s sister Bettina, again quoted by Kittler:

I’m so glad to be an unimportant person, there’s no need to come up with any fine thoughts when I write to you ... I used to think that one couldn’t write letters without putting in some moral content or something intelligent ..., but now I don’t care about chiseling out a thought or gluing one together, I’ll leave that to others.

Many a fanfiction writer’s statement echoes such sentiments, insisting they are hobbyists just “there for the squee.” Kittler helps place such comments in a historical context of women’s writing and the disavowal of authorship.

In almost every respect, fanfiction violates Kant’s paradigm. Fanfic writers do sometimes refer to a “muse” that drives their work that could stand in for the unaccountability of artistic inspiration, but in other particulars, fanfiction does everything Kant’s fine art does not. Fanfiction takes inspiration not primarily from nature, but programmatically from pre-existing works created by others. This holds true even of “real person fanfiction” or works based on the lives of celebrities—or cephalopods—since these are inspired by photographs, media accounts, or the curated lives the celebrities themselves share on social media. And yet Kantian ideas about high art as applied to the literary—that some texts are primary and others imitative; that this imitative nature makes the latter less valuable; that some texts are “original” and inspire others to imitate them; that the original text is “canon” and written by an author who owns it, whereas other writers are “just playing,” are hobbyists or writers in training if not future geniuses—set the conditions for fanfiction. These hierarchies continue to underlie fanfiction’s frameworks and even allow for its existence (it is crucial in terms of fair use or at least rightsholder tolerance, for example, that fanfiction not be in

competition with its sources) and *all* of these principles are in absolute accordance with the paradigm established in Kant's *Critique*. Regardless of the extent to which individual fanfic readers and writers agree with any of these principles—and this varies greatly—this paradigm establishes and maintains distinctions and hierarchies without which there would be no canon and fanfic, no high and low art—there would be only stories. A Kantian perspective illuminates aspects of fanfiction not only by virtue of the contrast it provides, but by virtue of the influence it still wields, even on its skewed mirror image. If fanfiction is the “bearded Spock” of Kant’s “Fine Art,” its works, ethos, and methods of creation, the twisted opposites of the principles Kant upholds, then just as *Star Trek*'s chaotic, hyper-sexualized mirror verse reflects the Enterprise itself, fanfiction replicates and relies upon the same Kantian structures it also resists and skews. Kant's firm distinction between originality and imitation creates and maintains the conditions necessary for some texts to be original canon and others fanfiction.

Deleuze and the Digital. And Squid.

As method of creation, by contrast, fanfiction has evolved in a way that challenges the very presuppositions that underwrite its own existence. Fanfiction does not simply mirror and reverse the underlying structure of Kant's model of authorship but rather dismantles and transforms it. Whereas Kant's model of creativity relies on a unitary chain of transmission—Nature-Genius-Artist-Nature-Art—fanfiction as it is written today *always* relies on multiplicity: its model is not a chain, but a web of connectivity. Far from coming directly from nature to artist, the inspiration for a fic often does not even come directly and singly from its stated media source but rather from a prompt or challenge given to an online community of readers and writers. A story might be written in response to a request for a *fill* on something called a *kink meme* where readers leave *asks* for particular fictional situations or story lines and anonymous writers fill them. Some writers simply take requests; some actively solicit them. Then, too, there circulate the fanfic *tropes*, genre-like conventions of plot and theme Hurt/Comfort; Fake Relationship; Sex Pollen; Curtain fic (domestic life), and many, many more. Tropes multiply and cross-pollinate, whether openly acknowledged or simply exerting their collective force through repetition: Sexy, bad-boy Leather Pants Draco, for example, became common and recognizable in the Harry Potter fanfic universe although he is nowhere in J.K. Rowling's novels. Crossovers with other sources are also common—Leather Pants Draco might meet Bearded Spock, for example, and start fake dating (please). The inspiration for that Spock/Draco story might come from another fanfiction in which they also know each other. An author's note will often explain a story's multiple inspirations and occasions; fanfiction writers are meticulous about crediting others. The text is networked—fictionally as well as digitally.

Kant's model could in no way account for the human-fiction-digital networked composition history of “Texts from Cephalopods.” The story of Octopus and Squid came about by means of the fanfic-specific tradition of Yuletide, an annual gift exchange that pairs willing writers with desiring readers of “rare” fandoms—stories for sources, characters, or romantic pairings that are not usually ficced. Begun in 2003 with 300 participants, Yuletide has since enrolled as many as 2,000. Every year, a list of “eligible fandoms and characters”—underserved sources—is generated, and participants list the sources they are willing to write for and about which they would like to receive stories. According to Fanlore.org, “Participants agree to write a ... story for a randomly assigned recipient who has requested at least one of the things the writer offered to do, in return for receiving a story ... fulfilling one of the participant's requests.” This exchange is made possible, Fanlore goes on to explain, by a specific piece of code, a script written by the noted fanfic writer astolat in 2003. As astolat (2004) explains in more detail, the script first finds all possible matchups between

willing writer and desiring reader and then begins pairing the people with the fewest possible matchups. This process repeats until everyone is matched with at least one story. If it doesn't work and people are left out, the script is run again ... which yields different results because of randomization. First, however, a human must intervene and make sure that everyone involved has at least one possible matchup of writing and reading desire or those readers and writers must be contacted to suggest additional desires. Before all this happens, humans have also generated the lists of potential sources and characters. Once the matches are made, the gifts are given, and then the results are—these days—returned to Archive of Our Own where they may ... spawn cousins, or make new connections. If a Yuletide reader requested a rare pair (Silver Surfer/Aunt May?) in The Marvel Cinematic Universe *Avengers*, that story will now assemble with its more popular Hulk/Iron Man and Captain America/Bucky Barnes fanfic colleagues in the *Avengers* tag. If Yuletide aliens made P. G. Wodehouse's unflappable butler Jeeves do it with his employer Bertie Wooster's formidable Aunt Agatha, that story would join all the others in which aliens have forced couples to fornicate. An "Aunts" tag might be born that would associate these unlikely couples, perhaps in turn inspiring more. Some of these assemblages may have been brought together by strong fan-nish readerly or writerly desire, but some will have been assembled by the "mechanic" workings of the archive's code and tag wranglers—the software-human assemblage that helps the archive keep stories as multiply findable as possible. The architecture of this archive exerts an indexical, interpretive and, ultimately, even a creative force on individual stories as well as on patterns of associating and reading across them—as distinct from other archives with different designs, a complex function Abigail De Kosnik has theorized at book length in her *Rogue Archives*.

