

Transformative Works and Cultures, No. 14 (September 15, 2013)

Editorial

TWC Editor, Spreadable fandom

Theory

Juli J. Parrish, [Metaphors we read by: People, process, and fan fiction](#)

Simon Lindgren, [Sub*culture: Exploring the dynamics of a networked public](#)

Praxis

Sarah Fiona Winters, [A Japanese media pilgrimage to a Tasmanian bakery](#)

Lori Hitchcock Morimoto, [Trans-cult-ural fandom: Desire, technology and the transformation of fan subjectivities in the Japanese female fandom of Hong Kong stars](#)

Emily Regan Wills, [Fannish discourse communities and the construction of gender in "The X-Files"](#)

Kevin Veale, [Capital, dialogue, and community engagement—My Little Pony: Friendship Is Magic understood as an alternate reality game](#)

Symposium

Whitney Phillips, [So bad it's good: The "kuso" aesthetic in "Troll 2"](#)

Shannon K. Farley, [Translation, interpretation, fan fiction: A continuum of meaning production](#)

Katherine E. Morrissey, [Fan/dom: People, practices, and networks](#)

Mel Stanfill, [Fandom, public, commons](#)

Review

Melissa A. Click, ["Spreadable media: Creating value and meaning in a networked culture," by Henry Jenkins, Sam Ford, and Joshua Green](#)

Josh Johnson, ["Reclaiming fair use," by Patricia Aufderheide and Peter Jaszi](#)

Amanda Georgeanne Retartha, ["Genre, reception, and adaptation in the 'Twilight' series," edited by Anne Morey](#)

Editorial

Spreadable fandom

TWC Editor

[0.1] *Abstract*—This issue indicates our expansion to include ever-wider arenas in which fans engage even as we remain focused on the communities and activities that gave rise to this discipline and to this journal in the first place.

[0.2] *Keywords*—Analysis; Authorship; Fan fiction

TWC Editor. 2013. "Spreadable Fandom" [editorial]. *Transformative Works and Cultures*, no. 14. <http://dx.doi.org/10.3983/twc.2013.0550>.

1. Introduction

[1.1] One of the most important publications for fan studies this year is Henry Jenkins, Sam Ford, and Joshua Green's *Spreadable Media*, even though—or maybe because—it mostly sidesteps media fandom in favor of using a variety of examples of commercial and industry-driven transmedia campaigns. Yet the book owes a lot to Jenkins's earlier work on traditional media fandoms, and these fandoms certainly lurk in the interstices of the arguments about user-generated content, transmedia authorships, and spreadable media. This general issue of TWC, No. 14, indicates our own expansion to include ever-wider arenas in which fans engage even as we remain focused on the communities and activities that gave rise to this discipline and to this journal in the first place.

[1.2] Accordingly, we include in this issue Melissa Click's review of *Spreadable Media*, joined by reviews of two books that show the range of media studies and TWC: Josh Johnson's review of *Reclaiming Fair Use*, by Patricia Aufderheide and Peter Jaszi, and Amanda Retartha's review of Anne Morey's important Twilight collection *Genre, Reception, and Adaptation in the Twilight Series*. Fandom studies thus proves to be both interdisciplinary (legal, literary, and media studies) and methodologically diverse (broad theoretical musings, specific case studies, and quantitative accounts). Fans and fandoms are multiple, as are the approaches to studying them; TWC continues to broaden its outlook, its authors, and its themes to do reflect to these various changes as the discipline of fan studies evolves.

2. Theory and Praxis

[2.1] The Theory and Praxis essays in this issue range broadly, geographically, culturally, and thematically. The two essays that comprise the Theory section illustrate some of that range. Juli J. Parrish's "Metaphors We Read By: People, Process, and Fan Fiction" studies the

terms fan scholars have used to discuss the process of fan fiction. Different metaphors, she argues, evoke vastly different conceptual processes that affect legal, literary, and social arguments. Resurrecting Constance Penley's metaphor of Brownian motion, Parrish advocates a view of fan fiction fandom as a chaotic space of creativity. Simon Lindgren likewise looks for useful models to describe fan communities in "Sub*culture: Exploring the Dynamics of a Networked Public." Lindgren reads online subbing communities as virtual public spaces as he studies the linguistic and social exchange dominating these communities. He analyzes their similarities and interactions by situating this particular networked public within the larger community of Internet culture.

[2.2] In the first two Praxis essays, Craig Norris and Lori Hitchcock Morimoto look at international media reception and fan tourism. For Norris, the element of the international fan pilgrimage is central to his argument in "A Japanese Media Pilgrimage to a Tasmanian Bakery." However, Craig's study suggests the pilgrimage is much more than a visit and celebration of a bakery that may have inspired a popular anime series. He also shows how all experiences surrounding fan travels become meaningful and are reconstituted as important fan experiences and expressions. Likewise, Morimoto observes the reception of Hong Kong film among Japanese female fans in "Trans-cult-ural Fandom: Desire, Technology, and the Transformation of Fan Subjectivities in the Japanese Female Fandom of Hong Kong Stars." She focuses on transcultural affect in her analysis of fan letters and zines to paint a historical picture of this moment in the history of Japanese fans, cult fandom, and Hong Kong film stars that is revealing of emotional intensity and star construction as well as material cultures and infrastructures.

[2.3] The final two Praxis pieces focus on individual fandoms and their surrounding communities, one older and the other more recent, but both groundbreaking. Emily Regan Wills looks at *The X-Files* and the way fans negotiate issues of gender both in readings of the show and in their own fan works. "Fannish Discourse Communities and the Construction of Gender in *The X-Files*" suggests that political—and other—topics are discussed and debated fruitfully within the multiple discourse communities of a given fandom. Kevin Veale's "Capital, Dialogue, and Community Engagement: *My Little Pony—Friendship Is Magic* Understood as an Alternate Reality Game" looks at the unusual fandom of *My Little Pony*, which has been singled out in popular media as a result of its unusual demographic of young adult boys for a show targeted to preteen girls. Veale's focus, however, is less on the unusual demographics than it is on the way the vocal fan community and its interaction with show runners constitute an example of how the structures of the show create a viewer's (and fan's) affective experience. Comparing it to alternate reality games, Veale concludes, allows the show's affective dimensions to be analyzed even as it becomes clear that the show is not exceptional in facilitating such strong emotional viewer engagements and interactions.

3. Symposium

[3.1] The Symposium section also covers a range of diverse topics and methodologies: antifandom, fannish roots in ancient texts, and the role of politics in fan communities. The

first two essays both describe personal investments in texts. Whitney Philips describes her enjoyment of and investment in *Troll 2*, focusing on what has been called antifandom yet looking at the particular aesthetic at play in this film, so terrible that it may actually be good. In contrast, Shannon K. Farley, focusing on original-language classical Homeric texts, looks over her personal scholarly history to establish the connection between fan fiction and translation studies, and to demonstrate her own academic investment in bringing the two together.

[3.2] The remaining two Symposium essays focus less on texts and personal investment and more on the overall role of community discourses within online media fandoms, especially in the wake of the recent Kindle Worlds announcement inviting fans to contribute to an online shared-world textual marketplace. Mel Stanfill uses this new model to address questions of artistic and communal ownership. By focusing on the way fandom spaces function as publics and counterpublics simultaneously, Stanfill suggests that such complex sociopolitical negotiations are erased when fan texts are commercialized. Katherine E. Morrissey likewise begins with Kindle's attempt to commercialize fan fiction, though her essay ultimately challenges the very model of expansive fan studies with which we began this introduction. She suggests that there may be real dangers—for fans and for the discipline of fan studies—in expanding the field without being aware of the different dynamics and remaining wary of them. As Morrissey concludes, "Only by exploring fandom holistically, looking at its communities, its practices, and its individuals, can fan studies continue to map out the role of fans and fandom in the shared production of contemporary culture and society" (¶3.9).

4. Coming up

[4.1] The next two issues of TWC, Nos. 15 and 16, will appear in spring 2014 as guest-edited special issues: Mel Stanfill and Megan Condis coedit a special issue on fan labor, and Bob Rehak's special issue focuses on material fandom.

[4.2] TWC No. 17 will be an open, unthemed issue, and we welcome general submissions. We particularly encourage fans to submit Symposium essays. We encourage all potential authors to read the submission guidelines (<http://journal.transformativeworks.org/index.php/twc/about/submissions#onlineSubmissions>). The close date for receipt of copy for No. 17 is March 15, 2014.

5. Acknowledgments

[5.1] It is not possible to properly acknowledge the depth of appreciation we feel toward everyone who has helped make this issue of TWC possible. They have suffered hard deadlines, late nights, and short due dates. As always, we thank the authors in this issue, whose original work makes TWC possible; the peer reviewers, who freely provide their time and expertise; the editorial team members, whose engagement with and solicitation of

material is so valuable; and the production team members, who transform rough manuscripts into publishable documents.

[5.2] The following people worked on TWC No. 14 in an editorial capacity: Kristina Busse and Karen Hellekson (editors); Cameron Salisbury (Symposium); and Louisa Stein (Review).

[5.3] The following people worked on TWC No. 14 in a production capacity: Rrain Prior (production editor); Beth Friedman, Shoshanna Green, and Christine Mains (copyeditors); Rrain Prior (layout editor); and Amanda Georgeanne Retartha and Carmen Montopoli (proofreaders).

[5.4] TWC thanks the journal project's Organization for Transformative Works board liaison, Andrea Horbinski. OTW provides financial support and server space to TWC but is not involved in any way in the content of the journal, which is editorially independent.

[5.5] TWC thanks all its board members, whose names appear on TWC's masthead, as well as the additional peer reviewers and Symposium reviewers who provided service for TWC No. 14: Darren Ashmore, Stephanie Betz, Bertha Chin, Alexandra Edwards, Darlene Hampton, Leon Hunt, Kyra Hunting, Mikhail Koulikov, Cheuk Yi Li, Luis Perez-Gonzalez, Stijn Reijnders, and Amanda Retartha.

Theory

Metaphors we read by: People, process, and fan fiction

Juli J. Parrish

University of Denver, Denver, Colorado, United States

[0.1] *Abstract*—New metaphors must be adopted for the writing of fan fiction. Henry Jenkins's metaphor of the textual poacher has achieved tacit acceptance and widespread circulation, suggesting that it has become relatively fixed as a description of fan creative practices among fans as well as in scholarship. Challenges to this model and metaphor are important but have not successfully displaced the prominence of the textual poacher. One promising alternative structure is that of Brownian motion, a scientific concept that both Michel de Certeau and Constance Penley have offered as a metaphor for creativity. Whereas textual poaching offers us a vision of fans as nomads, moving through a place and collecting materials, Brownian motion offers us a vision of fan fiction as world building, a process that remakes the place itself. Metaphors such as Brownian motion do not only offer us a different framework for understanding the creative processes that characterize fan fiction writing; they also remind us to focus on those creative processes themselves, as well as on the fans who engage in them.

[0.2] *Keywords*—Brownian motion; Creative process; Readers; Textual poaching

Parrish, Juli J. 2013. "Metaphors We Read By: People, Process, and Fan Fiction." *Transformative Works and Cultures*, no. 14.

<http://dx.doi.org/10.3983/twc.2013.0486>.

1. Introduction

[1.1] Fan fiction springs from a what-if moment. It takes something a text has offered to us as inevitable—a plot, a character trait, a setting—and unmakes it, thereby opening up a different set of possibilities. What if Oz had not decided to pursue a werewolf education, and instead stayed in Sunnydale with Willow and the rest of the *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* gang? What if Xena were not a warrior princess but a drug lord living in New York in the 1990s? What if, when Bella dove off the cliff in the second *Twilight* book, she broke her back and ended up paralyzed from the waist down? What if—to take the classic example—Kirk and Spock were lovers? In fan fiction, asking the question both unmakes one story and makes a new one possible.

[1.2] Consider this familiar premise: a fan visits a vast cultural preserve. She is perceived as a trespasser by the property owners, who have erected fences around their material. To sustain herself on her journey—because she will be moving on—the

fan must help herself to the conceptual game and vegetation. This, of course, is the story of the textual poacher, arguably the most influential story told about media fans in the last 20 years. It's a good story, but it's not the only one available to us. In a slightly earlier version of this story, the fan isn't passing through the cultural preserve but instead rebuilding it from the ground up. She uses existing materials to change the design; she reroutes the roads that allow access; she introduces new technologies that offer a different experience to future visitors.

[1.3] These two images of media fans, by Henry Jenkins and Constance Penley, respectively, appeared only a year apart in the early 1990s. These authors drew their central figures from the same theorist, Michel de Certeau. They wrote about fans of the same television program, *Star Trek*, and the creative practices of those fans. And yet Constance Penley's vision of fandom as Brownian motion was left alone, mentioned only occasionally in subsequent scholarship, while Henry Jenkins's idea of the fan as textual poacher became a powerful and dominant metaphor for the work that fans do. Any number of other metaphors for the notion of the fan have been suggested: minstrel (Hellekson 1997), performer (Lancaster 2001), steward (Davis and Brewer 1997), pilgrim (Aden 1999), apprentice (Borah 2002), gamekeeper (Hills 2002; Bury 2008), puppeteer (Pugh 2005); the list goes on. Many of these metaphors are compelling, offering us a range of ways to conceive of the processes by which fans make meaning. But they have not managed to shift the central idea of the textual poacher, which functions as a definition of fan work and a legitimizing description, and which presents such a coherent and powerful image of the fan as free agent and active transgressor.

[1.4] In this essay, I pose a set of what-ifs. What if we disrupt the concept of the textual poacher as a literal description of who media fans are? What if we use the idea of Brownian motion to help decenter and refocus our metaphorical understanding of what fans do? This essay, of course, is not a work of fiction, and so the move to ask what-if may not offer any real exigency. So let me suggest that we need to reconsider Penley's metaphor and its power to capture an aspect of fan fiction processes—world building—that does not fit easily into received metaphorical constructs about fans. In fact, Brownian motion is an outlier in the history of fan metaphors, not only because the process it shows us is so different from that of textual poaching, but also because it focuses on a process and not on an imagined person. In reconsidering this metaphor now, I suggest that our understanding of the creative work of fan fiction writing would benefit from adopting metaphors that allow us to focus more on process as well as on people.

[1.5] My purpose, then, is threefold. I first acknowledge the tacit acceptance and widespread circulation of Jenkins's metaphor of the textual poacher, suggesting that it

has become relatively fixed as a description of fan creative practices among fans as well as in scholarship. Next, I consider why challenges to that model and metaphor are important, but have not successfully displaced the prominence of the textual poacher. I then reconsider the idea of Brownian motion, a scientific concept that both de Certeau and Penley have offered as a metaphor for fan creativity, as an alternative construction. Whereas textual poaching offers us a vision of fans as nomads, moving through a place and collecting materials, Brownian motion offers us a vision of fan fiction as nearly invisible world building, a process that remakes places in ways that are difficult to name. Finally, I argue not that the metaphor of Brownian motion should itself become a new orthodoxy, but rather that we acknowledge its potential for modeling constructions of fan fiction writing that allow us to see different aspects of this kind of creative work.

2. The life of the textual poacher

[2.1] The textual poacher has become a character in its own right: in a recent blog post discussing an anniversary edition of *Textual Poachers*, Jenkins notes that his groundbreaking study of the cultural work of television fans has reached its 20th birthday, and is now "old enough to drink and vote" (2012). Jenkins's now-familiar premise is adapted from Michel de Certeau's work in *The Practice of Everyday Life*: that media fans are poachers, "readers who appropriate popular texts and reread them in a fashion that serves different interests, as spectators who transform the experience of watching television into a rich and complex participatory culture" (Jenkins 1992, 23). Jenkins takes care to distinguish his model of fan activity from what he calls "the passivity and alienation" of de Certeau's original essay on "Reading as Poaching." De Certeau constructs writing as an activity in time and space, one that can be documented and kept and that achieves a kind of agency, "resist[ing] time by the establishment of a place and multiply[ing] its production through the expansionism of reproduction" (1984, 174). Reading, on the other hand, "takes no measures against the erosion of time...It does not keep what it acquires, or it does so poorly" (174). De Certeau's sense of reading as poaching resides in his notion that readers are travelers —nomads and poachers—who pass through the "private hunting reserve[s]" of texts as through physical territory, taking what they need for sustenance but unable to put down roots or provide their own stock.

[2.2] Jenkins's revision of de Certeau's work is fundamental to his own theory of fan activity. He resists the ultimate separation between reader and writer, suggesting instead that "fan practices blur the distinction between reading and writing" (1992, 155). He argues that fans who engage in speculation, criticism, and fictionalizing are not only active readers but indeed writers, whose "scribbling in the margins" of media texts constitutes an explicit counter-position to de Certeau's claims. De Certeau writes

of a reader who, although able to recombine textual fragments in unintended ways, is always under the thrall of the media, which "extend their power over his imagination, that is, over everything he lets emerge from himself into the nets of the texts" (176). Jenkins's poacher is, by contrast, an active agent, making choices about what to take, what to criticize, what to reinvent.

[2.3] In scholarship, it is well established that textual poaching was a game-changing concept. Camille Bacon-Smith published a book-length study of fan fiction writers, including *Star Trek* fans, in 1992, but academic scholarship has tended to privilege Jenkins's version of fans as well-intentioned transgressors; many scholars, including those who resist Jenkins's model, identify the reading of his book as foundational to their own interest in fan studies (Aden 1999; Lancaster 2001; Hills 2002). Others refer to the term as a way to define the work that fans do (Scodari and Felder 2000; Booth 2010; Condis 2011). Kristina Busse and Jonathan Gray cast *Textual Poachers* as a point of origin for subsequent work: it is a "discipline defining" book that "began academic fan studies' more earnest attempt to make sense of fan communities, identities, and textual play" (425) (note 1). Sara Gwenllian Jones (2003) writes that, in fact, "it has become something of an orthodoxy for scholars to elevate television fans to the status of modern-day Robin Hoods, folk heroes busily snatching back 'our' popular cultural texts from the greedy global conglomerates who claim to own them" (163). This celebratory construction of the subversive fan has taken hold.

[2.4] One way to account for the initial appeal and subsequent popularity of textual poaching is to recall its place within a cultural studies literature that understood popular audiences to be engaged in a complex set of negotiations with powerful cultural institutions. Jenkins was writing alongside and in response to Janice Radway, Stuart Hall, and John Fiske, among others—writers who were theorizing subcultures, lowbrow reading practices, and the role of readers and audiences as active makers of meaning. Jenkins's work continues the argument that the work of individuals participating in and talking about ordinary entertainment was subversive—was, in fact, a larger resistance to and rewriting of the cultural expectations of the audience member, the reader, and the viewer. Jenkins has acknowledged that the idea of textual poaching was "tremendously convenient because it had resonance within the academy, particularly within a leftist academy that wants to identify things as guerilla semiotics, underground, resistant, and so forth, and because once it was fully understood, it had resonance in the fan community which also wanted to see itself in those terms and who could link the metaphor, 'poaching,' to Robin Hood" (1996, 266).

[2.5] Although it has resonated with academics and with fans, the metaphor has been subject to a fair amount of scrutiny and challenge (including from Jenkins himself); and these challenges have been successful in reminding us that textual

poaching as a metaphor for fans arose at a particular critical moment and served a very specific set of needs in cultural and audience studies. As fan studies has expanded its scope from the celebration of resistance that characterized early scholarship (Busse and Gray 2011; Coppa 2006; Harrington and Bielby 2007), scholars increasingly recognize that models of resistance are not the only way to understand the work of fandom. Matt Hills in particular has argued, echoing to an extent Jenkins's own comments in a 1996 interview, that the concept of the textual poacher was strategic, "a rhetorical tailoring of fandom in order to act upon particular academic institutional spaces and agendas" (Hills 2002, 10). For Hills, at least, textual poaching as a lens for understanding the complex processes by which fans create meaning cannot transcend its critical moment.

[2.6] And yet it has: this image of the transgressive hero has also circulated widely on the Internet among writers and publishers of fan fiction. It shows up on fan fiction sites, in blogs, in Tumblr feeds, in resource guides, and in dictionaries. In some cases, *Textual Poachers* is offered as a resource or guide. For example, a "primer on slash" appearing in *Apocrypha*, a zine for fans of *Law and Order*, lists Jenkins as one of four resources for further reading about slash fiction (the other three are fan-written and Internet-published) (Crenshaw 1998). In the FAQ section of an Angel and Buffy fan fiction site is the comment that "to learn more about fanfic in the media fandom world, I highly recommend *Textual Poachers*." Ashera, the author of a "glossary and fan fiction introduction" for Hercules and Xena fan fiction, notes that her website "is very much a 'work in progress' [because she's] still waiting for [her] copy of *Textual Poachers* in the mail" (Ashera 2001). The "because" here is important, suggesting that this fan understands the book to be not only part of her own education but also a necessary source for a publication offering information about fan fiction. Jenkins's work is used to legitimize this kind of reading and writing.

[2.7] In other cases, the concept of textual poaching seems to serve a more basic definitional purpose. For instance, a Janeway/Seven fan fiction FAQ (for the program *Star Trek: Voyager*) provides definitions for three basic questions: What is fan fiction? What is slash? And what is textual poaching? Similarly, an X-Men fan fiction site claims, as the first of a list of six things readers should know, that the fiction on this site "is textual poaching." These are significant and not uncommon gestures; these sites do not offer up textual poaching as a metaphor for thinking about what a fan fiction reader or writer does; instead, fan fiction and textual poaching are all but collapsed—interchangeable labels for the same set of activities. A final example should help to clarify this point. Mark Dery writes that the zine *Science Friction* is a "textbook example of textual poaching—a sort of guerilla semiotics in which consumers-turned-producers perversely rework popular fictions" (1996). Notice here that textual poaching is presented as a transparent, literal term; Dery offers a second metaphor,

guerilla semiotics, to gloss the phrase. In these sites and many others, the use of textual poaching as a description of, label for, or definition of what fans do has become a given; the term has established itself in the critical vocabulary of fans and writers across a variety of fandoms. For many of these writers and readers, writing fan fiction *is* textual poaching.

[2.8] The metaphor has persisted over the last two decades, even as we have increasingly complicated our understanding of who fans are and what fans do, and how they negotiate multiple fictional universes and diverse digital spaces. And this persistence is meaningful, not only for what textual poaching *is* but also for what it is *not*. In the next section, I look more closely at what it is not by considering the parallel metaphor, created at roughly the same time but without the cultural cachet. In fan fiction, this would be the what-if moment, where we take a secondary character and rewrite the story to give this character a larger role. How does the story change when we move a different figure into the center? What becomes possible that wasn't possible before?

3. Random fandom: Penley and Brownian motion

[3.1] Although it was published the year before *Textual Poachers*, Penley's essay "Brownian Motion: Women, Tactics, and Technology" is likely less familiar to readers. This essay, part of Penley and Andrew Ross's collection *Technoculture*, describes in some detail the slash fan fiction produced, edited, and circulated by female *Star Trek* fans. Penley ascribes to these fans great critical and creative agency: "no one," she would tell a *European Journal of Cultural Studies* interviewer later, "is more critical of mass cultural producers' failure of the imagination" (2012, 371). As Jenkins would do the following year, Penley described and celebrated the ways in which female fans resisted and rewrote storylines presented to them on television. Drawing on de Certeau's work in *The Practice of Everyday Life*, Penley suggested that slash fiction writers were engaged in a process of Brownian motion, a kind of creative guerilla action in which fans rewrite the relationships in the television they watch.

[3.2] For Penley, Star Trek fandom is composed primarily of women who function not just as viewers but as writers, readers, and fanzine producers, and whose work demonstrates an interest in remaking relationships, technologies, and worlds. In fact, both Jenkins and Camille Bacon-Smith, in their separate work on fans, emphasize both the revision of relationships between men and women, and the power relations that female fans often enact. Penley describes and quotes from pieces of fan fiction that feature Kirk and Spock in various romantic entanglements, suggesting that this work is most meaningful when considered within a dual tradition of science fiction and erotica or pornography written by women. Drawing on the work of female science fiction

writers like Joanna Russ, who in 1985 described slash fiction as "pornography by women, for women, with love" (quoted in Penley 1992, 138), Penley argues that science fiction itself is implicitly concerned with sexual relationships. Science fiction, "seemingly the most sexless of genres, is in fact engrossed with questions of sexual difference and sexual relations, which it repeatedly addresses alongside questions of other kinds of differences and relations" (138). Just as science fiction recombines humans, aliens, time travelers, and robots in unexpected ways, so does slash fiction combine familiar characters—in this case Kirk and Spock—in new kinds of relationships.

[3.3] Providing literary contexts for *Star Trek* slash fiction, then, is part of Penley's project. Just as important to her work is her insistence on slash fiction "and the writing practices that it supports...[as] a bracing instance of the strength of the popular wish to think through and debate the issues of women's relation to the technologies of science, the mind, and the body" (1991, 158–59). It is important not to overlook the gendered aspect of Penley's argument here; she notes that *Star Trek* slash fiction focuses more on technologies of the body than of the spaceship. Slash writers are more likely to focus on men having babies than on, say, the intricacies of warp drive; more likely to write about emotional turmoil than intergalactic battle. In other words, as she writes in her 1997 book *NASA/Trek: Popular Science and Sex in America*, "slash writing devotes as much time to inner space as to outer space" (148). Emotional ties, friendships and romantic entanglements, family and community structures—these become the machinery of slash writing for Penley.

[3.4] This work does not happen, of course, in a cultural vacuum. Penley, like Jenkins the following year, explicitly draws her vision of the work of slash fiction writers from de Certeau's *The Practice of Everyday Life*. She draws on de Certeau's model of the resistant consumer, who must engage in tactics to find meaningful cultural experiences, seeming to agree with de Certeau that the writing of slash fiction is a tactic, a gesture of those not in power (as compared with a strategy, a gesture of those in power). But where de Certeau suggests that tactics are essentially ephemeral actions on the part of the weak, not leaving the tactician any lasting product, Penley finds that tactics can result in permanent cultural products: literally, fanzines, but also a new and ongoing understanding of complex sets of relationships among genders and technologies. The writing and circulating of slash fiction is a subversive cultural act, one in which these female fans are "not just reading, viewing, or consuming in tactical ways that offer fleeting moments of resistance or pleasure while watching TV, scanning the tabloids, or selecting from the supermarket shelves...They are producing not just intermittent, cobbled-together acts, but real products (albeit ones taking off from already-existing heterogeneous elements)" (1991, 139). In other words, as Jenkins and before him Fiske and de Certeau argue, consumers are producers.

[3.5] To name the process by which consumption becomes production, Penley borrows the term Brownian motion, which de Certeau defines as the "tactical maneuvers of the relatively powerless when attempting to resist, negotiate, or transform the system and products of the relatively powerful" (Penley 1991, 139). For de Certeau, the future will be "a scene of Brownian movements of invisible and innumerable tactics" (1984, 40). In this formulation, Brownian motion is associated with tactics, with power structures; this is not surprising, considering John Fiske's observation that "running through [de Certeau's] work is a series of metaphors of conflict—particularly ones of strategy and tactics, of guerilla warfare, of poaching, of guileful ruses and tricks. Underlying all of them is the assumption that the powerful are cumbersome, unimaginative, and overorganized, whereas the weak are creative, nimble, and flexible" (1989, 26). But it is important to note that de Certeau does not actually gloss the term Brownian movement in any way, and Penley, who uses the more general term *motion*, similarly offers no definition. Perhaps she assumes that her readers are familiar with the actual scientific process meant by the term, or perhaps she is less interested in considering its associations, preferring to let it stand as a description of the tactical maneuvers of de Certeau's consumer against powerful cultural institutions.

[3.6] Either way, Brownian motion does bring with it a very specific set of associations and processes. Briefly, it has two primary meanings: the apparently random movement of particles suspended in a fluid; or a mathematical model that is used to describe those movements. Brownian motion has applications in nanotechnology, market analysis, and flood and drought prediction, to name just a few areas where it is useful to have a model that can represent changes in an unpredictable system over time. Images that attempt to capture Brownian motion in action, like the one shown in figure 1, tend to feature many small circles, often with arrows showing their movement trajectories, surrounding a larger circle; the idea is that the small circles may bump into the large circle, but not in a way that effects any real change.

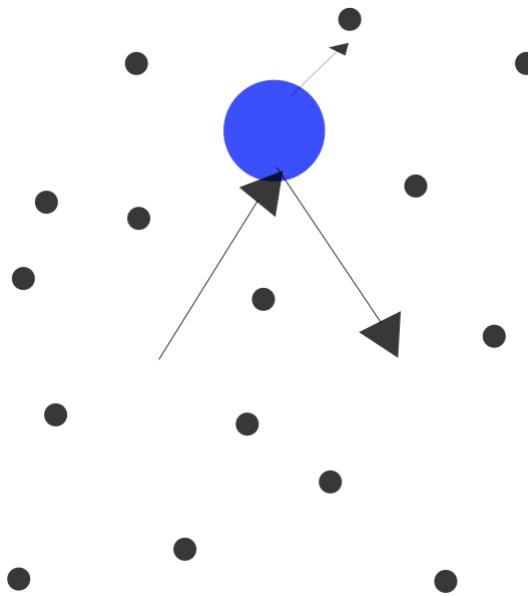


Figure 1. Brownian motion, courtesy of Wikimedia Commons. (Image licensed under Creative Commons Attribution 3.0). [[View larger image](#).]

[3.7] From even this most basic and unscientific attempt to describe Brownian motion, a potential connection to de Certeau becomes clear. For de Certeau, "tactics are a tool of the weak," and similarly, the scientific community recognizes an assumption that "Brownian motion is much too weak and much too slow to have major (if any) consequences in the macro world" (Holden and Kelly 2005). Presumably, this—or something like this—is how de Certeau would have envisioned the connection, as a relevant but ultimately unproductive process in which weak agents bump up against a more powerful agent in a way that does not change anything. This process takes place around us all the time, but it is simply much too small for us to see.

[3.8] Recent scientific research, however, suggests that Brownian motion is more important than we might suspect. For example, it is apparently a major factor in nanotechnology, which relies on minute movements in place of larger, more visible ones to aid in the process of assembly at the biomolecular level. Since Brownian motion is already happening, nanotechnologists can find ways to use that process: "The fundamental advantage of Brownian assembly is that motion is provided in essence for free" (Holden and Kelley 2005). This idea helps to refocus our attention on what is important when considering the metaphoric potential of Brownian motion. It's not the ineffective bumping of those little particles that matters. Rather, it is the motion overall, a process that can be used at the micro level to make things happen on a macro level. It is the motion, and not the molecules, that counts.

[3.9] It is significant that this metaphor, with its focus on a specific kind of motion, did not make the same kind of inroads as did that of the textual poacher. It cannot only be because the textual poacher suited the transgressive sensibility of cultural

studies work on fans in the early 1990s; after all, Penley also draws on de Certeau, and on his focus on tactics and strategies and consumers. Considering that both metaphors draw heavily on that work, it is tempting to speculate about why Jenkins's rereading of de Certeau, and not Penley's, took hold. Why did the textual poacher, and not Brownian motion, become the term by which we understood fans in the first place?

[3.10] To be sure, there are notable differences: Penley wrote one chapter in a collection she edited, while Jenkins wrote an entire book. (Penley did publish a book in 1997 with material on this topic, *NASA/TREK: Popular Science and Sex in America*, but this is not a book that is frequently referenced in studies of fan fiction.) Penley's title broadcasts the gender-specific nature of her argument; Jenkins's did not, although his arguments similarly focused primarily on women as viewers, readers, and writers. Penley was ostensibly addressing the writing of slash fiction; and while Jenkins did this as well, he situated that work in a broader spectrum of fan art, writing, criticism, and response. All these factors likely mattered.

[3.11] It was also this: readers, both fans and academics, respond to the personhood of the textual poacher. We understand who a poacher is; we can enter into that metaphor with relative ease. We see this person as a real person, a Robin Hood who walks and moves, who acts and is acted upon, a person who takes cultural goods, changes their form, and redistributes them. It is much more difficult to name the figure who stands at the center of Brownian motion; it does not occur to us to refer to a Brownian mover. In the next section, I discuss why this is meaningful.

4. Fans in space: How metaphors matter

[4.1] Jenkins writes in the preface to an essay in *Fans, Bloggers, and Gamers* that "we should change our theory every five thousand miles just like we change oil in our cars" (2006, 134). He expresses some regret that younger generations of scholars seem committed to decades-old critical lenses like textual poaching. And he evokes a metaphor for our own endeavors: As academics, fans, writers in search of new ways of thinking, we drive. We maintain our cars, and we drive down the road. We are, in this metaphor, people moving through space.

[4.2] For Jenkins, at least, even our new theories maintain this basic construction. When he writes in a 2012 blog post that he suspects that the widespread appeal of poaching has eclipsed other, more expansive, parts of his argument, he keeps our focus on a person:

[4.3] In *Textual Poachers*, I stressed that fans were nomadic, that they "traveled across" texts much as de Certeau describes readers as "travelling across" lands they have not cultivated. The nomadic dimensions of fandom

keep getting dropped from accounts of the book in favor of poaching—titles do shape readings, after all—but it is key to imagining the reader as structuring their relationships with texts and each other through choices made about which materials to borrow.

[4.4] Jenkins is right to note that titles shape readings; in this case, it is significant that the title of his first book was *Textual Poachers* and not *Textual Poaching*. The focus on the agents, as opposed to the processes, of fan activity was an essential part of his vision of fandom, and has been echoed even in attempts to offer new metaphors. The gamekeeper (Hills 2002; Bury 2008), the puppeteer (Pugh 2005), the cyberslayer (Consalvo 2003), the pilgrim (Aden 1999): these are all, like poachers, metaphors for people, metaphors that name a kind of person who occupies a certain space in the world.

[4.5] It is this notion of space and, in Jenkins's case, the traversing of space, to which I turn now. As Jenkins points out in his blog post, there are "nomadic dimensions" to fans. They are not poachers who stay in one spot, repeatedly taking from the same textual preserve; they are instead roammers, nomads who move around and across and through textual spaces. Louisa Stein and Kristina Busse echo this idea when they write about the ways in which "many media fans move from one source text to another" (2009, 194).

[4.6] This is not to say that the metaphor of textual poaching prevents us from seeing a process at all; as Kris Markman and John Overholt remind us, "textual poaching is a processual model of fandom; it emphasizes meaning making and interpretation" (2011, 68). But the process it shows us is inseparable from our notion of the specific activities of the textual poacher. It is difficult to talk about meaning making and interpretation without drawing on notions of poaching, of nomadism, of a fan whose primary strategies involve taking, reusing, and moving among sources and spaces.

[4.7] In other words, we cannot avoid the poacher, and to a greater extent, the person, in our fan fiction metaphors. Bronwen Thomas speculates that one reason that media and cultural studies continue to focus on the actions, methods, and identities of fans themselves is an assumption that "fans cannot be abstracted from the sorts of texts they write, but must be analyzed as socially situated practices and activities" (2011, 2–3). Certainly, much work on fans takes a sociological or anthropological view, seeking to understand fan creative processes through the lens of the actions of fans.

[4.8] Most other metaphors for fans, in fact, derive from the figure of the person moving through space in this very specific way, a point that Paul Booth makes in

Digital Fandom. Booth suggests that in the "many traditional fan studies" that "have used implicit examples of de Certeau's notion of 'textual poaching' as the basis for analyzing fan practices", the fan is constructed as one who "operates within and from the space of the producer" (2010, 155). Booth seems to see this as a limitation of such work, offering a gently competing reading of de Certeau that focuses, in the context of MySpace users, on the way that fans are not just operating within producer spaces but are in fact acting upon them. Booth writes that "instead of tactically reading the source text to 'appropriate popular texts and reread them in a fashion that serves different interests,' these fans rewrite the space of the producers itself" (155). Booth offers this rereading in the service of an argument that MySpace forces a rethinking of what he calls a traditional divide between fan and character, but it has relevance here as well, as a precedent of sorts for shifting focus from the fan within a space to the process of making that space.

[4.9] De Certeau—an antecedent for so many ways of thinking about fans—does in fact offer us such a focus on space. In "Spatial Stories," de Certeau differentiates between spaces and places. A place, he says, is "an instantaneous configuration of positions. It implies an indication of stability", whereas a space "is composed of intersections of mobile elements. It is in a sense actuated by the ensemble of movements deployed within it" (1984, 117). Offering an analogy with urban planning—the network of streets and sidewalks are a place, and the actions of pedestrians turn that network into a space—de Certeau suggests that "space is a practiced place" (117). De Certeau goes on to argue that stories do this transformative work. "Stories thus carry out a labor that constantly transforms places into spaces or spaces into places" (118), he writes, but he is less specific about just how the labor manifests or how the transformation happens.

[4.10] Lakoff and Johnson remind us that a "metaphor highlights certain features while suppressing others" (1980, 129); in the case of fan metaphors, what often gets highlighted is fans as people—and to some degree, the actions they take as fans. What gets eclipsed—it's not invisible, but it's harder to see—are the processes in which those people engage. Indeed, it is difficult to identify with a process, or with a space—and to the extent that a significant subset of our conversations about fans have been concerned with how fans as thinkers, writers, and readers are different from or the same as academics as thinkers, writers, and readers (Hills 2002; Harrington and Bielby 2007; Jenkins 2011), it is entirely logical that we would need an image of that fan to picture, to identify with, and to resist. And there is no figure in Brownian motion that allows us that focus. In the absence of a figure, perhaps Brownian motion allows us to see something else.

5. Harnessing Brownian motion: Fan fiction and creative process

[5.1] Our choice of metaphors reflects an effort to keep fans at the center, and there are good reasons for this: removing fans from consideration may be dangerous. What do we risk when we remove fans from the process, when we find metaphors that center our attention not on the fan but on some other aspect of the work of writing fan fiction? We may lose a sense of agency, autonomy, creative freedom—the idea that it is fans who choose to take on creative work and who carry it out independently of media and Internet franchises that might wish to capitalize on their efforts. We may end up dehumanizing or depopulating the landscape of fan fiction.

[5.2] But we might as easily ask the converse questions: What do we risk when we keep fans at the center of our discussions? What aspects of fan work do we miss when our metaphoric discourse leads us consistently back to fans themselves, and when we picture those fans as people moving through space? My suggestion is that we miss understanding creative processes that do not easily fit with the image of poachers and nomads. The process of making fan fiction that emerges through these specific people-centered metaphors is one focused on the taking—the moment when the poacher takes the rabbit or when the nomad moves from point A to point B. This is in some ways the very heart of fan fiction writing, of course, since all fan fiction depends on a relationship with a source text. Without the act of taking, and then perhaps moving among several other texts, it is not fan fiction.

[5.3] But what happens next? This is the question that I suggest our collective work is only beginning to answer. What is the nature of the creative work, the invention, the revising that is so necessary to good fan fiction? What is the work that happens under the guise of the what-if question, and what are the other questions that are asked as part of the process? There is value in identifying, naming, and discussing the creative processes that characterize fan fiction writing and fan texts, and this is work that we are only beginning to do. So far, it is work that happens mostly as a result of close reading of specific fandoms and the fiction that they produce, but there is room for a larger inquiry into the creative work of writing fan texts: what sorts of invention are happening in addition to the borrowing of source material?

[5.4] In asking these kinds of questions, it is easier to see the potential value of certain metaphors: Brownian motion and other metaphors that focus not on acts of borrowing or stealing or recombining, but on some other actions, perhaps appearing as random strategies and gestures. The concept of Brownian motion itself, decoupled from its associations with tactics and power structures, offers us a glimpse of a nearly invisible chemical process, an apparently random set of movements that on their own

seem to amount to little but can be harnessed to produce and predict. Nathan Rambukkana suggests that the metaphor of Brownian motion might be understood as having to do with creative chaos, "a chaos of non-pre-determined action and reaction that is not the antithesis of order but rather the raw stuff that order is built out of" (2007, ¶38). While Brownian motion can be harnessed—an action that implies an agent to do the harnessing—it is already happening on its own. We might look more closely at how it is happening.

[5.5] To date, this kind of decentering of the fan as agent is mostly being taken up by scholars and fans whose primary frame of reference is rhetorical or literary, not sociological or communicative. Sheenagh Pugh argues that fan fiction is a genre in itself, for example; and Bronwen Thomas suggests that "close textual analysis" might be more possible and revealing than we might expect (2011, 2). There are surely others. I have, so far, located two metaphors that offer us this sense of fan texts, rather than fans, as central. One is Abigail Derecho's concept of fan fiction as archontic literature, a vast archive that accrues meaning in the new relationships and associations that are created in an ongoing process:

[5.6] In fan fiction, there is an acknowledgment that every text contains infinite possibilities, any of which could be actualized by any writer interested in doing the job...In fan fiction, there is a constant state of flux, of shifting and chaotic relation, between new versions of stories and the originary texts: the fics written about a particular source text ensure the text is never solidified, calcified, or at rest, but is in continuous play, its characters, stories, and meanings all varying through the various fics written about it.
(2006, 76–77)

[5.7] In Derecho's construction there are indeed people who are doing the writing, but with the focus shifted to the fan fiction itself, those people are to some degree ancillary. Her focus is the archive, the constantly growing and shifting body of text. (Derecho does not cite de Certeau or the metaphor of Brownian motion, but she easily could have.) She does not invite us to ask what individual writers have poached, or where they have gone, or how they have combined texts in a new way. Instead, she invites us to ask how fan fiction accrues its meanings, how its various trajectories, its multiple ways of answering the question of what-if happen—how, on the page and on the screen, these texts intersect with, interrupt, and imagine stories.

[5.8] The second of these two metaphors comes from Jane Mortimer, whose essay on "Fan Fiction as an Art Form" (n.d.) was archived on the Pure Mutant X fan site in 2004. Mortimer describes the texts of television and fan fiction as a river:

[5.9] In the center we have the river of canon, aka "the show," a broad Mississippi rolling inexorably onward, pushed by money and Hollywood expertise. Off of it, we have a thousand tributaries, a thousand "what ifs," many of them branching off into yet further refinements of alternate reality as each writer examines what's gone before and spins off it...all these possibilities are true.

[5.10] Mortimer does not do away with writers, with fans, completely; they are here, doing the work. But the work itself is the focus: the river, the tributaries, the branching off of narrative possibilities and alternate realities. For Mortimer, as for Derecho, the question of what-if is the question that matters. What are the processes by which this branching off happens?

[5.11] I hope it is clear that I am not, in the end, suggesting that we replace the iconic image of the textual poacher with a story altogether absent of fans. Brownian motion may not suffice as an alternative, with its abstraction and apparent randomness. Asking what-if intends only to add a new story to the ever-growing set of narratives that a fandom amasses. Fan fiction writers who ask what-if do not intend to replace the original text; rather, the story that follows expands the canon, changes the space, and offers us new versions of familiar characters. We have not only the textual poacher, the performer, the pilgrim, but also, perhaps, the scientist or nanotechnologist who can look at the Brownian motion of fan creativity and see something previously unobserved. In fan fiction, the space of the text expands and transforms to make room for this proliferation of characters and the stories that shape them; and writers are working to make this happen in ways that we have not yet fully explored. If we turn away from the game preserve and the nomadic landscape, we can look instead toward the archive, the river, the creative chaotic place where Brownian motion is happening.

6. Acknowledgments

[6.1] I extend sincere thanks to Kelli Custer, Amber Engelson, Angie Sowa, and Kara Taczak, who offered valuable feedback on drafts of this essay.

7. Notes

1. See Harrington and Bielby's construction of an "emergent fan studies canon" (2007, 188), which indicates that Henry Jenkins is the most influential scholar in fan studies, in a class by himself, followed by a second tier that includes a number of prominent writers. Constance Penley appears in a third level of influence.

8. Works cited

- Aden, Roger C. 1999. *Popular Stories and Promised Lands: Fan Cultures and Symbolic Pilgrimages*. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press.
- Ashera. 2001. "Glossary of Terms." *Ashera's Archive*, March 13.
<http://www.asherasarchive.com/glossary.html>.
- Bacon-Smith, Camille. 1992. *Enterprising Women: Television Fandom and the Creation of Popular Myth*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Booth, Paul. 2010. *Digital Fandom*. New York: Peter Lang Publishing.
- Borah, Rebecca Sutherland. 2002. "Apprentice Wizards Welcome: Fan Communities and the Culture of Harry Potter." In *The Ivory Tower and Harry Potter: Perspectives on a Literary Phenomenon*, edited by Lana A. Whited, 343–64. Columbia: University of Missouri Press.
- Bury, Rhiannon. 2008. "Setting David Fisher Straight: Homophobia and Heterosexism in *Six Feet Under* Online Fan Culture." *Critical Studies in Television* 3 (2): 59–79.
<http://dx.doi.org/10.7227/CST.3.2.6>.
- Busse, Kristina, and Jonathan Gray. 2011. "Fan Cultures and Fan Communities." In *The Handbook of Media Audiences*, edited by Virginia Nightingale, 425–43. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1002/9781444340525.ch21>.
- Condis, Megan. 2011. "Converging Fan Cultures and the Labors of Fandom." In *In the Peanut Gallery with "Mystery Science Theater 3000": Essays on Film, Fandom, Technology and the Culture of Riffing*, edited by Robert G. Weiner and Shelley E. Barba, 76–87. Jefferson, NC: McFarland.
- Consalvo, Mia. 2003. "Cyber-Slaying Media Fans: Code, Digital Poaching, and Corporate Control of the Internet." *Journal of Communication Inquiry* 27 (1): 67–86.
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0196859902238641>.
- Coppa, Francesca. 2006. "A Brief History of Media Fandom." In *Fan Fiction and Fan Communities in the Age of the Internet*, edited by Karen Hellekson and Kristina Busse, 41–60. Jefferson, NC: McFarland.
- Crenshaw, Joan. 1998. "A Slash Primer." *Apocrypha*, Spring.
<http://www.podengo.com/apocrypha/spring98/slash.html>.
- Davis, Boyd H., and Jeutonne P. Brewer. 1997. *Electronic Discourse: Linguistic Individuals in Virtual Space*. Albany: State University of New York Press.

de Certeau, Michel. 1984. *The Practice of Everyday Life*. Translated by Steven Rendall. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Derecho, Abigail. 2006. "Archontic Literature: A Definition, a History, and Several Theories of Fan Fiction. In *Fan Fiction and Fan Communities in the Age of the Internet*, edited by Karen Hellekson and Kristina Busse, 61–78. Jefferson, NC: McFarland.

Dery, Mark. 1996. "Slashing the Borg: Resistance Is Fertile." *Tactical Media Files*. <http://www.tacticalmediafiles.net/article.jsp?objectnumber=37981>.

Fiske, John. 1989. *Understanding Popular Culture*. Boston: Unwin Hyman.

Harrington, C. Lee, and Denise D. Bielby. 2007. "Global Fandom/Global Fan Studies." In *Fandom: Identities and Communities in a Mediated World*, edited by Jonathan Gray, Cornel Sandvoss, and C. Lee Harrington, 179–97. New York: New York University Press.

Hellekson, Karen. 1997. "Doctor Who Fans Rewrite Their Program: Mini-UNIT Minstrels as Creative Consumers of Media." *Popular Culture Review* 8: 97–108.

Hills, Matt. 2002. *Fan Cultures*. London: Routledge.

Holden, Jason, and Kevin Kelly. (2005) 2007. "Brownian Motion." *Connexions*, May 29. <http://cnx.org/content/m14354/1.3/>.

Jenkins, Henry. 2011. "Acafandom and Beyond: Concluding Thoughts." *Confessions of an Aca-Fan*, October 22.

http://henryjenkins.org/2011/10/acafandom_and_beyond_concludin.html.

Jenkins, Henry. 1996. "A Conversation with Henry Jenkins." In *Enterprise Zones: Critical Positions on Star Trek*, edited by Taylor Harrison, Sarah Projansky, Kent A. Ono, and Elyce Rae Helford, 259–78. New York: Westview.

Jenkins, Henry. 2006. "Interactive Audiences? The 'Collective Intelligence' of Media Fans." In *Fans, Bloggers, and Gamers: Exploring Participatory Culture*, 134–51. New York: New York University Press.

Jenkins, Henry. 1992. *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture*. New York: Routledge.

Jenkins, Henry. 2012. "Textual Poachers Turns Twenty!" *Confessions of an Aca-Fan*, November 26. <http://henryjenkins.org/2012/11/textual-poachers-turns-twenty.html>.

Jones, Sara Gwenllian. 2003. "Web Wars: Resistance, Online Fandom and Studio Censorship." In *Quality Popular Television: Cult TV, The Industry and Fans*, edited by

- Mark Jancovich and James Lyons, 163–77. London: British Film Institute.
- Lakoff, George, and Mark Johnson. 1980. *Metaphors We Live By*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Lancaster, Kurt. 2001. *Interacting with "Babylon 5": Fan Performances in a Media Universe*. Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Markman, Kris M., and John Overolt. 2011. "Becoming 'The Right People': Fan-Generated Knowledge Building." In *In the Peanut Gallery with "Mystery Science Theater 3000": Essays on Film, Fandom, Technology and the Culture of Riffing*, edited by Robert G. Weiner and Shelley E. Barba, 66–75. Jefferson, NC: McFarland.
- Mortimer, Jane. n.d. "The Advantages of Fan Fiction as an Art Form: A Shameless Essay." *PureMX.net*. <http://puremx.masonesque.net/html/advantages.html>.
- Penley, Constance. 1991. "Brownian Motion: Women, Tactics, and Technology." In *Technoculture*, edited by Constance Penley and Andrew Ross, 135–62. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Penley, Constance. 2012. "Interview with Constance Penley." *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 15: 360–79. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/1367549412440522>.
- Penley, Constance. 1997. *NASA/Trek: Popular Science and Sex in America*. New York: Verso.
- Pugh, Sheenagh. 2005. *The Democratic Genre: Fan Fiction in a Literary Context*. Bridgend, Wales: Seren Books.
- Rambukkana, Nathan. 2007. "Is Slash an Alternative Medium? 'Queer' Heterotopias and the Role of Autonomous Media Spaces in Radical World Building." *Affinities: A Journal of Radical Theory, Culture and Action* 1 (1).
<http://www.affinitiesjournal.org/index.php/affinities/article/view/8/42>.
- Scodari, Christine, and Jenna L. Felder. 2000. "Creating a Pocket Universe: 'Shippers,' Fan Fiction, and *The X-Files Online*." *Communication Studies* 51 (3): 238–57.
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/10510970009388522>.
- Stein, Louisa, and Kristina Busse. 2009. "Limit Play: Fan Authorship between Source Text, Intertext, and Context." *Popular Communication* 7 (4): 192–207.
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/15405700903177545>.
- Thomas, Bronwen. 2011. "What is Fanfiction and Why Are People Saying Such Nice Things about It?" *StoryWorlds: A Journal of Narrative Studies* 3: 1–24.

Theory

Sub*culture: Exploring the dynamics of a networked public

Simon Lindgren

Umeå University, Umeå, Sweden

[0.1] *Abstract*—The sub scene, an online community for creating and distributing subtitle files for pirated movies and TV series, is a culture wherein the knowledge of a number of contributors is pooled. I describe the cultural and social protocols that shape the sub scene, with a focus on the linguistic and social exchange that characterizes this particular networked public. Analysis of the linguistic exchange shows that the sub scene is about networked collaboration, but one under a relatively strict social code. The analysis of the social exchange is structured according to Quentin Jones's definition of a virtual settlement. There is a minimum level of interactivity, as well as a variety of communicators, on the sub scene. It can also be described as a virtual common public place where computer-mediated interaction takes place, both in the form of coordination networks and of expert/user networks. Furthermore, it has a minimum level of sustained membership. The culture of the sub scene simultaneously bears characteristics of socialized and alienated cyberspace, which should not be perceived as a contradiction. The development of Internet culture is always happening within the full complexity of society as a whole, and the interplay between unity and discord must be seen as the basis for the social integration of any group.

[0.2] *Keywords*—Fan community; Fansub; Fan sub; Quentin Jones; Piracy

Lindgren, Simon. 2013. "Sub*culture: Exploring the Dynamics of a Networked Public." *Transformative Works and Cultures*, no. 14.

<http://dx.doi.org/10.3983/twc.2013.0447>.

1. Introduction: Setting the sub scene

[1.1] Subtitles, or captions, are textual renderings of the spoken dialogue in TV or movie content. In television broadcasts and in movie theaters, subtitles are included on screen in those cases where it is presumed that the audience needs them. In commercially released versions of films and series for home viewing, these subtitles can be activated by the viewer according to his or her needs. Subtitles are mainly used for two reasons: to provide text for viewers with a hearing impairment, and to provide the viewer with captions in another language so the viewer can follow the dialogue. A specific subfield within this area is called fan subbing, where fans obtain, subtitle, and release TV shows or films to other fans. This phenomenon has its roots in barter-based fan cultures that share videocassettes and audio tapes. While such fan subbing

represents a particular form of subtitling culture, based partly on its own premises and on high levels of commitment (Ito 2012; Lee 2011), I will focus on the more mainstream and straightforward creation and distribution of subtitles that has emerged in the wake of the more general breakthrough of file-sharing technologies.

[1.2] The rise in online piracy of copyrighted TV and movie content in recent years (Mason 2008; Strangelove 2005) has generated a need for subtitles to accompany ripped video files downloaded by users who do not speak the languages of the downloaded content. In practice, this generally means translating British or American English dialogue into a wide variety of languages spoken throughout Europe, Asia, South America, and Africa. However, sometimes the translation works in the other direction—from Japanese or Swedish to English. This has led to the emergence of an online scene for the distribution of subtitle files, known as subs. The subtitling scene is similar to the scenes that supply scanned cover art for CDs or DVDs; patches, cracks, serial numbers, or key generators for pirated games or other software; and passwords for commercial porn sites. These scenes all supply additional tools that users need to fully access the pirated material.

[1.3] Subs are plain text files containing captions tagged with data on frame rate, time stamps for individual captions, and information about text formatting. The two most common file extensions are SUB (MicroDVD format) and SRT (SubRip format). Subtitle files are supported by a number of media player applications, which overlay the text in the caption file onto the displayed video content. Files distributed on the sub scene are sometimes ripped in their original form straight from commercial DVDs, or—increasingly—from TV broadcasts and online streaming. In these cases, the captions up- and downloaded are those created by professional subtitlers for film companies. But in many cases, what are offered are amateur translations of initially ripped subtitles that make the subtitles available in more languages, or subtitle files created from scratch by enthusiasts translating the dialogue and then synching the text data with the video file (these fall into the category of fan subs). As various versions of videos with varying frame rates circulate on pirate sites, there is also sometimes a need to resync, or in other ways edit or correct, subtitle files so they can function in new contexts.

[1.4] The online subtitling community, or the sub scene, revolves around several forms of knowledge and expertise relating to dimensions such as language, movie file editing, file distribution, and site promotion. The sub scene participants therefore potentially represent a new form of media audience betwixt and between old and new media logics, and empowered by new technologies (Jenkins 2006a).

[1.5] The sub scene is interesting to analyze for several reasons. It is a culture wherein the knowledge of a number of contributors is pooled, which makes it an

expression of collective intelligence (Lévy 1999). It is also of interest to explore whether the sub scene is based on honor codes similar to those of hacker culture (von Busch and Palmås 2006; Thomas 2002; Wark 2004) or the warez scene (Rychlicki 2006; Rehn 2004), which are defined by networked collaboration under a relatively strict social code. Furthermore, the sub scene is firmly embedded in a pirate culture where current conceptions of copyright are questioned and infringed. All this makes it an object of study through which the interplay between alienation and socialization in cyberspace may be analyzed (Fuchs 2008).

[1.6] To use the conceptualization put forth by Castells (2001), the sub scene cuts across several layers of "the culture of the Internet." In this context, one would expect to meet "virtual communitarians" creating forms of online social organization characterized by "horizontal, free communication" (54), as well as hackers with a common need for openness and sharing, and entrepreneurs who are forerunners in a transformation toward a new economy with new rules of production and circulation. This hybrid media space can be used as an empirical tool for gaining insights into potential conflicts arising within emerging networked publics (Benkler 2006). Any space of this kind potentially represents a site of struggle and negotiation between different forms of power. These conflicts may promote or hinder the processes of peer production.

2. Subtitling as nonprofit production

[2.1] One way of understanding the sub scene is from the perspective of the expanding literature on participatory culture, democratized innovation, and peer production in networked publics. Participatory culture refers to a departure from previous notions of media spectatorship (Jenkins et al. 2009; Jenkins 2006a, 2006b). Media consumers and producers no longer occupy distinct and separate roles. Instead, they must be conceived of as participants interacting under a new set of rules that enable media users to collaborate, find their own voices, map out strategies, develop common interests, and forge political alliances. Similarly, other authors have written about processes of democratized innovation (von Hippel 2001, 2005; Herz 2002) and peer production (Benkler 2006) to illustrate how individual hobbyists and "colonies of enthusiasts" (Rheingold 1994, xxi) design and create new things with the sophisticated tools supplied by new media technologies. This digitally networked environment enables dynamic forms of group-based cooperation in which "thousands of volunteers" (Benkler 2006, 59) are engaged in developing technologies and reshaping culture.

[2.2] In short, there has been a turn toward a networked public culture characterized by amateur and nonprofit production, niche, and special interest groups, and by

sharing, remixing, and appropriating content (Lessig 2008; Russell et al. 2008). As Ito (2008) notes,

[2.3] The term networked publics references a linked set of social, cultural, and technological developments that have accompanied the growing engagement with digitally networked media. The Internet has not completely changed the media's role in society: mass media, or one-to-many communications, continue to cater to a wide arena of cultural life. What has changed are the ways in which people are networked and mobilized with and through media...Networked publics...are communicating more and more through complex networks that are bottom-up, top-down, as well as side-to-side. Publics can be reactors, (re)makers and (re)distributors, engaging in shared culture and knowledge through discourse and social exchange. (2-3)

[2.4] I conceive of the sub scene as a networked public. It is a participatory and collaborative environment where technology is used and developed, interests are shared, peer-to-peer sharing takes place, texts are appropriated, remade, and redistributed, and enthusiasts and volunteers create. However, it is important to note—especially because much work on new media is leaning toward the optimistic or even utopian side—that the cooperative and democratizing potential is not necessarily realized in a fully symmetric and frictionless manner. Some participants exert greater power than others, and some have greater abilities than others to participate (Jenkins 2006a).

[2.5] Jenkins (2006a) makes a distinction between interactivity and participation. Various media technologies allow for various degrees of interactivity. For example, listening to the radio allows for a lesser level of interactivity than playing a video game, where users can alter the world that is represented. Participation, on the other hand, refers to the patterns of media use that are shaped by cultural and social protocols.

3. Protocols of linguistic and social exchange

[3.1] I aim to analyze the cultural and social protocols of the sub scene by proposing a study of both linguistic and social exchange in this online environment. To study these protocols, I use a method combining bibliometrics and social network analysis (Lindgren and Lundström 2009) to map out the linguistic and social spaces of the sub scene.

[3.2] A particularly important part of this method is that it aims to bridge the dualism between quantitative and qualitative approaches to text analysis. It presumes that selective qualitative close readings of parts of the empirical material are made in order

to inform crucial decisions in the quantitative parts of the analysis, and also that several of the quantitative steps are validated through qualitative measures (Lindgren and Lundström 2009). The choice to combine quantitative content and network analysis with close readings of discourse in Internet research is in line with Quentin Jones's (1997) contention that "the fact that the communication is computer mediated makes it considerably easier to 'count' and 'map' group 'interactions.' At the same time the advent of virtual communities has further highlighted the importance of human interactions."

[3.3] By using the discourse theory of political theorists Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe (1985) as a source of inspiration, I analyzed relatively large data volumes by a combination of software tools: Bibexcel and Pajek. Bibliometrics (Osareh 1996) and social network analysis (De Nooy, Mrvar, and Batagelj 2005) combined can be used to perform an analysis of co-occurrences of linguistic concepts, as well as of social actors that can be graphically presented in a way reminiscent of how Laclau and Mouffe conceive of discursive formations. *Reminiscent*, however, is a key term here, because their conceptual apparatus must be reinterpreted and simplified quite a bit to be applicable to the components of the schematic discursive maps generated in this way.

[3.4] The basic idea of Laclau and Mouffe's (1985) much-quoted and much-used discourse theory is that the connections between meaningful elements in a discourse can be traced in terms of how links between concepts are authorized and asserted, how chains of signifiers are grouped, and how certain arrangements of these fit together. A discourse can be seen as a field wherein a number of symbolic components or concepts are positioned in relation to each other. Some of these concepts are peripheral; others are crucial. The discourse can thus be read as a set of conceptual and social relations (Laclau 1996).

4. The linguistic space of the sub scene

[4.1] According to Bourdieu (1977), "the social world is a system of symbolic exchanges," and "social action is an act of communication" (646). He argues that social structure can be conceived of as relations of symbolic power and that the linguistic competence of a speaker is impossible to separate from his or her position in the social structure. From this perspective, mapping the linguistic space of the sub scene overlaps to a high degree with mapping it as a solely social space. Language is social, and social interaction revolves around various forms of language use. Still, I choose to separate these two levels of analysis. I first map out the sub scene in terms of its written discourse, then in terms of the social positions of its actors.

[4.2] Figure 1 is a visualization of the linguistic space of the sub scene. The network map is based on the text content of 13,366 posts that were collected by a Web spidering application, Web Info Extractor (<http://www.webinfoextractor.com/>). The posts come from two different forums: Subscene (<http://subscene.com>) (10,447 posts) and Opensubtitles.org (<http://opensubtitles.org>) (2,919 posts). In line with my focus on mainstream subtitle distribution forums rather than fan subbing, I focus on these two general sites, which facilitate uploading and downloading ripped and/or translated subtitles for films and TV series. The sizes of the vertices in the graph indicate how common certain identified themes are in the material, and the lines illustrate the strongest links in terms of co-occurrences between themes.

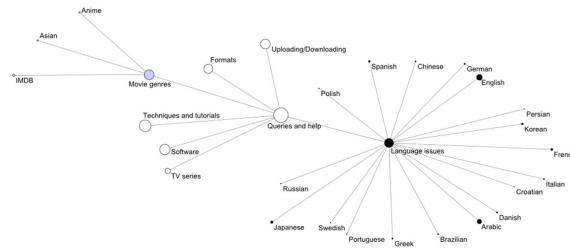


Figure 1. The linguistic space of the sub scene. [[View larger image](#).]

[4.3] Matters concerning queries and help, language issues, and discussions of various movie genres are the three key nodes in sub scene discourse. Discussions within the first category (queries and help) revolve around the exchange of technical help with regard to peer-to-peer sharing of the subtitle files, and around the use of different file formats. This category is also about the use of various software and techniques to rip and/or translate the subtitles, and about content aspects of the TV series and movies that are subtitled.

Extract 1

Hi. When I try to watch a movie with Korean subtitles using the VLC Player, the subtitles appear distorted. For example, instead of Korean alphabets, strange "squares" and symbols appear instead. I searched online relentlessly, but have found no resolution. If anyone could help, I would REALLY APPRECIATE it. Many thanks in advance! P.S. I have Windows Vista Home Premium

VLC "Tools / Preferences / Subtitles and oSD / Default encoding" set to KOREAN. Set the Font to a font that can display Korean characters. You should find the fonts in c:\windows\fonts. That *should* work.

If you're using VLC player, download the Korean font package file, baekmuk-ttf-2.1.tar.gz" from <ftp://ftp.mizi.com/pub/baekmuk/> then extract it to your \windows\fonts directory. In VLC, go to Settings > Preferences > Video > Subtitles/

OSD>Text Renderer. In the font box, click browse and select the \windows\fonts directory. DON'T click on the font you want. TYPE the name. For Korean, it's usually "gulim.ttf" or "batang.ttf." Be sure not to use the the ".ttc" Windows OS version of the fonts since I wasn't able to get them to display the subtitles properly. Save the changes, exit the program and restart it. Now, you should be able to display Korean subtitles files in your vlc player with your movies. Don't forget to restart VLC after you've made any changes...just in case.

Some people say that GOMPlayerworks fine with Korean subtitles. Since they are Korea based that sounds quite likely. Good player, too. Oor you could use any player together with vobsub/vsfilter.

[4.4] Extract 1 illustrates how the sub scene bears the mark of a knowledge community, the members of which pool, trade, and exchange knowledge (Lévy 1999). In this case, the first poster needs help with using Korean subtitles in VLC Media Player, an open-source software title. Three community members then suggest various solutions, which include altering the media player settings, downloading a special font package, and using an alternative media player. Analysis of data reveals that similar patterns may be found over and over in the forums. Although it may not seem surprising that people are willing to help each other with common technological problems, it is an example of how individual expertise is provided online toward shared objectives and interests.

[4.5] The sub scene is an example of an emergent knowledge culture that illustrates the ability of virtual communities to "leverage the combined expertise of their members" (Jenkins 2006a, 27). Its use of open-source software, and the patterns of peer-to-peer sharing and support, illustrate Lévy's (1999) idea that the ways in which commodity culture operates can gradually become altered by new types of audiences. The idea that the help given is expected to be reciprocated is illustrated in extract 2; the initial poster gets help in processing a file and is reminded to upload the finished result for the community to access. Extract 3 illustrates how the volunteer work done in the subtitling community is organized and coordinated in order to provide results as efficiently as possible, and extract 4 shows how discussions within TV series fandoms might lead to cooperation in the participatory culture of the sub scene.

Extract 2

hello everyone. How do I convert a regular translation file (divx) to 720p. i have a srt file for a dvdrip movie but the movie i have is BRrip now i want to convert the subtitle from dvd rip to BRrip please help.

Give subtitle and video the same name and see if it fits. You might be lucky. If the subtitle is off sync, have a look at our tutorials about syncing subtitles. There is no

difference between syncing a subtitle for a DVDRip or 720p mkv.

Unfortunately, I tried but did not fit. Why is there no difference. then why I see many people are asking to submit a copy of the subs for 720p

Well, then you have to resync it. As I said, have a look at the tutorials. You can use subtitle workshop or time adjuster for this task. Don't forget to upload the result. :-)

Extract 3

Dear Arab translators, I suggest that we make this page a forum for reporting the movies we are translating. Of course, some of us will decide not to translate a certain movie when we know that another good translator is already working on it. This will save our time and efforts and result in translating more films and allowing other subscribers to know the movies we are translating and wait for our translations. If any translator still wants to translate a movie although another translator has reported that he is working on it, there is no problem of course. Thanks for all your efforts and your valuable time.

Extract 4

Hi Mr Bibou thanks for your comments. Lost is really a great show so far. Apart from the sci-fi element, it has supreme actings that make you feel for the characters. I used to watch Stargate SG-1 and after watching 10 seasons you could tell the actors were getting tired into the show and became sloppy in acting. I mean how could you be entertained when they stepped into an unknown territory like they were walking a dog in the park?

I picked 24 [as one of my favorite series] for many reasons. It has great actings, fast-pacing stories, believable logics, near-the-future technologies, new villains for each season and everything you need to keep on watching. In fact the show could go on without Jack Bauer because a show with real-time concept could apply to many themes!

ya you where wright. and let me tell you that every have his interest and his ideas about what he like watch and what dislike. and you are free to watch every things you want and there isno one who can tell you why. and i hope so if we can working toghether in the near future.

[4.6] Extracts 5 and 6 illustrate discourse relating to matters of language, translation, and interpretation. Extract 5 illustrates how corrections submitted by a French-speaking participant regarding a translation of software developed within the

community (SubDownloader) led to his or her being made the official translator for that language.

Extract 5

Hi, This topic is to report translation errors in SubDownloader...Please report the concerned language!

I have a little one here: French translation: when uploading a subtitle, the message in the popup window says something like "en cours d'envoir, patience..." ...envoir is misspelled, it should be "envoi" (without the "r"). I think that the first letter of the sentence is in small caps too, it should be upper case...

login, and you can correct it. you are now official french translator, welcome to our team

[4.7] Extract 6 consists of part of a discussion thread about the 2007 Thai queer romantic drama film *The Love of Siam*. The extract illustrates how sub scene participants from different cultural backgrounds deal with technical and sociocultural aspects of the subtitling of this movie.

Extract 6

My directors cut subs are hard-coded and were downloaded from a gay torrent site. The other subs a friend gave me, not sure where he downloaded from. Can email them to you if you want to compare.

One scene from the directors cut that i wasn't quite sure of (and maybe im being stupid) when Mew and Tong were sitting on the bench indoors chatting and mew asks if he's different from other people, and then he says "no, i mean my ummm errr..." What's that about?

hey. the two gay torrent websites that I am aware of (and I am sure there are many), both of them have versions of the subtitles that we made. I have even posted a torrent with the subs hard encoded on a couple of websites including mininova and the piratebay. There were a couple different versions of our subs because we wanted to make sure we got it right and then I took it upon myself to try and make the dialogue flow a bit better and kind of "americanized it" so people could better understand what was trying to be communicated...um...err...um...errr...

Yeah, that scene on the bench I have NO EARTHLY CLUE what the hell they are talking about. I mean, how fricken vague and detached can you be...If you know what they are discussing, I wish you or someone else would share it with me. One thing I love, and hate at the same time, about this movie is that you are left to try and interpret what the hell is going on. Hell, for all I know, Mew was talking about

his shoe size. Well, I...um...err...ummm. errr...well, err, ...ummm...(what is all that sh*t about, is that how they talk over there?) NOT that there is anything wrong with that. If you have the ability to email the subs you got from your friend, I would be greatful. I really just want to see if they are a version of the ones we generated and I could figure that out very quickly. (I just need to look at the dialogue)

Well i've listened to it a couple of times, and it seems the umm errr is correctly translated! i will ask a thai friend if they can throw any light on it. I wondered if it Mew was actually referring to his sexuality here, in this scene. And Tong confirms that it doesn't matter to him.

Ive emailed, but dont know how to attach when sending through here.

If both my sources were from here, it was interesting some of the differences, how come? One that stood out was the scene with the dolls by the christmas tree. In one version the mother says: do as you please which has a very different sentiment in english from the better version "do what you think is best for you." Mostly little differences like that.

Hey, i am from China. I saw this director cut version for a couple of times, and i have both chinese and english subtitles. I think my english subtitle should pretty much the same as yours. From my understanding to this scence is that Mew is referring to his sexuality here, he want to know whether Tong think he is a little bit gay, but Tong didn't get it, he said Mew is no different than anyone else.

I would agree but did Tong get it or not? Tong seems to be a bit vague but I think he gets what Mew is saying. I did not actually think Mew was asking that because I did not think that Mew even thought of himself that way at that time. Thanks for resonding.

[4.8] Overall, the analysis of the written discourse of the sub scene gives the impression that this is a participatory culture in the sense of Jenkins et al. (2009). It can certainly be argued that the sub scene is a site of informal learning and collective problem solving, where skills for interacting correctly and efficiently with the subtitling tools are acquired, developed, and traded. Furthermore, knowledge is pooled, notes are compared, and the reliability and credibility of various sources of information are constantly evaluated. In order to participate on the sub scene, one must possess the ability to follow textual flows across multiple modalities; one must also have the skills necessary to search for, synthesize, and disseminate information. But the sub scene is also a site of negotiation, where participants must be able to discern the social code and grasp and follow certain norms (Jenkins et al. 2009).

[4.9] The culture of the sub scene—if we read it as an expression of networked participation—is an example of socialized cyberculture (Fuchs 2008) where

communication and collaboration stand at the center. If we assume a different perspective, however, it can also be described in terms of an alienated cybersculture, where rules for inclusion and exclusion are strict, and where there exists a policy of instilling fear.

Extract 7

Before posting, please read the damn rules!! The first user may not be correct with the answer, so don't depend on his answer if you know it.

Extract 8

What do everyone think about machine translated subs ? Personally it annoys me when people upload subs translated by a machine or online translator, the quality is just not good enough. To many errors and things that makes no sense for the person who reads it. Just today someone uploaded a hole bunch of Danish subs that was made with a machine, none of them made any sense, and some of them already existed in good quality translated by human. I rated all of them bad, if it was up to me such subs should be removed. What do you think ?

Thank you for bringing this subject up. We've been "pleading" with uploaders to refrain from uploading such nonsensical translations, but unfortunately nothing doing. They keep wasting everybody's time, including theirs. Several posts were written to this effect, but nobody bothers to read. Upon recurrence, such uploaders are eventually banned from the Site. Please rate such subs "fake," because that's what they are. Thanks

Extract 9

if you have read a bit this forum, you should know, that requests are forbidden. For requests look at <http://www.opensubtitles.org/request>—add your requests there and not here. Topic, as 100 others—LOCKED.

[4.10] It might seem exaggerated to interpret corrective discourse such as that illustrated in extracts 7–9 in terms of alienation, exclusion, and fear. However, these examples show that there are indeed limits and regulations on the sub scene: "read the damn rules"; "refrain from posting nonsensical translations"; "you should know that requests are forbidden." In many respects, this scene adheres to rules similar to those of the warez scene, where pirated software is ripped, cracked, and released. This is a form of gift economy that abides by its own logic. As Rehn (2004) notes,

[4.11] What interests [the core of] participants is not the direct acquiring of specific [subtitles] (although this can be a consequence), but the way in which reputation and status can be obtained through being noticed as a particularly good source...Managing to keep up a constant supply of new [subtitles] in a timely fashion, or distributing these efficiently ensures a participant's status, but only provisionally, as the scene is engaged in these contests on a continuous basis. (363)

[4.12] From this perspective, virtue on the sub scene lies in the efficient propagation of objects that are symbolically important. The key participants can then be conceived of as a powerless elite (Tulloch 1995) between the power of the industry that produces the TV series and films and their own peers, as well as the general public, on whose recognition in the form of downloads and support they rely. But no matter how powerless they may be from this perspective, they nonetheless constitute an elite. They possess a form of symbolic capital that is needed to play for the social field of the sub scene—a field that, like any other, has a specific logic that "determines those who are valid in this market...[and] are pertinent and active in the game in question" (Bourdieu 1984, 112–13).

5. The social space of the sub scene

[5.1] These dynamics can be further investigated by analyzing not only the written discourse of the sub scene, but also the social positioning and hierarchies of its participants. To be able to "give an account of discourse, we need to know the conditions governing the constitution of the group within which it functions" (Bourdieu 1977, 650). Jones (1997) proposes the term *virtual settlement* for the online place where a virtual community operates. He writes that a virtual settlement can be defined as "a cyber-place that is symbolically delineated by topic of interest and within which a significant proportion of interrelated interactive group-CMC [computer-mediated communication] occurs." This is similar to Bourdieu's (2000) statement that any social field is always delineated by a *doxa*, a set of fundamental rules or presuppositions that are specific to the field: "All those who are involved in the fields...share a tacit adherence to the same doxa which makes their competition possible and assigns its limits" (102).

[5.2] According to Jones (1997), an online place where group communication takes place must meet four basic conditions to be labeled as a virtual settlement, as follows: "(1) a minimum level of interactivity; (2) a variety of communicators; (3) a virtual common-public-space where a significant portion of interactive group-CMCs occur[s]"; and "(4) a minimum level of sustained membership." I use these four criteria to map out the social logics of the field, or the virtual settlement, of the sub scene. How is it

constituted? How are participants positioned? Which fundamental patterns does its social interaction adhere to?

[5.3] Jones (1997) notes that a variety of communicators is a condition highly intertwined with the condition of interactivity: "Clearly if there is only one communicator there can be no interactivity." By making the variety (more than two) of communicators a criterion, e-mail lists and other database interactions can be excluded from the analysis of virtual communities (figure 2).

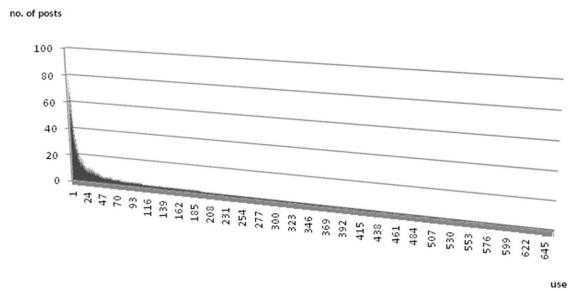


Figure 2. Number of participants (horizontal axis) listed by their numbers of posts (vertical axis). The sample comes from the Open Lounge section on the Subscene Web site (3,553 posts, in 357 threads, by 656 users). [[View larger image](#).]

[5.4] While 70 percent of the participants have only authored a single post, 25 percent have written two to nine posts, 4 percent have posted 10 to 35 each, and a 1 percent core of users have contributed 40 to 85 posts each. This means that 1 percent of the users write 25 percent of the posts. The figure parallels the well-known long tail curve, popularized in Net research by Anderson (2006). Anderson's argument does not relate directly to issues of community but to matters of supply-and-demand economics. His point is that in a cultural landscape where nearly everything is available, the true face of demand will reveal itself. He predicts that the future of business lies in catering to a large number of niche tastes. Reinterpreted and applied to the sub scene context, Anderson's idea raises the question of what the long tail represents in this case. Does it mean that the majority of participants are uncommitted or semiaccidental visitors to the sub scene, or does it make us aware that the definition of participation might include contributing extremely small numbers of posts?

[5.5] Liu (1999) notes that a "group of 'lurkers' [noncontributing forum users] who do not communicate cannot be called a community. For a group of individuals to qualify as a community, these individuals have to communicate and interact." I make a qualitative review of the content that was contributed by the users posting only once. Extracts 10–12 are typical examples of posts from one-off contributors, indicating that similar sub scene discourse to that illustrated in figure 1 is maintained

in these posts as well. Nothing in my qualitative review indicates that the one-off posters generally contribute discourse of random or residual character.

Extract 10

DR Khaled I am one of you fans so I will support your topic. I am translating this movie Alien.Raiders.DVDRip.XviD-BeStDivX

Extract 11

I want to add this movie to the database. I have subtitles to upload. When I enter the URLs and movie title I get a notice: Error title not added—most likely explanation is that title already exists in database—click here to search for the film title. The movie trying to add—Snow Buddies 2008. It's not in the database. I searched on Snow Buddies, Snow, and Buddies. The movie title is not there.

Extract 12

I would also like to join Spyder in saying thank you to everyone who contributes to this website. :) Recently I was looking for a website to get subtitles from and after discovering this site it's the first one I come to every time—and it hasn't disappoint! The reason I need subtitles is because I cannot hear very well. I find it hard to understand my own native language sometimes, especially when accents are involved so having subtitles helps me out a lot. So to everyone here: Thank you so much!!!!

[5.6] These extracts illustrate the general conclusion that committed fans, users, participants, and contributors to the sub scene are also prevalent among the very low-intensity forum posters. This means that the long tail is not to be read as an illusion of community, collaboration, and participation. Instead, processes similar to the ones I have described are in operation regardless of the posting frequency of a given forum visitor. Returning to Jones's (1997) theory of virtual settlements, there exists a minimum level of interactivity on the sub scene. Furthermore, there is indeed a variety of active communicators. But we have yet to examine the two remaining criteria: a virtual common public space where a significant portion of interactive group-CMCs occurs, and a minimum level of sustained membership.

[5.7] According to Steve Jones (1994), "Computer-mediated communication is, in essence, socially produced space" (17). Indeed, the social and the spatial are always interlinked, as space is constantly structured by those who occupy it and by how

occupants appropriate it. Space is therefore always a social product (Lefebvre 1974) marked by various spatial practices that can be read and interpreted. To better define the spatial logic of social interactions on the sub scene, I make a social network analysis (De Nooy, Mrvar, and Batagelj 2005) of relations of coauthorship (Persson, Danell, and Wiborg Schneider 2009). In this case, coauthorship is defined as the relationship established when two users contribute to the same discussion thread. The sample is once again drawn from the Open Lounge at Subscene (3,553 posts, in 357 threads, by 656 users).

[5.8] The purpose of this analysis is to map and visualize the common public space of the sub scene and to identify basic dynamics of interactive group-CMC within it (Jones 1997) (figure 3). Each vertex represents a single user. Vertex size indicates the level of activity of each user (that is, how many relationships of coauthorship they are involved in), and the positions of vertices and the connections between them represent the strongest links (in terms of coauthorship) among contributors.

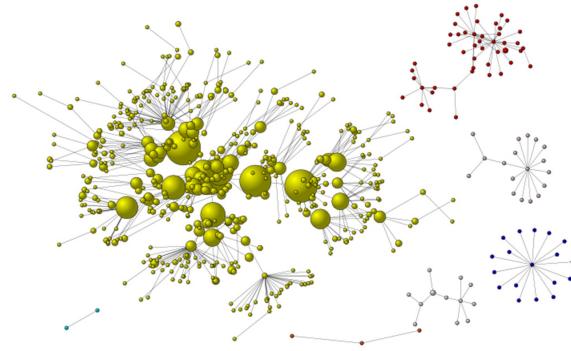


Figure 3. Relations between the 656 participants in the studied context. [[View larger image](#).]

[5.9] Once again, it is obvious that this social setting is centered on a relatively small number of key contributors (the 5–10 largest vertices in figure 3), around whom the rest of the social space is ordered. To get a more detailed picture, I now take a closer look at two ideal-typic (Weber 1968) patterns that are found on this network map. I use a set of unified analytical constructs, following Weber's interpretive philosophy, to understand the social logic of this complex network. These might not explain the full spectrum of variation, but they still serve as essential interpretive tools. The two patterns are illustrative of some of the important characteristics of the sub scene. In figure 4, I examine the cluster in the lower right corner of figure 3.

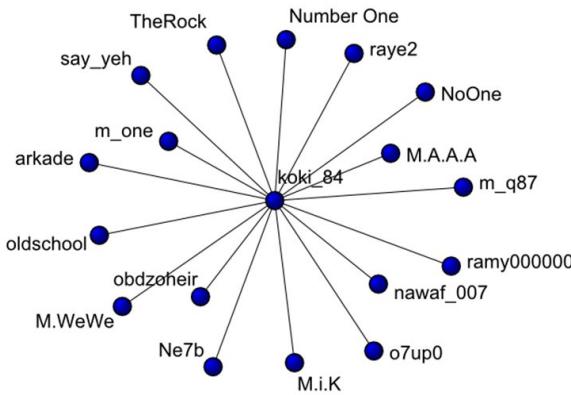


Figure 4. Coordination network (close-up of image in figure 3). [[View larger image](#).]

[5.10] This star-shaped type of cluster reveals itself, upon closer inspection, to be characteristic of the types of threads where the main activity is coordination of sub scene activities through brief messages. These threads generally consist of a first post stating the aim—for example: "I suggest that we make this page a forum for reporting the movies we are translating...This will save our time and efforts and result in translating more films and allowing other subscribers to know the movies we are translating and wait for our translations" (cf. extract 3). Then a large number of replies, sometimes thousands, follow. Extracts 13–16 provide examples of expressions of this form of coordination network.

Extract 13

i started doing "The Duchess" but i just checked and seems like Abu Essa had a great sub so I'm yet to translate a movie :) I will ! someday :DD

Extract 14

PS: within two days The Office US s05e11 will be ready.

Extract 15

due to personal reasons, I'm not gonna be doing any more subtitling for the time being until...well I'm not sure until when. sorry i couldn't reply any of my msgz or emails in the past two weeks.

Extract 16

I'm sorry CosTantEn, But I've checked about your movie and i found out that it's a porn movie :S:S...also i checked on the actors and actresses in this movie and i found out that they are porn stars. plz, correct me if I'm wrong and plz BE MORE CAREFUL

Extract 17

Dear users, as I stated 2 weeks ago, starting today MARCH 1ST we'll begin to delete all the links to other sites, no matter what. I hope you all fixed your uploads, because we won't be able to retrieve them. And please avoid to complain about your disappearing posts because you had 2 weeks to fix them. Please also remember that links have been strictly forbidden, and those who keep posting them could suddenly not be able to login anymore without notice. Thanks.

Extract 18

I really feel so sorry for all of you guys who have to suffer because of the dumb f**** who can't seem to understand what GIVING CREDIT and NOT UPLOADING TO STREAMING SITES mean...I really hope that this horrible situation can be resolved and that those idiots wake up and realize that what they are doing is WRONG!

Extract 19

For the third time: I already explained this. You're saving your text files in a different encoding than what the program expects. Either you're saving them as utf-8/Unicode and it expects Latin-1 or viceversa...I'll refrain from answering now and unsubscribe from this thread, as it obviously has no further point (I've repeated myself three times at least).

Extract 20

It is obviously clear that many members of this community are lazy...If Rollins says not to take his works and abuse it, he would like to believe that people would listen to him and use his works accordingly. But no...Obeying the wishes of someone is the only thing we have left in this corrupt, polluted Internet. If you people can't even do something as simple as that, then I'm afraid of what you're capable of doing elsewhere—within your family, at school or at the workplace...I don't know who Rollins is. Never met him, never PM'd him. I don't know if he's a

guy or a gal. Regardless, if Rollins says not to mistreat his works, and I use his works for enjoyment, I'm going to obey his wishes. What's so difficult about that?

[5.11] Within this cooperative network, discussions tend to be devoted to coordination (extract 13), information (extracts 14 and 15) and—quite prominently—regulation (extracts 16–20), in relation to the communal flow of subtitles being produced on the scene.