I may be alone in imagining Jeeves/Agatha could be a thing, but I am hardly alone in thinking about Deleuze and the digital—or even Deleuze and digital fiction. In thinking through extra-legal or un-official fictional networks in light of open source software, for example, David Roh (2015) nods to Deleuze and Guattari's theory of the rhizome and its broad influence in contemporary media theory: "Drawing on nature, [their] theorization of metaphorical rhizomes—a structure without structure, an antistructure—attempts to articulate postmodernism as a space without hierarchy" (100). Rhizomes, as they are further characterized in *A Thousand Plateaus*, are governed by "principles of connection and heterogeneity any point of a rhizome can be connected to anything other, and must be. This is very different from the tree or root, which plots a point, fixes an order" (7). Fanfictions recombine, form tropes, or repeated story lines—sex pollen, for example, in which characters are drugged by mysterious plants and overcome by sexual desire. There are currently over 1,800 "sex pollen" stories on Archive of Our Own, but many who write them will have no idea of the tropes sources in DC Comics' Poison Ivy fanfic or, even earlier, in the *Star Trek* episode "This Side of Paradise" (Figure 33.4).

As Deleuze and Guattari explain, "A rhizome may be broken, shattered at a given spot, but it will start up again on one of its old lines" (9). Like pollen, fanfiction spreads: the rhizomes quality of fanfiction is in evidence in the success rightsholders met in their efforts to close down blogs, remove sites, and discourage fan production. George R. R. Martin, for example, famously opposes fanfiction, but there are tens of thousands of *Game of Thrones* fanfics. As Roh also notes, however, skepticism toward the organicism of the rhizomatic model of connectivity has led other theorists (he cites Rita Raley and could have referred to many others) to prefer the concept and rhetoric of "the assemblage" as more accommodating of the network's electronic constituents.

Roh theorizes the textual relations we see in fanfiction networks as analogous to the versioning we see in open source software, although he wishes to distinguish the versioning model from what he considers to be "extralegal" fan texts: "In lieu of fixity, open-source software operates on a logic of incessant revisions, resulting in a multiplicity of editions. To counter a regime of permanence and to posit a more generous mode of creative construction that accounts for infrastructural



Figure 33.4 This Side of Paradise
Source: Courtesy of Anne Jamison.

developments, I conceptualize a *literary versioning*” (99). This notion of “versioning” resembles my account of character in fanfiction given in response to some excellent questions by Claire Class (2016):

Claire Class: Fanfiction plays with conventions: It imagines what happens after the marriage plot ends; it shifts a story written in 19th-century realist prose to stream of consciousness; it combines the generic tropes of the Western with those of the writing program memoir. However, fanfiction is more likely to preserve characters. What can fanfiction teach us about what constitutes a character and the role characters play in our stories and our lives?

[Anne Jamison] We have come to associate characters so much with unique individuality and specific, fixed portrayals that it is surprising when we see in fanfic how many distinctive characterizations can still be understood as versions of the same character.

How much leeway there is in characterization is fandom specific, but generally there are some characteristics that a story needs to hit. Sherlock Holmes needs to be inquisitive, obsessive, brilliant, hyper-rational and somewhat at odds with social convention. He also probably needs to be tall and striking-looking. He *doesn't* need to be a detective, but he needs to devote his mind to some pursuit exhaustively. ...

There are also what I'd call secondary characteristics, some but not all of which will make up the picture: Sherlock Holmeses can be drug addicted, rude, asexual, emotionally stunted, secretly hypersensitive, depressive, fond of bees, etc. But as long as Holmes is hitting a quorum of these qualities, he can be five years old or a professional pitcher or a sex consultant. He can be gay, straight or any given variety of queer; he can be neuro-nontypical; *he* can also be *she*. There's an interesting comic book version in which he is black and working in Harlem. I doubt, however, he could be blonde, ruddy-faced, easygoing and none-too-bright.

The rapid revisions Sherlock Holmes can undergo these days is similar to what open source software undergoes in its communities. But in the case of fanfiction, at least, the network of associations and values that enables and mobilizes these versions is not strictly horizontal or flat. A principle I'm going to call “Canon-Oriented-Ontology”—fanfiction's originary, definitional orientation toward a source that stands in special, select, and “original” relation to other versions—continues to organize and determine this complex character network. Roh also acknowledges a difference between software and literary circles, raising both the phenomena of “author worship”

and copyright law as limiting features in the number of connections that can be made in traditional print-based literary network: as he puts it, “the literary network is far from horizontal” (104). Fanfiction may be flatter than print publishing, but it has not abandoned its roots or the structures they imply.

In fact, fanfiction relates to its identified source material in a way that distinctly resembles what Foucault (1977) calls “the singular relationship that holds between an author and a text, the manner in which a text apparently points to this figure who is outside and precedes it” (124). Foucault analyzes the author’s functionality in categorizing and organizing texts: “A name can group together a number of texts and differentiate them from others” and “establishes different forms of relationships among texts,” among them “reciprocal explanation”; “filiation,” and “common utilization.” In fanfiction, it is the primary, named (and usually copyrighted) source that takes on these functions. In some cases—astolat, for example—a fanfiction author becomes beloved and popular enough that readers will search for her work in any fandom, but the primary means of organization remains the “canon” on which stories are based. Even these, of course, can be multiple, as in the ubiquitous crossover: fanfiction is never as unitary as the Enlightenment model of authorship.

Leading up to their theory of the rhizome, Deleuze and Guattari consider several other organicist models of “the book” that I find useful in mediating between the traditional and rhizomatic qualities of fanfiction. First is the much credited “root-book,” which is represented as having a somewhat unreconstructed relationship to the symbolic. For Deleuze and Guattari, it really cannot get any worse than this: “the classical book, as noble, signifying, and subjective organic interiority” (5). It aligns with “traditional character” as per my remarks above. Kantian geniuses would write such root-books, mysteriously inspired by nature and yet entirely original. Fanfiction has no place in the root-book except in the shade of the nobly signifying branches that soar transcendently from its root. The theorists offer another kind of tree for consideration on the way to the rhizome, however. The radicle-system, “to which our modernity pays willing allegiance” has much to do with fanfiction and its structures.