[5.12] The spider-shaped cluster depicted in figure 5 has been cut out from the lower middle of figure 3. From the perspective of network metrics, it has the same properties as figure 4. In figure 5 too, one user dominates the space (user Alsaeede80's larger vertex) over a number of equally active participants.

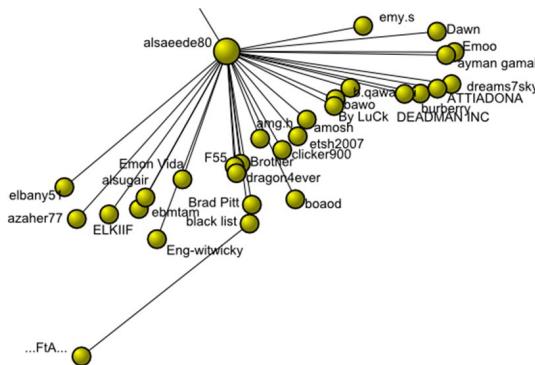


Figure 5. Expert network (close-up of image in figure 3). [[View larger image](#).]

[5.13] In making a closer qualitative reading, however, I found that this particular sub network did not mainly have to do with coordination but with one user, or a small group of users, taking on the role of expert in relation to a specific question raised in the forum. These threads tend to be started by someone else making a query, and then a discussion follows in which the expert user plays a key role in providing help with various aspects of the problem in question. When we look once again at figure 3, it is clear that the Subscene forum is in practice constituted of a complex mixture of networks converging to shifting degrees with the coordination and/or expert network ideal types. Around the center of the network, one finds increasingly dense networks (figure 6) of users clustered around those five to 10 lead users who are heading the long tail (figure 2).

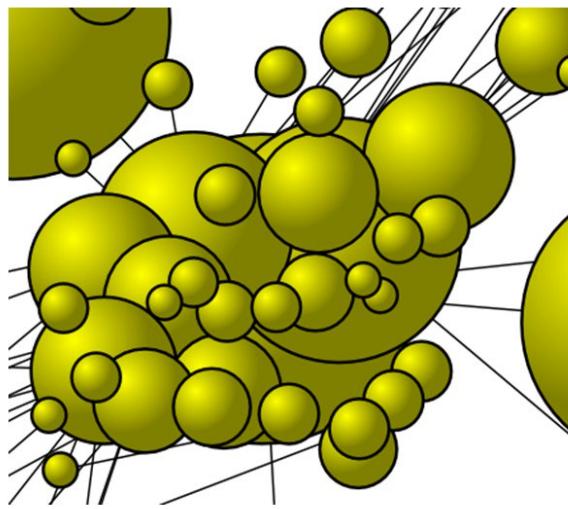


Figure 6. Dense network (close-up of image in figure 3). [[View larger image](#).]

[5.14] The fourth condition of a virtual settlement as defined by Jones (1997) is that it have a minimum level of sustained membership. Erickson (1997) writes that virtual communities can be defined as "computer-mediated social interaction among large groups of people, particularly long term, textually-mediated interaction" (1). The existence of online discourse on a topic does not necessarily mean that an actual community exists, and it is therefore relevant to evaluate the degree of participant commitment over time on the sub scene.

[5.15] Figure 7 is based on the sample from the Open Lounge section of Subscene. The vertices show the most prolific users from each year. Looking at the visualization from left to right, the first column of vertices is based on the period from April to December 2006. The second, third, and fourth columns represent the years 2007, 2008, and 2009, respectively, while the fifth column represents January to February 2010. Users are positioned in the column corresponding to the year of their debut as contributors to the forum, and the lines between them indicate the frequency with which users have posted during the same year and month. An example is the line connecting the users Worst and Ixquic. While Worst debuted on the forum in 2007, he or she has continued to post during the same months as Ixquic, who debuted during 2009. The results of the analysis conclusively indicate that there is a minimum level of sustained membership on the scene. Even though a substantial percentage of participants make only a single post or take part in a single thread on the forum, this pattern is not true of the scene as a whole. Key contributors stay faithful to the scene.

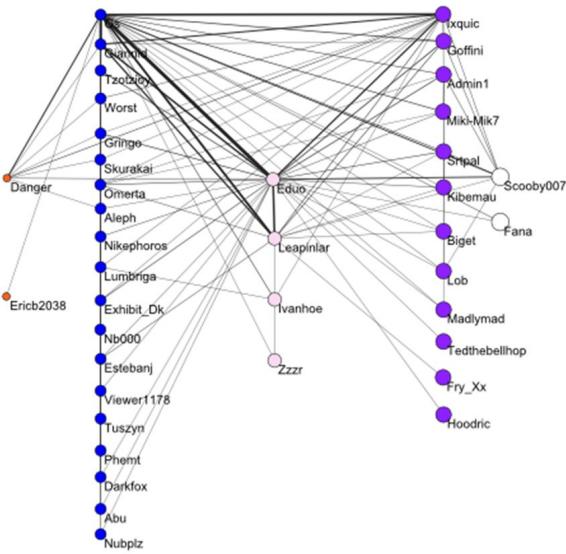


Figure 7. Visualization of sustained membership. [[View larger image](#).]

6. Conclusions

[6.1] I have analyzed the online community for creating and distributing subtitle files for pirated movies and TV series, with the aim of studying the cultural and social protocols that shape the sub scene. I focused on the linguistic and social exchange that characterizes this networked public. The analysis of the linguistic exchange showed that the sub scene is about networked collaboration, but collaboration that is still under a relatively strict social code. The analysis of the social exchange was structured according to Jones's (1997) definition of a virtual settlement. I concluded that there are (1) a minimum level of interactivity as well as (2) a variety of communicators on the sub scene. The sub scene can also be described as (3) a virtual common public place where interactive computer-mediated interaction takes place, both in the form of coordination networks and of expert/user networks. Furthermore, it has (4) a minimum level of sustained membership. The networks of coordination follow a relatively democratized pattern, whereas the expert/user networks are by definition more hierarchical. The strict social code that I identified in the analysis of written discourse also appeared in the social network analyses; they revealed that the acts of regulating and sanctioning constitute a prominent part of the interaction.

[6.2] Overall, the patterns identified may be read in terms of collective intelligence (Lévy 1999), pooled knowledge, and coordinated peer production (Benkler 2006)—but also in terms of a battle for recognition within an "ongoing process of rival generosity" (Rehn 2004, 365). Certainly many of the forum threads are about efficient coordination, but simultaneously, they are about users signaling their individual excellence (Rehn 2004) in a game of honor and responses to challenges (Bourdieu 1990).

[6.3] I arrived at the conclusion that the culture of the sub scene simultaneously bears characteristics of socialized and alienated cyberculture (Fuchs 2008). This is neither a surprise nor a contradiction. As Lovink (2002) notes, one must be fully aware that the development of Internet culture "is happening within society with all its layers of social...relations" (5). The dual process of socialization on the one hand and conflict on the other—the interplay between unity and discord—must be seen as the basis for the social integration and development of any group.

[6.4] As Simmel (1908) put it, it would be just as impossible for a group to lack any "repulsive [or] destructive...energies" as for it to be "deprived of the forces of cooperation, affection, mutual aid, and harmony of interest" (75). Social structure as such is, in fact, the result of this interplay: "Relations of conflict do not by themselves produce a social structure, but only in cooperation with unifying forces. Only both together constitute the group as a concrete, living unit" (77). And "what the observer or the participant himself thus divides into two intermingling trends may in reality be only one" (79).

7. Works cited

Anderson, Chris. 2006. *The Long Tail: How Endless Choice Is Creating Unlimited Demand*. London: Random House Business.

Benkler, Yochai. 2006. *The Wealth of Networks: How Social Production Transforms Markets and Freedom*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

Bourdieu, Pierre. 1977. "The Economics of Linguistic Exchanges." *Social Science Information* 16 (6): 645–68. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/053901847701600601>.

Bourdieu, Pierre. 1984. *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*. Translated by Richard Nice. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Bourdieu, Pierre. 1990. *The Logic of Practice*. Translated by Richard Nice. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Bourdieu, Pierre. 2000. *Pascalian Meditations*. Translated by Richard Nice. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Castells, Manuel. 2001. *The Internet Galaxy: Reflections on the Internet, Business, and Society*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

De Nooy, Wouter, Andrej Mrvar, and Vladimir Batagelj. 2005. *Exploratory Social Network Analysis with Pajek*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Erickson, Thomas. 1997. "Social Interaction on the Net: Virtual Community as Participatory." In *Proceedings of the 30th Hawaii International Conference on System Sciences: Digital Documents* 6:13.

Fuchs, Christian. 2008. *Internet and Society: Social Theory in the Information Age*. New York: Routledge.

Herz, J. C. 2002. "Harnessing the Hive: How Online Games Drive Networked Innovation." *Release 1.0* 20 (9): 1–22.

Ito, Mizuko. 2008. "Introduction." In *Networked Publics*, edited by Kazys Varnelis, 1–14. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Ito, Mizuko. 2012. "Contributors versus Leechers: Fansubbing Ethics and a Hybrid Public Culture." In *Fandom Unbound: Otaku Culture in a Connected World*, edited by Mizuko Ito, Daisuke Okabe, and Izumi Tsuji, 179–207. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

Jenkins, Henry. 2006a. *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*. New York: New York University Press.

Jenkins, Henry. 2006b. *Fans, Bloggers, and Gamers: Exploring Participatory Culture*. New York: New York University Press.

Jenkins, Henry, Ravi Purushotma, Margaret Weigel, and Katie Clinton. 2009. *Confronting the Challenges of Participatory Culture: Media Education for the 21st Century*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Jones, Quentin. 1997. "Virtual-Communities, Virtual Settlements and Cyber-Archaeology: A Theoretical Outline." *Journal of Computer Mediated Communication* 3 (3). <http://jcmc.indiana.edu/vol3/issue3/jones.html>.

Jones, Steve. 1994. "Understanding Community in the Information Age." In *CyberSociety: Computer-Mediated Communication and Community*, edited by Steve Jones, 10–35. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Laclau, Ernesto. 1996. "On the Death and Rebirth of Ideology." *Journal of Political Ideologies* 3 (1): 201–20. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13569319608420738>.

Laclau, Ernesto, and Chantal Mouffe. 1985. *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*. London: Verso.

Lee, Hye-Kyung. 2011. "Participatory Media Fandom: A Case Study of Anime Fansubbing." *Media, Culture and Society* 33 (8): 1131–47.

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0163443711418271>.

Lefebvre, Henri. 1974. *The Production of Space*. Translated by Donald Nicholson-Smith. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.

Lessig, Lawrence. 2008. *Remix: Making Art and Commerce Thrive in the Hybrid Economy*. New York: Penguin Press.

Lévy, Pierre. 1999. *Collective Intelligence: Mankind's Emerging World in Cyberspace*. Translated by Robert Bononno. Cambridge, MA: Perseus Books.

Lindgren, Simon, and Ragnar Lundström. 2009. "Discursive Networks: Visualising Media Representations of Crime Victims." In *Computer-Aided Qualitative Research, 2009: CAQR 2009 Proceedings*, edited by Jasper Lim, 68–85. Utrecht: Merlien Institute.

Liu, Geoffrey Z. 1999. "Virtual Community Presence in Internet Relay Chatting." *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* 5 (1).

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1083-6101.1999.tb00334.x>.

Lovink, Geert. 2002. "Dark Fiber: Tracking Critical Internet Culture." *Electronic Culture: History, Theory, Practice*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Mason, Matt. 2008. *The Pirate's Dilemma: How Youth Culture Is Reinventing Capitalism*. New York: Free Press.

Osareh, Farideh. 1996. "Bibliometrics, Citation Analysis and Co-citation Analysis: A Review of Literature I." *Libri* 46:149–58.

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1515/libr.1996.46.3.149>.

Persson, O., R. Danell, and J. Wiborg Schneider. 2009. "How to Use Bibexcel for Various Types of Bibliometric Analysis." In *Celebrating Scholarly Communication Studies: A Festschrift for Olle Persson at His 60th Birthday*, edited by F. Åström, R. Danell, B. Larsen, and J. Schneider, 9–24. Leuven, Belgium: International Society for Scientometrics and Informetrics.

Rehn, Alf. 2004. "The Politics of Contraband: The Honor Economies of the Warez Scene." *Journal of Socio-economics* 33 (3): 359–74.

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.soec.2003.12.027>.

Rheingold, Howard. 1994. *The Virtual Community: Finding Connection in a Computerized World*. London: Secker and Warburg.

Russell, Adrienne, Mizuko Ito, Todd Richmond, and Marc Tuters. 2008. "Culture: Media Convergence and Networked Participation." In *Networked Publics*, edited by Kazys Varnelis, 1–14. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Rychlicki, Tomasz. 2006. "Crimes Violating Intellectual Property Laws: The Modus Operandi of the Warez Scene." *Computer and Telecommunications Law Review* 12 (1): 27–31.

Simmel, Georg. 1908. "Conflict." In *On Individuality and Social Forms: Selected Writings*, 70–95. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Strangelove, Michael. 2005. *The Empire of Mind: Digital Piracy and the Anti-capitalist Movement*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

Thomas, Douglas. 2002. *Hacker Culture*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Tulloch, John. 1995. "'We're only a speck in the ocean': The Fans as Powerless Elite." In *Science Fiction Audiences: Watching "Doctor Who" and "Star Trek,"* edited by Henry Jenkins and John Tulloch, 144–72. London: Routledge.

von Busch, Otto, and Karl Palmås, 2006. *Abstract Hacktivism: The Making of a Hacker Culture*. London: Lightning Source.

von Hippel, Eric. 2001. "Innovation by User Communities: Learning from Open-source Software." *MIT Sloan Management Review* 42 (4): 82.

von Hippel, Eric. 2005. *Democratizing Innovation*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Wark, McKenzie. 2004. *A Hacker Manifesto*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Weber, Max. 1968. *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology*. New York: Bedminster Press.

Praxis

A Japanese media pilgrimage to a Tasmanian bakery

Craig Norris

University of Tasmania, Tasmania, Australia

[0.1] *Abstract*—A small bakery in regional Tasmania, Australia, has been reimagined as a pop culture destination by Japanese tourists who claim it is the inspiration for a key location in the anime *Kiki's Delivery Service*. To understand how and why Japanese tourists have located this bakery in the imaginary world of *Kiki*, two processes are explored: the media pilgrimage, where fans bridge their ordinary reality and enter the special media world, and the media scaffold, where *Kiki* becomes a way to interpret the world around them.

[0.2] *Keywords*—Anime; Cult geography; Fan community; Media scaffold

Norris, Craig. 2013. "A Japanese Media Pilgrimage to a Tasmanian Bakery." *Transformative Works and Cultures*, no. 14. <http://dx.doi.org/10.3983/twc.2013.0470>.

1. Introduction

[1.1] In this article I explore how the Ross Bakery Inn and Ross Village Bakery in Australia's southernmost state of Tasmania has become the destination for a steady stream of Japanese tourists who are fans of the popular Japanese anime *Kiki's Delivery Service*. The analysis of these tourist-fans' playful and critical activities contributes to research within fan studies which has explored the role of place and travel (see Hills 2002; Couldry 2000, 2007; Jenkins 2004) as well as broader research around the types of skills and literacies emerging within fan and youth media practices (Jenkins et al. 2006; Knobel and Lankshear 2007; Livingstone 2011; Black 2009; Lyman et al. 2009; Gee 2007). Through investigating the ways in which fans articulate their experiences, identities, and motivations while visiting the Ross Bakery I will suggest that, in addition to understanding the media's role in contributing to our perception of place, we must also address the cultural and emotional contexts which underpin the appeal of these media pilgrimages. Through analyzing visitors' comments in the Ross Bakery's guest books I will reveal the cultural and emotional issues facing the Ross Bakery's status as a *Kiki* media pilgrimage destination. Through this case study I will explore both the opportunities for fresh perspectives of a location and the risks these places face if they fail to measure up to an idealized fictional image. It is within the disjunctions and continuities between the fans' virtual and real maps that this article will explore how fans use *Kiki* as a scaffold to interpret their travel experiences.

[1.2] My use of the term *scaffold* follows that of Black (2009), Hoge (2011), Lewis (2004), and Thomas (2007) and should be understood as referring to a transformative or reworking process whereby fans draw upon the original textual world as a scaffolding to help structure, organize, and foster an audience for their own narratives, experiences, or ideas. While

scaffolding is most often used to describe the process of fan fiction writing, I see a similar process occurring in the reflective travel stories written by *Kiki* fans in the guest books of the Ross Bakery. It is through this extratextual focus on how fans use physical places and locations related to *Kiki* as the building blocks for their own work and the role of visitor comments in guest books as pseudo fan fiction that this article makes an original contribution to our understanding of the creative processes whereby the real and fictional are transformed and reworked.

2. Approach—Locating a media pilgrimage

[2.1] As Connell's (2012) recent overview of film tourism reveals, there are various ways to explore how and why fictional worlds become grafted onto real-world locations. Within the impact of film tourism on a location, these include concerns around film and heritage (Higson 2006; Sargent 1998), authenticity (Butler 2011), and appropriation (Jones and Smith 2005; Light 2009). Related concerns include the marketing of these film locations (Busby and Klug 2001); and the motivations, experiences, and perception of tourists (Im and Chon 2008; Peters et al. 2011). It is the latter that is the focus of this article—particularly the motivations, experiences, and perceptions of tourists as fans.

[2.2] Couldry's (2000, 2004) research on audiences who traveled to the set of the British TV show *Coronation Street* has been particularly significant in further unpacking the experiences of fans who embark on media pilgrimages to film locations. Couldry defines media pilgrimages as not only involving the physical act of traveling to a film location, but also the symbolic act of temporarily crossing the boundary from one's ordinary everyday life into the special world of media. However, Couldry argues that this play between worlds never threatens the integrity of the boundary between these worlds. Rather, these media pilgrimages reinforce the separation of these two worlds and validate the specialness and magic of the media world.

[2.3] Reijnders (2010) draws upon Couldry's (2000, 2004) argument that media pilgrimages involve a symbolic journey from the ordinary to the special in his research on James Bond fans traveling to film locations. While Reijnders agrees with Couldry's distinction between physical and symbolic journeys, he broadens his analysis beyond the normalization of media power to include the cultural embeddedness of other power structures such as gender and ethnicity that also frame these media pilgrimages. In the case of James Bond film tourism, Reijnders (2010, 370) argues that to understand the motivations, experiences, and perceptions of Bond fans, we need to understand how their media pilgrimages "reconstruct... dominant gender discourses" in addition to the questions around media power that Couldry raises.

[2.4] While I agree with Couldry's (2000, 2004) analysis of media pilgrimages as a way to highlight the relationship that fans develop between the ordinary and media worlds, drawing upon Reijnders's (2010) work we can see that there are additional relationships beyond the fan and the media being negotiated. Rather than centered around the power of media institutions and the challenges people have in interrogating the power of media to frame our view of the world, I instead aim to explore the ways in which notions of being a fan relate to

other symbolic frameworks, particularly social conventions around personal transformation such as coming-of-age and maturity.

[2.5] Matt Hills (2002) also contributes to this broader question of the emotional and textual practices of fans by arguing that they create cult geographies where places are redefined around pop culture associations. Hills explains that a cult geography is a place where we can see how fans inhabit a specific place through various practices such as reenacting a scene or other performance that reorders that location's meaning around their relationship with their favorite text. Through his analysis of fans of *The X-Files* traveling to Vancouver to visit filming locations, Hills observes that "the 'inhabitation' of extratextual spaces forms an important part of cult fans' extensions and expressions of the fan-text relationship" (2002, 144). In addressing how fans inhabit these extratextual spaces, my aim in this article is to similarly explore what it means to be an anime tourist at the Ross Bakery and the ways in which fans synthesize information and experiences to arrive at a playful or critical view of the experience.

[2.6] My main interest, then, is to explore how fans frame their media pilgrimage to the Ross Bakery and how this frame is questioned and interrogated within the fan community. Approaching media pilgrimages in this way broadens our understanding of the motivations, experiences, and perceptions of tourists as fans. This approach addresses the media pilgrimage experience as having contradictions and conflicts as well as acknowledging the reinforcement of existing hierarchies of power, such as that held by media institutions (Couldry 2000; Couldry and McCarthy 2004). As Reijnders argues, "the authority of the media does not come about in a vacuum, but is tightly interwoven with other power configurations" (2010, 376). To fully appreciate media pilgrimages, they must be understood in their wider cultural context.

3. Transformative processes

[3.1] I examine the use of two key processes involved in fans remaking the fictional into the real: the media pilgrimage (Couldry 2000) process, where fans bridge the ordinary reality around them with the fictional ideal of a media text, and the media scaffold process, where fans use the *Kiki* story as a framework to develop their own account of traveling to Ross to reflect on their life and experiences. In exploring how Japanese tourists connect *Kiki* to Ross, I will build upon both a media pilgrimage focus and work in the field of media literacy that has explored the ways in which fans and consumer groups participate in and transform media content (see Jenkins 2004; Thomas 2007; Black 2009; Hoge 2011).

[3.2] The process of fans using existing places as building blocks for fan fiction work or fan performances (such as restaging memorable scenes to photograph) has been related to the development of media literacies and practices (Hills 2002). The skills and practices emerging from affinity-based communities such as fans has also been an important area of investigation within media literacies and issues of online participation (Jenkins et al. 2006; Knobel and Lankshear 2007; Lyman et al. 2009; Gee 2007). Research around media literacies has begun addressing the types of pedagogical value that play has in assisting young media users to develop new skills and tap into a supportive peer network. Recent research has explored the

types of affiliations, creative work, collaborative problem solving, and circulation of content that is occurring in fan communities (Jenkins et al. 2006; Knobel and Lankshear 2007; Lyman et al. 2009). Of particular relevance to this article is recent work that has examined the social and discursive literacy practices of young people who write fan fic (Hoge 2011; Lewis, Black, and Tomlinson 2009; Black 2009; Thomas 2007). This research has examined how fans draw upon the characters, settings, and stories of their favorite pop culture worlds and use these as a scaffold or entry point for their own writing. Here I refer specifically to Thomas (2007), who draws upon the work of Jenkins (2004) and Lewis (2004) to describe fans using popular culture as a scaffold or launching point for writing from which they develop something new.

[3.3] In Lewis's analysis of children's fan fic writing, she argues that "what fan fiction offers to these young writers is a great, existing story line; interesting, three-dimensional characters that have already been developed; and a wealth of back story to both pull from and write about" (2004). The fans described by Lewis are able to confidently develop and craft a story of their own and not be overcome by the stress of imagining an entirely new world with believable characters, settings, and histories. Similar arguments have been made by Thomas (2007), Black (2009), and Jenkins (2004), who supports the idea that "not everything that kids learn from popular culture is bad for them: some of the best writing instruction takes place outside the classroom" (Jenkins 2004). In terms of this article, like the focus on the active designing and transforming of original content by fan fic writers, the *Kiki* fans visiting the Ross Bakery similarly build upon a fictional world to develop something original around their journey to Australia. Like the use of the term *scaffold* to describe the emerging literacy practices of young writers occurring in fan fic (Lewis, Black, and Tomlinson 2009; Black 2009; Thomas 2007; Jenkins 2004), my use of the term attempts to draw attention to the value of popular culture for these tourist-fans to negotiate a complex and challenging journey, often for the first time.

[3.4] In analyzing the ways that fans appropriate the Ross Bakery into the *Kiki* story, it soon becomes apparent that the story, location, and characters of *Kiki* provide a rich but contested scaffold for the travelogue of the Japanese tourist, working holiday visa holder, and international students. My primary interest, then, is how the posts and comments in the guest books use *Kiki* as a scaffold and entry point from which to develop an understanding of their experiences and identity.

4. Methods

[4.1] The analysis presented in this article is based on three methods: a discourse analysis of three guest books, which totaled 302 pages and included over 600 individual comments; an in-depth interview with the Ross Bakery owners; and participatory observations during my field study at the Ross Bakery. While limited information was available on the sociocultural background of the tourist-fans, the guest books provided rich and varied data in terms of the ways fans describe their immediate experience of staying at the Ross Bakery. These guest books were kept at the Ross Bakery's *Kiki's Room* accommodation. This room was set aside for *Kiki* fans because of its resemblance to the room depicted in the anime. As Dot, the owner of the Ross Bakery, put it during our interview: "Because a lot of Japanese wanted to stay

around and wanted to take photographs, we had a little attic in the back, and the only reason we called it Kiki's Room, was because it was a little attic, and [in the anime] Kiki was in an attic."

[4.2] The guest books span the years from 2004 to 2007 and include comments written in English and Japanese as well as drawings and sketches made by visitors. This article draws upon key comments in these guest books to show the fans' experience at the Ross Bakery. In order to preserve the tone and expression of these guest book entries I have not corrected their grammar or spelling. I feel this is important as it reveals some of the challenges in explaining the spread of this rumor by Japanese to non-Japanese speakers. However, where the comments were written in Japanese, I have had these translated into English as indicated.

[4.3] In addition to these close readings of the guest books, my observation of the Ross Bakery involved visiting Ross and interviewing the owners, Dot and Chris. This 1-hour, semistructured interview explored the origin, history, circulation, and production of the Ross Bakery's link to the *Kiki* story from the owners' perspective. This interview was transcribed and included within my overall project data.

[4.4] My own participatory observations complemented the data collected in the guest book comments and interview data. My observations during my stay at the Ross Bakery focused on two aspects of the phenomenon: general tourism practices around heritage, national identity, and cultural objects; and fan practices (issues of authenticity, privileging particular objects/actions, circulating the story, and fan art/performances). These observations were recorded in a notebook during the field research (Silverman 2001; Bryman 2004).

[4.5] The guest books, transcripts, and notebooks were compared for key similarities that would indicate broad, shared structures of this phenomenon. Special focus was applied to descriptions of visiting the Ross Bakery and any differences or conflicts within these experiences that brought the site under scrutiny. Comparisons between individual tourist comments were analyzed as well as broader differences around the environment and culture of the Ross Bakery and the township of Ross. As I will show, these comments reveal a spectrum of efforts to negotiate the surroundings through the lens of *Kiki*. This analysis uses an approach common to ethnographic studies within fan cultures of interviews, observations, and close readings of fan comments and creative expressions (see Jenkins 1992; Bacon-Smith 1999; Baym and Burnett 2009; Bury 2005; Whiteman 2009). To contextualize the continuities and discontinuities between *Kiki* and the Ross Bakery and the playful or skeptical reactions it prompted, some background will be provided on each below.

5. *Kiki's Delivery Service*

[5.1] *Kiki's Delivery Service* is a feature-length animated movie from Japan released in 1989 and directed by the well-known anime director Hayao Miyazaki. An English-language version was released in the United States in 1998, the United Kingdom in 2003, and Australia in 2004. Known in Japan as *Majo no Takkyūbin* (literally *The Witch's Delivery Service*), it was based on a popular novel of the same name by Eiko Kadono published in 1985. In Japan it was the

highest-grossing film on its theatrical release in 1989 and the best-selling anime DVD for June 2001. The story focuses on a rite-of-passage journey of Kiki, a 13-year-old witch, who must complete her training by moving to a distant village for a year. She and her black cat, Jiji, fly to a seaside village and are taken in by the kind owners of the local bakery. It is here that Kiki learns to overcome a number of obstacles by establishing a flying delivery service for the area.

[5.2] As I will show, the film's focus on the personal dilemmas of Kiki and the sanctuary she finds at the bakery provides a clear link to the comments left in the guest books, with many messages deliberately drawing upon similar motifs of travel, comfort, and personal transformation such as coming of age or gaining further maturity.

6. The Ross Bakery Inn and Ross Village Bakery

[6.1] Tasmania's historic town of Ross is regarded as one of Australia's most beautiful convict-built stone villages. Bypassed by Tasmania's Midland Highway (the main route between Tasmania's two biggest cities, Hobart and Launceston), Ross is secluded from much traffic and casual interest. An online article in the Australian newspaper *The Age* provides a typical preserved heritage frame to promote the appeals of visiting Ross, stating that its seclusion has helped to preserve its pristine heritage status and prevent it from being "corrupted by modern tourism" ("Ross" 2004). As a location heavily dependent on tourism to generate revenue, Ross relies on its heritage features and atmosphere to draw visitors in.

[6.2] Ross's attractive village layout gives rise to powerful historical and colonial associations; for example, the main crossroad of the village is said to represent Temptation (Man O'Ross Hotel), Recreation (Town Hall), Salvation (the church), and Damnation (the gaol). And it is within Ross's colonial-era buildings and charming village layout that the Ross Bakery has developed a connection to *Kiki*'s idealized vision of a small, early-20th-century European town. However, as I will show, the Ross Bakery's connection to *Kiki* extends beyond surface similarities. To produce such a resilient, global popular culture connection, there have emerged a number of deep thematic links between *Kiki*'s narrative and the personal journey of those visiting the Ross Bakery.

7. The *Kiki* fan identity

[7.1] In the guest books, fans presented their identity and what it meant to travel to the Ross Bakery in two different ways: first, by celebrating the similarity between *Kiki* and the Ross Bakery by adopting the identity of the main character, Kiki, and improvising links between the anime and the atmosphere and services of the Ross Bakery, and second, by adopting a more skeptical stance toward the link by questioning the credibility and reliability of the rumor and raising concerns about the motivations, unconnected to fannish concerns, of the Ross Bakery's owners.

[7.2] Some of the strongest expressions of being a fan on a media pilgrimage were configured around a transformative journey. In particular, fans drew a connection between

their experiences in Australia and Kiki's efforts to mature into a witch and be accepted in her new town. Consider for example, the following comment:

[7.3] I think my working holiday life is like Kiki's life, because Kiki was looking for a place to live and work, and she was learning many things in a foreign place.

Although I was fired from my job, my girlfriend broke up with me, and I've become homesick, I am so happy to stay at the bakery today. I want to say to my parents thank you very much for letting me go to Australia. (Translated from Japanese into English)

[7.4] In this case, by identifying with Kiki's coming-of-age story, this fan establishes a deep, personal link between life experiences, the Ross Bakery, and *Kiki*. The fan here draws upon key motifs from the anime such as facing a series of challenges in a foreign land, finding comfort and sanctuary in a local bakery, and the need for critical self-reflection to resolve past insecurities.

[7.5] A similar media pilgrimage as transformation can be seen in the opening words for this fan's guest book entry: "I traveling in Australia about one month by myself. The title is *look for Ghibli world and look for myself*." The entry concludes with, "I'm happy I can stay kiki's house. It was my dream. I'm looking forward tomorrow breakfast. Thank you."

[7.6] Titling the entry "look for Ghibli world and look for myself" emphasizes that the fan is on a journey of change and self-discovery, a type of transformative journey that many fans explicitly embarked upon on their journey to the Ross Bakery.

[7.7] This transformative narrative can also be seen in different ways, such as in this comment: "Cried when watching video even though Im 23 (Valentines day)." The emphasis on Valentine's Day suggests the romantic first love subplot in *Kiki* where she develops growing affections toward a local boy.

[7.8] The emphasis of childhood or youthful memories reveals a foregrounding of particular coming-of-age moments within the transformation motif—leaving home for the first time, traveling overseas, working and studying in a foreign country, and feeling the emotions of blossoming love. These are all central to the narrative of *Kiki* and reinforce a link between the themes of *Kiki* and the fans' journeys to the Ross Bakery. Both Kiki and the *Kiki* fan leave home to travel to a distant foreign town and experience personal growth and change. As the above comments show, these links are explicit for some fans—"I think my working holiday life is like the Kiki's life"—and provide a highly personal link between their time at the Ross Bakery and *Kiki*. It is through this type of connection that the emotional authenticity of the Ross Bakery as a type of cult media pilgrimage becomes established.

[7.9] Like the point of entry into mature writing that Jenkins (2004) described Harry Potter fan fic writers experiencing as their writing and networking skills grew in sophistication, these personal transformation stories involve a similar reworking of a familiar media text as a starting point to express a deeper personal story.

[7.10] The fans' identification with Kiki and her coming-of-age narrative suggests that media pilgrimages involve a meaningful remixing of the fictional into the real to produce creative expressions, such as the sketches in the guest books (figure 1), and stories of discovery, such as the deeper reflection on their past and current aspirations. For the Kiki fan, visiting the Ross Bakery provides a starting point for a deeper reflection and negotiation of the challenges faced while traveling across Australia. Through *Kiki*, the fans gained a fresh perspective on the challenges and adversities they faced. Much like the young fan fic writers who develop a stronger writing voice through using their knowledge of existing media franchises and characters, such as Star Trek or Harry Potter, as a scaffold around which to develop their own stories (Lewis, Black, and Tomlinson 2009; Black 2009; Thomas 2007; Jenkins 2004), so too these tourists draw upon the *Kiki* world to provide a shared worldview with which their fellow travelers can identify and through which they can economically express their experience of cultural, geographical, and identity changes. In this case, the appropriation of popular culture involves a starting point to begin a deeper reflection on the fan's own coming-of-age or self-discovery story while traveling and living in Australia.

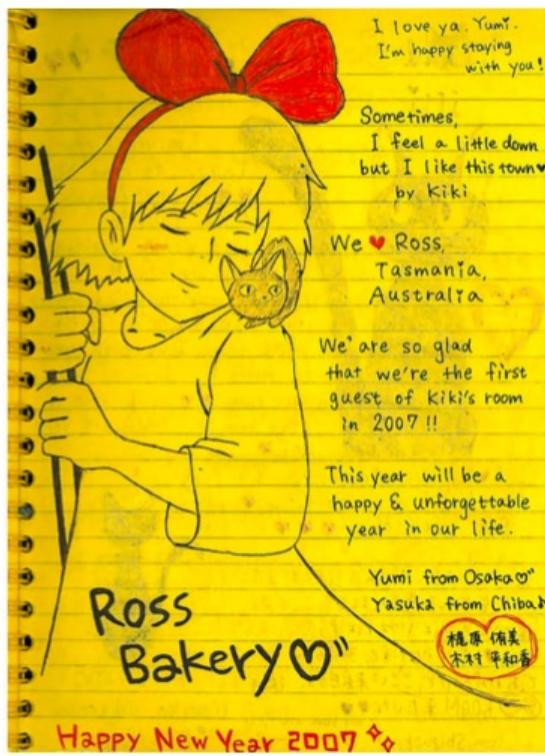


Figure 1. Ross Bakery guest book sketch (Yumi and Yasuka 2007). [[View larger image](#).]

7. *Kiki* and nostalgia

[7.1] The appearance of the coming-of-age or self-discovery frame within these guest books is not surprising given that most of the *Kiki* fans who visit the Ross Bakery are young. While no accurate data were available to provide an accurate average age or gender for the *Kiki* fans, in my interview with the Ross Bakery owners, they estimated the age of most of the *Kiki* fans as "around about late teens, twenties. They are the main. But what we are finding also is that Japanese families are coming now, so older parents with their children."

[7.2] While the majority of fans were described as young, it is interesting to note that even for those older fans who visited the Ross Bakery, the coming-of-age frame is still evoked. As the following comment shows, it can be based around the nostalgia of the past and memories of childhood:

[7.3] First time I saw Ross Bakery and Kiki's room. I thought really looks like "Majyo no Takkubin" movie's situation. When I was child I often watched this movie. So I'm really happy I watched "Majyo no Takkyubin" today in Kiki's room. I never forget that watched movie in Kiki's room and ate bread & pie in Ross Bakery and stayed in Kiki's room. I could experienced at movie world!! Next if I'll be visit to Australia again, I'll certain to come here again. When I'll go back to Japan, I'll recommend to stay here for my friends. Thank you very much for great & dream time for me.

[7.4] The remembrance of childhood is a related theme repeated throughout the guest books, with comments such as "We had a nice time to stay here and remember our childhood in Japan." Expanding upon the transitional coming-of-age frame, here the media pilgrimage is presented around fond memories of childhood and youth. For these fans, the opportunity to express nostalgic sentiments of childhood through inhabiting *Kiki*'s location is an important process of the media pilgrimage. Similar to Roskill's (1997, 202) "landscapes of presence" or Morgan-James's (2006, 199) notion of "emotional territory," experiencing a film landscape enables the tourist to refer to broader, difficult-to-express concepts or notions such as nationhood, identity, or cultural zeitgeist. Here, the encounter with the film landscape allows one to "express what is otherwise inexpressible" (Lefebvre 2006, xii).

8. The Ross Bakery as cult geography

[8.1] The framing of the Ross Bakery through a transformative narrative is similar to the creation of a cult geography by fans described by Hills (2002), which involves fans reinterpreting the meaning of a place around their fan interests. For Hills, visiting a cult geography involves fans reordering the meaning of a location through experimenting, improvising, and discovering links between their surroundings and their favorite text. Fans can take on the identity, characteristics, and practices of fictional characters within these environments, as Hills explored in the case of fans of *The X-Files* self-consciously adopting the investigative motifs from this TV series while tracking down shooting locations.

[8.2] The Ross Bakery's cult geography status is particularly apparent when fans describe the reason why their itinerary to Australia includes the remote location of Ross, Tasmania. As seen in the earlier post where the fan writes "find Ghibli and find myself," while the Ross Bakery has none of the glamour or cachet of other tourist designations such as Ayers Rock or the Great Ocean Road, it equals and may surpass these locations because of its connection to *Kiki*. This is further emphasized through the decision to leave the Ross Bakery to the last and reflect upon the entire trip through the experience in that place. Even the Ross Bakery's owners were familiar with the different ranking of tourist destinations that underpinned the *Kiki* fan's decision to travel there.

[8.3] **Chris:** We had a couple here that came to stay with us a few years ago, and they were on a 3-week tour of Australia—they were Japanese, and they tell us, they had to make a decision, they were on the Gold Coast, and they had to decide do they go to Ayers Rock or Ross Bakery. So they knocked off Ayers Rock—

Interviewer: But so many people would express incredulity at why would Ross beat Ayers Rock.

Chris: Well, I would suppose it had something to do with the fact that it was going to take them 10 days to get to Ayers Rock; it would have been easier to come down here. But I think it's sort of—it becomes a sort of rite of passage, a pilgrimage.

[8.4] While these distinctions between ordinary tourist destinations and special media pilgrimage locations highlighted the agency of fans and their reordering of top locations to visit, the value of the Ross Bakery as a *Kiki* location did not exclusively center on *Kiki*'s narrative.

9. Local food and atmosphere

[9.1] While the self-discovery or personal transformation narrative was a dominant expression of what made the journey to the Ross Bakery memorable and satisfying, there were other motivations and experiences that moved beyond the privileging of the *Kiki* text. Within the guest books, this was revealed through descriptions focused on enjoying the local food and atmosphere of Ross and its bakery. These experiences not only reveal the agency of fans to express their own interests and expectations beyond *Kiki*, but also emphasize the broader tourist practices of sampling local produce and soaking in the atmosphere of a foreign location that can occur in parallel to media pilgrimage practices.

[9.2] In discussing their broader experiences of the Ross Bakery, fans repeatedly mentioned their enjoyment of the Ross Bakery's food, especially its pies. This was expressed in different ways, but typically it reinforced a positive link between the Ross Bakery and *Kiki*. For example,

[9.3] Finally my dram has come true ! ! Ive been waiting for the day when I can visit Kiki's room. Ive had a lovely pie at the bakery. That was the best pie which I ever had in my life.

[9.4] And,

[9.5] The primary reason I visited the bakery for the first time was to see the bakery itself as a fan of Miyazaki's movies. From then on, I visited there several times because I loved the village of Ross and its environment, and delicious pies sold at Ross Bakery.

[9.6] While this fan may have been motivated to visit Ross because of *Kiki*, the discovery of delicious food and a comfortable atmosphere were important additions that deepened the enjoyment of the trip.

[9.7] Other more pragmatic associations grew out of a media pilgrimage, including Ross's convenient location as a stopover on the long drive between Hobart and Launceston:

[9.8] At the first time I was interested in Bakery as a model of *Kiki's Delivery Service*, but after that it became less important. Now, for me, Ross is a good rest point with a good bakery on the way to Launceston.

[9.9] Even those fans who were less convinced that the Ross Bakery provided the basis for *Kiki's* bakery were still impressed by the atmosphere of the town and how this evoked the spirit of *Kiki*:

[9.10] The bakery itself is slightly different from the bakery in *Kiki's Delivery Service* but I think the atmosphere of the town suits the image of the movie.
(Translated from Japanese into English)

[9.11] Or they found it to be a pleasant location to visit by itself:

[9.12] While the bakery didn't look similar to *Kiki's* bakery on the outside, its (and the town's) atmosphere was very good and the oven-baked bread was so nice.
(Translated from Japanese into English)

[9.13] By emphasizing the atmosphere of Ross and the Ross Bakery, these fans establish a positive experience of the trip while still maintaining a skeptical position toward the rumor linking the Ross Bakery to *Kiki*. While the concern around the Ross Bakery's authenticity is primarily based on visual and structural differences, the emphasis on the pleasures of eating pies and enjoying the atmosphere of Ross suggests an important emotional experience that underpins a positive media pilgrimage. This suggests that structural similarities between *Kiki* and Ross are only one element of authenticating Ross Bakery as a *Kiki* media pilgrimage location. The power of emotion and mood to underpin the discovery of the idealized *Kiki* bakery further reinforces Roskill's earlier point that media pilgrimages can be more about evoking impressions and emotions through the "landscapes of presence" (1997, 202) or Morgan-James's (2006, 199) "emotional territory" than simply being a one-to-one visible match.

[9.14] While some fans discovered a broader emotional link between *Kiki* and the Ross Bakery, nevertheless, as I will show in the final section, there were fans who directly challenged the link and argued that the Ross Bakery should not claim a connection to *Kiki*.

10. The dislocation of a media pilgrimage

[10.1] So far I have explored the positive ways in which fans framed their experience of Ross and the Ross Bakery through playful discovery and improvisation. In this final section I will discuss how fans raised questions of authenticity and credibility. These criticisms are important because they reveal attempts by fans to protect the integrity or value of *Kiki* from what they see as incongruous appropriations.

[10.2] While most of the comments in the guest books were positive and reinforced the links between the anime and the Ross Bakery, there was criticism of the experience. In contrast to the types of identifications and discoveries that characterized the fans who saw their trip as a transformative moment, those challenging the link raised three areas of concern: structural differences between the two, doubts around Ross's atmosphere being an entry point into the *Kiki* world, and anxiety around the intentions of the Ross Bakery owners.

[10.3] Consider, for example, the following complaint that the atmosphere of the Ross Bakery and its rustic nature was very different from the idealized vision of a bakery in *Kiki*:

[10.4] This room isn't similar to Kiki's room in the film at all. They should keep this room clean when they offer this room to guest though here is an attic. I couldn't sleep well because bakers began to work pretty early. It was damn noisy.

[10.5] This challenge to the Ross Bakery's appropriateness as a *Kiki* pilgrimage site is framed around the all-too-real atmosphere of sleeping above a bakery with its accompanying noise and mess.

[10.6] Other posts similarly felt the atmosphere and actual physical experience of visiting the Ross Bakery did not match their expectations of *Kiki*'s bakery.

[10.7] I don't want to come back to Ross. I think Kiki's room is different from my image of the movie. I don't like the place because there are many insects there.

(Translated from Japanese into English)

[10.8] This rejection of the Ross Bakery draws upon both the structural differences between the two and also the unpleasantness of being confronted with the ever-present nuisance of insects in Australia. Unlike the earlier positive experiences of Ross's atmosphere where *Kiki* acted as an entry point into discovering pleasant tourist experiences around country life, this post instead reasserts how far away the fantasy image of *Kiki*'s village and bakery can be from the experience of staying at a bakery in a small regional town.

[10.9] As Mordue argues, when visiting a film location, the dissonance between a real location and its portrayal in film or TV results in "often messy and contradictory interactions of people and place in a tourism context" (2001, 32). In a similar way, rejecting or embracing Ross's regional atmosphere by *Kiki* fans is related to the struggle of comparing the idealized *Kiki* bakery to the real Ross Bakery. Add to this other tourist demands—particularly expectations around receiving appropriate services and comforts—and it becomes clear how difficult it is for a media pilgrimage to satisfy everyone's needs.

[10.10] In addition to these disappointments, the commerce of tourism was also seen to threaten the fans' expectations around the appropriate ways to benefit from the *Kiki* connection. In these instances, anxieties around the media pilgrimage status of the Ross Bakery are often framed as moral concerns. This is particularly the case for those who felt that the Ross Bakery owners were exploiting the *Kiki* association for financial gain. Some were ambivalent at the supposed need for the Ross Bakery's owners to generate a profit, such as:

[10.11] Such a good business! I really liked Kiki's room, but I think the price is a bit expensive. However, the owner is a businessman at heart, because he promotes the room as Kiki's room. (Translated from Japanese into English)

[10.12] Other fans saw themselves as defending the value and integrity of the anime's vision. In this case a number of comments expressed concerns about how the original copyright holders, such as the creator Miyazaki, may not be happy with the Ross Bakery's claims.

[10.13] This is very rude to Miyazaki!! While the inside of the building looks like the image of the movie, the outside looks absolutely different. I think this rumor is very rude to Miyazaki. Who started talking about this rumor? (Translated from Japanese into English)

[10.14] Fan concern here is around the appropriateness of the Ross Bakery's status as a *Kiki* location and broader concerns around the cultural ownership of *Kiki*. Here we find examples of the type of damaging commercial practices that Hills (2002) identified as undermining the authenticity and legitimacy of media locations in the eyes of many fans. Hills argues that locations become enduring cult geographies because fans directly participate in the discovery and framing of the links between locations and their favorite media texts rather than local businesses proclaiming a link. Hills suggests that through this participation, fans themselves authenticate a media location.

[10.15] While the Ross Bakery owners described their efforts to meet fan expectations—such as allowing visitors to wear staff aprons for photographs, conducting tours of the kitchen to see the wood-fired oven, and going to the attic to see Kiki's room—the demands of running a café and bed-and-breakfast venue inevitably meant that they couldn't meet every request. Regardless of the daily operating demands that make this gatekeeping necessary, the consequence is that some fans feel that their pilgrimage activities are restricted. This frustration can be seen in the following guest book comment:

[10.16] Even though it takes advantage of the rumor to attract tourists, it does not allow visitors to take a look at its inside. When I went there I also was not happy with the manner of its shop assistants, which was rather disappointing. (Translated from Japanese into English)

[10.17] Comments like this display a morally invested, protective fan identity that defines itself against the motives or agendas of nonfans. This is an identity built around a strong sense of investment and possessiveness over *Kiki*.

[10.18] An interesting aspect of these judgments is that they emphasize either physical differences, an atmosphere that takes one out of the *Kiki* world, or moral concerns around commercial exploitation. This spectrum of concerns ranging from the concrete to abstract shares a similar structure to those who embraced the Ross Bakery, which ranged from discovering physical similarities to more intangible emotional resonances. This debate around

the appropriateness or authenticity of the Ross Bakery as a *Kiki* location reminds us that there are deeply conflicting notions of what makes a satisfying media pilgrimage.

11. Conclusion

[11.1] The analysis presented in this article has focused on the forms of improvisation and discovery adopted by *Kiki* fans as they negotiate the similarities and differences between the Ross Bakery and the anime *Kiki*. Drawing upon the comments in the guest books and interviews with the Ross Bakery's owners, I have examined the ways in which this community synthesizes information around the Ross Bakery and *Kiki*. I have also explored what key practices are occurring in media pilgrimages today, particularly the ability of fans to adopt alternative identities, reimagine their surroundings, and evaluate the credibility of these locations.

[11.2] As I have shown, while there are some dominant experiences shared by fans who visit the Ross Bakery, there was also conflict around the value and legitimacy of the experience. These moves involve arguments around playful or skeptical discourses that seek to legitimize experiences of the Ross Bakery. In this context, the experience of the Ross Bakery via *Kiki* is an example of the contested ways in which a location becomes co-opted into a media pilgrimage by a diverse community.

[11.3] In a similar way that Hoge (2011, ¶6.2) notes how the fan fic writers use "the scaffolding of the textual world...as an act of play, and an actively ludic opportunity for engagement," so too the agency of fans to impose their own *Kiki*-influenced narrative or to adopt the identity of Kiki to improvise and explore a world they would like to inhabit, onto the Ross Bakery is a form of play that integrates an existing fictional text with the fans' experiences and imagination. As Jenkins (2004) has argued, fans should be seen as active engagers and users of media content. However, in talking about media pilgrimages as scaffolds, my concern has not been to assume that all fan engagements with locations will lead to a positive, fulfilling experience or bring any real understanding of different perspectives and communities, but rather to acknowledge that "while the uneven flow of cultural material across national borders often produces a distorted understanding of national differences, it also represents a first significant step toward global consciousness" (Jenkins 2006, 170). In this case, the global consciousness is suggested by the experiences of those who described a type of self-discovery or transformative-journey narrative through embarking upon the *Kiki* media pilgrimage.

[11.4] What makes the fans' richly contested and celebrated experience of the Ross Bakery significant is that it involves physical places and locations being the catalyst and building blocks for fan fiction-type work. In this case it is expressed not through fan fiction stories or staged photographs but through the genre of visitors' comments in guest books. What I have analyzed here, then, are the ways in which the manipulation and integration of the *Kiki* story and characters into the Ross Bakery by fans provide a rich but contested scaffold for the *Kiki* fan's media pilgrimage and reveals a creative process where fans transform existing elements

of popular culture through their physical surroundings to express changes in culture, geography, and identity.

12. Works cited

- Bacon-Smith, Camille. 1999. *Science Fiction Culture*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Baym, Nancy K., and Robert Burnett. 2009. "Amateur Experts: International Fan Labor in Swedish Independent Music." *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 12 (5): 433–49. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/1367877909337857>.
- Black, Rebecca W. 2009. "Online Fan Fiction, Global Identities, and Imagination." *Research in the Teaching of English* 43 (4): 397–425.
- Bryman, Alan. 2004. *Social Research Methods*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Bury, Rhiannon. 2005. *Cyberspaces of Their Own: Female Fandoms Online*. New York: Peter Lang.
- Busby, Graham, and Julia Klug. 2001. "Movie-Induced Tourism: The Challenge of Measurement and Other Issues." *Journal of Vacation Marketing* 7 (4): 316–32. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/135676670100700403>.
- Butler, Richard. 2011. "It's Only Make Believe: The Implications of Fictional and Authentic Locations in Films." *Worldwide Hospitality and Tourism Themes* 3 (2): 91–101. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/1755421111122961>.
- Connell, Joanne. 2012. "Film Tourism: Evolution, Progress and Prospects." *Tourism Management* 33 (5): 1007–29. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2012.02.008>.
- Couldry, Nick. 2000. *The Place of Media Power: Pilgrims and Witnesses of the Media Age*. London: Routledge.
- Couldry, Nick. 2007. "On the Set of *The Sopranos*: "Inside" a Fan's Construction of Nearness." In *Fandom: Identities and Communities in a Mediated World*, edited by Jonathan Gray, Cornel Sandvoss and C. Lee Harrington, 139–48. New York: New York University Press.
- Couldry, Nick, and Anna McCarthy. 2004. *Mediaspace: Place, Scale, and Culture in a Media Age*. London: Routledge.
- Gee, James Paul. 2007. *Good Video Games + Good Learning: Collected Essays on Video Games, Learning, and Literacy*. New York: Peter Lang.
- Higson, Andrew. 2006. "A Green and Pleasant Land: Rural Spaces and British Cinema." In *Representing the Rural: Scene, Place and Identity in Films about the Land*, edited by Catherine Fowler and Gillian Helfield, 240–55. Detroit: Wayne State University.

- Hills, Matt. 2002. *Fan Cultures*. London: Routledge.
- Hoge, Charles William. 2011. "Whodology: Encountering *Doctor Who* Fan Fiction through the Portals of Play Studies and Ludology." *Transformative Works and Cultures*, no. 8. <http://dx.doi.org/10.3983/twc.2011.0262>.
- Im, Holly Hyunjung, and Kaye Chon. 2008. "An Exploratory Study of Movie-Induced Tourism: A Case of the Movie *The Sound of Music* and Its Locations in Salzburg, Austria." *Journal of Travel and Tourism Marketing* 24 (2-3): 229-38. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/10548400802092866>.
- James, Annie Morgan. 2006. "Enchanted Places, Land and Sea, and Wilderness: Scottish Highland Landscape and Identity in Cinema." In *Representing the Rural: Space, Place, and Identity in Films about the Land*, edited by Catherine Fowler and Gillian Helfield, 185-201. Detroit: Wayne State University.
- Jenkins, Henry. 1992. *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture*. London: Routledge.
- Jenkins, Henry. 2004. "Why Heather Can Write." *MIT Technology Review*, <http://www.technologyreview.com/news/402471/why-heather-can-write/>.
- Jenkins, Henry. 2006. "Pop Cosmopolitanism: Mapping Cultural Flows in an Age of Media Convergence." In *Fans, Bloggers, and Gamers: Exploring Participatory Culture*, 152-72. New York: New York University Press.
- Jenkins, Henry, Katherine Clinton, Ravi Purushotma, Alice J. Robinson, and Margaret Weigel. 2006. "Confronting the Challenges of Participatory Culture: Media Education for the 21st Century." An Occasional Paper on Digital Media and Learning. MacArthur Foundation. http://digitallearning.macfound.org/atf/cf%7B7E45C7E0-A3E0-4B89-AC9CE807E1B0AE4E%7D/JENKINS_WHITE_PAPER.pdf.
- Jones, Deborah, and Karen Smith. 2005. "Middle-earth meets New Zealand: Authenticity and Location in the Making of *The Lord of the Rings*." *Journal of Management Studies* 42 (5): 923-45. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-6486.2005.00527.x>.
- Knobel, Michele, and Colin Lankshear. 2007. *A New Literacies Sampler*. New York: Peter Lang.
- Lefebvre, Martin. 2006. Introduction to *Landscape and Film*, edited by Martin Lefebvre, xi-xxxii. London: Routledge.
- Lewis, Diane. 2004. *Understanding the Power of Fan Fiction for Young Authors*. Kliatt, <http://www.thefreelibrary.com/Understanding+the+power+of+fan+fiction+for+young+authors.-a0114326743>.
- Lewis, Lauren, Rebecca Black, and Bill Tomlinson. 2009. "Let Everyone Play: An Educational Perspective on Why Fan Fiction Is, or Should Be, Legal." *International Journal of Learning and Media* 1 (1): 67-81. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1162/ijlm.2009.0007>.

Light, Duncan. 2009. "Performing Transylvania: Tourism, Fantasy and Play in a Liminal Place." *Tourist Studies* 9 (3): 240–58. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/1468797610382707>.

Livingstone, Sonia. 2011. "Internet, Children, and Youth." In *The Handbook of Internet Studies*, edited by Mia Consalvo and Charles Ess, 348–68. Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1002/9781444314861.ch16>.

Lyman, Peter, Mizuko Ito, Barrie Thorne, and Michael Carter. 2009. *Hanging Out, Messing Around, and Geeking Out: Kids Living and Learning with New Media*. Cambridge: MIT Press/MacArthur Foundation.

Mordue, Tom. 2001. "Performing and Directing Resident/Tourist Cultures in Heartbeat Country." *Tourist Studies* 1 (3): 233–52. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/146879760100100302>.

Peters, Mike, Markus Schuckert, Kaye Chon, and Clarissa Schatzmann. 2011. "Empire and Romance: Movie-Induced Tourism and the Case of the Sissi Movies." *Tourism Recreation Research* 36 (2): 169–80.

Reijnders, Stijn. 2010. "On the Trail of 007: Media Pilgrimages into the World of James Bond." *Area* 42 (3): 369–77.

Roskill, Mark W. 1997. *The Language of Landscape*. Philadelphia: Pennsylvania University Press.

"Ross: The Most Beautiful Historic Town in Tasmania." 2004. *The Age*, February 8. <http://www.theage.com.au/news/tasmania/ross/2005/02/17/1108500205933.html>.

Sargent, Amy. 1998. "The Darcy Effect: Regional Tourism and Costume Drama." *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 4 (3/4): 177–86. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13527259808722235>.

Silverman, David. 2001. *Interpreting Qualitative Data: Methods for Analysing Talk, Text and Interaction*. London: Sage.

Thomas, Angela. 2007. "Blurring and Breaking Through the Boundaries of Narrative, Literacy, and Identity in Adolescent Fan Fiction." In *A New Literacies Sampler*, edited by Michele Knobel and Colin Lankshear, 137–66. New York: Peter Lang.

Whiteman, Natasha. 2009. "The De/Stabilization of Identity in Online Fan Communities." *Convergence* 15 (4): 391–410. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/1354856509342341>.

Praxis

Trans-cult-ural fandom: Desire, technology and the transformation of fan subjectivities in the Japanese female fandom of Hong Kong stars

Lori Hitchcock Morimoto

Independent researcher

[0.1] *Abstract*—This essay examines the ways in which affective desire and new media technologies were mobilized by Japanese female fans of Hong Kong films and stars to produce a fan subjectivity that was at once cult and transcultural. The origins of this fandom, which flourished from around 1985 through the 1990s, lay in structural affinities of the Japanese and Hong Kong entertainment industries of the 1980s, as well as the ways in which popular stars of both places were expected to perform their stardom. In particular, a shared valuing of stars' relatability and approachability translated, for Japanese fans, into a seemingly paradoxical sense of intimacy with the stars of another culture, an intimacy that was fostered and heightened by women's pursuit of Hong Kong media outside the official distribution channels of the Japanese media industry. I examine the knowledges required by women to seek out favorite stars' films on VHS and VCD, as well as the sites of such consumption, which combined in the production of what I tentatively term a trans-cult-ural fan subjectivity that was at once cultish in its intensity and desire for ownership, as well as transcultural in its performance by fans.

[0.2] *Keywords*—Cult fandom; *Dōjinshi*; Female fandom; Hong Kong cinema; Japan; Star fandom; Transcultural fandom; Video technology

Hitchcock Morimoto, Lori. 2013. "Trans-cult-ural Fandom: Desire, Technology and the Transformation of Fan Subjectivities in the Japanese Female Fandom of Hong Kong Stars." *Transformative Works and Cultures*, no. 14.

<http://dx.doi.org/10.3983/twc.2013.0494>.

1. Introduction

[1.1] When Jackie Chan was making his final, successful bid for Hollywood stardom in the latter half of the 1990s, the story of his obsessive Japanese female fandom was a staple of interviews and profiles published online and in the American press. An ever-evolving tale advanced by Chan himself in his 1998 autobiography, *I Am Jackie Chan*, its characterization of Japanese women as a barely contained mob of emotionally unstable hysterics effectively established the enormity of his pan-Asian superstardom to a mainstream Western audience heretofore unfamiliar with his extensive oeuvre. More importantly, it also served to flatter a predominantly male Western cult fandom of kung fu cinema that constituted itself in part through the

structuring absence of overtly affective investment in Hong Kong stars. In singling out for critique Japanese women who got too close to him—both emotionally and physically—Chan, who trades on his physicality, legitimated a proper interest in his body by appealing to male fans' appreciation of the "corporeal authenticity" (Hunt 2003, 159) of his embodied stardom ([note 1](#)).

[1.2] Cult fandom historically has constituted women as the mainstream other against which fan identities are constituted. Cult, which is based on a system of cultural capital that privileges authentic opposition to social institutions, consumer capitalism, and cultural homogeneity, distances the female spectator as much through material practice as textual content (Hollows 2003, 36–38). Women's often unavoidable implication in the social organization of time and space results in the construction of a feminine-coded mainstream against which cult, emerging from what Joanne Hollows has termed the spatiotemporal "twilight zones" (41) of midnight movies and sleazy theaters, derives its oppositionality. Thus, if, as Sarah Thornton (1995) suggests, cult fandom positions itself "outside media and culture" as "grassroots cultures (which) resist and struggle with a colonizing mass-mediated corporate world" (quoted in Jancovich 2002, 315), women would seem to be precluded from participating in it by virtue of their social susceptibility to that same colonizing culture.

[1.3] I problematize this conceptualization of cult fandom through an examination of the intersection of women's affective interest in Hong Kong stars, new media technologies, and commodified practices of star-centered fandom in the Japanese female fandom of Hong Kong stars in the late 1980s and 1990s, arguing that this intersection produced both a transcultural and a trans-cult-ural audience situated not only between the fan cultures of Hong Kong and Japan, but also between cult and star fan subjectivities. The term *transcultural* has been invoked with increasing frequency in scholarship of transnational media and fandoms as a means of capturing the dialogical possibilities of affinities of experience that both literally and figuratively exceed the parameters of the nation-state (Lau 2003). While necessarily maintaining this sense of the term, my use of the term *trans-cult-ural* to describe the female fandom of Hong Kong stars in Japan is equally intended to foreground the "semiotic solidarity" (Lau 2003, 6) between cult and star fan modalities that are both produced by their industrial and technological contexts and themselves contribute to the production of new fan subjectivities.

[1.4] The Japanese female fandom of Hong Kong stars was composed of fans ranging in age from 20 to 59 (and even beyond, as in the case of one fan in her 80s who attended Leslie Cheung's 1997 Osaka concert in formal kimono), and spanning a diversity of occupations: everything from students and housewives to office ladies and

even entertainment industry executives. They, as well as the businesses that sought both to cater to and capitalize on them, left a paper trail of fan letters, *dōjinshi* (fan magazines), advertisements, journalism, and fan-targeted publications that are at the center of this historical materialist analysis, in which I attempt to reconstruct the discursive surround of this fandom, the better to understand not only why and how fans consumed Hong Kong stars in Japan, but the implications of such consumption for how we understand transcultural—and trans-cult-ural—fandom in the main.

[1.5] I first interrogate the notion of cult fandom within an increasingly diversified media landscape, in which what was once the purview of twilight zones has been domesticated, in more than one sense, through the proliferation of home viewing technologies. I look at the contexts of women's uses and consumption of media technologies, in particular highlighting the ways in which the mainstream proliferation of Hong Kong movies on video CD (VCD) rendered female fans accidental connoisseurs of a technology that was, in the Japanese context, both masculine and highly niche. I then turn to discussion of the cultural geographies of Japanese women's fandom of Hong Kong stars; I pay particular attention to the ways in which fans' affective drive to procure star-centered media and paraphernalia combined with specific sites of acquisition to contribute to the transformation of female fans from mainstream to marginal cult consumers. This marginality, which produced and mobilized specialized knowledges of Hong Kong popular culture, translated to a mode of fandom that exceeded both prescribed female fandom and Japanese fandom, becoming the impetus for a transformation of these women's fan subjectivities from domestic, in both the household and broader national sense, to trans-cult-ural.

2. The domesticity of cult

[2.1] In the United States and the United Kingdom, where cult historically has been the primary mode of Hong Kong film reception, tales of Jackie Chan's unhinged Japanese fans were among the first discourses to be associated with the star, at once confirming his status as a global superstar and implicitly affirming the cult sensibility of his Anglo-American audience. Similarly, even in Japan, where such stories went untold, women's association with commercial, mainstream media colored the perception of Chan's female fans by male martial arts aficionados. In the 1999 book *Ajian mubī jankīzu!!* (Asian movie junkies!!), four men take up the issue of Chan's mid-1980s transformation, implicitly conveying their own oppositional tastes through their critique of the star's marketing to a mainstream, mostly female audience:

[2.2] **Ginty:** In Jackie's case, fans' perception of him went from Jackie as an action star to [the book] *Okurimono* (All About Jackie Chan), in which he

was promoted as an idol. And since I wanted information [about him], I wound up buying that book.

Yashiro: And then, it had pointless pictures of Jackie blowing out candles on a birthday cake and stuff.

Ginty: Even though he wasn't supposed to have a girlfriend, it was stuffed with information like how he had a double bed. And then in the latter half of the book, he had an advice column (laugh). That was the point at which everyone distanced themselves [from Chan].

Kiuchi: Yeah, that was a difficult period.

Uechi: The charming Jackie of those days was also good. But even though he came to Japan often, I have no recollection of him. After all, he was on TV programs like [Beat Takeshi's] "Super Jockey."

Kiuchi: The "Challenge Jackie" series in the "Ganbareman" sketch was good. Jackie did a lot of appearances on variety shows...and he also did a concert when *Five Lucky Stars* came out. At the Budōkan, with Sammo Hung and Yuen Biao.

Yashiro: It's a side of him that's hard to believe now. They were selling a Tōhō-Tōwa-style image of "everybody's Jackie."

Kiuchi: With people on TV like Grandma Komori saying stuff like "Jackie Chan is cute." (Kiuchi, Kobayashi, and Takeshi 1999, 42) ([note 2](#))



Figure 1. Raymond Chow, Jackie Chan, and Sibelle Hu with Komori Kazuko. *My Lucky Stars* film pamphlet, 1985. [[View larger image](#).]

[2.3] In this conversation, Chan's mainstream fandom, in which women, children, and even the elderly predominated, was signified through references to Chan's pop-idol promotion and the banality of pictures showcasing his soft side. Through the articulation of film studio and distributor Tōhō-Tōwa's marketing tactics with the

mainstream audience to whom they were aimed, these fans were able to differentiate between their own authentic cult fandom and that of the feminized/infantilized masses.

[2.4] Yet the dividing line between male cult and female mainstream here is blurred by these men themselves in their reluctant admission of participation in and appreciation of Chan's popular persona, a blurring that, in fact, mirrors technological changes that transformed audiences' relationships to media in 1980s Japan. As Barbara Klinger (2006) has argued, the emergence of technologies that brought media into the home afforded cult fans an intensity of experience that strengthened the divide between detached mainstream and cult spectatorship. VHS and, in particular, DVD technologies allowed for the circulation of relatively rare media texts outside official distribution channels, the collection of which reinforced an authentic cult identity. However, the very technologies that contributed to the reinforcement of an oppositionality critical to this cult subjectivity equally blurred the line between cult and mainstream fans by bringing cult media into the domestic sphere.

[2.5] Does it thus follow that cult becomes an empty category, or does it retain a hermeneutical usefulness? In his discussion of what he terms postmodern cult, Timothy Corrigan argues that conditions of film spectatorship, more than specific film texts themselves, have produced the "cultish formations and viewing activities" (1991, 81) associated with cult film. In particular, his observation of audiences' ownership of films—both material and affective—presaged more recent scholarship on the intersection of media technologies and intense fan subjectivities. The technology-enabled collecting of films on portable media is conceived as an exercise that, as Klinger argues, "surpasses and obscures the [collector's] function as a consumer in the marketplace" through media industrial deployment of "the rhetoric of intimacy...and mastery" (2006, 88–89). Such appeals to media and technological mastery are, as James Kendrick argues, "a way of reworking the gendered nature of television and its association with everydayness into a masculine domain of control" (2005, 65) and as such constitute an effective inoculation against the otherwise feminized and feminizing domestic sphere within which cult media are consumed.

[2.6] The intimacies of film collecting center on the behind-the-scenes minutiae of DVD extras that at once inundate the viewer with the "secrets" (Klinger 2006, 89) of production and, as Craig Hight writes in the context of *The Lord of the Rings*, "invite us into the closed and artificial world of the production...as if we have been invited into the homes of the cast and crew to view the film with them, listening as they tell stories of their production experience with the sound of the film turned down" (2005, 12). Thomas Doherty describes this "imaginary friendship nurtured in the vicarious dialogue between pantheon artist and mortal fan" as being "of a wholly new order of intimacy"

(2001, 78), and it is in this sense that we may begin to discern within the practices of cult consumption a space for female star fandom, insofar as this kind of affective intimacy born of DVD collecting, in contrast with the paradoxically distanced intimacy of esoteric knowledges of media production, closely parallels women's fandom of stars. Particularly within the Japanese context, as William W. Kelly observes, such fans

[2.7] are not satisfied with the formal performances, with the mediated and staged glimpses of stars. They seek to get behind the curtain, to know more about the performers, to "possess" them through tokens like autographs and handprints and bootleg tapes. Jazz record collectors do not just like listening to jazz; they want ownership, physical possession of the very material objects of jazz performance. They want the visual and tactile intimacies of ownership, beyond—and sometimes quite apart from—the pleasures of hearing the music. Thus, intimacy can inhere in the physicality of a momentary handshake and the materiality of vinyl and the unique tremolo of a voice but also in the more ephemeral and virtual. (2004, 9)

[2.8] Kelly argues that Japanese star "fans are set apart from others in seeking intimacy—and paradoxically, seeking intimacy in highly commodified settings" (2004, 9). Equally paradoxical, at first glance, is the idea that such intimacy might be forged across both cultural and geographical borders. Yet as the abovementioned work on cult fan practices shows, a desire for precisely this kind of commodified, transcultural intimacy is, in fact, a defining characteristic of intense fandom in late capitalism, and one that is critical in producing a new, trans-cult-ural fan subjectivity.

3. "The VCD age has arrived!!"

[3.1] Mori Kei's 2001 self-published fan memoir, *Machigatte itara gomen nasai* (Forgive me if I'm wrong), begins with a protracted tease narrating her discovery of and gradual attraction to Hong Kong film and music star Leslie Cheung. Throughout the course of "seven or eight years" (2001, 13) during the 1990s, his name and image catch her largely indifferent eye through film reviews in the magazine she edits, gossip columns in the sports dailies through which she follows horse races, and snippets of Chinese-language TV programming that she watches while waiting for Serie A soccer matches to begin on cable TV. Yet it is not until her relocation from Tokyo's Setagaya Ward to Mitaka, a suburb largely devoid of cultural distractions such as cinemas, that she truly engages with Cheung's persona. On the recommendation of a friend, she rents Wong Kar-wai's *Days of Being Wild* (1993, dir. Wong Kar Wai) at a neighborhood video rental shop; Cheung's wounded portrayal of the narcissistic Yuddy piques her interest to the extent that she begins first to notice his image everywhere—notably in a garish display advertising his latest CD at a local music shop—and then to actively

seek out his works at Chinese entertainment specialty shops. Her sister, a fan of Japanese Taiwanese star Takeshi Kaneshiro, dispels her of the preconception that she will have to venture as far as Yokohama's Chinatown—a trip of at least 2 hours—in order to find Cheung-related media and paraphernalia, instead directing Mori to Jasmine Tea, a small specialty shop located within nearby Nakano Broadway mall.

[3.2] The actual process of star discovery described here by Mori is in itself unremarkable. What is noteworthy about her account of near misses on an inexorable path leading to Leslie Cheung is its circuitous trajectory through both media and degrees of engagement. Her journey from print media to cable television to video to music CD reflects the mainstream circulation of Hong Kong stars in Japan in the 1980s and, in particular, the 1990s; equally, this initial engagement with Cheung, which she describes as "the beginning of it all (1)" (2001, 11), echoes that fragmented and distracted mode of reception described in scholarly research of both Anglo-American and Japanese women television viewers. Glimpses of Cheung within her everyday media environment pique her interest, but none sufficiently to spur her to fandom. Rather, her immersion in Cheung fandom—"the beginning of it all (2)" (17)—starts at the point at which she exhausts official channels of Hong Kong media circulation and turns to alternative sites and modes of media acquisition. The mutually intensifying affect and activity that characterizes Mori's growing fandom of Cheung is, in fact, characteristic of Japanese women's fandom of Hong Kong stars in the late 1980s and 1990s, emerging through a transforming technological landscape that exceeded the strategizing of Japanese media industries of the period.

[3.3] Given the peripheral role of Hong Kong cinema within the mainstream of Japanese popular culture, the rise of a discernible female fandom of Hong Kong stars in Japan during the 1980s and 1990s appears paradoxical. While viewed as potentially lucrative from the perspective of the Hong Kong film industry of the 1980s, the Japanese film market posed a number of difficulties for Hong Kong producers. Among these were incompatibilities in production and distribution cycles between Hong Kong and Japan (Yeung 2000); where Hong Kong cinema of the 1980s and 1990s was distinguished by the speed with which films went from concept to screen (Bordwell 2000), both Japanese production and distribution followed "meticulous" (Yeung 2000, 151) and highly structured timetables that translated to an inevitable lag between a film's completion and its release in Japan. Moreover, particularly in the case of television broadcasts of Hong Kong feature films, producers had "little say over whether the film [was] used simply to fill time slots or whether it [was] being run during prime time by its Japanese distributor" (Yeung 2000, 151), further inhibiting Hong Kong producers' drive to market to Japanese audiences.

[3.4] Not only differences of production and distribution but also difficulties in conceptualizing a Japanese audience for Hong Kong cinema proved to be a significant barrier to Hong Kong penetration of the Japanese film market. While the first flush of Bruce Lee's posthumous popularity in 1970s Japan indicated a male audience primed for Hong Kong's substantial martial arts output, only Jackie Chan, Jet Li, and comedian Michael Hui made a substantial impact on Japanese theater and television audiences through the mid-1980s (Kurata 1984, 130–32). Of these, only Jet Li could lay claim to the kind of sober kung fu that characterized Lee's earlier films. In contrast, Hui and Chan introduced a comedic complexification of the notion of Hong Kong cinema as a de facto martial arts tradition. In the Japanese context, particularly at the hands of distributors who carefully pitched their mainstream appeal to Japan's boys' manga and girls' pop idol markets, these latter-day Hong Kong films were perceived as immature and *dasai* (uncool) to the mass of adult moviegoers.

[3.5] In 1986, John Woo's action hit *A Better Tomorrow* became the highest-grossing local film in Hong Kong history, bringing in US\$4.25 million at the box office. Intending to capitalize on its Hong Kong success, Nihon Herald released the film in Japan during the prime Golden Week window to a box-office take of only US\$590 thousand, lagging far behind the 1987 box-office returns of other foreign films ([note 3](#)). In its South Korean release, as Jinsoo An has observed, *A Better Tomorrow* did equally poorly in mainstream theaters, which, he notes, were primarily a site of female filmgoing. The film's subsequent popularity among South Korean men resulted from its redistribution in minitheaters that catered primarily to teenaged males (2001, 104–5). In contrast, in Japan the film was revived not in urban minitheaters but on home video, the reach of which translated to the wider dissemination of Hong Kong films throughout the country and across genders.

[3.6] Japan's video rental market peaked at the same time as films such as *A Better Tomorrow* and *A Chinese Ghost Story* (1987, dir. Tsui Hark) were finding their way onto video rental shelves. During the 1986–1989 period, when video players achieved a 53% penetration of Japanese households (Nakamura 1996), over 300 Hong Kong films became available for rental on subtitled (or, in some cases, dubbed) VHS (Ui 1988). The majority of films released during this period were targeted at an audience of male martial arts and action film fans. Nonetheless, the low cost of obtaining Hong Kong film distribution rights, relative to those of Japanese and Hollywood films, meant that a wide variety of Hong Kong film genres—ranging from martial arts, action, and horror, to drama, romance, and comedy—received distribution, often through small-scale companies (Tochigi 1990). As Itō Takashi, the editor of a Hong Kong film-centered *dōjinshi*, retrospectively observed, "in the early period, Hong Kong films in Japan were discovered (*hakken sareta*) in video shops...titles were available in greater

numbers in the late 1980s than today—as long as it was new, anything was stocked" (quoted in Shinohara 1998b, 24–25).

[3.7] As much as the diversity of titles stocked on video rental shelves, the sites of video rental activity were also critical in attracting female viewers to Hong Kong films. Although emerging rental chains such as Tsutaya often carried the widest range of videos, just over half of all rental activity occurred in small shops located near train stations and residential neighborhoods: *papamama* (mom and pop) home electronics shops, bookstores, and convenience stores, in particular (Nakamura 1996, 173). Such sites, whether in Tokyo or outlying Oita or rural Tottori, stood shoulder to shoulder with the grocery stores, dry cleaners, and coffee shops that women frequented, effectively enfolding Hong Kong cinema within the daily patterns of women's lives.

[3.8] Particularly outside urban areas, the inclusion of Hong Kong films among the rental offerings of a given shop was often random and unpublicized; as such, women's rental of such films was also frequently happenstance. As self-described fan Mari Shimamura wrote in the 1998 mook (magazine/book), *Mōsō tengoku* (Fantasy paradise),

[3.9] Suppose you, who have always hated Hong Kong films without seeing them (or completely disregarded them), reach out for the first time to pick up a film by Wong Kar-wai from the video rental shop...By the time you've thought, "[That actor] has a certain coolness that Japanese don't have," it's all over. Even while its appeal is still unclear, you find yourself returning day after day to the 'Asia Corner' of the video store. (Shimamura 1998, 52)

[3.10] Despite the apparent randomness of such encounters, organization within video rental shops frequently reflected women's star-centric interests. While Japanese video rental shops of the 1980s and 1990s employed the same general organizational structure as their American counterparts, within specific genres (drama, horror, action) the films of popular performers and filmmakers were often grouped together where critical mass allowed. Between 1988 and 1997, Hong Kong films migrated throughout the organizational hierarchy of Japanese video stores, positioned first within an anonymous mass of genre offerings and gradually coalescing into a coherent Asia category organized by star. For example, in the case of Chow Yun-fat, cult action films such as *A Better Tomorrow*, *City on Fire* (1987, dir. Ringo Lam), and *The Killer* (1989, dir. John Woo) eventually came to stand alongside other films of Chow's oeuvre: the drama *Love Unto Waste* (1986, dir. Stanley Kwan), the romance *Dream Lovers* (1986, dir. Tony Au), and the *A Better Tomorrow* parody, *The Romancing Star* (1987, dir. Wong Jing). In fact, this breadth of work was an intrinsic part of the Hong Kong star system of the 1980s and 1990s, designed to capitalize on a relatively limited number of stars in such a way that they appealed to every imaginable demographic.

Within the Japanese context, the malleability of star personae characteristic of Hong Kong cinema afforded star-centered Japanese female fans a way of sampling a wider variety of films than in markets where it was defined almost wholly as martial arts and action films. Nonetheless, such sampling was heavily circumscribed by what Japanese video distributors chose to market, ultimately leading fans to alternative avenues of media circulation.

[3.11] When both official and bootlegged VCDs supplanted VHS as the preferred method of aftermarket film distribution in Hong Kong, their light weight, standard CD size, and digital formatting made them an ideal medium for transnational circulation. VCDs were a technological precursor to DVDs, brought to the market in 1993 by Japan's Sony and Philips corporations (Wang 2003, 50). In Japan, they were a technology catering mainly to early adopters; players were commercially available, but primarily in the electronics districts of Tokyo's Akihabara and Osaka's Den-Den Town. Yet as Jakob Nobuoka observes, Akihabara and Den-Den Town historically have been sites heavily coded as masculine through both the preponderance of computing and audiovisual hardware, as well as the ubiquity of "sexist and misogynistic [images], many of which amount to forms of pornography" (2010, 213). In this sense, Akihabara and Den-Den Town are akin to those twilight zones of cult consumption from which, as Hollows writes, women are excluded by design. Moreover, while commercial VCD software was available in more mainstream outlets, it was content rather than availability that discouraged its consumption by women in Japan. Anime, racing/car footage, and pornography constituted the vast majority of VCD software production in Japan, its low cost making the format suitable for such niche markets. Thus, in Japan VCDs were an implicitly masculine technology for which women had little need and which did not circulate within their own media landscapes.

[3.12] Nonetheless, on the back page of the October 1996 issue of *Hong Kong Stars News*, the media and star paraphernalia catalogue of specialty mail-order company Nishimoto Shōji (Nishimoto Trading), an in-house advertisement for the Sony VCP-S50 VCD player declared:

[3.13] From now on it is the age of the video CD. With their compactness and clear picture quality, they archive [media] eternally. For those of you who haven't been able to buy video CDs because you didn't have a player, let us introduce you to a veeeery special [item]. We're offering a player that will bring the enjoyment of watching movie videos on a CD-sized disc closer to you! (*Hong Kong Stars News*, vol. 14, 1996, 12) (note 4)

[3.14] Given that VCDs were an intermediary technology bridging analog and digital video through low-resolution Mpeg-1 encoding, this was something of an overstatement designed to sell players that, if not as expensive as still-evolving DVD

hardware, were nevertheless not cheap. Moreover, despite the ubiquity of VCD media in Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Southeast Asian markets (Curtin 2007, 80–83), their relative obscurity in Japan made VCD players a niche item that could not be justified as a household purchase. In thus appealing to readers' desire to both see and own Hong Kong films unavailable in the mainstream Japanese media market, invoked particularly through enticing images of VCD cover art that punctuated the pages of their monthly catalogs, Nishimoto Shōji presciently capitalized on the intersection of new technology and fans' affective desire for greater intimacy with favorite stars. In this sense, through their peripheral consumption of VCDs and their playback devices, female fans themselves entered into a materially and culturally peripheral subjectivity that intensified their sense of intimacy with Hong Kong stars, one that was at once cult and transcultural.

[3.15] Parenthetically, fans' domestic consumption of VCDs also signaled a convergence of family and fannish identity that seems nearly antithetical to the ways we have come to talk about women's media consumption in the home ([note 5](#)). In a 1997 fan letter to Nishimoto Shōji's monthly *Hong Kong Stars News* catalog, a Yokohama woman described her acquisition of a VCD player, writing,

[3.16] I have finally obtained a VCD player for my home. Until now, I watched [movies] on my personal computer, but they just aren't the same on a small screen. Nonetheless, since it's just for my own enjoyment (here, the only software available is anime and X-rated...), I thought it was a little too expensive and didn't tell my husband that I wanted a player. But after seeing me look through the catalog at the end of every day, he just said, "If you want one that badly just buy it; in return, order me some Vivian or Rosamund VCDs." Without my knowledge, my husband had gotten into Hong Kong movies...now we watch Hong Kong films together every night...Isn't the good thing about video that you can watch just the good parts over and over? If you don't grasp everything on the first go, as you watch it again and again you start to figure out what's happening. (And every time you watch it, it's fun to discover new things.) My seven-year-old daughter is completely unable to read subtitles, but she manages to figure out the story and has fun watching. (S.K., *Hong Kong Stars News*, vol. 25, 1997, 12)

[3.17] While by no means a universal phenomenon, for some women fannish activities were facilitated by what Matt Hills has called the "tacit legitimation" (2002, 87) of family members. One Hokkaido woman concludes a detailed description of her 2-day trip to Tokyo for the purpose of attending Leslie Cheung's 1997 World Tour concert with thanks to "my husband, who sent me to Tokyo with money to spend, and to my three children, mom, and grandmother, who held down the fort while I was

gone" (160). Another writes of her mother and sister, "On a trip to China, they spotted a coat hanger with a picture of Jacky Cheung on it at a silk factory (in Huaxi Village), and asking for it as a souvenir for me, they were told 'No one has ever asked to have anything like that before,' as all the factory workers came to point and stare at the 'stupid Japanese.' Today, Jacky Cheung hangs in my closet wearing my overcoat" (K.K., *Hong Kong Stars News*, vol. 22, 1997, 12). Similarly, a Wakayama woman writes,

[3.18] Did everyone know there are star homepages on the Internet? (Did you know? Am I the only one who didn't know?). There was a very detailed article about the Internet in the monthly *Honkon Tsūshin* with a column of the homepages of famous stars. Imagine my happiness when I saw Jet Li's name! My heart danced when my son (a high school senior) agreed to my entreaties to access his page in exchange for a promise to raise his allowance. There was so much information there! (K.M., *Hong Kong Stars News*, vol. 18, 1996, 10)

[3.19] While a patriarchal hierarchy yet underlies the permission needed to attend a concert, or the gendered technological competence required in 1996 to access a webpage on the Internet, these anecdotes share in common a sense that women are participants in, not victims of, domestic life, a stark contrast with two-dimensional notions of marriage in Japan (or elsewhere) as a wholly patriarchal institution within which the wishes of wives are subordinate to those of husbands.

[3.20] VCDs also contributed to fans' sense of transcultural intimacy with Hong Kong stars in one other critical way. As an inexpensive media targeted at local and diasporic Chinese audiences of Hong Kong cinema, VCDs were subtitled in Chinese and, frequently, English of varying qualities. In this sense, Japanese fans arguably were disadvantaged within the transnational VCD market. Yet the use of dual subtitles on VCDs in fact prompted fans to draw on their knowledge of Chinese characters, from which written Japanese derives, and their limited English reading ability to decipher on-screen action and dialogue. Such reading strategies served to naturalize spoken Cantonese for fans; as Hosoda Seiko writes in her fan memoir, *Yume miru Honkon* (Hong Kong dreamland), "These days, because I watch too many Hong Kong films and listen to too many Cantonese tapes...even Japanese has wound up sounding like Cantonese. It's even occurred to me that Japanese sounds a bit like Cantonese. Not so much in the pronunciation, but maybe in the intonation? Somehow, when I hear them, I've started to be unable to tell the difference" (1999, 42–43). The slippage between written Japanese and Chinese, coupled with fans' reliance on foreign-language rather than intermediating Japanese subtitles, encouraged fans' use of Chinese film and popular cultural terminology. Among these was the Chinese written word for movie,

dianying, pronounced den'ei in Japanese and connoting a vague Chineseness analogous to the use of European terminology to convey a certain cinephilic sensibility in the English-language context. Such use of Chinese terminology, in fact, had precedents in a vast body of Japanese critical writing on Hong Kong and other Chinese cinemas, and its mobilization by fans signified an alternative enculturation within Hong Kong popular culture.