What Deleuze and Guattari call “the principal root” has given rise to “an immediate indefinite multiplicity of secondary roots” which in turn “undergoes a flourishing development.” In this model, the root is perhaps not even present, as it were (“aborted” or perhaps only “its tip has been destroyed”) but the root’s unity subsists. They suggest that “reflexive, spiritual reality” may compensate for this state of things by demanding an even “more comprehensive secret unity, or a more extensive totality” (6). Some of this rhetoric resonates with the way fans talk about fandom: their sense that they participate in a secret and perhaps spiritual unity called fandom; that there are fandom “insiders” and “outsiders”; that fandom has norms outsiders just “don’t get.” Fans’ increasing concern that their desires be realized not only as fanfic but *as canon* plays into this dynamic as well, as does, alternately, the sense that stories can be so good they “become” canon. On the other side, fanfiction typically includes as paratext a note that the fanfic author is “just playing”; that she “does not own” the material and that her story “in no way infringes” on the territory of the writer—a constant reminder that these writers do not claim the sense of authorship that implies ownership, serious work, “fine art” and likely genius. Thus, fanfiction and its networks are not exactly “flat” but they are not exactly rooted, either—there are hierarchies (“canon” is structured as paramount even when it is not particularly central to the story or characterization), but the structure of fanfiction texts as they interrelate among one another tends to be more rhizomatic. This quality is favored by the code running Archive of Our Own—itsself based on open source software—that is designed to allow the most interconnections. The archive’s tagging system arguably offers the biggest challenge to date to the primacy of “Canon-Oriented-Ontology” that dictates fanfiction be organized by source *before* ... sex pollen, etc. The assemblage—as opposed to the more organicist rhizomatic model—allows us to focus on different parts or sets of relations within networks but releases us from the idea that doing so

enacts a kind of vivisectional violence to the whole. This model enables us to acknowledge human, code, and textual agencies within fanfiction, to consider these as specificities without adhering to a single definition or disciplinary model.

Fanfiction as assemblage allows us to imagine a system too heterogeneous to be accurately characterized from within a single discipline. Assemblage theory can help identify instances in which component parts of the fanfic assemblage “exercise their capacity” and therefore enable new assemblages not previously possible, as in the case of the Yuletide algorithm or the Archive of Our Own’s tagging system. We can talk about tropes as having an agency and influence in a story without erasing the writer’s sense of telling her own story *and* consider how different platforms produce different kinds of stories, pages, and organizational conventions. Assemblage theory provides an ethos for prioritizing the non-human, one reason it has been embraced by environmental studies, object-oriented ontology, and thing theory. Alternately, it allows fanfiction to be studied as a set of human interactions without considering the literary precedents that just as certainly shape its stories or the code that enables and structures these human connections. The limitations of any study are built into our understanding of the object. Assemblage theory accounts for the perplexing but undeniable fact that some stories do not start off as fanfiction but become fanfiction by entering the system, whereas some stories start out as fanfiction but may not remain fanfiction, even when the text remains the same, *à la Fifty Shades of Grey*. It even allows for the multiplicity of definitions to coexist, each one arising as more appropriate depending on which aspects of the fanfiction assemblage are currently under scrutiny. Like Kant and Squid, story, human, source, and code can come together, exert their agencies on one another for the length of an essay, and part again—without anyone worrying that we can never look at a squid in the same way, or that a new rhetorical monstrosity has been unleashed permanently on the world.

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Chapter 34

Interdisciplinarity in Fan Studies

Tisha Turk

The interdisciplinarity of fan studies is often assumed without comment by scholars in the field. The Fan Studies Network advertised its 2016 conference as “an enthusiastic space for interdisciplinary researchers at all levels to connect, share resources, and further develop their research ideas” (2015). The *Journal of Fandom Studies* bills itself as an “interdisciplinary peer-reviewed journal.” In these two examples, as in many others, *interdisciplinary* is used without definition or discussion. Occasionally we offer some justification for the term, as when Sam Ford (2014), in a recent overview of developments in the field, asserts that “the strength of fan studies and its rich body of research stems in part from the interdisciplinarity that has allowed scholars from varied fields to bring their research methods and theoretical constructs to bear on the relationships active audiences have with and around media texts” (53–54). This description of interdisciplinarity posits a shared topic explored by many academics using tools from their own disciplines.

Kristina Busse and Karen Hellekson (2014), the editors of the journal *Transformative Works and Cultures* (TWC) and of two essential anthologies of essays on fanfiction, go a step further. Their account of fan studies’ interdisciplinarity is notable for its unusual detail; they not only describe fan studies as “a truly interdisciplinary field, one that has adopted and adapted ideas from various other disciplines, particularly audience and cultural studies” (1) but also offer specific examples of disciplinary lenses used by fan studies scholars:

The disciplines of English and communications interpret fan artifacts, their creation, and the rhetorical strategies they use to make meaning; anthropology and ethnography analyze the fan subculture; media, film, and television studies assess the integration of media into fan practice and artworks; psychology examines fans’ pleasure and motivation; and law analyzes the underlying problems related to the derivative nature of the artworks, including concerns related to copyright, parody, and fair use. (1–2)

The picture that emerges explicitly in Busse and Hellekson’s account, and implicitly in most other accounts, is of fan studies as a very large umbrella sheltering anyone, of any disciplinary background, who studies fans, fandom, or fannish activities. As Busse and Hellekson make clear, scholars from plenty of different academic specialties might find it interesting to study fans and fandom for reasons relevant to, and with methods from, their respective disciplines. The well-received anthology

Fandom: Identities and Communities in a Mediated World (Gray, Sandvoss, and Harrington 2007), for example, includes contributions from scholars trained in sociology, anthropology, law, and American studies as well as film, communication, and media and cultural studies. We might say, then, that fan studies is interdisciplinary because it collects or juxtaposes the discipline-specific but fan-related output of many academics from many disciplines.

Unfortunately for us, that's not what *interdisciplinary* means.

Interdisciplinarity and Multidisciplinarity

The approach to fan studies described by Busse and Hellekson (and implied by many others) would more accurately be described as *multidisciplinary*. We can get a general sense of the difference simply from comparing the meanings of the two prefixes. From the *Oxford English Dictionary*: *multi-* means "more than one, several, many,"; *inter-* means "between, among, amid, in between, in the midst." Choi and Pak (2006), comparing definitions of the terms, observe that multidisciplinary is "additive," while interdisciplinarity is "interactive" (351); multidisciplinary is "like a salad bowl" (359) in which "ingredients remain intact and clearly distinguishable" (360), while interdisciplinarity is like a soup or stew, in which "ingredients are only partially distinguishable" (360).

The distinction between *interdisciplinary* and *multidisciplinary* may seem arbitrary or a matter of mere semantics, but in fact the two terms represent different goals for and approaches to knowledge-building. Multidisciplinarity, Marilyn Stember (1991) explains, "involves several disciplines who each provide a different perspective on a problem or issue"; she offers the example of "faculty members from history, literature, and sociology who teach in a women's studies program or study women's position in society" (4). Scholars from various disciplines work on projects related to the same issue, but the projects themselves remain essentially *intradisciplinary*. Interdisciplinarity, on the other hand, "brings interdependent parts of knowledge into harmonious relationships" (4); "a genuinely interdisciplinary enterprise is one that requires more or less *integration* and even *modification* of the disciplinary contributions while the inquiry or teaching is proceeding" (5, my emphasis).