[3.21] More specific to fans, however, was the use of linguistic overlap between written Chinese and Japanese to naturalize and claim ownership of stars. This was effected both through the adoption of native Cantonese nicknames for certain stars (Gorgor [elder brother], for Leslie Cheung, and Wahjai [Little Wah], for Andy Lau Tak-wah, for example), as well as the Japanization of Chinese names (such as Gakuyū for Jacky Cheung Hok-yau, or Koharu for Jordan Chan Siu-chun, both of which derive from the Japanese pronunciation of the Chinese characters comprising their given names). In his work on language performativity in transcultural hip-hop cultures, Alastair Pennycook argues for the consideration of "the ways by which transgressive meaning-making (writing on the walls of the city, mixing languages, sampling sound texts, walking the walk, wearing the clothes) may be seen not so much as adding meaning-making practices to a pre-existing language but rather as a performative making of meaning across many sites" (2007, 50). In the context of the female fandom of Hong Kong stars, this perspective allows us to understand fans' uses of Chinese terminology not as linguistic appropriation or misuse, but as a transculturally inflected mode of fanspeak that contributed to the formation of fans' trans-cult-ural subjectivity.

4. Towards a trans-cult-ural subjectivity

[4.1] While VCD and music CD acquisition was key to the circulation of Hong Kong star oeuvre among Japanese female fans, the act of buying them was easier said than done. As one Sapporo-based fan asked in a letter to the editors of *Honkon den'ei jō 3* (Hong Kong Movie Castle 3),

[4.2] Where does everyone see movies that haven't been released in Japan? In Hong Kong? I'm sure that there are cheap tours there from Tokyo, but...There's no Chinatown in Sapporo. And, of course, there are no video shops aimed at Chinese people here in Sapporo. You can hardly find CDs, and [in order to find] movies I have many member's cards [to video rental shops]!! Depending on the store, they sometimes organize by actors, and [once] when I saw "Andy" I cried out, "Ho ye!" But it was "Garcia." (Tōmon et al. 1998, 223) ([note 6](#))

[4.3] Particularly for fans outside of Japan's urban centers, obtaining Hong Kong media required the expansion of fans' geographical repertoires to encompass not only local and area resources but also distant cities and even Hong Kong itself. In this way, alternative sites of Hong Kong media procurement also were critical in producing a transcultural fan subjectivity that drew as much from affective pleasures of discovery and ownership as from the transnational locus of such activity.

[4.4] By the mid-1990s urban fans had access to a growing number of specialty shops that targeted the growing fandom of Hong Kong cinema and, in particular, stars. In Tokyo, the latter were represented not only by film distributor Prénom H's upscale Cine City Hong Kong but also by such shops as the abovementioned Jasmine Tea, which primarily sold music CDs and music video DVDs, and Cactus Club, an apartment-cum-retail establishment that sold imported star goods, fan-produced *dōjinshi*, and magazines from both Hong Kong and Japan that focused on Hong Kong and other East Asian stars. Additionally, intrepid fans made use of the resources of shops such as Chubun Shoten (Chinese Bookstore), which were tailored to the expatriate Chinese community. Osaka's China Center, Hong Kong King in Kobe, and Nishimoto Shōji in Fukuoka further contributed to the wider accessibility of officially distributed Hong Kong media outside the Tokyo metropolitan area. Together, such specialty shops supplemented the unevenly available Hong Kong film offerings of neighborhood video rental outlets with media imported from Hong Kong and even bootlegged in Taiwan. At the same time, they responded to fans' demands for other star-centered media and goods—music CDs, Chinese-language entertainment tabloids, promotional posters, star figurines, and bromide (celebrity photographs)—as well as offering outlets for the sale of fan-produced *dōjinshi*. Through the increased availability of such products, fans' relationship to Hong Kong stars shifted from simple spectatorship to active consumption, which had the effect of intensifying fans' sense of ownership of and intimacy with them, even as this was mediated by Japanese marketers of Hong Kong products.

[4.5] Independent distributor Prénom H was among the earliest retailers of Hong Kong film-related media and goods in Japan, establishing a small shop called Honkon Den'ei Fune (Hong Kong Film Ship) in 1991 that sold Hong Kong videos and CDs as well as star paraphernalia (Shinohara 1998a). In 1994, it relocated to a larger space and reopened as Cine City/Cine City Hong Kong. Situated just off of Aoyama Boulevard in the exclusive Omotesando residential district, and advertising itself as "Japan's premier specialty shop" (Cine City advertisement 1997) for Hong Kong pop culture-related goods, Cine City Hong Kong (CCHK)'s location and polished interior design, as well as the indie/experimental bent of coterminous Cine City, advanced an urban cinephilic sensibility that was fully in the service of the fashionable Wong Kar-wai films that Prénom H then distributed. Given its affiliation with Prénom H, CCHK necessarily

hewed closely to products that were officially licensed in Japan: not only its in-house line of *Prénom H* films, books, postcards, and posters, but also professionally subtitled film videos and laser discs distributed by competitor Japanese companies, Japanese-language books about Hong Kong cinema and stars, and magazines such as *PopAsia* and *Asian Pops Magazine*. CCHK was also, in its earliest incarnation, the sole Japanese outlet for commemorative programs of the Hong Kong International Film Festival.

[4.6] Both the HKIFF and its substantial printed programs have been described by Hector Rodriguez as one facet of a "reflectionist framework" within which Hong Kong "critics as cultural connoisseurs [on] a pedagogic mission" sought "to establish the artistic values of Chinese directors by erecting a corpus of canonical filmmakers and film texts that in their view demanded or deserved authorial interpretation" (2001, 57–62). In thus making these texts available to Japanese connoisseurs of Hong Kong cinema, *Prénom H* both reflected a local and contributed to a transnational discourse of Hong Kong art cinema that was a potent counterpoint to the attractions of its commercial film industry, an assertion of difference that belied the mainstream underpinnings of all but the most experimental Hong Kong cinema of the period.

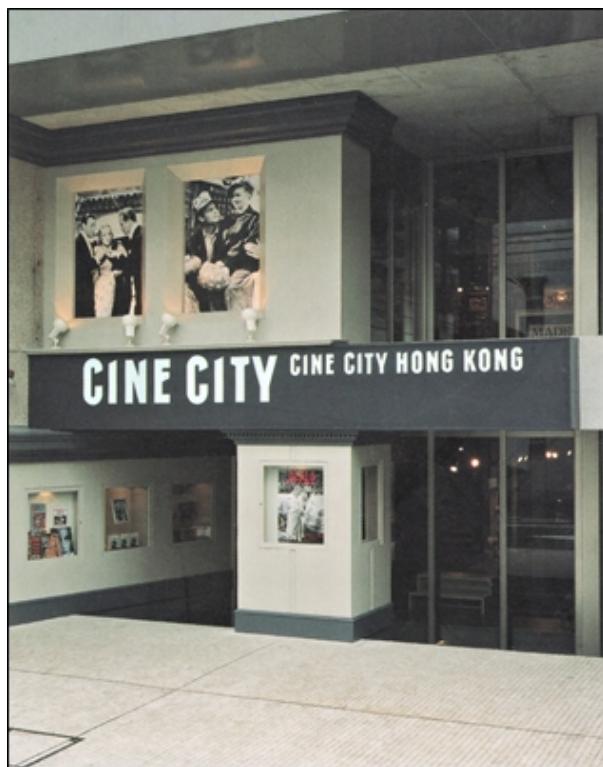


Figure 2. *Cine City/Cine City Hong Kong exterior. Cine City advertisement, 1997.*
[\[View larger image.\]](#)



Figure 3. Interior of Cine City Hong Kong shortly after its 1994 opening, on Fuji TV's *AsiaNbeat* show (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j3CGDa7rKgs>). [View larger image.]

[4.7] At the same time, Cine City Hong Kong evinced a fan orientation in its limited selection of imported CDs and VCDs, Chinese-language magazines, and, in particular, fan-produced *dōjinshi*. Moreover, by way of aligning both the shop and its ancillary fan organization, the Yumcha Club, with the broader female fandom of Hong Kong stars, Prénom H sponsored an award for fan-producers of Hong Kong popular culture-centered *mini-comi* (minicomics). As one of the oldest and most publicized specialty shops catering to Hong Kong films and stars in Japan, both CCHK and its smaller Osaka and Fukuoka branches, opened in November 1997, were an integral part of Japanese fans' introduction to the wider world of Hong Kong star fandom. Ultimately, however, the combination of Prénom H's narrow focus and emerging competitors, both in Japan and—particularly as online sales gained in popularity in the 2000s—overseas, diminished CCHK's overall appeal within a rapidly diversifying market for Hong Kong films and star goods.

[4.8] Following the opening of Cine City Hong Kong in 1994, other retailers soon materialized to compete for fan business. Like CCHK, shops such as Tokyo's Jasmine Tea and Cactus Club, as well as China Center in Osaka, conveyed specific fan sensibilities through their location, design, and merchandise, albeit to different effect than CCHK. Jasmine Tea was situated within the labyrinthine *otaku* paradise of Nakano Broadway Mall, located about 15 minutes by train from central Tokyo. A subcultural destination for not only Japanese but also overseas fans of anime and manga, Broadway contains three floors of shops selling everything from newly released manga and anime-related collectibles to cosplay clothing, vintage scripts, and animation cells. The mall opened in 1966 as an American-style indoor shopping arcade catering to local residents of Nakano Ward (<http://www.nbw.jp/new/swf/hist/hist.html>). In 1987, used manga retailer Mandarake established business within the now-aging Broadway complex, ultimately expanding both its space and operations to include sales of

dōjinshi as well as manga and anime-related goods (<http://www.mandarake.co.jp/en/shop/>). Mandarake's presence within Broadway mall attracted similar alternative culture-centered establishments, effectively transforming the mall into an *otaku* space within which cult consumption was and remains the norm.

[4.9] In this sense, Jasmine Tea, with its bright lighting, laminate wood floors, tastefully designed *kanban* (signboard), and frequently older female clientele was something of an anomaly within a site that catered more to cutting-edge kids and middle-aged male *otaku*. Nonetheless, the ways in which it organized and displayed Hong Kong CDs and VCDs reflected the same expectation of fans' intimate knowledge of both Hong Kong stars and their popular cultural habitus as Jasmine Tea's more cultish neighbors, making use of stars' Chinese-character (as opposed to transliterated) names and capitalizing on limited space by forgoing explanatory signage in favor of stocking merchandise in every available nook and cranny. In so doing, Jasmine Tea interpellated female fans as cult aficionados of Hong Kong media, enfolding them both literally and figuratively within an *otaku* habitus.



Figure 4. *Jasmine Tea interior. Richard Jeffery, 2008. [View larger image.]*



Figure 5. *Jasmine Tea kanban and hallway display*. Richard Jeffery, 2008. [[View larger image](#).]

[4.10] Located in a repurposed apartment building on a side street of Tokyo's trendy Shibuya district, Cactus Club similarly evinced an expectation of fans' familiarity with Hong Kong stars born of limited room and an abundance of imported merchandise. In contrast with Jasmine Tea, Cactus Club was an explicitly female space that resembled nothing so much as the bedroom of an avid collector of star goods. Teetering bookshelves and cheap laminate cubbies—each brimming with Chinese-language entertainment tabloids and books about Hong Kong stars—lined the walls of the store, encircling small tables and chairs that themselves overflowed with assorted star paraphernalia. Where bookcases could not reach, the walls were covered in Hong Kong star and film posters.



Figure 6. *Cactus Club interior*. Daijōbu nikki, 2008. [[View larger image](#).]



Figure 7. *Cactus Club interior from the entrance*. Daijōbu nikki, 2008. [[View larger image](#).]

[4.11] As described by one fan-blogger, the experience of discovering Cactus Club was akin to that of the cult fan chancing upon a rare object:

[4.12] When I first became obsessed with Leslie in '95, I heard about Cactus Club in a book, identifying it by its small signboard down a murky corridor on the 2nd floor of a multi-tenant building. "Is this Chungking Mansions?" [I thought]. It had the air of one of Hong Kong's dens of vice, and as I opened the door with mounting trepidation, I discovered inside a small room with mountains of Hong Kong star goods—a real treasure chest—that was crammed with 2 or 3 customers inside.

(http://sangyafaailok.at.webry.info/200812/article_3.html)

[4.13] Indeed, much of the appeal of Cactus Club lay in just such acts of discovery. The shop made use of only the broadest of star-centered organizational systems, within which merchandise was to be rummaged through like an attic, the possibility of finding some Precious Thing always just under the next magazine or rolled up in the next poster.

[4.14] Osaka's China Center similarly capitalized on space, sporting not only steel shelves teeming with Hong Kong music CDs, VCDs, and Chinese-language books and magazines but also walls plastered in original Hong Kong film and star promotional posters for sale. Originally located in a converted concrete house on a back street near Osaka's Abenobashi neighborhood, which was undergoing a gradual process of gentrification in the late 1990s, the shop—unlike Jasmine Tea—did not derive any cultish capital from its environs; rather, it conveyed a sense of cosy cult through its domestic setting, enhanced by the store requirement that patrons remove their shoes and don house slippers while browsing merchandise. Equally, the daily presence in the shop of the Japanese proprietor and his Hong Kong-born wife, combined with the handmade quality of its marketing, communicated an intimate, female-friendly, fan-centered site for the consumption of Hong Kong media and star goods.



Figure 8. China Center exterior. *China Center flier*, 1997. [[View larger image](#).]



Figure 9. *China Center interior. China Center flier, 1997.* [[View larger image](#).]

[4.15] For some outlying fans, such specialty shops were a destination; as a fan of Taiwanese boy band F4 wrote on her blog upon hearing of China Center's closing,

[4.16] This was the first place where I was able to touch F4. I can still remember the excitement that I—a country fan who had never seen [idol] goods—felt when I entered the store. At that time, the shop was located near Tennōji Station in Abeno Marche. It was a small shop, but my first impression was "There are so many F4 things..." It was fun just picking them up and looking at them, and there were so many things I wanted...my daughter, who was with me, was mortified. After that, I'd use the excuse of checking up on my daughter to go to Kyoto, and while there I always made my way to the store. (<http://tosa-f4.jugem.jp/?eid=59>)

[4.17] For other fans, both urban and not, the drive to consumption of Hong Kong media and star-related goods became the impetus for overseas travel to Hong Kong itself. Particularly given the substantial price markup of VCDs in Japan, where one popular retailer regularly sold licensed Hong Kong movies on VCD for ¥3,980/title (a 300 percent increase over Hong Kong prices), as well as the strong yen of the late 1980s-mid-1990s and the relatively low cost of travel from Japan to Hong Kong (Sakai 2003), repeat travel to Hong Kong for the express purpose of star-centered shopping became a common activity among fans. As self-described Hong Kong addict Mizuta Naho wrote in 1996,

[4.18] When Hong Kong entertainment fans travel to Hong Kong, they don't really run around buying up brand-name goods. Instead, their goal is to pick up CDs that are half as expensive as in Japan, videos and LDs of films that haven't been released in Japan, idol albums and photographs; even more, connoisseurs corner the market on film and music specialty

books at bookstores, and run around searching for out-of-print used records on Cat Street. I even have friends who regularly exceed economy class luggage weight restrictions by 10 kilos (that is, 30 kilos!) suitcases full of CDs. In fact, this is a different pattern of activity than that of regular tourists. Sometimes [fans] head towards the "weight-reducing soap," but only if it's on their way to someplace else. (86)

[4.19] Sarah Chaplin observes that buildings with a mainstream popular culture orientation generally align with "'high' Japanese architecture" that privileges the use of marble, glass, stonewall, and, more recently, cast concrete in the creation of an antimodernist aesthetic (2007, 84). In contrast, Broadway Mall in Nakano, Cactus Club's Dynast Building, and the converted house in which China Center was originally located were all, by the 1990s, several decades old, utilitarian in design, and wholly lacking in the light airiness of more contemporary urban commercial spaces. Thus, while not quite the twilight zones of cult fandom, these spaces were nonetheless materially peripheral to mainstream sites of consumption, which in turn contributed to the production of a fan subjectivity that was equally peripheral to more mediated modes of star fandom in Japan. Moreover, the limited resources of space that characterized these specialty shops mirrored those of Hong Kong's Oriental 188 Shopping Centre and Sino Centre, both of which housed Hong Kong star and Japanese anime/manga-related specialty shops. In this sense, the expectation of fans' recognition of Chinese names and media titles resulting from, among other things, the lack of space for clear organization and explanatory signage in Japanese stores translated to an emergent, transcultural familiarity with the Chinese contexts of star-centered commerce.

[4.20] Through domestic travel to urban specialty shops in Japan and overseas travel to Hong Kong itself, as well as the use of mail order to obtain Hong Kong star-related media and goods, Japanese women became participants in a translocal marketplace that circumvented the narrow Japanese distribution of Hong Kong films. Articulated with the cult-inflected fan subjectivity produced by such sites of alternative consumption, this marketplace effectively mobilized the "emotional energies [that] travel across cultural boundaries" (Ma 2002, 133) in the transcultural reimagination of Japanese women's roles as media consumers.

[4.21] I have attempted to demonstrate how the specific confluence of Japanese women's interest in, and desire for intimacy with, Hong Kong stars in the 1980s and 1990s and the contemporaneous emergence of new, transnationally circulating media technologies engendered a fannish subjectivity that was at once transcultural and trans-cult-ural. Situated between both the official entertainment worlds of Hong Kong and Japan as well as gendered fannish subjectivities, this trans-cult-ural fandom for

years elided the understanding of a Japanese media industry whose marketing of foreign stars was and remains predicated on their difference from Japanese entertainers. It enfolded Japanese fans, imperfectly, within the popular cultural practices of another place, and in this way it offers an alternative means by which to conceptualize how media circulate and thrive both transnationally and transculturally. It would be easy to understand or even misunderstand this phenomenon as an isolated case within the broader context of Japanese fandom. But the ways in which present-day star fans make use of online platforms such as Twitter and Tumblr to exchange real-time information and images of stars with other fans around the globe, often regardless of attempts to mediate this flow on the part of the mass media and marketers, suggests that it is but one iteration of a periodically occurring perfect storm of affective investment and the technological means to pursue it across geographical borders that together constitute one critical facet of transcultural fandom.

5. Acknowledgments

[5.1] I would like to thank Barbara Klinger, Michael Curtin, Gregory Waller, and Michiko Suzuki, as well as the anonymous reviewers at TWC, for their insightful comments on earlier drafts of this essay.

6. Notes

1. All translations are mine. Japanese names are given in Japanese order (surname first) except where an alternative precedent exists. Photographs are used by permission.
2. Grandma Komori (*Komori no obāchama*) was the nickname of film critic and TV personality Komori Kazuko (1909–2005).
3. Golden Week refers to four nearly consecutive holidays spanning the end of April and the beginning of May.
4. As advertised by Nishimoto, a discounted VCD player could be bought for ¥33,000 (US\$275), compared with ¥68,000 (US\$567) for the Pioneer DVL-9 DVD player, also retailed by Nishimoto.
5. Anglophone research on women's practices of media consumption within the home historically has centered on a binary between submission to and subversion of gender expectations, in which more time-consuming, invested fandoms constitute the greatest challenge to patriarchal institutions, articulating suppressed "dissatisfaction, longing, and protest" (Radway 1984, 138) over the less than ideal conditions within which women conduct their lives. See, for example, Janice Radway, *Reading the Romance*

(1984), Ann Gray, *Video Playtime* (1992), and Camille Bacon-Smith, *Enterprising Women* (1992).

6. *Ho ye* is a Cantonese colloquialism meaning "great."

7. Works cited

- An, Jinsoo. 2001. "The Killer: Cult Film and Transcultural (Mis)Reading." In *At Full Speed: Hong Kong Cinema in a Borderless World*, edited by Esther C. M. Yau, 95–114. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Bordwell, David. 2000. *Planet Hong Kong: Popular Cinema and the Art of Entertainment*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Chaplin, Sarah. 2007. *Japanese Love Hotels: A Cultural History*. London: Routledge.
- Corrigan, Timothy. 1991. *A Cinema without Walls: Movies and Culture after Vietnam*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.
- Curtin, Michael. 2007. *Playing to the World's Biggest Audience: The Globalization of Chinese Film and TV*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Doherty, Thomas. 2001. "Homevideo/DVD Commentary Tracks: Listening to the Auteurs." *Cineaste* 26 (4): 78–80.
- Hight, Craig. 2005. "Making-of Documentaries on DVD: The Lord of the Rings Trilogy and Special Editions." *Velvet Light Trap* 56 (1): 4–17.
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1353/vlt.2006.0006>.
- Hills, Matt. 2002. *Fan Cultures*. London: Routledge.
- Hollows, Joanne. 2003. "The Masculinity of Cult." In *Defining Cult Movies: the Cultural Politics of Oppositional Taste*, edited by Mark Jancovich, Antonio Lazaro Riboli, Julian Stringer, and Andrew Willis, 35–53. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Hosoda Seiko. 1999. *Yumemiru Honkon: '98-'99 Honkon den'ei nikki* [Dreamland Hong Kong: A '98-'99 Hong Kong film diary]. Tokyo: Haga Shoten.
- Hunt, Leon. 2003. "Kung-fu Cult Masters: Stardom, Performance, and 'Authenticity' in Hong Kong Martial Arts Films." In *Defining Cult Movies: The Cultural Politics of Oppositional Taste*, edited by Mark Jancovich, Antonio Lazaro Riboli, Julian Stringer, and Andrew Willis, 157–71. Manchester: Manchester University Press.

Jancovich, Mark. 2002. "Cult Fictions: Cult Movies, Subcultural Capital and the Production of Cultural Distinctions." *Cultural Studies* 16 (2): 306–22.
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09502380110107607>.

Kelly, William W. 2004. "Introduction: Locating the Fans." In *Fanning the Flames: Fans and Consumer Culture in Contemporary Japan*, edited by William W. Kelly, 1–16. Albany: State University of New York Press.

Kendrick, James. 2005. "Aspect Ratios and Joe Six-Packs: Home Theater Enthusiasts' Battle to Legitimize the DVD Experience." *Velvet Light Trap* 56 (1): 58–70.
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1353/vlt.2006.0008>.

Kiuchi, Gen, Ginty Kobayashi, and Uechi Takeshi, eds. 1999. *Ajian mubī jankīzu* [Asian movie junkies]. Tokyo: Suisei Sha.

Klinger, Barbara. 2006. *Beyond the Multiplex: Cinema, New Technologies, and the Home*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Kurata, Rokurō. 1984. *Honkon den'ei hyakka* [Hong Kong cinema special]. Tokyo: Haga Shoten.

Lau, Jenny Kwok Wah. 2003. Introduction to *Multiple Modernities: Cinemas and Popular Media in Transcultural East Asia*, edited by Jenny Kwok Wah Lau, 1–10. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press.

Ma, Eric Kit-wai. 2002. "Translocal Spatiality." *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 5 (2): 131–52. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/1367877902005002568>.

Mori Kei. 2001. *Machigatteitara gomen nasai: Resurī Chan Netsujō Enjōkai o meguru ikutsuka no tabi* [Forgive me if I'm wrong: Several journeys following Leslie Cheung's Passion Tour]. Tokyo: Tōka Sha.

Naho, Mizuta, 1996. "Aidoru ni chikazuke!" [Get close to idols!]. In *Wonderland Traveler 6: Honkon hatsunetsu dokuhon*, edited by Inoue Hiromu, 86–97. Tokyo: Takarajimasha.

Nakamura, Hogara. 1996. *Nihon bideo sofuto-shi* [History of Japanese video software]. Tokyo: Eizō Shinbun Sha.

Nobuoka, Jakob. 2010. "User Innovation and Creative Consumption in Japanese Culture Industries: The Case of Akihabara, Tokyo." *Geografiska Annaler: Series B, Human Geography* 92 (3): 205–18. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-0467.2010.00348.x>.

Pennycook, Alastair. 2007. *Global Englishes and Transcultural Flows*. London: Routledge.

Rodriguez, Hector. 2001. "The Emergence of the Hong Kong New Wave." In *At Full Speed: Hong Kong Cinema in a Borderless World*, edited by Esther C. M. Yau, 59–69. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Sakai, Chie. 2003. "The Japanese Community in Hong Kong in the 1990s: The Diversity of Strategies and Intentions." In *Global Japan: The Experience of Japan's New Immigrant and Overseas Communities*, edited by Roger Goodman, Ceri Peach, Ayumi Takenaka, and Paul White, 131–46. London: Routledge.

Shimamura, Mari. 1998. "Yakushin suru chuka myōjō" [The onslaught of Chinese stars]. In *Mōsō tengoku: onnatachi no hamari no gokui hen* [Fantasy paradise: A compilation of essential female obsessions], edited by Mari Shimamura, Kawata Nanami, and Hasegawa Keiko, 34–59. Tokyo: Geibunsha.

Shinohara, Hiroko. 1998a. *Shinema tokkan musume* [Racing cinema girl]. Tokyo: Fusō Sha.

Shinohara, Hiroko, ed. 1998b. *Kettei Ban!! Honkon Den'ei Tsushin* [The definitive Hong Kong Movie Times]. Tokyo: Prénom H.

Tochigi, Akira. 1990. "Commercial and Ideological Factors in the 'Asianization' of the Japanese Film Industry." *Asian Cinema* 5 (2): 12–14.

Tōmon, Jinni, Yuzuki Hiroshi, Ippongi Ban, Tanuki Neko, Ēsu Kokura, Yakumo Hiroshi, Sakai Nozomi, Koizumi Hanano, and Matsuda Kumiko, eds. 1998. *Honkon den'ei jō 3: Honkon eiga runessansu* [Hong Kong movie castle 3: Hong Kong film renaissance]. Tokyo: Shinkikaku Sha.

Ui, Hisayuki, comp. 1988. *Honkon eiga bideo marukajiri* [A mouthful of Hong Kong films on video]. Tokyo: Kindai Eiga Sha.

Wang, Shujen. 2003. *Framing Piracy: Globalization and Film Distribution in Greater China*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.

Yeung, Yin Lin. 2000. "Understanding the Japanese Market of the 1980s." Translated by Piera Chan. In *Hong Kong Cinema Retrospective: Border Crossings in Hong Kong Cinema*, edited by Law Kar, 150–53. Hong Kong: Leisure and Cultural Services Department.

Praxis

Fannish discourse communities and the construction of gender in *The X-Files*

Emily Regan Wills

School of Political Studies, University of Ottawa, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada

[0.1] *Abstract*—Fandoms can constitute discourse communities, where fans make claims about issues of real-world political importance, such as the relationship between gender, power, and autonomy, and where other fans engage with and evaluate those claims. In fan works and fan analyses of Dana Scully in the television show *The X-Files*, fans pose claims both in discussion spaces and in the creation of fan fiction, and these fannish evaluations and discussions of these fictions analyze those claims.

[0.2] *Keywords*—Fan conversations; Fan fiction

Wills, Emily Regan. 2013. "'Fannish Discourse Communities and the Construction of Gender in *The X-Files*.' *Transformative Works and Cultures*, no. 14.
<http://dx.doi.org/10.3983/twc.2013.0410>.

1. Introduction

[1.1] When we refer to fan works as transformative, what precisely do we mean? On a literal level, the notion of transformation refers to the act of making a story one's own, through producing or consuming fan works and participating in fan communities around beloved cultural objects. However, there is also a sense that fans are doing something particularly transformative, something radical. Much of the academic study of fandom has centered on this idea of radicalness, trying to pin down what fans are doing when they are being transformative.

[1.2] Fandom studies literature has had at least two distinct periods of conceptualization, wherein it has posed different theories of what is transformative about transformative works and cultures. The first emphasized the role of the fan community, which it defined as transformative because of the way it seizes control over mainstream texts and takes ownership of them. This was the perspective of the very first academic studies of fandom, from the lionizing of it in Jenkins's *Textual Poachers* (1992) to the more critical analysis in Bacon-Smith's *Enterprising Women* (1992), and it has continued in a long line of cultural studies examinations of fandom. In the study of *X-Files* (1993–2002) fandom, when Bury (2005) reads the practices of

the David Duchovny Estrogen Brigade, she does so in a context that considers them transformative for seizing metaphorical control over their show, asserting an active female sexuality in the face of the show's denial of it, and being willing to interpret against the grain of surface readings. This attitude toward fandom prioritizes the fannish community, rendering fannish production itself merely a fact; the content and meaning of that production matters only because it is not canon.

[1.3] On the other side, there is the more recent literary turn in fandom studies, which emphasizes not the existence of a community (while seeing the production of fan fiction merely as an artifact of this community) but also the literary practices and forms embodied in fan fiction. In this literature, best embodied in the essays in Hellekson and Busse (2006), fan fiction and other fan works are considered primarily for the specific transformational work that they perform. That work may be transformational because it interrogates canon identities and ideologies or inserts new ones into the world of canon (Derecho 2006; Driscoll 2006), or because it actively reinterprets the sources it draws from (Kaplan 2006; Willis 2006). All of these studies prioritize the linguistic and literary work being done in textual fan works. (Complementary studies aim to analyze visual fan works in similar terms.) Fan works stand in relation to the communities that make them, but the object of analysis is fundamentally the text.

[1.4] I approach the study of fandom as a political scientist and ethnographer, with an interest in understanding how people engage in political contestation in everyday social spaces. That is, I am interested in fandom as a place where people interact; it is humans who make texts, not texts in their human context, that interest me. However, I agree with the criticisms of the community-focused analysis of fandom, which can obscure the content of fan works, as if the practices of fans can possibly be divorced from the substantive material they both produce and consume. If an analysis of fandom and fan works is to help me investigate how fans engage in political and social contestation, it must allow me to explore the content of fan works and speech as a part of understanding fan actions and communities. The political work done by fan works is located not merely in their status as archontic (Derecho 2006) texts that resist the closed nature of media production, but in what they actually say and do about issues that have social import beyond the world of canon.

[1.5] Here I conceptualize fandom as a discourse community focused on contestation, particularly contestation between fans. That is, fan works put forth claims about canon, fanon (or the fan text), and the broader social content. Fan works can contest elements of all these issues at the same time; a work that might propose a certain reading of canon, for example, might also aim to queer a particular moment, by writing queer persons into the text or by asserting that they are already there. The

claims that fan works pose are frequently implicit and are often not specifically directed toward another interlocutor; instead, other fans encounter a claim in its context (in a discussion post, comment thread, or creative fan work) and evaluate it while evaluating the other qualities of the context. A successful claim might motivate other fans to reorient their position on the issues that the claim pertains to, both those specific to the fandom and those that operate at a more general level.

[1.6] Practically, my work here has resonances with work by Parrish (2007) and Scodari and Felder (2000), who examine fan debates and frameworks between both works of fan fiction and fan discussion. However, my notion of the discourse community differs from Parrish's. Whereas for her a discourse community is a community that shares language-using practices, my working concept of a discourse community is derived from the Habermasian concept of practical discourse, wherein proposed norms are tested by interrogation by a collective community. In my own work, I do not limit practical discourses to norms in the sense that Habermas does, but include claims about interpretation and meaning broadly. I also diverge from Habermas in that his theory presupposes that an ideal discourse situation is possible (or can be approximated), and that parties can be legitimately free to take any position in a discourse situation, whereas I assume that discourse is limited and constrained by the workings of power in actual political spaces (in a more Foucauldian line). Structuring discourses at the meta level shapes how practical discourses are carried out, and both need to be analyzed in dialogue with each other.

[1.7] I focus on the functioning of a segment of *X-Files* fandom as a discourse community through the lens of fannish texts that serve to contest and reconstruct gender roles as they pertain to the character of Dana Scully. The source text acts as a structuring discourse, indicating the main tropes through which gender can be explored within fandom. However, once those tropes have been set, fans are substantially free to disagree with the way that canon instantiates them and to produce fan works that, explicitly or implicitly, contest canon's reading. Within the context of the broader fan community, fans talk about other fans' interpretations and, obliquely or purposefully, about the claims embodied in them, and these conversations lead to the development of fanon or fanons around these issues.

[1.8] In what follows, I focus on two specific issues that appear within the source text of *The X-Files*: sexuality and motherhood. Both are central to Dana Scully's character arc, and they are also primary ways in which questions of gender appear in the text (which makes no pretensions to being feminist or woman-centered). Both are also areas where many fans take enthusiastic exception to canon's framing, and they are central to Mulder/Scully relationship fandom, the particular corner of the broader *X-Files* fandom I am focusing on. Therefore, after introducing how each issue functions

in canon, I explore how fans resignify it, both in conversations about the text and through writing fan fiction. Finally, I will look at how the claims that fans make in conversations and in fan works continue to circulate among and be evaluated by other fans.

2. Case selection: Where to look for contestation

[2.1] I approached this project as a fan of *The X-Files* and a participant in *X-Files* fandom, but also as an ethnographer and social scientist, with an interest in ensuring that my analysis would be generalizable. Fandom is far from univocal; as Hellekson and Busse say, "It is impossible, and perhaps even dangerous, to speak of a single fandom" (2006, 6). But because I wanted to record fandom as a discourse community, I needed texts that were a part of ongoing engagements with others—that is, texts that fans actively discussed and that were widely read. Although *The X-Files* is a comparatively old fandom, I emphasize works and conversations that were ongoing at the time of my research, when the 2008 release of the second feature film based on the series had spurred a resurgence of the fandom, rather than reach back to the fandom's heyday in the late 1990s, for the simple reason that contemporary data were more accessible and more complete.

[2.2] I draw from two main sources: first, nonfictional writing within *X-Files* fandom, such as conversations on message boards, meta essays, and rewatch posts (in which fans rewatching the series post thoughts on and analyses of each episode in sequence); and second, fan fiction. Because fan fiction allows fans to manipulate and reshape many (but not all) elements of their fannish object simultaneously and gives them greater creative freedom to embody a critique than does any other form of fan activity, it can be an ideal set of texts in which to search for contestation in fandom. However, I do not want to isolate it from other forms of fannish activity or claim that it has more transformative potential than other fannish productions. Particularly because I am interested in fandom as a discourse community, I wanted to look both at conversations among fans and at fan works that were actively under discussion in order to see how the claims embodied in both forms are taken up or discussed.

[2.3] I focus on Dana Scully and on fan analysis of her character and arc largely because of her prominence in canon (she is the only female protagonist, appearing in almost nine times as many episodes as any other female character) and because of fans' love for her. Scully is also the site of a great deal of the canon's, and fandom's, engagement with gender. Both fans and scholars of *The X-Files* frequently comment on the playful way it inverts gender stereotypes in the Mulder/Scully dynamic: Mulder the intuitive, Scully the rational; Mulder the psychologist, Scully the scientist; Mulder the emotive, Scully the reserved; even Mulder the sexualized, Scully the unsexualized

(Delasara 2000; Badley 2000). Many fans of the show respond specifically to this inversion, and in particular to the image of Scully as a powerful, strong woman, capable of holding power and taking on leadership (Bury 2005). Throughout the series, images of Scully asserting her authority or behaving as a leader are tied to images of her as androgynous or masculinized. Both of her chosen careers—medicine and law enforcement—are coded as masculine, and her physical presentation is similarly coded: she wears suits and scrubs, hiking boots and plaid shirts, a regulation FBI windbreaker and SWAT team armor; sometimes she carries a cocked assault rifle.

[2.4] If masculinity is tied to power within the universe of *The X-Files*, then participating in social roles coded as feminine is tied to powerlessness. In particular, both sexuality and motherhood, as Scully experiences them, are deeply linked to the loss of her power and strength, as they are constructed within the world of the show. I focus on fan interpretations of these subjects because of their centrality to canon and fan contestation.

[2.5] Because of this interest in sexuality and motherhood, I focused on what Philes (that is, fans of *The X-Files*) refer to as MSR, or Mulder/Scully relationship, fics. In addition, I chose mostly fics with sexual content. As Driscoll (2006) argues, pairing and rating are the most important markers of genre in fan fiction, and fandoms are frequently divided into sharply delineated camps on the basis of ships, or preferred pairings. By choosing to focus on one pairing, I focused on a discursive field whose boundaries were derived from fannish community practices rather than being imposed by me. Focusing on the Mulder/Scully pairing allowed me both to watch fans engage in contestation in ways that sometimes paralleled canon, rather than deviating from it (the two characters eventually paired up in canon, although the series creator, Chris Carter, maintained for a long time that they never would), and to have access to a large number of fics that focus on Scully, particularly a sexually active Scully.

[2.6] Much of the literature on fan fiction sees slash fiction as transformative because of its imposition of a queer framework on heteronormative texts. While I do not disagree that this is one way fan fiction can be transformative, it is a mistake to believe that slash is inherently more transformative than het or gen fic just because of its queering of canon. MSR bears certain structural similarities to slash fic; for instance, it imposes a sexual relationship on a canon that long denied it. In addition, MSR fic is nearly always intimatopic, centering on how characters create and maintain intimacy both through and outside of sexual relations, which Woledge (2006), who coined the term, identifies as a feature of slash fic and other forms of male/male romance. There is a small but vibrant Scully slash community, and a good deal of Scully-centric gen fic has been written. However, MSR as a genre is rich in critical and

complex articulations of how gender and sexuality work in the world of *The X-Files* and provides enough material for this analysis.

[2.7] *The X-Files* has a long and storied history of fannish production; the major fandom-specific archive, Gossamer, holds over 35,000 individual stories, and thousands more are on other archives, in authors' journals, and on personal Web sites. When scholars of fandom want to analyze how certain types of fic work or how their authors approach a subject, any stories that fit our needs are relevant. However, because I am interested in the ways in which texts are read, commented on, and evaluated by readers and writers in a discursive community, I chose to focus on stories that fans recommended to other fans in communities of fan readers. I found these stories in three main places: the fan fiction thread on the Television Without Pity (TWoP) *X-Files* board (<http://forums.televisionwithoutpity.com/index.php?showforum=633>); the Reading Group for *X-Files* Fanfiction, a LiveJournal community that regularly hosts discussion about pieces of fan fiction, particularly those seen as high quality in their language and structure (http://community.livejournal.com/xf_book_club); and Crack Van, a pan-fandom fan fiction recommendation community on LiveJournal that regularly recommended *X-Files* stories until 2011 (http://community.livejournal.com/crack_van/tag/the+x-files). I then returned to these sites to look for analyses of the stories. Fan fiction is not a product of the fannish discursive community but is instead another entry into its ongoing circulation of claims about what canon is and what it could be.

[2.8] In what follows, I examine the way that fans engage in practical discourses in the context of these themes of sexuality and motherhood. First, I will briefly lay out how canon constructs the gender ramifications of each theme, with reference to episodes. After that, I will explore fans' reactions, looking at both previous research on *X-Files* fandom and specific conversations and analyses I encountered. Next I will trace the same conversations into fan fiction, where, as I argued above, the claims made by fans can take on their most layered and discursively complex forms. To demonstrate that the loop of fan contestation does not close with fan fic, I will show how fan fic becomes a part of a dialogue among fans about the construction of gender and how practical discourses continue over time.

3. Sexuality and threat

[3.1] The canon universe of *The X-Files* presents Scully as sexual primarily through instances of violence and threat. Men who treat her as sexually available tend also to aim to harm her: the death fetishist Donnie Pfaster, who plans on killing her in a parody of female beauty ritual (2.13 "Irresistible"); Ed Jerse, a one-night stand she picks up on a case who tries to kill her because of his poisonous tattoo (4.13 "Never

Again"); Philip Padgett, a writer who stalks her and then goes on to direct his supernatural protagonist to rip out her heart when she rejects him (6.18 "Milagro"). Scully's consensual sexual relationships also appear on screen only in a context of threat and danger. Her ex-boyfriend becomes possessed by the soul of a murderer, abducts her, and chains her to a radiator, where she cannot save him with her medical knowledge (1.14 "Lazarus"); one encounter with the married professor with whom she had an affair in medical school is capable of making her doubt all of her choices up to that point (7.17 "all things"). The show is also remarkably coy about the sexual nature of her relationship with Mulder; it was not clear to viewers when the episode first aired that "all things" was meant to indicate that Mulder and Scully had begun a sexual relationship. Physical contact between Mulder and Scully was rare even after that point in the series, and MSR fans still complain today about the paucity of on-screen kisses between the two. However, Scully is assumed to be romantically involved with Mulder on some level from late in season 7, and from that point on, her character is portrayed as less competent and powerful than during the earlier seasons of the show.

[3.2] Fans are highly critical of the portrayal of sexuality within the series, and Scully's sexuality in particular. For instance, the thread on the Mulder/Scully relationship on TWoP often discussed the relationship between violence and sexual attractiveness within the series, particularly how the only people who saw Scully as attractive also wanted to hurt her. The lack of direct acknowledgement of Mulder and Scully's sexual relationship is also connected, in the eyes of some members of the board, to "deep-seated issues with female sexuality" on the part of the show's creators.

[3.3] Fans use a variety of tactics to push back against canon's framing of Scully's sexuality. For instance, fans may identify her beauty and sexual attractiveness not in moments of threat but in moments of strength and power. For instance, a long conversation on TWoP, with photographs, was dedicated to proving, to a doubting friend of a board member, that Scully is hot. The images used pictured her in a variety of contexts, many of them linked to her professional role or her strength as a law enforcement officer: going worm hunting in the Arctic, playing baseball, cleaning her gun, wielding a machete. Thelittlespy, a fan who rewatched the later seasons of the show (and some earlier episodes) and wrote about them while waiting for the release of *I Want to Believe* (2008), also tended to locate hotness in moments when Scully is acting as a scientist or taking charge, continually repeating "at least she looks hot" as those around Scully proceeded to strip her of agency.

[3.4] Recontextualization of Scully as both sexually attractive and powerful is not a new element of *X-Files* fandom. Wakefield (2001) argues in her analysis of the Order of the Blessed Saint Scully the Enigmatic, an online group of Scully fans, that "the

focus on appearance can be read as a way of reclaiming Dana Scully as 'feminine,' in a rather stereotypical American-cultural sense" (133–34), repositioning her as sexually desirable. According to Bury (2005), the David Duchovny Estrogen Brigade Research Project analyzed Scully's actions in 4.13 "Never Again" in ways that cast her as an autonomous actor, rather than a passive victim who is acted on. Fans read the gendered dynamics of sexuality in the series in ways that allow them to turn sexuality from a terrain of threat and passivity to one of autonomy and action.

[3.5] In sexually explicit fan fiction, many authors break the connection between sexuality and danger or threat; instead, they portray Scully as sexually assertive and confident, capable of retaining both her scientific acumen and her investigative skills while being sexually active. For instance, in "The Unfinished Universe" (Revely 2001), Scully uses metaphors of Newtonian physics to describe her relationship with Mulder during "a moment of candor that owed a lot to being pressed naked and damp against one another," suggesting that her mind is still as scientific as ever even when she is basking in the afterglow. Stories that revolve around solving either paranormal or mundane cases also provide an opportunity for Scully to both be sexually active and demonstrate her competence. "Blood Oranges" (syntax6 n.d.) opens with a sex scene, establishing Mulder and Scully's ongoing relationship, which is then ruptured by the personal dynamics of the case. But Scully retains her investigative capabilities, and the romantic resolution comes only when the case has been solved, thanks in part to her forensic discoveries and work as a decoy. In "This House Is Burning" (Tesla n.d.), she works with Mulder on a profiling case while they are beginning a sexual relationship and struggling with their feelings for each other. Scully manages to use her new sexual relationship with Mulder to exorcise some of her trauma at her abduction by the alien conspiracy while retaining her investigative skills. While she views the sex as unproblematic, she worries that revealing the depth of her feelings for him will render her weaker in his eyes. When she finally decides to risk it, she finds that he is sulking out of fear that she won't love him, which she dismisses with a curt, "Mulder, what have you got up your ass? I thought I was the one who was supposed to have all the remorse, or embarrassment, or whatever." Scully can be sexually active in fic, and can even wrestle with her feelings and admit to emotional vulnerability, while avoiding the threats of victimization and weakness that inevitably accompany sexuality in canon.

[3.6] Much as fan discussions of episodes interrogate and contest the association between sexuality and weakness embodied in canon, fan discussions of fan fic can also analyze how well fics transform this relationship. For instance, the Reading Group discussion of "Blood Oranges" revolved around the role of self-injury in the fic, but the use of sex between Mulder and Scully to explain their relationship was commented on approvingly: the opening scene was described as "nontentative," and their relationship as clearly portrayed. Readers criticized the moment when Scully is threatened by a

suspect not because they believed it made her look weak or vulnerable, but because they believed it was illogical or failed to fit in the story's arc.

[3.7] Most of the fans in the xf_book_club discussion of "This House Is Burning" agreed it was a brilliant story, but some criticized it for establishing an unequal power dynamic between Mulder and Scully. However, critics disliked this not because they are sexually involved but because they disliked the way the case is structured and how it gives Mulder more to do than Scully. One reader argued that Scully's "contributions to the case's resolution are minimal and if these were episodes I'd have skipped them in a season rewatch," while another mentioned that the fic's author "has been known to throw Scully under the bus in deference to King Mulder." However, others countered that Scully has more autonomy in this story than in others by the same author and mentioned that it is difficult to balance vulnerability and strength in Scully's character at this particular moment in canon. Just as the relationships among sexuality, strength, and autonomy are central to the intervention these two fics are making into canon, fans' conversation about them returns to this ground for analysis.

4. Motherhood and protection

[4.1] *The X-Files* seems an unlikely candidate for a vehicle for discussing understandings of motherhood in popular culture. However, motherhood and infertility became major tropes throughout the Scully-centric parts of the show's myth arc, especially in its later seasons. One of the major consequences of Scully's abduction in the second season of the show (which occurred, ironically, in order to give Gillian Anderson a brief break from filming around the time she gave birth) is that she becomes infertile. (The show repeatedly refers to her as "barren," which is not a term used by modern medical professionals and which is considered highly offensive by most infertile people.) This helps cement the image of abduction as medical rape and a particular form of violence against women, which the show returns to frequently.

[4.2] Wherever the show references Scully's infertility, it does so in a context that strips her of agency and autonomy. When, in the paired episodes 5.6 "Christmas Carol" and 5.7 "Emily," she discovers a child cloned from her stolen ova, she is consistently belittled and thwarted in her efforts to intervene in the case: she is called Miss Scully rather than Agent Scully or Doctor Scully, even as she conducts an autopsy; told she is an unfit adoptive parent to her cloned daughter; told by hospital and state officials that she has no authority over the girl when Emily is dying; and finally robbed of the chance to collect evidence by the theft of Emily's body. As a parent, she cannot protect her child or parent her properly; as a doctor, she cannot save her life; as a pathologist and investigator, she cannot gather evidence. All of Scully's roles of power are stripped from her over the course of the two episodes.

[4.3] At the end of the seventh season, Mulder is abducted and Scully discovers that she is pregnant. The eighth season follows her pregnancy and the ninth her experiences as a new mother. For Mulder/Scully fans, these seasons are a double-edged sword: the long-awaited confirmation that the pair are in a romantic relationship is coupled with the departure of Mulder from the show and an abrupt change in Scully's personality and portrayal. Throughout these seasons, Scully is gradually portrayed as more emotional, in contrast to her iron emotional control in earlier seasons. We rarely see her working to find Mulder, despite her stated commitment to doing so. Skinner, Doggett, and eventually Mulder all conceal information from her, believing her too fragile to hear the truth. When Mulder is found dead and then brought back to life, she has little to do with either event and is prevented from seeing his body at several points. As preparations for her son William's birth begin, others come up with plans to protect her and her child without her input. In the end, she is unable to defend her child as she gives birth; the alien replicants she is hiding from find her, though they do not harm her. Mulder must swoop in and rescue her after the birth, not from the replicants but from her own hemorrhaging body. Scully's experience of motherhood is punctuated by threats to her son, nearly all of which occur in her home. At the end of the series, she gives William up for adoption, saying she will never be able to protect him properly.

[4.4] This is such a radical departure from Scully's portrayal in the earlier seasons that many fans of the show reject seasons 8 and 9 altogether, refusing to admit that they exist, not rewatching them, or choosing to develop alternative "head canons" for those seasons. In a discussion on parts of canon fans refuse to believe held in the LiveJournal community *xfiles*, many fans reply by rejecting seasons 8 and 9 (*xfiles* 2010), and in a discussion 8.10 "Badlaa" is strongly marked by fans describing Scully's actions in the episode, which derive from her profound longing for Mulder and attempt to replace him in his absence, as being out of character, saying she "didn't act like Scully to me" (*xfiles* 2009). The gendered ways that Scully's character shifts do not go unremarked. *Thelittlespy* (2008) returns to the theft of Scully's authority and power repeatedly in analyzing these seasons: "I hate the escalating theme of keeping things from Scully and protecting her because she's a fragile, womanly flower. She just has a vagina, people, not some Victorian nerve disorder."

[4.5] Huge numbers of fan stories try to find new ways to talk about Scully's infertility and her experiences of motherhood within the canon. As in any fandom, there are plenty of simple wish-fulfillment stories where Mulder and Scully become parents together in an unproblematic fairy-tale way. However, many others grapple complexly with canon's legacy in this area. For instance, in Darwin's fic "Ceremony" (n.d.), Scully mourns her period as a symbol of her infertility: "She had begun in the past few years to hate its useless carnage and pain, a war that she still had years to

fight but couldn't ever win. And all that was before she had a lover who had ejaculated on or around her cervix so often in the past few weeks that she had begun to feel inevitably fertile, like he was pumping her full of babies." The fic goes on to let Mulder and Scully resignify her period through sex, to let their relationship replace the babies she had always imagined she would have.

[4.6] Other fics approach the question of motherhood by writing Scully as a mother but in ways that strengthen, rather than weaken, her autonomy. Some follow the Emily arc, such as the Iolokus series (MustangSally and RivkaT 2009), a fandom classic, wherein Scully parents one of the children produced from her stolen ova while struggling with her immense ambivalence about becoming a parent in this manner. Far less dramatically, in "A Winter's Tale" (Anjou 2008) Mulder and Scully become the parents of the only clone child to survive the experiments that produced Emily. Scully uses the experience to find emotional closure, and also, with Mulder, to shut down the Consortium and go after those involved in her abduction.

[4.7] Because of fans' dissatisfaction with the William arc, and with seasons 8 and 9 in general, a wide variety of fics try to resignify that period. Some of them stick close to canon, such as "Doctor, Sailor, Copper, Corpse" (Scarlet Baldy 2002), which focuses on Scully's hatred of being seen as weaker during her pregnancy and provides an opportunity for Doggett to honor her autonomy by inviting her to work with him on the day when she has first started showing and gossip has perked up about her pregnancy. Others deviate from canon at various points, to alter the circumstances of Mulder's return or allow them to parent together. In "The Unfinished Universe," Scully is a warrior mother who can protect both Mulder and her child:

[4.8] Having a baby was supposed to make her more careful, but it hadn't. She drove faster, thumbed her nose at the Proper Channels and didn't try to hide the bulge of her gun. Something fierce rose to the surface and there was not even a slight chance that anything bad was going to happen to them again. With a fatalistic decree she has decided this and not one thing in heaven and earth will stop her...She's a card-carrying member of the lioness club now, and she feels ready to prove it. Mulder is neurasthenic and shaky, useless in case of an emergency, but she doesn't mind. She'll carry them both if she has to.

[4.9] "Belmont, Ohio, 3:36 PM" (Segretti 2000) portrays an alternate universe, deviating from canon after the end of season 8, in which, rather than Mulder going on the run alone, Mulder, Scully, and William all go on the run together, camouflaging themselves under other names. And "Ghosts" (Anjou 2002) and the stories that follow it, which follow canon up through the series finale, provide an excuse for Scully and Mulder to take William back from his adoptive parents (killed by aliens) and become

leaders of an antialien resistance as well as parents, providing an opportunity for Scully to be both a scientific hero and a mother—a dual capability simply impossible in canon.

[4.10] When fans recommend and discuss fan works that engage with the conversations around motherhood and seasons 8 and 9, they often prioritize the elements of works that seek to undo canon's association between motherhood and weakness. A fan who recommended "Doctor, Sailor, Copper, Corpse" on Crack Van, the multifandom fic recommendation community, praised the fic because "Scully is grieving after Mulder's death and not coping too well, but she is not a completely emotional crybaby"; that is, Scully is emotional and grieving, but still retains her personality. The rec for "Belmont, Ohio, 3:36 PM" frames the story as an improvement to canon: "An ending to *The X-Files* that isn't quite as sad, quite as hopeless, quite as heartless, as the one we were left with at the end of 'The Truth.'" The discussion of "Ghosts" at the Reading Group is limited, but participants praise the characterization of William, who is a toddler in this story, as a realistic, not-saccharine portrayal of a small child who happens to have strong supernatural powers, and they also remark on how the story integrates the supernatural and fantastic elements of *X-Files* canon (ghosts, aliens, mysterious powers) with the daily life of Mulder and Scully as parents. Fans recognize the need for fic to come in and fix canon's mishandling of Scully's experiences as a mother, and they are relieved to find stories that provide satisfying narratives of her as a mother while undoing the drastic loss of autonomy her character canonically suffers.

5. Conclusion

[5.1] Not everything is possible in fandom. The world of canon sets limits on discursive production: any fan work that wants to engage a community of fannish interlocutors must obey, or at least engage with, those limits. When fans want to talk about the way that gender works within the world of their fandom and argue with its limits and absences, they do so within the implicit limits that are set for them by canon. For fans of *The X-Files*, and particularly fans of Dana Scully, this means that the canon's association of traits and behaviors culturally coded as masculine and the performance of power, as well as of sexuality and victimhood and of motherhood and powerlessness, are the terrain where different claims about femininity, sexuality, and power can be rearticulated.

[5.2] Because fandom operates as a series of discourse communities, both nested and parallel, these conversations take place not merely in a direct dialogical relationship with the canon text but rather are in dialogue among fans. That means that fans together make claims that play within the limits of their canon and develop

collective readings that they can argue and negotiate with further. The key element of these conversations is their recursiveness: the canon text presents an initial framework, and fans interrogate it, produce creative fan works promulgating various readings and interpretations of it, and then engage in conversations and contestation with each other about the forms of meaning presented and interpreted in the fan works. In fandoms where canon is still being produced, new elements of it can be added into this process, but even in closed-canonical fandoms, like *The X-Files*, this contestation can continue.

[5.3] Here I've used the working of fannish discourse communities in order to understand how fans engage in contestation around issues of real-world political importance—in particular, how they contest the construction of gender in a canon that, from a feminist point of view, is both profoundly flawed and has fascinating possibilities. I focus on this issue because I am interested specifically in fandom as a site of political engagement. However, this understanding of fandom as a discourse community, where fans put forth claims that are then evaluated by their fannish interlocutors within the structuring discourse established by canon, does not apply only to fannish contestation that intersects with issues of political importance. When fans engage in contestation that intersects with politics, such as when they critique a canon's treatment of issues of gender, race, sexuality, or class, they do so in an environment where they are also contesting preferred interpretations of canon characterization, the various ships they support, the relative value of various show runners' contributions to the total production, and other matters that are not relevant outside fandom. Engaging in fandom means joining a discourse community where fans will inevitably have to evaluate claims and present reasons for their positions in ongoing discourses. Habermas may not have imagined ship wars as a context for practical discourse, but fandom is in fact an excellent space in which to engage in the forms of contestation he describes.

6. Acknowledgments

[6.1] Thanks to Bethan Jones, DashaK, Isabel Youngberg, and Wendelah for their helpful feedback throughout the writing process.

7. Works cited

Anjou. 2002. "Ghosts." Gossamer.org, December 8.

Anjou. 2008. "A Winter's Tale." Gossamer.org, January 24.

Badley, Linda. 2000. "Scully Hits the Glass Ceiling: Postmodernism, Postfeminism, Posthumanism, and *The X-Files*." In *Fantasy Girls: Gender in the New Universe of Science Fiction and Fantasy Television*, edited by Elyce Rae Helford, 61–90. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.

Bury, Rhiannon. 2005. *Cyberspaces of Their Own: Female Fandoms Online*. New York: Peter Lang.

Busse, Kristina, and Karen Hellekson. 2006. "Introduction: Work in Progress." In *Fan Fiction and Fan Communities in the Age of the Internet: New Essays*, edited by Karen Hellekson and Kristina Busse, 5–32.

Darwin. n.d. "Ceremony." Tripod.com.

Delasara, Jan. 2000. *PopLit, PopCult, and "The X-Files": A Critical Exploration*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland.

Derecho, Abigail. 2006. "Archontic Literature: A Definition, a History, and Several Theories of Fan Fiction." In *Fan Fiction and Fan Communities in the Age of the Internet: New Essays*, edited by Karen Hellekson and Kristina Busse, 61–78.

Driscoll, Catherine. 2006. "One True Pairing: The Romance of Pornography and the Pornography of Romance." In *In Fan Fiction and Fan Communities in the Age of the Internet: New Essays*, edited by Karen Hellekson and Kristina Busse, 79–96.

Hellekson, Karen, and Kristina Busse, eds. 2006. *Fan Fiction and Fan Communities in the Age of the Internet: New Essays*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland.

Kaplan, Deborah. 2006. "Construction of Fan Fiction Character through Narrative." In *Fan Fiction and Fan Communities in the Age of the Internet: New Essays*, edited by Karen Hellekson and Kristina Busse, 5–32.

MustangSally and RivkaT. 2009. "Iolokus." *Archive of Our Own*, December 26.

Parrish, Juli J. 2007. "Inventing a Universe: Reading and Writing Internet Fan Fiction." PhD diss., University of Pittsburgh.

pellucid. 2008. "Proprietary Fannish Love; or, Who 'Ruined' My Female Character." LiveJournal.com, July 8.

Revely. 2001. "The Unfinished Universe." KeyOfX.org, April 20.

Scarlet Baldy. 2002. "Doctor, Sailor, Copper, Corpse." Gossamer.org, January 20.

Scodari, Christine, and Jenna L. Felder. 2000. "Creating a Pocket Universe: 'Shippers,' Fan Fiction, and *The X-Files* Online." *Communication Studies* 51 (3): 238–57.
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/10510970009388522>.

Segretti, Sarah. 2000. "Belmont, Ohio, 3:36 PM." Reocities.com, September.

syntax6. n.d. "Blood Oranges." Omniscribe.com.

Tesla. n.d. "This House Is Burning." Reocities.com.

thelittlespy. 2008. "Rewatch: 8x14 This Is Not Happening." LiveJournal.com, May 31.

Wakefield, Sarah R. 2001. "'Your Sister in St. Scully': An Electronic Community of Female Fans of *The X-Files*." *Journal of Popular Film and Television* 29 (3): 130–37.
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/01956050109601018>.

Willis, Ika. 2006. "Keeping Promises to Queer Children: Making Space (for Mary Sue) at Hogwarts." In *Fan Fiction and Fan Communities in the Age of the Internet: New Essays*, edited by Karen Hellekson and Kristina Busse, 153–70.

Woledge, Elizabeth. 2006. "Intimatopia: Genre Intersections between Slash and the Mainstream." In *Fan Fiction and Fan Communities in the Age of the Internet: New Essays*, edited by Karen Hellekson and Kristina Busse, 97–114.

xfiles. 2009. "Season 8: Badlaa." LiveJournal.com, November 19.

xfiles. 2010. "Canon You Refuse to Believe." LiveJournal.com, December 17.

Praxis

Capital, dialogue, and community engagement—*My Little Pony: Friendship Is Magic* understood as an alternate reality game

Kevin Veale

University of Auckland, Auckland, New Zealand

[0.1] *Abstract*—The experience of engaging with the television show *My Little Pony: Friendship Is Magic* is structurally and affectively analogous to the experience of an alternate reality game. The community presents multiple tiers of engagement in which individual contributions can be recognized; the creators of the show include material with the specific intent that it be taken up by the community but without any control of the way in which it is used, and material created by the community is folded into the text by the creators in a dialogue. The context of the cocreative dialogue that surrounds the show and its community is a good example of both what Paul Booth identifies as a digi-gratis economy and the forensic fandom used by Jason Mittell to understand community engagement and response to *Lost*.

[0.2] *Keywords*—Affect; Digi-gratis economy; Forensic fandom; Textual structure; World of concern

Veale, Kevin. 2013. "Capital, Dialogue, and Community Engagement—*My Little Pony: Friendship Is Magic* Understood as an Alternate Reality Game." *Transformative Works and Cultures*, no. 14. <http://dx.doi.org/10.3983/twc.2013.0510>.

1. Introduction

[1.1] The Internet is bridging different forms of storytelling media and their communities, meaning that to some extent, everything is becoming a transmedia narrative. This shift is opening new opportunities for scholarship even as it destabilizes the dividing lines between previously distinct forms of media. If a significant proportion of fan engagement with television shows, comics, films, video games, and other forms of popular culture are all playing out online alongside texts like alternate reality games (ARGs) that exist entirely in that context, where do we draw the lines between them?

[1.2] What makes each kind of textual storytelling distinctive is not found at the level of textual structures but at how we engage with them. The process each medium requires of us in order to negotiate a given text helps shape the way we perceive the story and different modes of engagement alter our experience of texts (Veale 2011, 2012b). As such, I have argued elsewhere that media forms should be defined by the processes of engagement required of their textual structures and the affective

responses shaped by that engagement as much as by their textual structures in isolation (Veale 2012a). The simplest example of this is to compare watching a film in the context of a cinema to watching it at home on DVD: in the cinema, no matter how tense a scene might be, everyone knows that the film will not stop and is outside our control; in comparison, when watching at home, it's possible to pause the film to make a cup of tea if it becomes too tense in order to take a breather. The same filmic text exists on two different textual structures, which promote different modes of engagement and very different affective experiences as a result.

[1.3] ARGs are defined by processes of engagement rather than textual structure because they can be constituted by any form of textual engagement common to the Internet at large; the only boundary demarking where an ARG ends and reading e-mail for work begins exists at the level of affect (Veale 2012a). At the same time, modern television is demonstrating some slippage into modes of engagement and resulting affective tenor often associated with ARGs:

[1.4] Technological transformations away from the television screen have also impacted television narrative. The Internet's ubiquity has enabled fans to embrace a "collective intelligence" for information, interpretations, and discussions of complex narratives that invite participatory engagement—and in instances such as *Babylon 5* or *Veronica Mars*, creators join in the discussions and use these forums as feedback mechanisms to test for comprehension and pleasures. Other digital technologies like videogames, blogs, online role-playing sites, and fan websites have offered realms that enable viewers to extend their participation in these rich storyworlds beyond the one-way flow of traditional television viewing...The consumer and creative practices of fan culture that cultural studies scholars embraced as subcultural phenomena in the 1990s have become more widely distributed and participated in with the distribution means of the Internet, making active audience behavior even more of a mainstream practice. (Mittell 2006, 31–32)

[1.5] Modern television is increasingly framed around online communities forming collective intelligences through which to negotiate complex texts, and there is thus a significant experiential overlap between playing an ARG and engaging with the communities that surround television shows. Approaching media forms on the basis of their modes of engagement and how those modes of engagement shape the affective experiences they mediate rather than their outward distinctions provides an opportunity for critical insight that might otherwise have been missed. Doing so means that tools from modern television scholarship can be deployed to consider elements of ARG communities at the same time as theory developed in the context of ARGs can be

focused on television fans. This allows for a more unified overall perspective regarding how fan communities and the economies that surround them function, how engaging with fan communities changes the experience of texts in fundamental ways, and how television shows are moving to reflect their audiences and engage them in dialogue.

[1.6] The concept of using the lens provided by ARG engagement to explore broader media is not new: Paul Booth (2010) has argued that modern fandoms across media qualify as ARGs due to online convergence and a "philosophy of playfulness" (2):

[1.7] Fans are actively engaged in their media texts, participating in some way with the creation of meanings from extant media events. Players of ARGs, similarly, participate in the active reconstruction of the game environment, and create new meanings from the intersection and convergence of media texts. Further, active fans who create fan fiction regularly transgress the boundaries of the original text, by adding new material, creating new readings, or providing alternate takes of the plot of the original. Similarly, ARGs utilize ubiquitous web and digital technology to help players participate in a game that is both constructed through and effaced by mediation, transgressing and destabilizing traditional media theories. In short, the types of participation in which fans engage minors the type of participation in which players of ARGs engage; and this type of participation is reflected by many contemporary media audiences in general. (2)

[1.8] Booth's argument that the kinds of engagement presented by modern media fandoms map onto that of an ARG is persuasive, and his work presents useful tools for understanding the flow of capital within fan communities. However, his argument can be extended further because he does not consider the affective dimension to the experiences under comparison. The affective dimension of something refers to a spectrum of subjective things that we feel but that we are less conscious of than our emotions. It is possible to name an emotion and pin it down, but the affective tone of an experience is harder to label and is more amorphous (Kavka 2008). A good distinction is that between fear and dread: fear has a distinct focus, whereas dread can lack a focus or even a conscious reason for us to feel the way we do. Affective investment is contextual ([note 1](#)) (Nyre 2007) and reflects whatever is relevant to the individual engaging with a given text and his or her situation at the time. The affective tone of those watching something they enjoy changes when they watch the same thing in the context of studying it (Veale 2012a).

[1.9] In contrast, Matt Hills engages with affect in *Fan Cultures*, arguing that fans should be viewed as players because they become "immersed in non-competitive and affective play" that is "not always caught up in a pre-established 'boundedness' or set

of cultural boundaries, but may instead imaginatively create its own set of boundaries" (2002, 112). However, Hills misses some of the internal dynamics within fan communities that map to ARGs, such as the fact that some of the affective play is entirely competitive, along with the affective impact of cocreative engagement between the creators and the fan community in shaping unfinished texts.

[1.10] Exploring the experience of community engagement centered around the television series *My Little Pony: Friendship Is Magic* (MLP:FIM) (2010–) will illustrate how the modes of engagement involved overlap with those of ARGs. MLP:FIM displays the rabbit holes common to ARG experience at the levels of both the text and its paratext (Genette 1997). There is direct engagement between the creators of the show and the community in a relationship analogous to how ARG communities relate to the people who guide the game. Contributions at the level of the MLP:FIM community become folded back into the official text, suggesting a cocreative engagement. The fan community displays the same experientially distinct tiers of engagement as ARGs do, with similarly distinct modes of engaging with cultural capital.

2. Rabbit holes, both textual and paratextual

[2.1] The television show MLP:FIM has developed such a ubiquitous online presence that it has been hard to avoid encountering it within many virtual communities, whether they are dedicated to a form of fandom or not. One consequence has been that the first encounter many people have with MLP:FIM is through online image memes, posters, or discussions rather than through dedicated advertising or watching the show itself. As a result, these encounters with the show's paratext shape the first impressions that many people have of MLP:FIM as a series; for example, the difference in tone and context between official advertising (figure 1) and the community-generated images (figures 2–4) is hard to miss. Another important element about the comedic images is that they imply a community of other people who might share a similar sense of humor with you as the reader—and that they are enjoying engaging with MLP:FIM itself. Figure 4 borrows the same context as the advertising image (figure 1) in that it presents the core characters in ways that make them distinctive, except it does so through the medium of parodying a video game poster of *Left 4 Dead* (Turtle Rock Studios, 2008) that has the characters working together to fight zombies (TheArtrix 2011). The shift in context brings MLP:FIM closer to themes enjoyed by an older, and in this case primarily male, audience, and it does so with visual style in such a way that the labor involved is obvious. The encounter raises the question, "What is this show that people are spending so much time and energy on, when they're connecting it to other things I already enjoy?"

[2.2] Community is a feeling, not just a process (Rheingold 1993). Participating in a wider group that shares at least some of the same interests and purposes is itself a powerful thing. Encountering and enjoying these images provides a connection to a visible community of other people who share a similar sense of humor and engagement ([note 2](#)). That remains true even for those who may not have actually watched any of the series that inspired the paratext. The creators of MLP:FIM are aware of the ways that fandom communities are engaging with their show, and they have folded the same style of humor into their advertising: figures 5, 6, and 7 all show the same kind of playful self-awareness and engagement with popular culture that the community has delighted in ([note 3](#)). The cumulative effect of all of these minor encounters is to build an impression that a community of people are having fun that is centered around a particular television series, and that the creators of the show are playing with and alongside them.

[2.3] In the context of discussing ARGs, rabbit holes refer to entry points into the text—ones where questions are raised that some people will be motivated to investigate (Szulborski 2005a, 2005b). The advertisements in figures 5, 6, and 7 are explicitly grounded in being this kind of locus for curiosity: only one of them mentions which day of the week episodes of the series are broadcast, with the others only mentioning the channel. Those who want more information need to start hunting for it themselves. Any of the paratextual material produced by the fan community or the creators themselves can function as a rabbit hole for MLP:FIM, and the order in which material is encountered is going to help shape the affective impressions that people take into the series with them (Veale 2012a). The mode of engagement they present is affectively identical to that of ARGs.



Figure 1. Advertising. [[View larger image](#).]

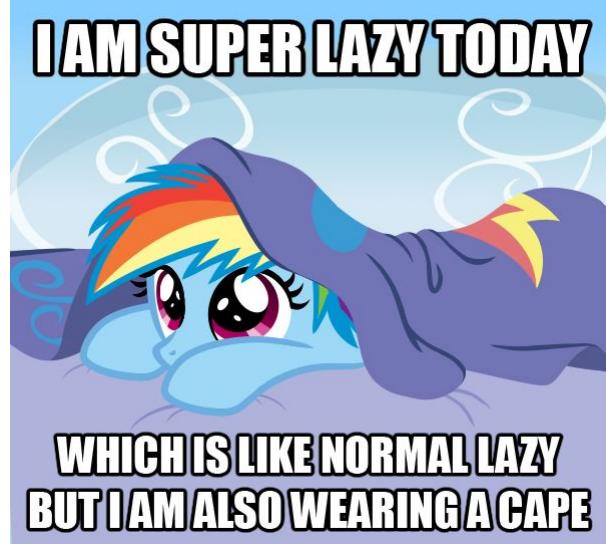


Figure 2. Super lazy. [[View larger image](#).]



Figure 3. Love and tolerance. [[View larger image](#).]

[2.4] Figures 2 and 3, which are sight gags, have been recirculated to the point that attribution is practically impossible; all make use of a similar sense of humor that meshes and juxtaposes with the imagery for its impact. They're also used as a comedic visual shorthand during online communication, standing in for written statements.



Figure 4. *Friendship Is Survival* (TheArtrix 2011). [[View larger image](#).]



Figure 5. *Bridlemaids* ad. [[View larger image](#).]



Figure 6. *Ponygeist* ad. [[View larger image](#).]

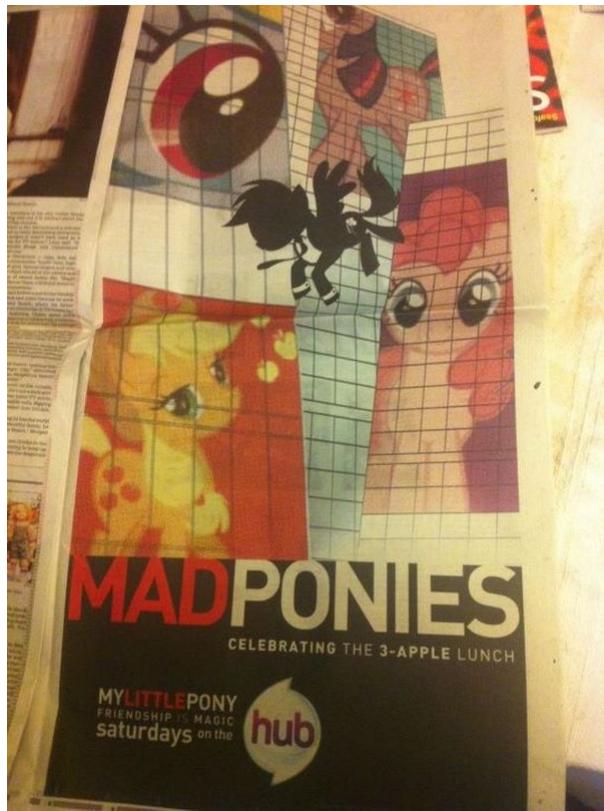


Figure 7. *Mad Ponies* ad. [[View larger image](#).]

[2.5] However, the show itself also features elements that can qualify as Easter eggs and intratextual jokes or as rabbit holes, with the sole difference being the mode of engagement of the person viewing them rather than anything intrinsic to the texts themselves. These go beyond the kind of content that would make sense for a children's demographic and are grounded in a deep engagement with popular culture. For example, 2.06 "The Cutie Pox" features background characters clearly inspired by *The Big Lebowski* (1998) (figures 8–12). Assuming the audience recognizes them, their inclusion is going to be amusing and startling, particularly considering that seeing a cartoon version of a cinematic pedophile is not something television viewers generally expect to see (figure 9). For someone who is already engaging with MLP:FIM and invested within its paratext, this will function as an Easter egg: it invokes a broader community of viewers who likewise get the gag, and by playing with the audience this way, it suggests that the creators of the show share the same sense of humor. However, for someone who isn't already engaged with MLP:FIM and its context ([note 4](#)), the same material could function as a rabbit hole, prompting viewers to reevaluate their impression of the series and investigate further. The distinction between the two exists entirely at the level of affect and mode of engagement. There is nothing in the text itself to separate whether the appearance of a pony version of The Dude or The Jesus functions as a treasure to be found or a rabbit hole to explore.

[2.6] The show specifically seeks to create a rich visual field that viewers can engage with as a treasure hunt, and it mines wider media for elements to include. To an

extent, this raises what Jason Mittell calls forensic fandom, which refers to embracing "a detective mentality, seeking out clues, charting patterns, and assembling evidence into narrative hypothesis and theories" (Mittell 2009a, 128–29). It is "a mode of television engagement encouraging research, collaboration, analysis and interpretation" (Mittell 2009b, ¶2.3) that is exemplified by the statement, "We're going to need to watch that again" (Mittell 2006, 35; 2009a, 129). Mittell's conceptualization of forensic fandom was designed to account for serialized shows with complex, interrelated content such as *Lost* (2004–10) that go significantly further than the treasure hunts found in MLP:FIM. However, the modes of engagement and affective complexion of delight in spotting something unexpected and either wanting to know more or wanting to share that discovery with a community is something common to both *Lost* and MLP:FIM, even if MLP is comparatively less complex ([note 5](#)). Nevertheless, the information density can be high, despite the difference in narrative complexity; for example, 2.20 "It's About Time" has a single scene that visually references the films *Escape from New York* (1981) and *The Terminator* (1984), together with the video game *Metal Gear Solid* (Konami, 1998) (figure 13).



Figure 8. "Ponified" characters from *The Big Lebowski* in "The Cutie Pox." [[View larger image](#).]



Figure 9. Pony version of The Jesus, complete with comparison shot of John Turturro from *The Big Lebowski*. [[View larger image](#).]



Figure 10. The Dude as a horse. [[View larger image.](#)]



Figure 11. Walter Sobchak seems calmer in Equestria. [[View larger image.](#)]



Figure 12. Donny. [[View larger image.](#)]



Figure 13. Twilight Sparkle meets her future self. [[View larger image.](#)]

[2.7] Along with the delight of sharing a discovery with a whole community of other fans is the fact these sequences highlight that the creators of the show are fans of the same media as the audience and that they have a sense of humor in how they approach their own work. Tara Strong, who provides the voice for Twilight Sparkle in the show, has a strong social media presence (@tarastrong on Twitter). She regularly discusses developments within MLP:FIM fandom, including sharing links to fan material or making teasing statements about where the story and characters might go. Lauren Faust (@Fyre_Flye on Twitter), the creator of the show, has likewise spent a great deal of time and energy communicating with the fan base, including spending time in chat channels on sites such as 4chan, which are typically risky environments for people to identify themselves, especially if they are female or have some celebrity attached to them. Both are visibly supportive of the MLP:FIM community, and this helps change the context in which people engage with the series itself; feeling that one is sharing the fun with the people who are creating it is a powerful affective distinction from feeling that one is simply consuming a product. Another side effect is to emphasize that the creators of the show are engaging with the same fan-generated content as the fans themselves, which also brings them closer together. Essentially, the creators and the fans are part of the same collective fandom, creating and consuming texts together and sharing the parts they particularly enjoy with each other. The affective register that makes the experience of engaging with MLP:FIM distinctive is sharing it with a broader community, even when they are not present, and feeling a connection to the show's creators—something that is also shared by the experience of engaging with an ARG.

[2.8] When we watch an episode of the show, along with knowing that the creators of the series are having fun with us, we are aware of how the rest of our collective fandom is likely to respond to events and points of characterization. The audience of MLP:FIM is never alone in watching the show, even when by themselves (note 6). For example, 2.07 "May the Best Pet Win!" is framed around a contest to select the appropriate pet for Rainbow Dash. This episode contains a sequence where Twilight Sparkle argues that "cool," "radical," and "awesome" all mean the same thing, to which Rainbow Dash responds, "You *would* think that, Twilight, and that's why you would never qualify to be my pet." Twitter conversation at the time was filled with a gleeful or tolerant awareness that elements of the community were going to be unable to leave that line alone, and that it would be the focus of a great deal of audience-generated content that used the statement as a springboard to examine the relationship between the two characters.

[2.9] The Easter eggs and rabbit holes that connect the show to a broader fandom community exist even in completely independent forms of media. Fans found encrypted references to MLP:FIM within the video game *Crysis 3* (Electronic Arts,

2013) that needed to be decoded using techniques similar to those required by previous ARGs (Meer 2010a, 2010b, 2010c), with similar moments of affective discovery and achievement (Dena 2008; Veale 2012a) ([note 7](#)). On the one hand, this plays into the affective connection that the other Easter eggs promote between members of MLP fandom and a perceived community. On the other hand, it also explicitly suggests that some of the creators of *Crysis 3* share the fandom. This may well be true, but it isn't a neutral claim because it also plays on the social capital that being part of the MLP:FIM community confers—in much the same way that the creators of MLP:FIM have used this connection to promote the show themselves.

3. Affect and capital in fandom

[3.1] Paul Booth (2010) uses the term *digi-gratis economy* to describe the dynamics within digital fandom that are a hybrid of a market economy and a gift economy. Fans spend a great deal of money on merchandise within their fandom, and this investment of market capital has a social capital within the audience, while at the same time there is sharing and reciprocity with resources. However, though it is shared freely, there is a significant underlying labor to a great deal of fan engagement, such as writing fan fiction and blogs, creating fan art, maintaining wikis, and remixing or creating music around a particular theme related to the relevant fandom. This labor wouldn't happen if the fans did not get pleasure from the effort, and part of that pleasure is grounded in the social capital it gains within the community.

[3.2] Part of what links the modes of engagement involving social capital within the communities surrounding MLP:FIM and ARGs is that both are experienced in a context of phenomenological reality. If an ARG player wants to hack into an e-mail address, he or she must possess or acquire the skills to do so; there's none of the mediation provided by a video game character, for example, who might have the ability if the players themselves do not (McGonigal 2003; Veale 2012a). Likewise, if those engaging with the MLP:FIM paratext wants to create a piece of art, remix music, or write fan fiction, then they create it themselves, using their own everyday skill sets. Both contexts of engagement are ones where people can feel legitimate pride in developing their own skills, or even in finding transferable skills that can apply to other parts of their lives (Veale 2012a).

[3.3] Christy Dena (2008) introduces the concept of tiering to understand how different forms of engagement and activity levels within communities of ARG players change individual experiences of the game. This framework is equally relevant to fandom communities. The most active tier consists of those who create their own material for the MLP:FIM community by writing fiction, creating art or music, editing video, or any of a number of such creative avenues. There is another layer of people

who are deeply involved with that community content and who share what they find with the rest of the fandom community. Below them, there is a broader strata of people who engage with fan-generated material once it is located but who would not expend particular effort to find it themselves. At the base of the pyramid are people who merely watch the show. The boundaries between these levels are fluid, just as they are in ARGs, with people moving between categories, depending on their available time, energy, and motivation.

[3.4] So far, Dena's tiers are consistent with Booth's *digi-gratis* economy. Tiers are useful for considering the distinct affective dimensions that are involved in different forms of engaging with a fandom—a factor that Booth does not discuss. The people in the tier who actively create new material are having fun dedicating significant labor to that effort. Part of the pleasure lies in the feeling of personal pride that comes from making a name for themselves within the community as a result of the capital surrounding their contributions and as a result of the fact that they are developing their own everyday skills. For example, the *My Little Sweetheart* book is marketed entirely on the strength of having known individuals within the MLP:FIM adult art scene as its contributors, who are only referred to by their preferred online handles. The unspoken understanding is that those who might be interested in the product will already recognize at least some of the artists and know of some or all of their work. In other cases, it is possible for creators to get some commercial recognition through sites such as Bandcamp for music, or through sales of T-shirts and other merchandise on sites like WeLoveFine.com ([note 8](#)).

[3.5] The secondary tier is focused around people who have a deep engagement with the fandom and its culture but who do not create new material themselves. Nonetheless, this tier of individuals can become known by finding new material and popularizing it within contexts such as Equestria Daily, which is one of many sites devoted to collecting, collating, and organizing contributions from the community. Simply being a member in good standing is a form of capital in allowing for the discussion and critique of other work within the community. The affects that distinguish the experience of this tier are grounded in competition in a way that is not as true for the primarily creative tier ([note 9](#)). Those creating new material might measure themselves against others, but ultimately, they are working to improve their own abilities. If someone disagrees with an interpretation of a character or wider canon, that is feedback, not something that has to be taken on board. In comparison, the secondary tier's focus on discussing the work produced by the primary tier means that disagreements and debates are inevitable, along with the kinds of energetic discussion and drama that online communities are known for. As such, the secondary tier's mode of engagement shaped by the context of phenomenological reality is also due to being able to take pride in one's work, but that work consists of communicating

with other people about other artwork and news relevant to the community. People who are invested in this tier are aware that because developments in the community will keep unfolding whether they are engaged, at sleep, or at work, they could be left behind (Veale 2012a). In the same way that many people check Facebook as one of the first items in their morning routine, those invested in the secondary tier of fandom communities, such as those presented by MLP:FIM, dedicate significant energy to catching up on whatever they've missed while off-line so as to remain current and informed.

[3.6] The tertiary tier, by contrast, gets to enjoy the fruits of the more active parts of the community by engaging with the paratextual content surrounding the show. This tier has its mode of engagement shaped least by the context of phenomenological reality in both ARGs and the MLP:FIM community because its members are primarily engaging with work produced by others, rather than producing their own. They contribute contextual capital to those who are considered deserving in the form of reviews, positive feedback, and the alchemy that turns commercial engagement with fan-produced products into capital. At the same time, the tertiary tier shares the affective bonds of connection with the community even when engaging with the fandom by themselves.

4. The complex capital of endorsement and commerce

[4.1] The greatest hallmark of capital within the community is acknowledgement from the creators through the use of community-generated ideas, either within the show or in the unfolding paratext surrounding it. It is here that Booth's concepts surrounding the digi-gratis economy become particularly relevant: often official acknowledgement of community-generated material involves the creation of more merchandise for sale to that same community ([note 10](#)). This dynamic is an example of both what Suzanne Scott (2009) refers to as a regifting economy, where fan-generated content is sold back to fans in exchange for giving the fan community credibility and capital, and a process of remixing the productive output of fans, which Jeff Watson (2010) argues is a fundamental component of Web 2.0. It is also a form of capital closely associated with experiential registers found in ARGs and grounded in cocreative engagement. Essentially, the ending of an ARG is not finalized at its onset; those responsible for running the game adjust it—sometimes drastically—in response to actions taken by the player community (Kim et al. 2009; Veale 2012a). This leads to a perception among the community of people playing the ARG that they are working with the people creating it. There are many examples where players took significant steps to correct and repair problems they found with ARGs before those responsible for running them were even aware something was wrong (Veale 2012a).

[4.2] An example that tracks across several layers of official recognition and cocreative engagement is the character mainly known as either Derpy Hooves or Ditz Doo. The character originated in an animation fault in the first episode of season 1, where she was accidentally given eyes that pointed in different directions, giving her a goofy expression (figure 14).



Figure 14. The animation fault that created a legend. [[View larger image](#).]

[4.3] The character developed a significant fan following, with the gradual establishment of a quasi-formalized fanon character defining who Derpy is and how she fits into wider society within the show and its setting. This process tapped into both Dena's tiers and Booth's digi-gratis economy. People created a wide variety of works inspired by the character, and then other secondary works were inspired by fan-generated material, until a sufficient body of work existed that there could be said to be multiple subcanons surrounding interpretations of the character. Derpy became a site of significant affective investment: a subset of the population cared deeply about the character, whether they were primary-tier people who had created work featuring her or people in the secondary tier who had engaged with that primary work and critiqued it, or ones in the tertiary tier who simply enjoyed the fact that she belonged to the fandom in a way that was seen as special ([note 11](#)).

[4.4] The creators of the show became aware of the depth of the community's engagement with the character and began deliberately repeating her googly-eyed design in the background of scenes, explicitly folding her into the diegesis of the show. Initially, these were limited to *Where's Waldo*-style treasure hunts, another form of Easter egg, albeit with the distinction that the character originated within the community rather than in the broader popular culture. However, the creators of the show went further, specifically creating scenes that featured the character and

eventually releasing an episode where she had a brief speaking part. Community response to this episode, 2.14 "The Last Roundup," and the cocreative engagement tied up with it was controversial; there was extensive debate about whether the creators of the show had stayed sufficiently close to fanon in portraying the character and whether the characterization was itself offensive.