This concept of integration is central to most informed definitions of interdisciplinarity. Allen Repko and Rick Szostak (2016) explain that interdisciplinary analysis "draws on the disciplines with the goal of integrating their insights to construct a more comprehensive understanding" (8). The mission statement of the Association for Interdisciplinary Studies, available on its website, uses similar language: "Interdisciplinarity integrates the insights of knowledge domains to produce a more comprehensive understanding of complex problems, issues, or questions." The emerging consensus about the importance of integration is demonstrated by William Newell (2007), who examines the commonalities among definitions from organizations, including the Teagle Foundation; Harvard University's Project Zero; the National Academies of Science, Engineering, and Medicine; and the Association of American Colleges & Universities. Taken together, these definitions describe interdisciplinarity as an approach to scholarship that synthesizes ideas and approaches from multiple disciplines in order to find common ground, see an issue from more angles, construct a more comprehensive understanding, or otherwise go beyond what would be possible in a single discipline. Newell concludes that the goal of interdisciplinary studies programs should be to "integrate rather than merely juxtapose what they draw from disciplines" (1). Juxtaposition is a sign of multidisciplinary; integration is the hallmark of interdisciplinarity.

The process of integrating disciplinary insights may be easier when inquiry is collaborative and problem-driven, undertaken not by individuals or by large groups addressing a general topic but by small groups cooperating on specific projects. Such small groups are the starting point for

Stember's (1991) analysis. As she observes, "Interdisciplinarity literally means between disciplines, suggesting the basic elements of at least two collaborators, at least two disciplines, and a commitment to work together in some fashion in some domain" (4). Repko and Szostak (2016), on the other hand, acknowledge the possibility of topic-based interdisciplinary inquiry when they describe interdisciplinary analysis as "a process of answering a question, solving a problem, or addressing a topic that is too broad or complex to be dealt with adequately by a single discipline" (8). This description should resonate with fan studies scholars; anyone seriously interested in fan studies would agree, I hope, that fans, fandom, and fannishness are topics "too broad or complex to be dealt with adequately by a single discipline." But that very breadth makes it easy to conduct what is essentially *intradisciplinary* inquiry on topics related to fans and fandom rather than identifying specific questions or problems that require the input of multiple disciplines to answer or solve.

With these distinctions in mind, Paul Booth's argument that Tumblr is "a metaphor for what fan studies can be" (2016, 225) is revealing. Tumblr is, in fact, an excellent example of multidisciplinary rather than interdisciplinarity: it allows users to post whatever they want and to recirculate content from multiple sources, but the platform itself does not connect those chunks of content in any meaningful way, and it does not encourage users to do so either. Tumblr is juxtaposition, not synthesis; its nature—both in individual blogs and on the user's dashboard—is to accumulate rather than integrate. And, as Booth himself notes, "Diversity is easy to eliminate" on Tumblr (236). Choosing which users to follow (and which tags to blacklist with third-party extensions) allows fans to manage and customize our Tumblr experience, but these choices can also produce what Booth calls a "filter bubble" (263) in which we are exposed only to that with which we're already familiar. Similarly, in multidisciplinary fan studies, it is easy to maintain a fundamentally intradisciplinary perspective simply by following the authors and prioritizing the journals most aligned with our own work. At this point, fan studies is small enough that it is still possible and in some cases even necessary to read beyond one's own specific interest and academic training. But as the field gets bigger—and the fact that this collection exists should remind us that it *is* getting bigger—it will probably become easier to remain in our disciplinary bubbles.

Tensions among intradisciplinary, multidisciplinary, and interdisciplinary inquiry are certainly not unique to fan studies. As Stember's example of women's studies faculty shows, and as Diane Lichtenstein (2012) and Ann Braithwaite (2012) discuss more fully, gender studies (which I use here as shorthand for a field encompassing gender, sexuality, feminist, and women's studies) has a long history of identifying itself as interdisciplinary, even as gender studies programs and majors have gained disciplinary status within academic institutions. The question of whether and how doing interdisciplinary work in gender studies differs from bringing a feminist perspective to disciplinary work has been a live issue in the field since its inception. Gender studies "has sought to challenge not only disciplinary borders and disciplinary rules of conduct but the very idea of boundaries as well as the institutional structures that maintain those boundaries" (Lichtenstein 2012, 35). It's certainly true that, as Susan Stanford Friedman (1998) observes, "[for boundaries] to be transgressed, they must exist" (310): "as a form of intellectual, methodological, and institutional hybridity, interdisciplinarity depends for its meaning upon the prior existence of disciplinarity" (310). But for much of its history, gender studies has focused "not just on producing knowledges, but on accounting for the *process* of knowledge production itself, and especially in the university context that constantly demands (and rewards) differentiation between knowledges, or disciplines" (Braithwaite 2012, 216).

Unlike gender studies, the field of fan studies is not, I think, invested in challenging disciplinary boundaries as an end in itself, not least because it is not quite so powered by concerns about the patriarchal history of knowledge production (though many individual scholars within fan

studies do share those concerns). But claiming interdisciplinarity serves emotional as well as intellectual functions: Lichtenstein (2012) argues that gender studies “needed to believe it is interdisciplinary” because “those identifying as practitioners of Women’s Studies in the 1970s saw themselves as doing transgressive work” (35), a description that resonates with at least some of us in contemporary fan studies as well. If, as Lichtenstein explains, the term *interdisciplinary* contains “promises of innovation, integration, unbounded possibility, and even of progress” (35), it may be those promises, as much as the word’s actual meaning, that fan studies attempts to claim by calling itself interdisciplinary.

My point is not that fan studies should start calling itself multidisciplinary rather than interdisciplinary—though I do think Henry Jenkins (2014) is not wrong when he refers to “the dispersed multidisciplinary nature of fandom studies” (103) at the present moment. Nor am I saying that fan studies *must* be interdisciplinary or that it will never achieve interdisciplinarity. Rather, my point is that measuring fan studies’ belief in our own interdisciplinarity against the meaning of the term raises questions about what we think we’re doing, what we’re actually doing, and what we want to do—both as individual scholars and as a field.

The first question is: Do fan studies practitioners want to engage in interdisciplinary inquiry? It is entirely possible that the answer is “not really.” To return to Booth’s Tumblr comparison: scrolling through a multidisciplinary hodgepodge of content and occasionally reblogging the most appealing bits or even throwing in something of one’s own can be, for many fans, a pretty satisfying activity—just as participating in a largely multidisciplinary version of fan studies has been, for many of us, a pretty satisfying activity. Perhaps it’s enough for fandom-related work from multiple disciplines to accumulate in fan studies (and other) conferences, journals, and anthologies without the kind of integration described by Stember, Newell, Repko and Szostak, Julie Thompson Klein (2010), and other scholars of interdisciplinarity.

Booth’s analogy should also prompt us to ask whether fan studies might be susceptible to the same problems that long-time fans have noted with Tumblr. Specifically, although Tumblr is great for collecting, curating, annotating, and sharing, it is significantly less useful for carrying on sustained, focused dialogue. A Tumblr post can easily accumulate layers of commentary from multiple contributors, but *conversation* can be difficult precisely because recirculating a post produces a new post in a new location with a new audience. Reblogs spin off in all directions; responses appear in many different spaces and take many forms (such as comments in tags rather than the main text of a post). Tumblr does not facilitate the cohesion and collaboration that characterize true interdisciplinarity. Does fan studies? Should it?

If we do want to aim for a more interdisciplinary fan studies, how? That is, if the goal of interdisciplinary inquiry is to integrate insights from multiple disciplines, who do we expect to do the integrating, and where and how is that integrative work to happen? One might argue that the job of fan studies, like Tumblr, is merely to collect and disseminate material and that integration is the private responsibility of the individual user or reader. Then again, fan studies, unlike Tumblr, does not simply distribute whatever is put into it. Rather, the field is curated by editors of journals and anthologies and, to a lesser extent, by conference organizers and proposal reviewers. Perhaps integration is part of that curatorial responsibility, distributed to the rest of the field in editors’ introductions to journal issues and collections like this one. Alternatively, the rest of us might take a more participatory (!) approach to the project of integrating insights from different disciplinary traditions—in our own essays (academia, unlike Tumblr, requires original posts on occasion), in our reviews of others’ work, in panels and roundtable sessions at conferences, or in whatever form our contributions to the field may take.

I believe that all of these questions are worth discussing, and I do not assume that we will reach consensus about the answers. In the remainder of this chapter, however, I proceed from the premise

that we might at least want to consider what a more interdisciplinary fan studies might look like, how it might work, and what the obstacles—and benefits—to such work might be.

What's Left Out—and Why

Three recent essays offer starting points for thinking about interdisciplinarity and outline some of the intellectual and practical problems with sticking to our present multidisciplinary.

In “African American Acafandom and Other Strangers: New Genealogies of Fan Studies,” Rebecca Wanzo (2015) directly addresses interdisciplinarity—or the lack thereof—in fan studies. Wanzo observes that “a rich critical history of black fans and black acafandom” (1.2) has been neglected in fan studies scholarship, identifies key texts in this alternative genealogy, and argues persuasively that “including African American cultural criticism in remapping the genealogies of not only acafandom but also fan criticism ... would both augment and complicate our understanding of much of the vocabulary of fan studies and definitions of fans and antifans” (1.5). She concludes her essay by noting that:

The absence of race in fan studies may be symptomatic of a moment in which increasing numbers of scholars say they do interdisciplinary work without actually engaging with other disciplines. Some scholars who are not trained in television, film, or cultural studies write about popular culture without reading extensively in those fields, as almost every discipline feels as if it has access to the popular. At the same time, race continues to be only vaguely referenced in many fields, if it is referenced at all. Many scholars may fail to do the work of learning the different critical languages and studying the canonical texts in fields that touch their work. (5.4)

The perspective on interdisciplinarity in this paragraph aligns with that described by Repko and Szostak, Newell, and other scholars of interdisciplinarity such as Julie Thompson Klein (2010): not simply presenting one's own work alongside work from other disciplines but, as Wanzo says, “actually engaging with other disciplines”—in this case, African-American studies; not merely citing work from different disciplines but “learning the different critical languages and studying the canonical texts” of those disciplines.

Wanzo's critique dramatizes a specific problem within fan studies: Insufficient attention to African-American studies and critical race studies by fan studies scholars has simultaneously whitewashed our understanding of fans and fandom and left unexamined the “attachments to whiteness” and “investments in whiteness” (1.5) that structure many fans' experiences. At the same time, as Wanzo herself observes, this specific problem is also one symptom of a more general problem: Because fan studies at present is, in practice, more multidisciplinary than interdisciplinary, each of us has license to leave out whatever is not in our own field. The under-interrogated whiteness of fan studies is thus both a significant deficit in and of itself and also one instance of a larger issue: Until someone from a field not currently represented in fan studies' multidisciplinary (and/or someone with interest or expertise in an underdiscussed element of fandom) happens to take an interest in fan studies and show up at a conference or publish in a fan studies journal, potentially valuable topics, tools, texts, theories, and concepts are not even acknowledged, much less brought into the fan studies conversation (see Stanfill's Chapter 19 in this volume). As a result, we risk neglecting critical information and perspectives and reinventing wheels that are readily available outside our home disciplines. Wanzo calls into question the assumption that a *field* can be interdisciplinary even if most of the scholars in that field do not do interdisciplinary work.

Adrienne Evans and Mafalda Stasi (2014) address interdisciplinarity more obliquely than Wanzo, through a discussion of methods and methodology in fan studies. In “Desperately Seeking

Methodology: New Directions in Fan Studies Research,” they describe fan studies as “located at an inherently interdisciplinary space” but note that there are “both bridges and divides between those positioned across the humanities and social sciences” (6). The essay describes their search for “explicit discussion in fan studies research of methodology or substantial research methods sections, accounts of lived experience, or discussions of textual analysis” (5). They report that they found very little of such discussion: “despite a variety of published research in the area of fan studies, explicit reference to methodology or research methods was often missing” (5). Although Evans and Stasi do not explicitly make this point, the dearth of methodological discussion can be understood as a symptom of fan studies scholarship that is produced within the intellectual context of a single home discipline (where disciplinary and methodological assumptions are likely to be shared and thus do not require explicit explanation), even if the intended audience includes readers from outside that discipline.

Evans and Stasi note that the limited attention to methodology in fan studies

has wider implications, raising questions such as: what kinds of knowledge do fan studies researchers want to produce? What are the objects being studied? How does fan studies inform a general approach to research? And how is the area going to maintain itself, if we don’t start talking about our methodology and world view? (4)

Most of us, I hope, could answer Evans and Stasi’s first two questions for ourselves, but I wonder how similar our answers would be and how well we could anticipate each other’s answers. The third and fourth questions are trickier—for each of us, and certainly for fan studies as a whole. Evans and Stasi point out that fan studies emerges from “a rich tradition of methodological discussion situated at the intersections of media and cultural studies, with its concerns about the audience, the production of media texts, and the way texts, identities and industries interact” (8), implying, perhaps, that fan studies scholars with a media studies or cultural studies background have addressed methodological issues in their disciplinary training and may feel that further discussion would be redundant. But if the field of fan studies is to be truly interdisciplinary and not merely a subset of media and cultural studies, then all of us—including scholars trained or housed in media studies—need to have some sense of what “viewpoints, approaches and ‘ways of seeing the world’” (5) other disciplines are bringing (or could bring) to the table.