[4.5] In a good example of the affective and communicative dynamics of the secondary tier of the MLP:FIM fandom community, there were several different factions that were at odds with each other, and everyone was invested enough that tempers ran high. Essentially, the different interpretations of the character within the fandom ranged from framing her as a clumsily well-meaning character with her head in the clouds all the way to her being a punch line because of being mentally handicapped. The name "Derpy" is now associated with online image memes and macros where the subject's eyes point in different directions, but in some cases, these same images have been used to make fun of the mentally disabled. Importantly, a detectable section of the fandom had no idea about the name's unfortunate connotations, or were unaware of the character's name altogether. As a result, the brief characterization during 2.14 "The Last Roundup" was seen to be invoking the more offensive interpretations by a section of the fandom. The vehemence of the anger from the fan base took the creators by surprise, and they were understandably horrified that they might be perpetuating a character who was ableist and offensive. The episode was pulled, the character was rerecorded to sound different, and mentions of the character's name were eliminated. This then caused a further backlash from fans angered that what they considered to be an accurate reflection of harmless fandom—and the capital associated with the character being recognized officially by the creators—had been needlessly ruined ([note 12](#)).

[4.6] This is an example where the complex energies invested in cocreative engagement and the digi-gratis economy turned ugly; an attempt to reinforce the felt connection between those creating the show and the fan base was instead divisive. Correcting the problem cost money for rerecording and reediting the episode, and it left no one comfortable with how their investment of capital in the character had been handled. However, the collective investment of contextual capital in the character was too great to simply abandon, and so forms of official recognition—official merchandise—that avoided the more problematic elements were created. A limited-edition toy of the character was made available at conventions such as Comic-Con 2012 and sold out rapidly. Although the toy was left unnamed to avoid a repeat of the controversy, imagery associated with the character by the community, such as muffins, were included on the box (figure 15).



Figure 15. Official recognition through commerce. [[View larger image](#).]

[4.7] The year 2012 also saw the release of trading cards for MLP:FIM, which represented a more successful example of the digi-gratis economy: fan-generated material was used to generate commercial products that could be sold to the fan base. Several cards explicitly reference an official awareness of fanon surrounding specific characters.

[4.8] There was considerable debate when two background characters named Lyra and Bon-Bon, whom the community understand to be in a relationship, were not sharing the same card, and delight when another card not only brought together two other background characters—Octavia and DJ-P0n3—but specifically teased viewers with possibilities about their relationship (figures 16 and 17). Another background character, who had been nicknamed Doctor Whooves because of his visual similarity to Matt Smith's appearance in *Doctor Who*, appeared on a trading card with the official name of Time Turner—itself a reference from the Harry Potter series. His card specifically mentions a talent for all things "timey-wimey," referencing a quote from David Tennant's tenure as the Doctor (figure 18).

[4.9] The complex interplay within the digi-gratis economy means that there is a significant connection between finance and social capital. Fans can demonstrate their allegiance to MLP:FIM by purchasing commercial products, and in doing so, they can gain social capital within the community. It is also affective because people get pleasure and pride from investing in what they enjoy and using it to identify themselves. Interestingly, one can gain social capital from purchasing unofficial merchandise as well, which is why the decision to ground official merchandise for the digi-gratis economy in fan-generated content is an intelligent one. It means that the decision to purchase official merchandise is not just about identifying with a fan

community, but also about identifying with creators who are part of that same fandom.

[4.10] Suzanne Scott (2009) has argued that commercialization of fan production by fans themselves might operate as a mode of preserving fandom's gift economy by motivating fans to compete with a co-opted framework, whereby fans are encouraged to submit work that can then be sold by the industry. However, the approach currently favored by Hasbro is not in itself neutral: the fact that fan commercialization is allowed to exist largely without interference gains capital that can be leveraged commercially. If the audience feels positively about a commercial entity, it is more likely to buy products based on that felt connection. There have also been specific occasions that triggered a backlash against what is taken to be gratuitous commercialization, where the community response is far less positive. Examples include Twilight Sparkle's transformation into a princess at the end of the third season, and the development of the *Equestria Girls* spin-off movie that frames the six main characters as human teenagers at high school ([note 13](#)).

[4.11] The general understanding is that there has been sufficient connection and support of the fan base by the creators that they are not simply being manipulative, and that they have earned some trust. The audience members are aware that they are engaging with a commercial product. They understand the business model and are mostly accepting of it—particularly because of the capital the creators have gained in their dealings with the fan community:

[4.12] Every season Hasbro makes demands. They need a new pink princess pony and for Twilight Sparkle to have a brother. The board wants to see crystal ponies because the buzzword "crystal" anything is popular with girls 4–8 years of age. And now, they want Twilight Sparkle to be a princess, because Hasbro is not like us...Unlike all of us, Hasbro is convinced that being smart and capable and open to learning and new experiences—the myriad of character traits for which we love a certain purple unicorn, are unimportant. Their priority is rushing the character into being a princess because retailers don't want books as accessories with girls toys, they want dresses and flowing hair and weddings and yards of pink material. BUT, and this is the important bit, these demands are being filtered through artists and writers and directors who do understand, who ARE like us...This is the same team that took an out-of-nowhere pink princess and made her into both a creepy insectoid monster queen AND a highly capable and good-hearted heroine who returns from exile to buck tradition and save her prince. These are the crafters of a show we love and appreciate—they know

what we want to see, they believe in the work they produce and the world they have been building for three seasons. (Pixelkitties 2013a)

[4.13] Part of what has convinced MLP:FIM fandom that the creators actually want to be part of the community, rather than to simply leveraging it for commercial gain, is the noncommercial interactions that also unfold in the digi-gratis economy.



Figure 16. Front of card. [[View larger image](#).]

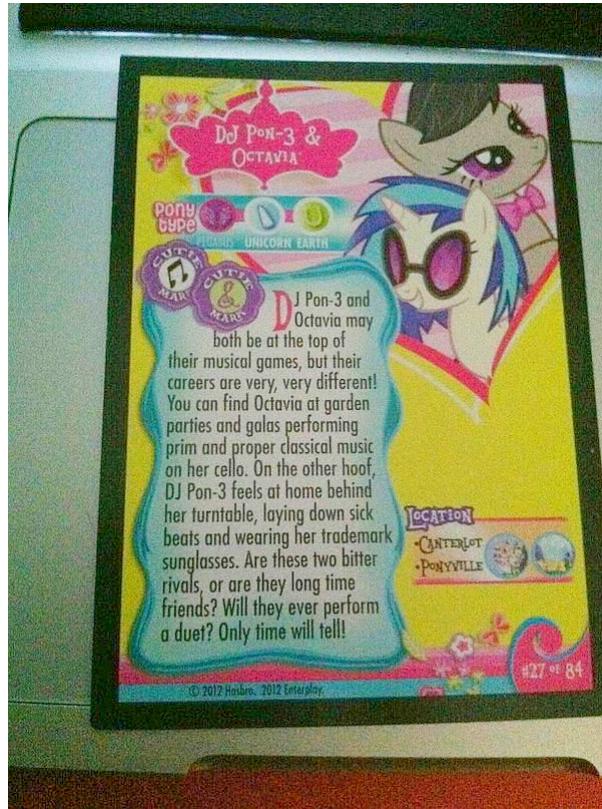


Figure 17. Back of card. [[View larger image](#).]

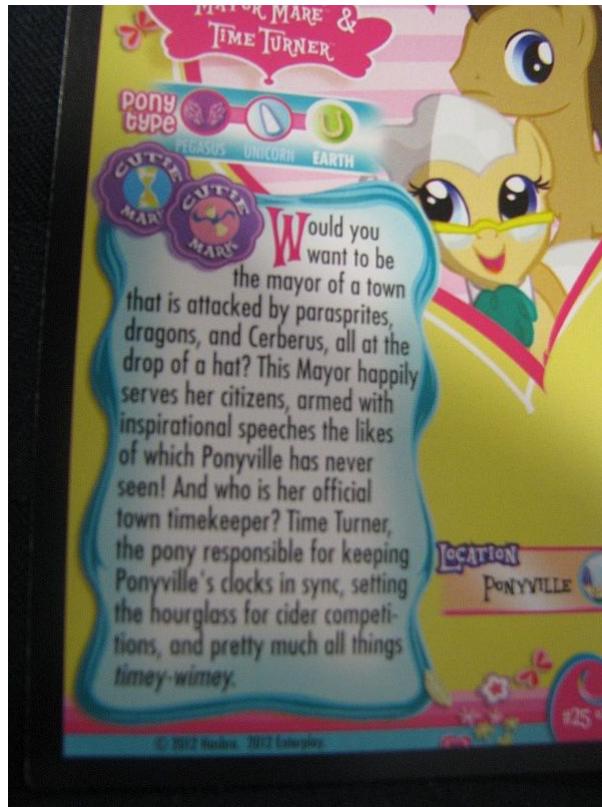


Figure 18. "Timey-wimey." [[View larger image](#).]

5. Affective capital for its own sake

[5.1] Many people who identified with being an official part of producing MLP:FIM have spent time engaging with the fan community on their own time, without direct financial motive, in many cases because they find it fun. As mentioned earlier, Lauren Faust braved the depths of 4chan to discuss the show with fans; she has also become involved in sponsoring a fan-generated fighting game based on the MLP characters, despite a cease-and-desist order from Hasbro ([note 14](#)). Tara Strong directly references artwork and creative engagement from the community via social networking, including demonstrating a playful acceptance of sexualized content within the show's paratext. The sheer glee that members of the MLP:FIM community display when she or one of the other creators references some of their work or even requests a piece of art is wonderful to behold, and this is a significant part of what underlies the perception of cocreative engagement within the paratext of the show. Strong also creates material for the fandom herself, outside of her involvement with recording voices for the series: on March 7, 2012, she tweeted a section of a hip-hop song written in character as Twilight Sparkle in her stage persona ([note 15](#)). The community quickly seethed with excited responses including the "Twililicious" image by John Joseco released on March 19 (figure 19). There was some confusion and debate within the community about which element had come first—the artwork from Joseco, or Strong's tweet—and there was great excitement at early speculation that she had made the post in direct response to the artwork in an example of true cocreation. However, although the relationship actually moved the other way, Strong has since adopted Joseco's "Twililicious" as the background image to her Twitter account—a serious coup for both social capital in the digi-gratis economy and the idea that the MLP:FIM paratext is a collaborative effort.



Figure 19. "Twililicious" by John Joseco (2012). [[View larger image](#).]

[5.2] Perhaps one of the more dramatic embraces of noncommercial benefits of the MLP:FIM digi-gratis economy is the #LasPegAssist fund-raising effort in the wake of the MLP:FIM Unicon convention in 2013. The convention focused on MLP:FIM fandom and invited voice artists and other members of the creative team as paid guests, along with raising money for various charities. Whether as a deliberate scam or simple incompetence, the convention collapsed financially. No money was paid to any of the guests for their attendance, none of the money raised and earmarked for charities was passed on, and many fans were financially stung as the hotel recouped funds by charging for what would otherwise have been compensated rooms. The #LasPegAssist hashtag was created on Twitter when members of the MLP:FIM community began raising money to pay for the guests left unpaid and out of pocket for travel, food, and hotel costs, and it snowballed as more members of the community became involved. What had begun as emergency efforts focused on gathering funds for the convention's headlining guests expanded in scope, and the guests from the creative team themselves began to participate. They suggested that because their emergency had been solved as a priority by the community's response, the effort could now refocus around the charities, vendors, and fans likewise left out of pocket. Tara Strong and John de Lancie waived the appearance fee they were each due, writers Meghan McCarthy and Amy Keating Rogers offered up the shirts off their own backs for auction to contribute to the effort, and other members of the creative team began raising awareness about the fund-raising and donating behind-the-scenes merchandise and production notes. By the time #LasPegAssist closed, the collective MLP:FIM community had raised nearly \$20,000, and everyone disadvantaged by the collapse of the convention—including charities—had received money equivalent to what they were owed ([note 16](#)). It is telling that the thank-you notes on the #LasPegAssist Web page use people's online handles: the appreciation that matters comes from within the community.

[5.3] The #LasPegAssist effort showcases the kind of fund-raising normally seen in a campaign to save a television show from cancellation or to otherwise harness the spending power of a fan base for a particular commercial purpose. In this case, the motivation many people mentioned was a refusal to see MLP:FIM conventions and fandom at large tainted by financially harming those who had given their time and personal capital as creators to the cause. The fans banded together to raise emergency funds for the creators, after which the creators began helping the fund-raising effort to assist disadvantaged fans. In the process, they collectively auctioned items worth a great deal of capital within the digi-gratis economy. Ultimately, fans could help fans and at the same time collect some of that capital for themselves.

[5.4] In stark comparison to the controversy surrounding Derpy Hooves, this event served to profoundly reinforce the perception of a cocreative community encompassing

both the creators and fans of MLP:FIM (Pixelkitties 2013b). The pride and investment in community spirit surrounding it has been significant, even as the effort itself displayed the same tiering and affective distinctions as the wider fandom itself.

6. Conclusion

[6.1] The modes of engagement that shape the community experience of MLP:FIM have a great deal of experiential overlap with those found in ARG communities.

[6.2] The affective register that makes the experience of engaging with MLP:FIM distinctive is sharing it with a broader community, even when members are not present; and feeling a connection to the show's creators in collaborating on a project still under development that everyone is invested in. The text and paratext combine to provide a large number of distinct and independent points of entry into engaging with the series that are analogous to the rabbit holes found in ARGs, each of which will shape the impression and mode of engagement that a viewer will carry into the show. Just as with ARGs, the community is made up of multiple modes of distinctive experiential engagement that individuals move between over time.

[6.3] When I say that considering MLP:FIM and the community surrounding it through the lens of an ARG produces useful analytical insights, I do not mean that it is unique in this regard; considering media forms and franchises in terms of how their modes of engagement shape experience will open many productive doors in comparing texts that would not outwardly seem to be similar. This is an approach I intend to explore further in future work.

7. Acknowledgments

[7.1] Many thanks to Jason Gill for tireless efforts in locating relevant developments within MLP:FIM fan culture. Thanks also to Robert Harris of DustyOldBooks.net for help sourcing academic sources on brony culture, and to the denizens of RPG.net's "Other Media" forum for supplying an endless stream of examples and useful material.

[7.2] Additionally, Mark Stewart, Dr. Suzanne Woodward, and Dr. Laurence Simmons of the film, television and media studies department of the University of Auckland kindly offered assistance in providing access to university resources during the review phase, which is greatly appreciated.

8. Notes

1. Affective investment occurs within a "Heideggerian world-of-concern," which Lars Nyre defines as a space shaped by human engagement, rather than an objective space (2007, 26). Nyre argues that an objective space is everything present within an environment, such as all of the furniture and fittings within a lecture theater, whereas a world of concern is grounded in contextual relevance. In the context of a seminar, a world of concern would involve the speaker, the audience, and the subject at hand, while the majority of the room fittings would remain irrelevant or uninvolved (Veale 2012a, 2012b).

2. A great deal of interesting work is being written and published regarding the bronny phenomenon and the fact that MLP:FIM, a show marketed toward young girls and their mothers, has nonetheless collected a vociferous and energetic audience of adult men (see Robertson 2013); the word *brony* is itself a portmanteau of "bro" and "pony." However, as important as this audience and its representation is, it is also not unproblematic. Derek Johnson (2013) argues that the near-exclusive focus on bronies as adult heterosexual men leads to an erasure of the contributions to the community made by teenagers, women, and those on the LGBTQ spectrum because their work is attributed to the discursively masculine whole (see also Russo 2012). The marginalization of women in fan communities is hardly unique to the MLP:FIM phenomenon, though the bronny phenomenon is one of the more visible recent examples. Bertha Chin notes a tendency within *The X-Files* (1993–2002) fandom to pathologize unprofessional fans as "overly-emotional fangirls"—note the term *girls* (2013, 95, 98). Likewise, Suzanne Scott (2009) argues that the modes of engagement favored by female fans are out of favor with the media industry, which encourages male fans, to the detriment of women and their contributions to fan communities. I argue that this form of discursive erasure is also relevant to the ARG context, given that women have been and are now heavily represented in ARG communities and have made important contributions to their development; yet there is a tendency to consider ARGs as skewing toward male demographics. Possibly the simplest and fairest definition of a bronny is someone older than a child who shows a sincere enjoyment of MLP:FIM and potentially its paratext, while aware—possibly playfully aware—of the ironies involved with being coded as male or otherwise outside the target market for the show. Of course, given the masculine framing of bronny itself, use of the term is hardly neutral or without tensions.

3. It also demonstrates that the fandom is not overly bounded, in that both the fans and the creators are putting time and energy into enjoying and celebrating MLP:FIM, often at the same time as or through the lens of wider popular media. None of these people are just engaging with MLP:FIM; many are playing with conceptual mash-ups and points of inspiration that bridge things like MLP:FIM and *Breaking Bad* (2008–13), or any other fandom that catches their fancy.

4. That is, someone outside the contextual world of concern for affective engagement.

5. Although MLP:FIM does not fit Jason Mittell's definition of "narrative complexity" because it returns to plot closure at the end of each episode (2006, 32), it does belong to a collection of modern television series that I argue qualify as experientially or at least diegetically complex. Even while returning to a point of narrative closure, the storytelling context continually evolves through many background details, which the audience is aware of. *Gravity Falls* (2012–) is careful to retain any changes to its environment between episodes and the characters evolve over time, despite reaching narrative closure at the end of each episode; *Adventure Time* (2010–) features rich world building and character development in the background, where the audience can put the pieces together even while the protagonists themselves don't notice. It's also interesting that all three of these shows are pitched at a paired demographic—both children and adults who have a particular sense of humor. I intend to explore this concept in future work.

6. See Misha Kavka's concept of the "cusp formation" for understanding the role of the television set as providing a bridge for becoming aware of other people's investment in reality television alongside one's own (2008, 33–34).

7. See "Possible Crysis 3 Pony Reference?"
(<http://www.equestriadaily.com/2013/03/nightly-roundup-603.html>).

8. It is interesting that fan-generated material is seen as being sufficiently important to community investment with MLP:FIM that Hasbro is taking a quite hands-off approach to fan-created merchandise. This includes ignoring erotica based on the brand. More information on the *My Little Sweetheart* book is available online, at <http://www.lulu.com/shop/mega-sweet/my-little-sweetheart/paperback/product-20490740.html> and <http://megasweet.deviantart.com/art/My-Little-Sweetheart-288234847>.

9. This is at odds with Matt Hills's (2002) understanding that affective play is uncompetitive.

10. It is no accident that almost all ARGs to date have had either the goal of promoting a particular product—albeit obliquely—or have been commercial products themselves (Veale 2012a).

11. Derek Johnson (2013) has presented an extensive critical examination of the extent to which the MLP:FIM community was actually responsible for Derpy. He argues that there are significant discursive tensions involved: at different points, people involved with the production of the show claimed both that the fans "created" Derpy and that fans had very little impact on the development of the series, depending on

which response seemed appropriate at the time. Certainly he suggests that neither option is a neutral claim and that each was being leveraged for different purposes at different times. Regardless of these fundamental tensions, many of those engaging with the MLP:FIM community and paratext have spoken of a perception of cocreative engagement that shaped how they experienced the series.

12. The word *derp* appears to have either originated from or been popularized by the 1998 movie *BASEketball* by *South Park* creators Trey Parker and Matt Stone (<http://nymag.com/daily/intelligencer/2013/06/derp-meaning-origin.html>).

13. See the Equestria Daily article "Keep Calm and Trot On" (<http://www.equestriadaily.com/2013/05/an-appeal-to-fandom-keep-calm-and-trot.html>). Of course, this appeal to fandom to be reasonable is also not a neutral one. As Bertha Chin (2013) has noted, subgroups within fandom will attempt to police the wider fandom in an attempt to foster professionalism, particularly when a lack of professionalism might harm the relationship between that subgroup and the creators.

14. More information available online (<http://www.polygon.com/2013/3/4/4062264/my-little-pony-creator-to-help-with-development-of-fighting-is-magic>).

15. Available at Twitter (<https://twitter.com/tarastrong/status/177515719842480129>), March 7, 2012.

16. More information is available at #LasPegAssist (<http://www.laspegassist.com/>).

9. Works cited

Booth, Paul. 2010. *Digital Fandom: New Media Studies*. New York: Peter Lang.

Chin, Bertha. 2013. "The Fan-Media Producer Collaboration: How Fan Relationships Are Managed in a Post-series *X-Files* Fandom." *Science Fiction Film and Television* 6 (1): 87–99. <http://dx.doi.org/10.3828/sfftv.2013.8>.

Dena, Christy. 2008. "Emerging Participatory Culture Practices: Player-Created Tiers in Alternate Reality Games." *Convergence* 14 (1): 41–57.
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/1354856507084418>.

Genette, Gerard. 1997. *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation*. Translated by Jane E. Lewin. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511549373>.

Hills, Matt. 2002. *Fan Cultures*. London: Routledge.

Johnson, Derek. 2013. "Participation Is Magic: Collaboration, Authorial Legitimacy, and the Audience Function." In *A Companion to Media Authorship*, edited by Jonathan Gray and Derek Johnson, 133–57. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell.

Joseco, John. 2012. "Twililicious." *deviantART*, March 9.
<http://johnjoseco.deviantart.com/art/Twililicious-289444245>.

Kavka, Misha. 2008. *Reality Television, Affect, and Intimacy: Reality Matters*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Kim, Jeffrey, Elan Lee, Timothy Thomas, and Caroline Dombrowski. 2009. "Storytelling in New Media: The Case of Alternate Reality Games, 2001–2009." *First Monday* 14 (6).
<http://dx.doi.org/10.5210/fm.v14i6.2484>.

McGonigal, Jane. 2003. "'This Is Not a Game': Immersive Aesthetics and Collective Play." In *Proceedings of the Fifth International Digital Arts and Culture Conference*. Melbourne, Australia: RMIT.

Meer, Alec. 2010a. "Is This Portal 2?" *Rock, Paper, Shotgun*, March 2.
<http://www.rockpapershotgun.com/2010/03/02/is-this-portal-2/>.

Meer, Alec. 2010b. "Portal: There's Something Going On..." *Rock, Paper, Shotgun*, March 2. <http://www.rockpapershotgun.com/2010/03/02/portal-theres-something-going-on/>.

Meer, Alec. 2010c. "Valve Won't Let Us Sleep: Portal Updates." *Rock, Paper, Shotgun*, March 3. <http://www.rockpapershotgun.com/2010/03/03/valve-wont-let-us-sleep-portal-updates/>.

Mittell, Jason. 2006. "Narrative Complexity in Contemporary American Television." *Velvet Light Trap* 58 (1): 29–40. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1353/vlt.2006.0032>.

Mittell, Jason. 2009a. "Lost in a Great Story: Evaluation in Narrative Television (and Television Studies)." In *Reading "Lost": Perspectives on a Hit Television Show*, edited by Roberta Pearson, 119–38. London: I. B. Tauris.

Mittell, Jason. 2009b. "Sites of Participation: Wiki Fandom and the Case of Lostpedia." *Transformative Works and Cultures*, no. 3. <http://dx.doi.org/10.3983/twc.2009.0118>.

Nyre, Lars. 2007. "What Happens When I Turn On the TV Set?" *Westminster Papers in Communication and Culture* 4 (2): 24–35.
http://www.westminster.ac.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0016/20086/003WPCC-VolFour-NoTwo-Lars_Nyre.pdf.

- Pixelkitties. 2013a. Untitled Tumblr post, January 30.
<http://pixelkitties.tumblr.com/post/41891667888/controversy-is-once-again-brewing-among-fans-of>.
- Pixelkitties. 2013b. Untitled Tumblr post, February 28.
<http://pixelkitties.tumblr.com/post/44224723769/in-the-annals-huh-hehheh-of-sunday-afternoon>.
- Rheingold, Howard. 1993. *The Virtual Community: Homesteading on the Electronic Frontier*. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.
- Robertson, Venetia Laura Delano. 2013. "Of Ponies and Men—*My Little Pony: Friendship Is Magic* and the Brony Fandom." *International Journal of Cultural Studies*, January 3. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/1367877912464368>.
- Russo, Julie Levin. 2012. "Queer Labor? Online Workers in the Television Factory." Paper presented at Marxism and New Media Conference, Durham, NC, February 17.
- Scott, Suzanne. 2009. "Repackaging Fan Culture: The Regifting Economy of Ancillary Content Models." *Transformative Works and Cultures*, no. 3.
<http://dx.doi.org/10.3983/twc.2009.0150>.
- Szulborski, Dave. 2005a. *This Is Not a Game: A Guide to Alternate Reality Gaming*. Privately published.
- Szulborski, Dave. 2005b. *Through the Rabbit Hole: A Beginner's Guide to Playing Alternate Reality Games*. Privately published.
- TheArtrix. 2011. "Friendship Is Survival." deviantART, September 8.
<http://theartrix.deviantart.com/art/Friendship-is-Survival-257447332>.
- Veale, Kevin. 2011. "Making Science Fiction Personal: Videogames and Inter-affective Storytelling." In "The Projected and Prophetic: Humanity in Cyberspace, Cyberspace and Science Fiction," edited by Jordan J. Copeland, special issue, *Critical Issues* 176:41–49. <https://www.interdisciplinarypress.net/my-cart/ebooks/ethos-and-modern-life/the-projected-and-prophetic>.
- Veale, Kevin. 2012a. "Comparing Stories: How Textual Structure Shapes Affective Experience in New Media." PhD diss., University of Auckland.
- Veale, Kevin. 2012b. "'Interactive Cinema' Is an Oxymoron, but May Not Always Be." *Game Studies* 12 (1). <http://gamestudies.org/1201/articles/veale>.

Watson, Jeff. 2010. "Fandom Squared: Web 2.0 and Fannish Production." *Transformative Works and Cultures*, no. 5. <http://dx.doi.org/10.3983/twc.2010.0218>.

Symposium

So bad it's good: The *kuso* aesthetic in *Troll 2*

Whitney Phillips

New York University, New York City, New York, United States

[0.1] *Abstract*—The *kuso* (shitty games) aesthetic draws from and complicates notions of camp and antifandom to provide a way to understand the emotional appeal of bad content.

[0.2] *Keywords*—Antifan; B movie; Camp; Cult film; Parody; Satire

Phillips, Whitney. 2013. "So Bad It's Good: The *Kuso* Aesthetic in *Troll 2*." *Transformative Works and Cultures*, no. 14.
<http://dx.doi.org/10.3983/twc.2013.0480>.

1. Introduction

[1.1] I like terrible things. My favorite movies, for example, are not "good" movies; my favorite movies, a pantheon of weirdness that includes *Troll 2* (1990), *The Room* (2003), and *Jack Frost* (1997's romp with a mutant killer snowman, not the 1998 Disney family film of the same name), are breathtakingly bad. They feature lines of dialogue like "Fucker's a snowman!" (from *Jack Frost*) and "I did naht hit her, it's naht true, it's bullshit, I did naht hit her...*I did naht*. Oh hi, Mark!" (from Tommy Wiseau's antimasterpiece *The Room*). The same holds for my favorite television shows, books, art, and whatever else. Poorly made, strange, and generally awful things make me happy, and they have for as long as I can remember.

[1.2] Although my impulse to transpose bad with good might strike some people as odd, I am not alone. There exists an entire genre of "so bad it's good" B-movie fandom. The aesthetic is also pervasive within Internet culture circles; it can be seen in everything from broken memes (that is, variations of a popular meme that get all the details laughably wrong), video aggregators like the Web site Everything Is Terrible! (<http://www.everythingisterrible.com/>), which spotlights an alphabetized index of comically strange videos, and the online obsession with failure generally, which worships at the altar of ineptitude and technological incompetence. In the following essay, I will both pull from and complicate notions of camp, antifandom, and the Japanese term *kuso* in order to provide a conceptual framework for understanding the emotional appeal of bad content. Furthermore, I will discuss the ways in which

social and economic privilege undergirds the impulse to declare something so bad, it's good.

2. Not quite camp

[2.1] Even though I have long been a fan of questionable content, I often struggle to describe the nature of my interest. Certain aspects of Susan Sontag's (1964) analysis of camp capture the "so bad it's good" spirit: for example, her insistence that camp is "the love of the exaggerated, the 'off'" (279) as well as her assertion that the essential element of pure camp is seriousness. But Sontag's further insistence that the hallmark of camp is extravagance, flamboyance, and unselfconscious garishness—what Sontag describes as "dandyism in the age of mass culture" (289)—doesn't quite line up with the ultimately antagonistic pleasures of watching a film or television show that falls short of its own ambitions. Contrary to the camp aesthetic, which Sontag insists is "above all, a mode of enjoyment, of appreciation—not a judgment" (291), gleeful engagement with poorly made content is inherently judgmental. Bad movies may have a great deal of overlap with camp, and certainly they adhere to Sontag's final statement that camp is good because it's awful (except, as Sontag subsequently insists, when it isn't), but I am reluctant to say that a "so bad it's good" movie is camp—at least not without major qualifications.

[2.2] Similarly, the frequent, usually dismissive assertion that this sort of engagement is ironic (that is, performative or otherwise disingenuous) also fails to account for the genuine pleasure found in terrible things. Although their amusement is derived at least in part from mocking the product of another person's labor, fans of this ilk genuinely like the texts they ridicule. This may be an odd sort of affinity, but the emotional connection is every bit as strong as more conventional forms of fan engagement. Consequently, even the term *antifan* falls short. These are not people who love to hate a given text. These are people who love to love it, but for all the wrong reasons—reasons that, if repeated to the content producer, would likely be the source of some confusion, if not outright distress: "You were horrible in that film—I loved it!" or "You are a terrible writer—don't ever change!" or "I love how everything you do is the worst!"

[2.3] Although there are no perfect linguistic matches in English—curious, considering how pervasive these behaviors are on the English-speaking Internet—one Japanese term provides a helpful behavioral analog: *kuso*. The term *kuso-ge*, "shitty games," was originally deployed as an enthusiastic response to incompetent video game design ("Kuso" 2010). The term has since been adopted by the Chinese-language Web as an efficient response to content that in English would variously be described as camp, kitsch, and irony. Used as an interjection, the term essentially

means, "Ha ha, awesome, this is terrible." And that, in a nutshell, is what it means to love bad content. Ha ha, awesome, this is terrible. *Kuso!*

3. "Nilbog" is "goblin" spelled backward

[3.1] Fan responses to 1990's *Troll 2*—a film that is neither a sequel nor a film about trolls—provide a shining example of the *kuso* response. The brainchild of Italian husband-and-wife team Claudio Fragasso and Rosella Drudi, the film, which was retitled in postproduction to *Troll 2* in a rather perplexing attempt to capitalize on the meager and entirely unrelated success of 1986's *Troll*, focuses on a homicidal group of vegetarian goblins. In 95 minutes of screen time, the word *troll* is never uttered. The main protagonist of the film is Joshua Waits, who is warned by the ghost of his dead Grandpa Seth that Nilbog, the town to which the Waitses are traveling as part of a vacation home house swap, is overrun by "cruel, deformed forest dwellers, spiteful and impudent, vengeful, evil" goblins. As a result of their dietary restrictions, the goblins of Nilbog must first transform their victims into plant-human hybrids, a feat accomplished by tricking humans into ingesting what the goblin queen describes as a "concentration of all the vegetal properties of the earth": green frosting (figure 1).



Figure 1. Goblin queen Creedence Leonore Gielgud. Screen shot from *Troll 2* (1990).
[\[View larger image.\]](#)

[3.2] If the film's premise is absurd, then its production values, writing, editing, and acting are even more so. The film's numerous plot holes are filled in with bizarre dog-ate-my-homework explanations, and the actors almost always seem confused about what's happening in each scene. For example, smack in the middle of Holly Waits's infamous bathroom mirror dance routine (figure 2), otherwise omniscient Grandpa Seth appears in Holly's reflection, bellowing Joshua's name. As he sheepishly explains, he's still figuring out the layout of the new house, and he simply got the wrong room. In another strange scene, homosocial tagalong Arnold finds himself injured on the front steps of a building that is clearly a church, complete with steeple and arched

stained glass windows. "Let's go inside this house," Arnold's dying companion suggests. Arnold looks up at the building, befuddled.



Figure 2. Holly Waits's infamous dance scene. Screen shot from *Troll 2* (1990). [[View larger image.](#)]

[3.3] Even the goblins are inconsistent. Sometimes violent shape-shifters, sometimes oversexed Druidic witches, sometimes inanimate set pieces outfitted in potato sacks and hastily painted Halloween masks, the goblins in *Troll 2* can't seem to decide on their preferred MO. They vacillate between reducing their victims to mounds of green slime and transforming them into potted plants.

[3.4] Unsurprisingly, reviews of the film have been less than stellar. Consider the following invectives, collated at the movie review aggregator Web site Rotten Tomatoes (<http://www.rottentomatoes.com>), on which the film has a 0% approval rating:

[3.5] No description of it can quite contain its misguided ludicrousness or the way its infinite and varied sins against the traits of good cinema combine to produce one of the most uproarious unintentional comedies ever made. (Kendrick 2010)

[3.6] It is a marvel of ineptness, staging scene after scene of total implausibility without a single believable performance, and many lines of dialogue that pose an audacious disregard for coherence. (Taylor 2009)

[3.7] Even bad movies...usually stumble into a good moment or two or at least reveal a brief glimpse of the good intentions that led the filmmakers down the road to cinematic perfidy. *Troll 2*, however, is a disaster from start to finish. (Biodrowski 2010)

[3.8] Put simply, *Troll 2* is a bad movie. It is so bad, in fact, that the film was immortalized in a documentary, *Best Worst Movie* (2009), written and directed by Michael Stephenson, the actor who played Joshua Waits. In addition to profiling the cast and chronicling the film's difficult production (though producing an English-language film with an English-speaking cast, the Italian director, screenwriter, and film

crew spoke very little English), *Best Worst Movie* examines *Troll 2*'s growing and wildly enthusiastic fan base.

[3.9] Yes, fan base. Because in addition to being extraordinarily bad, the film has also proven to be extraordinarily beloved, as evidenced by nationwide *Troll 2* parties, sold-out midnight theater screenings, and extravagant fan art, including a fan-made *Troll 2* video game, *Troll 2* costumes, and, of course, *Troll 2* T-shirts. One fan even got a *Troll 2* tattoo—not in spite of the film's significant shortcomings, but because of them. As one fan succinctly explains of his first exposure to the film, "It was pure genius and joy and we watched it a second time right away," a statement followed by his friend's assertion that the film is "the worst movie ever made!" One fan remarks almost reverently that it is "perfectly bad," another notes that the film is a "glorious failure," and yet another, echoing this sentiment, says he and his friends "pass the DVD around like it's a Bible," concluding that they're "missionaries for *Troll 2*."

4. You have to know the rules to know (or care) when the rules have been broken

[4.1] In addition to providing a textbook example of the *kuso* response, fan reactions to *Troll 2* also reveal the inherent—if invisible—conservatism implied and in fact necessitated by this sort of engagement. Consider the aforementioned scene in which the hapless Arnold finds himself on the steps of a church. According to his vegetal-splattered companion, this structure is a house. But that's not what it is. Anyone even remotely familiar with American religious symbology would immediately realize that the structure is a house of worship, not a house of residence—transforming the statement (possibly the result of a translation error or location scouting mishap) into an inadvertent punch line. Of course, this joke only works if the viewer is able to recognize the iconic form of an American church. Without full and immediate knowledge of the convention, the viewer wouldn't—couldn't—recognize that it had been subverted.

[4.2] Although proponents of the "so bad it's good" aesthetic may appear to subvert the hegemonic meaning of a particular text by imposing some new or wholly unintended meaning (Hall [1973] 1980)—for example, by laughing at a statement or scene not intended to be comical—they adhere to larger and more pervasive cultural conventions that must remain intact for the subversion to function. In the case of *Troll 2*, these conventions have to do with the "correct" way to write, produce, cast, edit, and perform in a film. *Troll 2*'s scathing critical reviews echo this point, particularly James Kendrick's (2010) insistence that the film commits "infinite and varied sins against the traits of good cinema." A person who does not accept these conventions—which ultimately are arbitrary; they could be otherwise, but they are taken to be

natural and necessary—would have no reason to laugh at the glorious failure that is *Troll 2*. There would be nothing to laugh at.

[4.3] Of course, only those who have fully internalized the rules (about filmmaking, about television production, about video game design, about anything else to which these sorts of conventions may be affixed) will be invested in the degree to which they are followed. Not everyone has the access to the requisite materials, education, or time to pursue these types of leisure interests, nor the inclination to care one way or another. In this way, giddy engagement with "so bad it's good" content is as much an indication of privilege, my own privilege as a white middle-class American academic very much included, as it is an expression of a particular comedic aesthetic. In fact, I would argue that in this case, privilege and *kuso* are one and the same. You can't have the latter without a certain degree of the former—a point that brings into sudden political focus the overwhelming whiteness of the fan audiences profiled in *Best Worst Movie*.

5. Conclusion

[5.1] Why does the *kuso* aesthetic matter? First, it pushes against the borders of fandom itself. This sort of engagement may not behave like "normal" fandom, but it is a kind of fandom—one that calls into question where the line of normalcy can or should be drawn. Second, it challenges the seemingly straightforward distinction between like and dislike, hegemonic and counterhegemonic readings, fan and not-fan, suggesting that our clear-cut definitions are in practice anything but. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, it reminds us that the things we like are directly and inextricably connected to our individual social circumstances. Liking things is always political in that it is always informed by larger and more complicated cultural forces, thus casting unexpected but revealing significance over the giddy declaration, "Ha ha, awesome, this is terrible."

6. Works cited

Best Worst Movie. 2009. Directed by Michael Stephenson. DVD. Magic Stone Productions.

Biodrowski, Steve. 2010. "Troll 2 Review." *Cinefastique*, August 16.
<http://cinefantastiqueonline.com/2010/08/troll-2-review/>.

Hall, Stuart. (1973) 1980. "Encoding/Decoding." In *Culture, Media, Language: Working Papers in Cultural Studies, 1972–1979*, edited by Stuart Hall, Dorothy Hobson, Andrew Lowe, and Paul Willis, 128–38. London: Hutchinson.

Jack Frost. 1996. Directed by Michael Cooney. DVD. Frost Bite Films.

Kendrick, James. 2010. "Troll 2 Review." *Qnetwork*, October 10.
<http://www.qnetwork.com/index.php?page=review&id=2461>.

"Kuso." 2010. *Know Your Meme*.
<http://knowyourmeme.com/memes/subcultures/kuso>.

The Room. 2003. Directed by Tommy Wiseau. DVD. Wiseau-Films.

Sontag, Susan. 1964. "Notes on Camp." In *Against Interpretation and Other Essays*, 275–92. New York: Picador.

Taylor, Rumsey. 2009. "Troll 2 Review." *Not Coming to a Theatre Near You*, March 23.
<http://www.notcoming.com/reviews/troll2/>.

Troll 2. 1990. Directed by Claudio Fragasso. DVD. Fimirage Productions.

Troll 2. *Rotten Tomatoes*. <http://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/troll-2/>.

Symposium

Translation, interpretation, fan fiction: A continuum of meaning production

Shannon K. Farley

University of Massachusetts, Amherst, Massachusetts, United States

[0.1] *Abstract*—By using the arguments of Maria Tymoczko to enlarge the definition of translation and of Rosemary Arrojo to draw a parallel between the struggle between author and translator and creator and fic writer, I argue that translation studies is a fruitful way to theorize fan fiction and other transformative fan works.

[0.2] *Keywords*—Rosemary Arrojo; Maria Tymoczko

Farley, Shannon K. 2013. "Translation, Interpretation, Fan Fiction: A Continuum of Meaning Production." *Transformative Works and Cultures*, no. 14.
<http://dx.doi.org/10.3983/twc.2013.0517>.

1. Redefining translation

[1.1] *Translation* is a word that is regularly used in ways other than what translation scholars refer to as interlingual translation, or translation between two different verbal sign systems. We talk about translating concepts to simpler diction, or about studying translating into good grades; we even have "Obama's Anger Translator," a skit on the *Key & Peele* show on Comedy Central (<http://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLD7nPL1U-R5q1FaNZIXWbRJdummbcksUd>). Translation is already accepted as being more than just interlingual, even among those who have never heard of translation theory. In translation studies, many of us are working on enlarging the field to not only include conceptualizations of translation that go beyond traditional, Eurocentric variations on literal meaning transfer. Maria Tymoczko challenges these Western modes of defining translation, highlighting the "cultural equivalents of translation" such as *rupantar* (to change in form) and *anuvad* (speaking after) in India, or *tarjama* (definition) in Arabic, or *tapia* and *kowa* in Igbo, both of which mean a variation of "break apart and tell again" (2007, 68–71). Even if one doesn't think of writing fan fiction as a form of translating, it's hard not to agree that it constitutes a deconstruction and a retelling.

[1.2] Further, both translators and fan fiction writers have been subject to cries of "thief" and "traitor" as they practice their art. Rosemary Arrojo (2002) theorizes the struggle between the author of a work and its translator in terms that are very familiar to writers of fan fiction who have been served with DMCA notices by the authors of their beloved source texts. She spends some time with Kafka's "Der Bau" (*The Burrow*; 1931), in which an unnamed animal constructs an underground burrow but is filled with "recurring doubts regarding the actual composition of his work and his painful obsession to create a totally flawless structure, an object that could be absolutely protected from invasion and deconstruction" (2002, 66). The conclusion of Arrojo's reading of Kafka's story is meant to be an argument for translation as a legitimate act of interpretation, but it is just as easily (if not more easily) read as an argument for fan fiction as the same:

[1.3] If the construction of a text/labyrinth is inevitably related to revision and reinterpretation, forever resisting any possibility of completion or perfect closure, we find the creating animal painfully divided between his human condition, which binds him to the provisional and the finite, and his desire to be divine, that is, to be the totalitarian, sole master of truth and fate. As a dazzling illustration of such a division, Kafka's character reflects the pathos of every author and of every interpreter, inevitably torn between the desire to control and to forever imprison meaning, and the human condition, which subjects both writers and interpreters to an endless exercise of meaning production. (69)

[1.4] Who controls meaning? Authors or readers? Creators or translators? Show runners or fandom?