Katherine Morrissey’s (2013) essay “Fan/dom: People, Practices, and Networks” illustrates this point. Though prompted by a specific event—Amazon’s announcement of its Kindle Worlds platform—the essay intervenes in a much larger conversation about how our field theorizes fans, and in particular the recurring debate about how to define *fan* and *fandom*. Who counts as a fan? What’s the difference between fans and other audiences or consumers? Are we studying individuals or groups? Emotional investment or textual production? Affirmation or transformation? What about antifans? The differences in our answers, and the resulting differences in scholarly emphasis, have been widely noted and described as a shift or movement from studying social and interpretive communities and their creative output to studying individual fans’ patterns of consumption and emotional involvement (Busse and Hellekson 2006; Gray et al. 2007; Coppa 2014). The editors of *Fandom*, in particular, frame this movement as a corrective that allows us to “broaden our analytic scope to a wide range of audiences” (Gray et al. 2007, 8).

But this understanding of the different threads of fan studies misses a critical point, which is that “this broadening of subject represents a *change* of subject” (Coppa 2014, 74). As Morrissey observes:

If this is a refocusing ... it is one that risks reducing our depth of field. Individuals interact with objects in many ways, and group ties play a major role in guiding how they do so. A great deal of fan

activity is still cooperative and still linked to social networks. This means that the specifics of community and context remain significant, particularly in a networked media environment where media objects are increasingly designed to be shared. (2.3)

Morrissey's response to the field's "refocusing" is a fundamentally methodological proposal. She sensibly suggests that "rather than narrowing our view to focus on individuals and consumption, it may be more productive to see the shift, instead, as an *addition* to approaches we have long used to study fans" and that we should "look at the different ways that fan experiences are distributed at both the individual and social levels" and "analyze fandom *not only* through individuals' media consumption, *but also* through fan networks and practices" (2.4, emphases mine). Morrissey's argument that "the field of fan studies needs to approach fans and fandom in a variety of ways: at the level of the individual, at the level of practices, and as a framework in which the self encounters media culture" (2.5) implicitly acknowledges that fan studies is multidisciplinary; no single discipline or approach is going to give us all the tools we need to understand all the things fans do and make—especially as fan landscapes shift, fan practices change, and fannish activities are mainstreamed and monetized.

At the same time, though Morrissey does not use this language, her recommendations suggest that being more overtly interdisciplinary would allow us to better understand each other and, further, to borrow from each other, to recognize the affordances and limitations of different approaches and combine our own training and habits of mind with the tools of other disciplines when appropriate. Foregrounding methodological discussions might help us share information that is relevant across disciplines but that our lack of institutional infrastructure can render invisible, especially to scholars new to the field. For example, scholars publishing or presenting work in their home disciplines might not be aware of the guidelines for best practices in Internet research suggested by the Association of Internet Researchers (Markham and Buchanan 2012) or the editors of *Transformative Works and Cultures* (Busse and Hellekson 2012)—unless those guidelines are part of a robust and ongoing discussion of methods in the field.

Obstacles to Interdisciplinarity

As these three essays suggest, interdisciplinary scholarship faces a number of obstacles. Many of these obstacles have to do with the structures of the institutions within which we train and work. Colleges and universities are organized by departments that, for the most part, represent separate disciplines. Most if not all of us are trained and later employed within departments that *are not fan studies*, which means that, however interdisciplinary the field (or our own scholarly inclinations) may be, we spend a great deal of our time thinking, reading, teaching, and working in disciplinary contexts. Our choices about what projects to pursue are likely to be influenced by what will be legible to dissertation advisers, search committees, tenure and promotion committees, and other colleagues. As grad students, we have to think about the realities of the job market; as faculty, we need to be taken seriously in our employing departments and in our home disciplines more broadly. For most of us, that means presenting at conferences and publishing in journals and anthologies clearly related to our home disciplines. In particular, junior faculty at American colleges and universities may be discouraged from pursuing interdisciplinary research because such work can create difficulties during the tenure process: external review letters from colleagues outside the candidate's home discipline may be seen as irrelevant, essays in interdisciplinary journals may be perceived as having less merit than those in disciplinary journals. These problems are not universal, but they do exist. For most of us, there are few institutional rewards for doing truly interdisciplinary work—and few consequences for *not* doing it.

The pressure to produce disciplinary rather than interdisciplinary work and to publish in disciplinary rather than interdisciplinary venues can be especially acute, and especially isolating, for graduate students and junior faculty not trained and housed in media studies programs. Fan studies is often treated and marketed by publishers, and even by scholars in the field, as a subset of media studies: Routledge labels Henry Jenkins's *Textual Poachers* (2013) "media studies/popular culture" on the back cover of the print edition, while NYU Press labels Gray, Sandvoss, and Harrington's *Fandom* (2007) as "cultural studies/media studies" (despite contributions from scholars in other fields). Similarly, media studies publications make up much of the Fan Studies Network's list of journals that welcome articles on fan studies. The list does include *Transformative Works and Cultures* and *Journal of Fandom Studies*, both dedicated to fan studies, and the multi-disciplinary *New Media & Society*, which "publishes key research from communication, media and cultural studies, as well as sociology, geography, anthropology, economics, the political and information sciences and the humanities." But most of the list consists of media and cultural studies publications: *Participations*, *Intensities*, *Cinema Journal*, *Popular Communication*, *International Journal of Cultural Studies*, and so on. These are valuable journals, without question, but so are (to pick just three examples from my own home fields) *Computers and Composition*, *JAC: A Journal of Rhetoric, Culture, and Politics*, and *Journal of Adolescent Literacy*, all of which have published work relevant to, and to varying degrees informed by, fan studies.

This disciplinary imbalance is self-perpetuating. For most prospective graduate students interested in studying fans or fandom, it might seem like media studies is the logical discipline within which to work. It can be harder to imagine examining fandom through the lens of, say, Africana studies, American studies, anthropology, art history, classics, comparative literature, composition studies, computer science, dance, demography, discourse analysis, East Asian studies, economics, fashion design, gender and sexuality studies, history, information science, Latin American area studies, law, linguistics, literacy, literature, musicology, performance studies, philosophy, psychology, rhetoric, sociology, South Asian studies, statistics, visual studies, or any of the other relevant fields I've no doubt left out. Important though the field of media studies is to the multidisciplinary mix of fan studies, it is possible to study fans, fandom, and fan behaviors and practices with very little reference to the media or mediated experiences that inspire some contemporary fannishness, especially when we remember that not all fans are or have been *media* fans.

Institutional pressures can also be exacerbated by our own disciplinary tendencies: the interests and habits of mind that drew us to graduate study in the first place. As scholars, most of us are to some extent "fans" of disciplines, theories, approaches, assumptions, and methods that we find particularly congenial or persuasive. It is personally satisfying, as well as professionally prudent, to reflect those disciplinary interests and preferences in our fan studies research. For many of us, then, learning the key texts, concepts, and norms of another discipline well enough to produce integrative interdisciplinary scholarship can seem counterintuitive. And, of course, it can also be uncomfortable; the prospect may activate imposter syndrome and fears of failure. As Wanzo (2015) reminds us, interdisciplinarity "is humbling and hard. Doing truly interdisciplinary work means that sometimes you may get things wrong" (5.4).

These tensions between interdisciplinary intellectual pursuits and disciplinary norms challenge our cohesion as a field. The *Journal of Fandom Studies* acknowledges as much in its standing Call for Papers: "The multi-disciplinary nature of fan studies makes the development of a community of scholars sometimes difficult to achieve." Journals like *JFS* and especially the online, open-access *TWC* help centralize our conversations, as do organizations and events like the Fan Studies Network and its annual conference. But in practice, fan studies research is dispersed across publications and disciplines. Online bibliographies, though valuable, are inevitably incomplete, not least because there's always a field, or a journal within a field, that the compilers did not think to include, did not value enough to include (once again, see Wanzo), or simply did not know

about. Tracking individual scholars on various online sites and platforms can certainly help, but there are always people we haven't heard of or did not remember to find online after a terrific conference presentation. And as the field gets bigger, it is tempting to allow our conception of which existing work is relevant to a particular project to get smaller, lest our reading lists spiral out of control.

Benefits of Interdisciplinarity

Given the present state of the field and the potential difficulties of doing interdisciplinary work, it is worth taking a step back to think about whether and how interdisciplinarity is worth it. What makes the prospect of interdisciplinary fan studies any better than writing about fans or fandom in the context of our disciplinary silos? What do we get out of being a multidisciplinary field, and how might being interdisciplinary extend or enhance those benefits?

1. In fan studies—whether multidisciplinary or interdisciplinary—we do not have to apologize for our topics. Some of us come from home disciplines that are suspicious of research on fans, fandom, or fan works for any of a number of reasons. Being able to take for granted that fans are worth studying rather than having to defend that premise is one of the greatest gifts we give each other.
2. Fan studies allows us, even obligates us, to keep fans, fandom, and fan activities at the center of our work. Outside of a fan studies context, we can easily be distracted by the things that fans are fans *of*—especially if we're fans ourselves, and especially if those objects of fandom are established objects of study in our home fields. But in a fan studies context, we can stay focused on fans and fandom, as opposed to the music, media, characters, creators, performers, events, texts, and teams that fans adore. We can study what fans do, the activities (affirmative or transformative, fleeting or ongoing, individual or social) and investments (of meaning, emotion, time, money) that characterize fans and fan communities.
3. We share at least a few foundational texts and terms. As scholars, we can assume that a fan studies audience is aware of an existing body of work on fans and fandom and that they've probably read at least a little bit more of it than *Textual Poachers*. As readers, we can assume that the *author* is aware of that body of work—frequently *not* the case for either journalism or the “look at this shiny thing I've discovered!” scholarship characteristic of, but not limited to, conference presentations by graduate students who are interested in fan-related topics within their field but who have not yet found fan studies. Interdisciplinarity goes further: seeking out and citing work by people trained in fields not our own can give us a more nuanced and/or comprehensive view of the field and establish more links among disciplinary nodes.
4. Because we share (some) texts and terms, we can get beyond the “Fandom 101” (“Slash 101,” “Vidding 101,” etc.) exposition that inevitably takes up time or space in any publication, presentation, or proposal aimed at an audience that does not have a fan studies background. We can prioritize depth and complexity rather than explanation and overview. Explicitly comparing and evaluating the value of different approaches for particular topics and purposes equip us to see what is new and interesting in our own ideas and work—as opposed to where we are reinventing the wheel—and to build that work on broader foundations.
5. Fan studies connects us to colleagues with whom we can develop mutually supportive intellectual and personal relationships grounded in shared scholarly (and sometimes fannish)

interests: people with whom we can kick around ideas and compare notes on recent readings, people who show up at our conference panels and whose papers we always want to read, people who may even become co-panelists, co-editors, co-authors. Greater interdisciplinarity allows us to connect with *more* of these people and to understand and learn from questions, suggestions, and criticisms grounded in other disciplinary ways of knowing.

6. The pre-existence of fan studies—as an area of interest, as a body of work—can help us explain and justify our work to skeptical colleagues, administrators, editors, and granting agencies. Especially for grad students and junior faculty, this is a non-trivial benefit. (One of the most astonishing things about *Textual Poachers*, and something that is easy to overlook now that Henry Jenkins is the venerable elder statesman of fan studies, is that Jenkins published it before he had tenure. You would not have caught me pinning my tenure hopes on a book in a field that was not actually a field yet, no matter *how* good a book it was.) Even for those of us whose work is fan-related but discipline-specific, being able to explain the borders and parameters of fan studies and its relation to our work—or the work of students or colleagues whom we are recommending or evaluating—has value. If we cannot explain the coherence of fan studies as a field beyond “the study of fans and fandom,” then we put ourselves and our colleagues at a disadvantage when dealing with people in our home disciplines and at our home institutions who are reluctant to take fans and fandom seriously. More explicitly interdisciplinary expertise increases the odds that each of us will be able to explain the value of our work in terms that colleagues in *other* disciplines, as well as our own home disciplines, will understand.

Interdisciplinarity is, as of this writing, a fashionable idea, not to say a buzzword. Its very popularity is a reason to be skeptical of it, not least because its appeal to administrators often has to do with the perception that interdisciplinarity is a way of doing more with less: more work from the same number of faculty, more ways to market existing resources. At the same time, interdisciplinarity is no mere passing fad. As Susan Stanford Friedman (1998) notes, paraphrasing the science faculty with whom she spoke, “the cutting edge of science has for many years existed at the interface of scientific boundaries. Scholarship solidly within the discipline, they argued, is important and necessary, but it seldom breaks new ground. Their frontiers of knowledge clearly sat in the liminal space between traditional disciplines” (320). Disciplines are important for the preservation and transmission of present knowledge, but new knowledge is often made at the edges and in the interstices of those disciplines—not just by accumulating disciplinary ideas but by identifying and analyzing the places where those ideas converge or conflict.

Toward an Interdisciplinary Fan Studies

Diane Lichtenstein (2012) argues that, for gender studies, interdisciplinarity is “an ever-receding horizon, an unachievable destination” that nevertheless “has functioned as a catalyst and a place toward which to travel” (50). This is, it seems to me, a sensible way to think about interdisciplinary work. I am not interested in setting arbitrary standards for what is interdisciplinary enough, much less policing the field or individual contributions to it for adherence to such standards, but I do think that, for many of us, moving (or continuing to move) in the direction of interdisciplinarity, integration, and critical reflection on our ways of making knowledge is a goal worth considering.

We might think of interdisciplinarity, then, not as a product but as a process, and specifically as a process of creating sustained dialogue about and among the knowledges and methodologies of existing disciplines. Those dialogues would be anchored in specific disciplines; as I have already

acknowledged, there are both practical and intellectual reasons for each of us to maintain what Friedman (1998) calls “a strong home base,” a disciplinary starting point for work “which one enriches and challenges with ideas and methods from other areas” (312). Depending on the project, these dialogues might be either literal or metaphorical, either “a collaborative process where people from different disciplines interact” or “a form of individual intellectual travel away from one’s home discipline” (313). Of course, these approaches are not mutually exclusive and could even be mutually supportive; it is easy to imagine the publication of collaborative work that offers starting points for other scholars’ intellectual travel or of intellectual travel that sparks ideas for collaboration.

Of the two options, “intellectual travel” is for most of us the more familiar, and it is, I think, the direction in which Wanzo’s, Evans and Stasi’s, and Morrissey’s essays all point. Doing our homework on neighboring fields and learning about methods from other disciplines are both forms of intellectual travel; the new theories, methods, and information that we bring back from these travels can help us “challenge and shed light on disciplinary knowledge” (Friedman 1998, 313).

Collaborative processes are less common, at least in part because co-authored work is often even more undervalued than interdisciplinary work, especially in the humanities. For junior faculty in tenure-track positions, collaboration may not be worth the risk; I have attended more than one tenure and promotion meeting in which tenured faculty debated how much weight to give a junior colleague’s co-authored publications. These realities suggest that the primary responsibility for both doing collaborative work and asserting and defending the value of such work should fall to those members of the field who have tenure or other forms of job security.

But collaborative work offers a number of benefits, including access to a much richer and more nuanced understanding of relevant research and methods than intellectual travel alone may be able to provide—and thus some insurance against what Ethan Kleinberg (2008) describes as “dilettantism” and Friedman (1998) calls “superficiality” (318). Sam Ford (2014) identifies some possible starting points:

The gap between histories of studying sports fandom and pop culture fandom – and my own experience in researching pro wrestling – are just two examples of a wide range of work in other disciplines with which we should strive to connect the body of fan studies work. To draw on other examples of cultural texts/fan communities from my own life, the communities surrounding country and bluegrass music provide a rich area for fan studies to collaborate with folk studies. Active fandom of gospel/Christian music groups and Protestant evangelists might provide the chance for deeper collaboration with scholars in religious studies, anthropology, and communication studies. Or more exploration of fan communities surrounding politicians and celebrities, in connection with political science. Or deeper studies on the aging of long-term media fan communities, in collaboration with gerontology scholars. These are all areas fan studies has brushed up against from time to time but also where more exploration needs to be done from a fan studies orientation, and in many cases where vibrant histories of research already exist with which we might come into deeper conversation. (62)

Ford’s language suggests the kind of project-based collaboration described by Kleinberg (2008), in which “interested faculty from multiple disciplines are brought together in order to address a specific issue or set of issues.” Kleinberg’s discussion takes as its starting point an interdisciplinary program at a single institution, but the idea can of course be applied to partnerships across institutional as well as disciplinary boundaries. He emphasizes that this project-based model focuses on “dialogue, exchange, and the infusion of new ideas,” and thus not only accommodates but in fact relies on participants grounded in traditional disciplines. “In turn,” he notes, “the traditional disciplines are brought into contact with each other not only through the interaction of scholars and students in the interdisciplinary projects but also through the return of these scholars to their

‘home’ disciplines, where they can share these new ideas and approaches.” In such collaborations, “participants must have an eye toward the holistic complex of interrelationships and take into account the contributions of others in making their own contributions” (Stember 1991).

From existing discussions of interdisciplinary work, we can draw not only information about the general value of collaboration but also specific ideas about how such collaborations might be undertaken. Stember’s (1991) essay is particularly useful in this regard, and a brief examination of her key proposals about procedure demonstrates that, as a field, we already have many of the tools that we need to continue developing our interdisciplinarity. She quotes R. Richard Wohl’s advice that “clusters of scholars must be united in self-sustaining and satisfying social ties before creative collaborative work becomes possible” (11)—ties that social media make much easier to develop and sustain now than when the essay was published, though for many of us they would still require a concerted effort to seek feedback from and provide feedback to colleagues trained in disciplines different from our own. Stember suggests that collaborations begin with “preliminary exploration by all members of what the discipline can offer to the problem of interest” (8)—an exploration modeled in general terms, as we have already seen, by Busse and Hellekson’s (2014) inventory of various disciplines’ contributions to and interests within fan studies (1–2).

This exploration might be followed by conversation in which “each specialist should have the opportunity to inform and educate the other colleagues presenting both theoretical and methodological views” of the problem at hand—exactly the sort of explicit methodological discussion advocated by Evans and Stasi (2014)—and “discontinuities of method and perspectives are to be tolerated and even celebrated as indicators of pluralism and diversity, hallmarks of interdisciplinary efforts” (8). As the collaboration proceeds, participants must address their methodological differences; Stember (1991) suggests several strategies for doing so, include presenting parallel methods, combining methods, using dialectical reasoning to reconcile apparently contradictory methods, and developing new methods that draw selectively from existing methods in order to address a complex, multidimensional issue or problem (9–10).

More importantly, Stember (1991) suggests, collaborators must address *epistemological* differences, and this point applies not only to collaboration but to the “intellectual travel” approach to interdisciplinarity: “Participants need to recognize that different disciplines have different cognitive maps and that learning at least part of these maps is essential for turning multidisciplinary work into interdisciplinary work” (9). These cognitive maps include “basic concepts, modes of inquiry, what counts as a problem, representation techniques, standards of proof, types of explanation, and general ideals of what constitutes the discipline” (9). Her assessment of the importance of understanding these differences resonates with Wanzo’s: “failure to learn concepts and other parts of another’s disciplinary map results in communication at the lowest common denominator” (9).

My point here is not to adopt or endorse Stember’s proposals as the only or even the best way to do interdisciplinary work. I quote her at length merely to reiterate that there is already a substantial body of work about interdisciplinarity stretching back several decades—my citations in this chapter only scratch the surface—on which we can draw as we consider the nature and direction of the field and our own contributions to it. This literature is seldom cited within fan studies but might inform in useful ways both our sense of the field and our ongoing conversations.

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