[1.5] Arrojo goes on to discuss Dezső Kosztolányi's "The Kleptomaniac Translator." Kosztolányi, a translator himself (from English into Hungarian), writes about the struggle between the creator of a mediocre original text and a talented translator who improves upon it with his translation. Gallus, the kleptomaniac translator of the title, "steals" objects from the text he is translating by leaving them out of his translation. Arrojo highlights the way in which this story "epitomizes ... the widespread disregard for translation as both a theoretical issue and a legitimate profession" (2002, 77). One is again reminded of the ways in which fandom is frequently denigrated as an illegitimate and even illegal hobby. While Kosztolányi's intent was clearly ironic—by demonstrating how ridiculous it was to call a writer a thief on account of their leaving objects out of a translation, he highlights the ridiculousness of fighting over the interpretation of any given text—it is actually beyond feasible and into the realm of likely that a writer of fan fiction will at some point be accused of thievery. Arrojo concludes that texts as objects are "the inevitable result of a comprehensive, incessant

process of rewriting that is forever reconstituting them in difference and in change" (65). Arrojo wants to apply this notion to translation specifically, but she does not rule out other forms of interpretation. Just as there is no true or definite interpretation of a text, there is no true or definite form of interpretation.

2. Fic writer as translator

[2.1] Translation is, of course, not the only way to theorize fic writing. But it is a way that works for me, and a way that I think is fruitful and that has rich potential for discussing the intent, strategy, and reception of interpretive fan work. I've been translating for longer than I've been writing fan fiction. As a classics major, and later as a master's student in comparative literature who was translating Euripides' *Bakkhai* as my thesis, I would get into a groove where I knew just what the source text was trying to express, and I knew exactly how I wanted to express it in my translation. Further, I had a specific feminist and postcolonial argument to make about the reactionary translations I had seen historically fear and denigrate Dionysos and his *choros* of *Bakkhai*. My translation was more than a word-for-word expression of the text; it was an interpretive argument.

[2.2] When I began to think about dissertation topics, my head was full of translation studies and the ways in which scholars such as Maria Tymoczko had been enlarging the definition of translation in their own work. A seminal essay that I use when teaching translation theory, Roman Jakobson's "On Linguistic Aspects of Translation" (1959), posits that there are three different kinds of translation: interlingual, intralingual, and intersemiotic. Interlingual translation is what most of us think of as just translation: transferring words from one distinct language into another. Intralingual translation is a transfer of source text from one sign system to another, but within the same language. For example, updating the language and setting of one of Shakespeare's plays (*West Side Story*, *10 Things I Hate About You*) would be an example of intralingual translation. Finally, intersemiotic translation is when a text is transferred from one distinct sign system to another. *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* (LBD), in which the story of *Pride and Prejudice* is told through the medium of Lizzie's vlogs on YouTube (<http://www.youtube.com/user/LizzieBennet>), is a great example of intersemiotic translation.

Video 1. Episode 6 is an especially good introduction to the intersemiotic translation that *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* engages in, with Lizzie literally giving us her personal interpretation of Darcy and their first impressions of each other.

[2.3] Anyone who's found herself pointing out that LBD basically amounts to *Pride and Prejudice* fan fic might be able to predict the next step in this argument.

Translation theorist André Lefevere (1992) argues that most people know most of what they know about canonical literature because of rewrites, not because they're intimately familiar with the source texts. Lefevere includes anthologies, criticism, adaptations, and of course translation as rewritings. To this I would add fan fiction. I theorize fan fiction as a form of translation, and I use aspects of translation theory to analyze fan fiction.

3. Translator as fic writer

[3.1] But not every writer of fan fiction considers what she is doing to be a form of translation, even if she does consider it a rewriting. Each writer has her own process and her own metacognition about what she is doing. When I began to finally stick my toe into the writing side of fandom 3 years ago, I found myself using the same mode of writing that I use when I translate: I read a fair amount of the existing fic to make sure that I actually have something new to say, I rwatch/reread the source material, I frequently rewrite scenes that already exist in canon in order to graft on my own additions seamlessly, and I make explicit my own interpretation of certain scenes in the versions I write.

[3.2] Let me discuss one specific example to further demonstrate the parallel between writing fic and translating. My first piece of fan fiction was written for the

Yuletide fic exchange (<http://archiveofourown.org/collections/yuletide>) and was a crossover between Homer and fairy-tale fandoms. I chose to offer these particular fandoms not because I knew them well (there were plenty of other fandoms that could have fit that bill), but because I had already translated within them. I explicitly translated Homer as part of my undergraduate degree in classics, and I have translated fairy tales and folklore for classrooms full of students for over 15 years. It's an oral translation, but as a rerendering of the text, it's still valid. As a first-time Yuletider and a first-time fic writer, I felt that this familiarity with the voice and language of the source texts was essential to my success.

[3.3] I had a particular interpretation in mind: a feminist retelling of the life of Helen of Troy, following the frame of Sleeping Beauty. I felt strongly that my retelling of Homer needed to keep its Greek flavor, just as I made sure to foreignize my translation of the *Bakkhai* enough to remind modern Anglophone readers that it's not really theirs, even as we consider all of the literature and culture of ancient Greece to comprise the Western canon. So I chose to leave particular potent concepts in the untransliterated Greek language, including the title of the fic. I quoted a line from Euripides—again in untransliterated Greek—as the epigraph of the fic. I included the Greek words τίμη, κάλλιστη, and ἔρος within the fic. And while I did not write the names of Greek epic characters in untransliterated Greek, I made a point to spell their names in exact transliterations, not in the Latin tradition: Hektor, not Hector; Akhaians, not Achaeans. These are choices I make when I translate Greek texts as well, for the purposes of retaining their Greekness and resisting the romanizing influence. When I wrote in Helen's voice, I found myself structuring my syntax in much the same way I do when I am translating Greek, even though there was not a specific source text that I was translating word for word. It was Homeric, but not Homer's text rerendered. It was Homeric fan fiction, but to me it felt like a translation.

4. Conclusion

[4.1] From the point of view of reader-centered literary theory, there is little difference between the interpretive activity of translating and the interpretive activity of writing fan fiction. Lefevere argues that rewriters are "responsible for the general reception and survival of works of literature among non-professional readers, who constitute the great majority of readers in our global culture" (1992, 1). I would argue that by this he means that it is the rewritings of literature that ensure its afterlife, just as Walter Benjamin argues in "Task of the Translator" ([1923] 1969). Using translation theory as the discursive model when discussing rewritings such as criticism, anthologizing, abridging, translating, and creating fan works can offer a rich field of intertextual study and provide many useful tools for ultimately arguing for the literary merits of fan fiction.

5. Works cited

- Arrojo, Rosemary. 2002. "Writing, Interpreting, and the Power Struggle for the Control of Meaning: Scenes from Kafka, Borges, and Kosztolányi." In *Translation and Power*, edited by Maria Tymoczko and Edwin Gentzler, 63–79. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press.
- Benjamin, Walter. (1923) 1969. "Task of the Translator: An Introduction to the Translation of Baudelaire's *Tableaux parisiens*." In *Illuminations*, edited by Hannah Arendt, 69–82. Translated by Harry Zohn. New York: Schocken Books.
- Jakobson, Roman. 1959. "On Linguistic Aspects of Translation." In *On Translation*, edited by Reuben A. Brower, 232–39. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Lefevere, André. 1992. *Translation, Rewriting, and the Manipulation of Literary Fame*. London: Routledge.
- Tymoczko, Maria. 2007. *Enlarging Translation, Empowering Translators*. Manchester, UK: St. Jerome Publications.

Symposium

Fan/dom: People, practices, and networks

Katherine E. Morrissey

University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, United States

[0.1] *Abstract*—The announcement of Kindle Worlds as open to writers of fan fiction provides an opening to discuss the field of fan studies in terms of fandom communities and individual self.

[0.2] *Keywords*—Fan communities; Fan networks; Fan practices; Fan studies; Fan work; Media studies; Methodology; Participatory culture; Social media

Morrissey, Katherine E. 2013. "Fan/dom: People, Practices, and Networks." *Transformative Works and Cultures*, no. 14.
<http://dx.doi.org/10.3983/twc.2013.0532>.

1. Introduction

[1.1] The announcement of Amazon's Kindle Worlds platform has launched another round of debate on the future of fans, fandom, and fan production. An e-publishing platform that allows authors to self-publish tie-in works to a selection of media franchises, Kindle Worlds describes itself as "a creative community where Worlds grow with each new story" (Amazon.com 2013b). Amazon's announcement picks up on the rhetoric of fans, calling these stories fan fiction and using terms like "creative community." Of course, in this version of fan culture the creative community's worlds are licensed, ownership of the stories is retained by the licensee, and permissible content is specified by a Terms of Service agreement.

[1.2] Is this the brave new future for fans? Maybe. Maybe not. Fans have certainly seen other efforts at monetizing fan fiction come and go. The popular (and fan-run) Archive of Our Own was inspired by large-scale fan outrage over FanLib, a 2008 attempt by two entrepreneurs at creating a for-profit fan fiction archive. However, in that instance the owners of FanLib, not fans, were making the profit. In contrast, Amazon positions Kindle Worlds as an opportunity for fans themselves to monetize their work. Where this will lead remains uncertain, but in a post-*Fifty Shades of Grey* world, fans and their creative work are getting a lot more industry attention. Many fans and academics are keeping a careful eye on the unfolding of current events.

[1.3] At a time when digitization and media convergence are changing so much within media culture, fan scholars need to ask themselves: Is fan studies in a position to thoroughly study and monitor these changes? In recent years, many scholars have observed tensions between scholars interested in fan communities and practices and those advocating instead for a focus on individual fans, their consumption, and modern identity. These tensions make it challenging for fan studies to fully attend to contemporary media shifts and the impact of these shifts on fans and fandom.

[1.4] The current interest in identity and the experiences of individual fans might be seen as part of an ongoing effort to expand the scope of fan studies. If early work on fans focused primarily on specific subsets of fan culture, a more individualized and diffuse view of fans certainly extends the field's scope. However, this does not mean that research into communities and practices can be left in fan studies' past. In our current moment, issues of power, agency, and representation within cultural production greatly need our focus. We need to be attentive to the ways that contemporary media technologies impact fan networks and fan production today. Earlier work on communities and practices has been criticized for being too specific and too narrow, but when has context not been crucial to the thorough study of media and culture? Studies of fans are studies of individuals, their practices, and their social networks, as well as of changing communication technologies. Only by studying fans and fandom at multiple levels—looking at fans as individuals, at their collective practices, and at the networks they create—can we more fully understand their positions within today's shifting media environment.

2. (De)historicizing fan studies

[2.1] The term "fan" once conjured up images of Star Trek conventions, Beatlemania, and Red Sox games. Today the term is used generally to indicate a myriad of individual tastes and preferences, from film noir to southern barbecue. Fans and fan engagement can be conceptualized very broadly, in ways that encapsulate a diverse array of objects, interests, and experiences. It is precisely because of this that fan studies faces such a challenge in its efforts to broadly theorize fans.

[2.2] Recently, fan studies has focused increasingly on the individual as fan and on the relationship between fandom and the self. For example, in *Fan Cultures* (2002), Matt Hills calls for increased attention to individuals' experiences as fans over the course of their lives. In *Fans: The Mirror of Consumption* (2005), Cornel Sandvoss looks to the relationship between fan consumption practices and the shaping of identity. This shift toward the individual and away from fan communities has also been described as a "move away from studying the community" and a "refocusing on the

relationship between fans' selves and their fan objects" (Busse and Hellekson 2006, 23; Gray, Sandvoss, and Harrington 2007, 8).

[2.3] If this is a refocusing, however, 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. In *Spreadable Media* (2013), Henry Jenkins, Sam Ford, and Joshua Green warn that we "focus too often on the value or sovereignty of the individual rather than the social networks through which audience members play active roles" (xiii). Jenkins, Ford, and Green are interested in a more general (and less fan-specific) spreading of media content, but fans and fan networks are still central to these conversations about audiences and media flows.

[2.4] 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. In their introduction to *Fandom* (2007), Jonathan Gray, Cornel Sandvoss, and C. Lee Harrington argue that fan studies has passed through three stages. First was an interest in audience communities' responses to popular media. Next came a complicating of the producer/consumer binary and a look at the ways that fans themselves can replicate cultural hierarchies. That led into the third, a contemporary interest in "fandom as part of the fabric of our everyday lives" (Gray, Sandvoss, and Harrington 2007, 9). If this is true, perhaps now it is time for a fourth stage, one in which we look at the different ways that fan experiences are distributed at both the individual and social levels. We should analyze fandom not only through individuals' media consumption, but also through fan networks and practices.

[2.5] A focus on fandom from multiple perspectives is critical, given ongoing challenges in conceptualizing what it is to be a fan. How do we attempt to process a concept that is simultaneously claimed as an activity, an identity, and a connection to others? Rather than seeing this confusion as a problem, perhaps it is more useful to see it as precisely the point. In trying to understand an aspect of media culture that we all, to some degree, engage in, 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. In our current moment, the media environment is undergoing dramatic changes. It is critical that fan studies continues to question the control of cultural production and consider the ways that today's media industries are working to accommodate both fans and fan practices.

3. Media industries and fans

[3.1] Whether public or private, individual or social, fan practices and networks are facilitated and shaped by communication technologies. In 1992, Henry Jenkins described a "weekend-only" version of fandom, accessible via weekend conventions and meet-ups (280). Shaped, in part, by the slower-moving, print-based systems these fans used to communicate, this world offered them a reprieve from their day-to-day lives. Ten years later, Matt Hills describes a very different, "just-in-time fandom," in which the "practices of fandom have become increasingly enmeshed within the rhythms and temporalities of broadcasting" (2002, 178). These changes were shaped by fans' adaptation to Internet-based communications that enabled more rapid communication among greater numbers of fans.

[3.2] Hills has cautioned against describing the changing temporality of fandom "as a techno-evolution towards fuller 'interactivity.'" He argues instead that "this eradication of the 'time-lag' works ever more insistently to discipline and regulate the opportunities for temporally-licensed 'feedback'" (2002, 179). Today, just over a decade after Hills outlined the just-in-time version of fandom, technical developments have further complicated fan temporalities and social practices. Today, viewers use digital recorders to delay viewing or circumvent broadcasts entirely by downloading content on their own. These shifts continue to affect fans' media engagement, their social networks, and their creative practices. In turn, media industries continue to restrategeze.

[3.3] Today, we see entertainment industries expanding their efforts at monetizing social networks online. Social media encourage users to identify as fans by guiding the writing of online profiles, suggesting interest categories, providing "like" buttons, and so on. These tools allow users to seek out others who share their interests while also helping companies collect user data, track online consumption patterns, and target advertising toward specific sets of users. Amazon's Kindle Worlds describes itself as a "platform that will enable any writer to create fan fiction...and earn royalties." Positioning the platform as a "creative community" and imagining intertextual "Worlds [that] grow with each new story," Amazon picks up on fans' longstanding interest in community and in collaborating to develop story networks (Amazon.com 2013a). This language is one example of media industries' increased view of fans as a target demographic. Initiatives like this represent ongoing attempts to reposition fan production within controlled production environments that then license and limit creative work.

[3.4] These industry efforts are part of longstanding attempts to control content and profits. Fan communities have dealt with takedown notices from corporate lawyers for decades. As fan practices have become more widespread, media industries have adapted in turn. Fan communities are increasingly taken up by media industries today

as target consumer groups. Fans are identified as preexisting audiences for products, and fan practices are selectively encouraged as part of industry marketing strategies.

[3.5] In our contemporary moment, media industries are particularly interested in shaping fan networks, fan engagement, and fan practices as a means of organizing and facilitating commerce. Just as academic scholars have used and defined the term "fan" to activate different objects of analysis, media industries today are strategically positioning fans and fandom to suit their own ends. Fan studies must therefore attend to the ways that fandom emerges as a negotiation between various cultural stakeholders at the individual and the group level.

[3.6] Focusing on identity and fan engagement on the individual level is an effective way of trying to trace the many different ways individuals experience media and process the world around them. However, there is a risk here of overemphasizing the individual and overlooking the significance of community and networks of practice. Fan studies needs to continue to consider both the significance of fans coming together to form collaborative networks and the technological conditions that currently affect this process. We are shaped as much by our encounters with others and by our practices as we are by our individual acts of consumption and our individual experiences of media texts.

[3.7] What kinds of fan communities are media industries interested in, and how are they engaging them? What kinds of practices do media industries seem the most comfortable with, and on what terms? How are fans responding to the increasing attention that fan networks and practices are receiving? These are just a few of the important questions that scholars of fan studies face today in our ongoing conversations about fans, fan practices, and fandom's role in shaping identity.

[3.8] In today's media environment, fans engage with media culture as producers, as consumers, and as part of social practice. This means that the questions above should not be reduced to classic producer/consumer or active/passive models of media consumption. However, we still need to think about questions of power, access, and representation. Fans are a part of a complicated web of cultural engagement and mediation. Access to cultural production and power within communication technologies is distributed at multiple levels and across various systems.

[3.9] Within fan studies, we need to remember that the act of being a fan unfolds across these structures, not outside or apart from them. Individuals are not simply reflected by media, they are constituted within it. Fan studies is, absolutely, a study of the modern self and its mediation, but the self is shaped by practice and within multiple social networks. Only by exploring fandom holistically, looking at its

communities, its practices, and its individuals, can fan studies continue to map out the role of fans and fandom in the shared production of contemporary culture and society.

4. Works cited

- Amazon.com. 2013a. "Amazon Publishing Introduces 'Kindle Worlds'..." Press release, May 22. <http://phx.corporate-ir.net/phoenix.zhtml?c=176060&p=irol-newsArticle&ID=1823219>.
- Amazon.com. 2013b. "Kindle Worlds for Authors." <http://www.amazon.com/gp/feature.html?ie=UTF8&docId=1001197431>.
- Busse, Kristina, and Karen Hellekson. 2006. "Work in Progress." Introduction to *Fan Fiction and Fan Communities in the Age of the Internet: New Essays*, edited by Karen Hellekson and Kristina Busse, 5–32. Jefferson, NC: McFarland.
- Gray, Jonathan, Cornel Sandvoss, and C. Lee Harrington. 2007. "Why Study Fans?" Introduction to *Fandom: Identities and Communities in a Mediated World*, edited by Jonathan Gray, Cornel Sandvoss, and C. Lee Harrington, 1–16. New York: New York University Press.
- Hills, Matthew. 2002. *Fan Cultures*. New York: Routledge.
- Jenkins, Henry. 1992. *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture*. New York: Routledge.
- Jenkins, Henry, Sam Ford, and Joshua Green. 2013. *Spreadable Media: Creating Value and Meaning in a Networked Culture*. New York: New York University Press.
- Sandvoss, Cornel. 2005. *Fans: The Mirror of Consumption*. Malden, MA: Polity.

Symposium

Fandom, public, commons

Mel Stanfill

University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, Illinois, United States

[0.1] *Abstract*—Fans, by creating for a public, also create a public: in producing for a community, they create one. Kindle Worlds and other attempts to monetize fan labor are problematic because the producer is attempting to invent a new mode at the expense of such fannish traditions.

[0.2] *Keywords*—Fan community; Fan fiction; Fan vid

Stanfill, Mel. 2013. "Fandom, Public, Commons." *Transformative Works and Cultures*, no. 14. <http://dx.doi.org/10.3983/twc.2013.0530>.

[1] Phenomena such as removing fan fiction from the Web and eliminating identifying markers to publish it as original fiction like E. L. James's *Fifty Shades of Grey* (2011) (known as pulling to publish or filing off the serial numbers) and Amazon.com's inauguration of Kindle Worlds as a commercial, licensed fan fiction platform have been celebrated by some in fandom and excoriated by others. One side champions the right of the individual fan author to profit from her labor; the other laments this insertion into capitalist exchange as undermining fan community and its noncommercial traditions. These arguments, in operating at different levels, are incommensurable and thus tend to come to an impasse. Adjudicating between these positions (and their variations) means working through the fact that intellectual property is two things: intellectual and property. That is, intellectual property is rooted in both a concept of authorship and one of ownership, and more particularly, as Leon Tan (2013, 67) points out, in the Western imaginary creative production is generally understood as the work of an individual and "underpinned by another concept, namely, individual property ownership." The relation of contemporary notions of creativity to property is not often recognized but is in fact vital to understand the system. Carol M. Rose (1998, 152) adds that "the author principle is easy": a demarcatable, single-person creation is much easier to legally wrangle than long-standing, incrementally produced traditions of less specifiable creators like villages. For these reasons, it is well entrenched in contemporary Western thinking that authorship is property and property is individual. However, here I use a framing that does not share these assumptions, that of indigenous intellectual property, to understand the implications of these tensions around commercialization.

[2] Despite the normative status of individualistic authorship and property, they map unevenly and uneasily onto fan production like vidding and fan fic. Some of the best previous examinations of the disjunctions of creative production from individualistic authorship and property ownership have looked at indigenous cultures. Because work on indigeneity is the location of this conversation—Rose (1998) gives the examples of the village, the folktale, and the plant cultivar, and Tan (2013) focuses on Maori tattoo—I am going to think through indigeneity to help me unpack what is happening with fandom; however, it must be acknowledged that the content of the two circumstances is ultimately not comparable: fans may be in some senses oppressed, but they've never been subjected to genocide. Thus, the idea of indigenous intellectual property is being used here structurally or metaphorically to illuminate a group with a different set of values than the dominant ones of capital and a different set of beliefs about ownership and individual creativity, which is devalued by the dominant culture both because of this difference in values (seen not as benign variation but inferiority) and because the people who have the different beliefs are not respected.

[3] To begin with the question of authorship, while there is certainly recognition of the individual creator in fan production, there is also usually an acknowledged context of collaboration through beta reading, feedback on in-progress work, fanon formation, and other practices. No act of authorship comes *ex nihilo*, of course, but the linkages are clearer and more directly acknowledged in fandom than in many other places where the dominant Romantic ideology of the lone author is stronger. The idea that the fan fic writer or vidder does not produce work alone but with help from the community is relatively uncontroversial.

[4] With respect to ownership, there is a similar divergence from the individualist, exclusionary model, with work shared freely among community members. Of course, there has always been a subset of fandom participants who have been out to benefit themselves, but that is not the norm in these creative communities and is sometimes even seen as antisocial rather than being valorized as rational, capitalist, Ayn Randian self-interest. Normative, within-community sharing tends to take the form of a gift economy (Hellekson 2009; Scott 2009), and the free circulation of creative work produces more communal and less individualistic formations that "do not look like property at all to us" (Rose 1998, 140), much as some indigenous forms of property have not been intelligible as ownership because they are internally understood as more like guardianship (Tan 2013).

[5] As fans create, then, they not only create for a public but also create a public; that is, in producing for such a community, they call one into existence. Publics, Michael Warner (2005) contends, come into being through being addressed by a circulated text; this is not an address to individual readers or interlocutors but to an

imagined body. This is, in M. Jacqui Alexander's (1994) phrase regarding citizenship, not just any body, but one with particular characteristics. Fan creative production like fiction and vidding is produced for an imagined audience of people who know not only the source text or texts but also—more importantly—people who understand what these forms are as a genre. This can be seen from the ways in which fan creators tend not to do the work of explaining how to interpret these things. When fans create, they do so with the understanding that the people who ultimately consume their work will understand that they are reworking popular cultural texts within a set of conventions of both authorship and ownership. Through addressing an imagined public with those specifications, that text performatively produces one. Fandom is defined as the group of people who understand what is being done in the fan text; "the circularity is essential to the phenomenon" (Warner 2005, 67). The public of fandom—or, to use Warner's terminology (since fandom is a minoritized position), the counterpublic of fandom—is produced through an ongoing circulation of these texts binding people together.

[6] The idea that the consumers of a fan text are those who understand its cultural milieu is not necessarily always a true assumption, of course, but the text speaks to an audience that shares its assumptions and then actual people negotiate the extent to which this hail means them ([note 1](#)). Importantly, because fandom as a counterpublic is performatively constituted each time a text makes a claim to its existence, each iteration can potentially differ from the last, as Judith Butler (1990) argues about gender. In the case of systems whose current forms are troublesome, such as gender, this opens up potential for improvement. With fandom, there is much less consensus over what should alter or stay the same, but there has nevertheless been change with regard to the nonindividual norms of authorship and ownership traced out above as traditional. People who have been in fandom for a while, and in several fandoms over time, have been exposed to and/or acculturated into that set of practices and values, but generational turnover is happening in the population that creates fan texts, and from my own limited and anecdotal experience, younger fan bases are often not within the tradition.

[7] Changes to fan creative practice are various and telling. Posting fiction that has not been beta read and is thus riddled with errors relating to both show canon and to writing is now routine. Leora Hadas (2009, ¶5.2) has described this attitude in the context of Doctor Who fandom as the sense of a "basic right" to create and post fic, and it points to prioritizing individual desire to create over any sense of obligation to produce something others will find worth reading. Similarly, some of the old rules about acceptable content, such as the prohibition on real-person fiction described by Henry Jenkins ([2002] 2006), are no longer widely used, again gesturing toward individual creativity over concern for what the community might find objectionable

(see also Hadas 2009). Moreover, the reciprocity of feedback as payment for creativity seems to be decaying, with frequent pleas or demands for feedback appended to chapters of large works, often as a condition of continuing the story, suggesting that there is no longer a norm that such response is freely given. Finally, the aesthetic conventions of vids are changing, such as incorporating show dialogue rather than simply having the music provide the soundtrack, or producing trailers for fan fiction stories; while this is not as clearly an individualistic move as the other examples, it does demonstrate a move away from previous modes of producing creative fan work. It is unclear whether these fans know that the older modes exist and have rejected them; or whether the influx of new fans was too great to teach them all how it had been done before; or whether they don't know at all because searchability provides different routes to finding out that there is such a thing as fic or vidding in the absence of knowing how it has traditionally been done. However, change is clearly in progress.

[8] Against the background of historically non-strictly-controlled forms of authorship and property, fan creative production seems open for exploitation, particularly in the context of a potential generational culture shift away from hard-line positions on these subjects—nobody owns it, but some may be starting to want to. With things like *Fifty Shades of Grey* or Kindle Worlds, the indigenous creativity and property parallel is particularly useful, as these projects follow the line of trying to (exploitatively) modernize alternative modes of creative production because the people doing them are imagined to not know their worth.

[9] The problem with such disarticulation from fannish community is that fans are not foolish people freely giving away things they could (and should) be selling any more than are indigenous populations. Instead, fan creative production is productively understood as what Rose (1998, 144) calls "limited common property," which is "property on the outside, commons on the inside." That is, it is not a pure commons, because not everybody is eligible to exploit it, but those who are on the inside can make use of it as completely as is allowed within the norms of the community. Tan (2013) calls for an understanding that when an indigenous group like the Maori acts to prevent others from using their cultural heritage, they are not fencing off part of a universal commons that rightly belongs to all humanity; rather, there are different commons and this is a Maori commons—free on the inside and restricted on the outside. One problem with the commons metaphor, as these examples point out, is that it invokes a binary opposition between restrictive, bad property and free-for-all commons, whereas more nuance is needed. As Eric Kansa (2007) notes, no one would seriously argue that all information should be freely available—slapping a Creative Commons Attribution license on a person's medical records does not make it okay to disseminate them. Likewise, with the indigenous knowledge Kansa is concerned with, and fan intellectual property in the cases examined here, there are things that belong

to particular people and groups that can be transferred outward, but whether they should be is a sticky ethical question even when this is done with good intentions like cultural preservation or payment for labor.

[10] The model of limited common property is quite useful for fandom: everybody in the community has shared access to everybody else's stories, vids, meta, and other work, but—in part as a result of histories of stigma—there is often a protective attitude in relation to outsiders. Related to this are "questions of alienability", which Rose (1998, 140) raises but does not really delve into; limited common property is not very alienable because, unlike standard property, no one person owns it, such that nobody can really sell it off, and particularly not for individual gain. And here we see the nonindividual notion of authorship and property really running into trouble vis-à-vis things like pulling to publish and why this is often frowned upon in fan communities. Yes, a person wrote it, but that person generally did so in a community. Indefinable but vital contributions arise from interaction with those community members, such that then denying them access is denying recognition for their labor out of belief in the single creative figure of the author. In framing their licensed properties as worlds in which many people can write stories, Amazon is imitating this communal aspect, but without the corresponding shared ownership/authorship. Limited common property is useful because it explains how people can seemingly share things freely and at the same time have a right to freedom from appropriation by capital.

[11] Of course, fandom has never been isolated from market values, not least because it tends to respond to capitalist-produced media. But normatively, the counterpublic hailed by fan texts was a noncommercial one. This has given rise to contentions that Kindle Worlds is not really fan fiction, that E. L. James betrayed the fans of her Twilight fan fiction, and that both of these cases are not really fandom. In Karen Hellekson's (2013) inimitable phrase, "if you define fan fiction as 'derivative texts written for free within the context of a specific community,' then this isn't that. True, they are fans. And they write...fiction," but who's doing what alone is not enough to make it fan fiction in the absence of those norms of authorship and ownership. Indeed, "you could even say that Amazon is turning the term 'fan fiction' into fan fiction itself, lifting it from its original context and giving it a new purpose and a new narrative, related to the original but not beholden to it" (Berlatsky 2013). However, considering that fandom must be continually reconstituted through being addressed, and given this question of generations and fannish continuity, is there a critical mass of fan subjects who will feel hailed by industry's invitation?

[12] Although fandom has historically been brought into being as a counterpublic through the circulation of fannish texts, that is, if this new hail feels familiar or right—even though it is coming from a corporation instead—a new public might be produced

by it. Indeed, given the invitation into normative concepts of authorship and ownership (as opposed to fannish ones) extended by Kindle Worlds, this may pose the parts of fandom that accept the invitation as what Warner (2005), writing of *Field & Stream* readers, calls a subpublic: those not acting as the majority public in their participation in the subgroup but who are not imagined to be distinct from or antithetical to the larger public. The creation of a new fannish subpublic isn't inherently bad, unless it crowds out the old one and becomes the only way to be a fan, or unless legal measures are deployed by rights holders to ensure they get every penny of the licensing revenue from projects like Kindle Worlds by insisting that all fan fiction be run through this normative authorship and ownership. This potential for inventing a new mode at the expense of fannish traditions is cause for concern when industry is the one doing the hailing.

Note

1. Although Warner (2005) specifically distinguishes his view from Louis Althusser's (1971) concept of interpellation, I think they are more similar than he concedes if he is less literal about Althusser's use of the example of a police officer saying "Hey, you!"
-

Works cited

- Alexander, M. Jacqui. 1994. "Not Just (Any) Body Can Be a Citizen: The Politics of Law, Sexuality and Postcoloniality in Trinidad and Tobago and the Bahamas." *Feminist Review* 48:5–23. <http://dx.doi.org/10.2307/1395166>.
- Althusser, Louis. 1971. "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses." In *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, 127–86. New York: Monthly Review.
- Berlatsky, Noah. 2013. "Do Fans Really Own Fan Fiction?" *Atlantic*, May 28. <http://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2013/05/do-fans-really-own-fan-fiction/276236/>.
- Butler, Judith. 1990. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. New York: Routledge.
- Hadas, Leora. 2009. "The Web Planet: How the Changing Internet Divided 'Doctor Who' Fan Fiction Writers." *Transformative Works and Cultures*, no. 3. <http://dx.doi.org/10.3983/twc.2009.0129>.
- Hellekson, Karen. 2009. "A Fannish Field of Value: Online Fan Gift Culture." *Cinema Journal* 48 (4): 113–18. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1353/cj.0.0140>.

Hellekson, Karen. 2013. "Kindle Worlds and Fan Fiction." May 23.
<http://khellekson.wordpress.com/2013/05/23/kindle-worlds-and-fan-fiction/>.

Jenkins, Henry. (2002) 2006. "Interactive Audiences? The 'Collective Intelligence' of Media Fans." In *Fans, Bloggers, and Gamers: Exploring Participatory Culture*, 134–51. New York: New York University Press.

Kansa, Eric. 2007. "Finding Common Ground in the Digital Commons." *iCommons*, August 14. <http://archive.icommons.org/articles/finding-common-ground-in-the-digital-commons>.

Rose, Carol M. 1998. "The Several Futures of Property: Of Cyberspace and Folk Tales, Emission Trades and Ecosystems." *Minnesota Law Review* 83:129–82.

Scott, Suzanne. 2009. "Repackaging Fan Culture: The Regifting Economy of Ancillary Content Models." *Transformative Works and Cultures*, no. 3.
<http://dx.doi.org/10.3983/twc.2009.0150>.

Tan, Leon. 2013. "Intellectual Property Law and the Globalization of Indigenous Cultural Expressions: Māori Tattoo and the Whitmill Versus Warner Bros. Case." *Theory, Culture and Society* 30 (3): 61–81.
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0263276412474328>.

Warner, Michael. 2005. *Publics and Counterpublics*. New York: Zone Books.

Book review

Spreadable media: Creating value and meaning in a networked culture, by Henry Jenkins, Sam Ford, and Joshua Green

Melissa A. Click

University of Missouri, Columbia, Missouri, United States

[0.1] *Abstract*—Henry Jenkins, Sam Ford, and Joshua Green. *Spreadable Media: Creating Value and Meaning in a Networked Culture*. New York: NYU Press, 2013, \$29.95 (352p) ISBN 978-0814743508.

[0.2] *Keywords*—Convergence; Media production; New media; Participatory culture

Click, Melissa A. 2013. *Spreadable Media: Creating Value and Meaning in a Networked Culture*, by Henry Jenkins, Sam Ford, and Joshua Green [book review]. *Transformative Works and Cultures*, no. 14.
<http://dx.doi.org/10.3983/twc.2013.0525>.

Henry Jenkins, Sam Ford, and Joshua Green. *Spreadable media: Creating value and meaning in a networked culture*. New York: New York University Press, 2013, hardcover, \$29.95 (352p) ISBN 978-0814743508.

[1] *Spreadable Media: Creating Value and Meaning in a Networked Culture* is an exciting new book from Henry Jenkins, Sam Ford, and Joshua Green. As the authors describe in their preface, "How to Read This Book," the book was written to build understanding and conversation among three groups of readers: media scholars, communication professionals, and citizens who actively produce and share media content. The book's themes developed from the authors' work at MIT's Convergence Culture Consortium, which also endeavored in its five and a half years to put these groups in conversation.

[2] Jenkins is now professor of communication, journalism, cinematic arts, and education in USC's Annenberg School for Communication and Journalism. He is the author of numerous books, including *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide* (2008) and *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Cultures* (1992). Sam Ford works as director of digital strategy for Peppercom, a strategic communications and public relations agency. He is coeditor of *The Survival of Soap Opera* (2011). Joshua Green is a senior strategist at Undercurrent, a digital strategy firm. He is coauthor of *YouTube: Online Video and Participatory Culture* (2009).

[3] Though dialogue and exchange are the book's stated goals, *Spreadable Media*'s numerous compelling examples of media industry shortsightedness and grassroots indie innovation read as appeals to media professionals to embrace the logic of participatory culture, and create and circulate media in ways that demonstrate an understanding of and respect for audience motivations. For this reason, readers with stakes in the tug-of-war between fans and industry will likely enjoy, and be invigorated by, the authors' arguments about spreadability. Readers with interests in media audiences and participatory culture, however, may have more mixed reactions to the book's content. In general, *Spreadable Media* is less focused on speaking to media fans and media scholars than it is on using examples from participatory culture and media scholarship on audiences and fans to help build a persuasive argument aimed at media professionals.

[4] Developing a sophisticated understanding of the movements of media content in networked communities is Jenkins, Ford, and Green's primary purpose. The authors argue that although the growth of online communication tools has increased the speed and scope of the sharing of media messages, the practices and values of those who share content in our contemporary digital media environment have long histories. Thus, they assert that digital platforms like YouTube and Twitter are not new per se; rather, they are built upon practices that have long been part of participatory culture. In direct opposition to familiar metaphors for the movement of media content like "stickiness" and "viral," both of which suggest the desire to either lure or overtake audiences, "'spreadability' refers to the potential—both technical and cultural—for audiences to share content for their own purposes, sometimes with the permission of rights holders, sometimes against their wishes" (3). In short, spreadability encourages industry producers who wish to have audiences engage deeply with their media messages to reconsider their conceptions of the audience, strategies for turning a profit on the media messages they produce, and approaches to message production and circulation.

[5] The book's 352 pages are divided into seven chapters that build and support *Spreadable Media*'s main arguments. The first chapter endeavors to explain "Where Web 2.0 Went Wrong." The chapter is a thorough evaluation of the disconnects in the rhetoric and mind-set of Web 2.0, which promised a new era of producer-consumer relationships by tapping into online participatory culture for the purpose of the promotion, distribution, and improvement of media content. Jenkins, Ford, and Green assert that Web 2.0's failure is rooted in producers' inability to develop mutually beneficial long-term relationships with users, or what E. P. Thompson described as a "moral economy." In other words, because content producers are driven by the logic of profit-driven commodity culture, and audiences are driven by the logic of the reciprocity of gift culture, producers do not fully understand the social motivations

undergirding the relationships that enable content sharing. As a result, many producers are overinvested in their ownership of content, which has kept them from appreciating the value of spreading their content freely.

[6] Chapter 2, "Reappraising the Residual," spells out what producers ought to know about audiences by discussing the motivations and contexts that shape audiences' evaluations of media content. Grounding this chapter is Raymond Williams's notion of the "residual" value that develops from cultural practices. The authors use the term residual in two senses: cultural and economic. Residual cultural value is developed when communities arise from longing nostalgically for or making "new" discoveries of past materials (e.g., retrogames and Steampunk). Residual economic value, on the other hand, is the extra or bonus monetary value of forgotten commodities (e.g., Scooby-Doo and World Wrestling Entertainment). The possibilities for the development of both kinds of residual value are heightened in a digital environment where individuals and communities can easily use, appraise, and share media texts online. This chapter's examples demonstrate how residual meanings can result in new value for media content and brands. The authors stress that message producers wishing to profit from messages with economic value should work to better understand audiences' cultural and social motivations for appraising and spreading content online.

[7] "The Value of Media Engagement" is demonstrated in chapter 3, which takes a close look at the American television industry. Specifically, this chapter explores the tensions between the new possibilities for storytelling and delivery in a digital environment and the television industry's refusal to let go of its narrow approaches to audience measurement and evaluation. The authors describe the overall changes in the TV industry through a shift from appointment-based viewing, where audiences must turn on their TV on time for the content they desire, to engagement-based viewing, where audiences have the ability to access TV content when and how they want. Jenkins, Ford, and Green argue that engaged audiences "are more likely to recommend, discuss, research, pass along, and even generate new material in response" (116). With reference to the cancellation of shows like *Jericho* and *Chuck*, and the innovative storytelling from shows like *Ghost Whisperer* and *Glee*, the authors demonstrate that the TV industry would be better served by rethinking its approaches to audience measurement and engagement than by trying futilely to make an appointment model more economically feasible. Noting that the contemporary environment has both fragmented audiences and normalized cult behaviors, chapter 3 also cautions those media producers who have already or who will choose to move to the engagement model to rethink the status quo practice of valuing certain kinds of audiences over others, and to value all of the audiences and activities their programs inspire.

[8] Chapter 4 seeks answers to the question, "What Constitutes Meaningful Participation?," and supports the previous chapter's assertions. Jenkins, Ford, and Green discuss the impact of the changing relationship between media producers and audiences, and explore what constitutes participation. They acknowledge that the move in the contemporary digital environment to describe audiences as producers is an attempt to move away from the assumed passivity of consuming, but they stress that it would be a mistake to accept that activities requiring greater skill are more meaningful or participatory. Instead, we should value a range of participatory roles, including evaluation, appraisal, critique, and recirculation, and recognize that people play different roles in different media environments. Much of the chapter explores a number of participation models that illustrate these arguments and build on Axel Brun's concept of "produsage," a portmanteau of "producer" and "usage" that demarcates the fluidity of roles necessary for communal creation and recreation. Examples from Technobrega communities in Brazil to the immigrant rights movement in L.A. drive home the authors' message that media companies need to build strong relationships with their audiences, and that the most spreadable media is that which is most relevant to audiences' lives.

[9] Exploring strategies for "Designing for Spreadability" is chapter 5's purpose. The authors use John Fiske's notion of producerly texts—texts that offer multiple layers of readings and/or openings for audience reworkings—to frame their suggestions that media content designed for spreadability must begin with an understanding of audience motivation. The kinds of content that are most spreadable, Jenkins, Ford, and Green posit, include collective values and fantasies, humor, parody and shared references, ambiguous or unfinished narratives, mysteries, controversies, and rumors. To be spreadable, content must also be movable, reusable, and part of a larger flow of content. The chapter includes a discussion of the ways spreadable media, by mobilizing participatory cultures to be more civically engaged (e.g., the Harry Potter Alliance), may be "may be planting seeds which can grow into deeper commitments over time" (224). These hopeful examples of spreadable media's potential are tempered with a crucial discussion about spreadable media's risks and a call for audiences to develop critical skills to help them carefully discern what is ethical to spread and when.

[10] In chapter 6, Jenkins, Ford, and Green examine a range of strategies used by producers who are "Courting Supporters for Independent Media." These producers do not have the promotional budgets and platforms to compete with the majors but have created "spreadable business models" (233) by building on the reciprocity of gift-economy logic and by targeting communities that are likely to find their content appealing. The numerous examples in this chapter demonstrate how indie producers (from web comics to Christian media), by relinquishing control over how their content

gets to audiences, spread their messages to audiences with whom they may have never had contact and built reputations and relationships with audiences that, in many cases, brought them economic benefit. The message here is that setting content free, according to the logics of participatory culture, does produce the results the major media corporations want. The authors also stress, though, that audiences reap important benefits from these strategies through increased access to niche media content and through increased agency over their media environments via collaboration with producers to produce, distribute, and promote media content.

[11] Chapter 7, "Thinking Transnationally," draws from the work of Arjun Appadurai to explore spreadability's increased diversity in terms of transnational media flows. The chapter's self-reflexive discussion acknowledges that much of the authors' arguments about spreadability are based on the assumption that networked culture is accessible to those who wish to spread content. However, the ability to participate in and shape media environments is not available to all. The Global South (including parts of Africa, Latin America, and Asia) are the areas of the world specifically discussed in this chapter, but the authors also point out that divides exist within countries because of educational, economic, and geographic inequalities, meaning that the digerati around the world may have more in common with each other than with their compatriots. With reference to Nigerian film, Japanese anime, and Iranian Internet television, the authors demonstrate that spreadable media increases the diversity of offerings of transnational media, not its numbers. Examples including pirates, diasporic communities, and pop cosmopolitans demonstrate that transnational flows of spreadable media offer audiences the opportunity to challenge the global dominance that Western media organizations have traditionally enjoyed—on both local and global levels. Spreadable media flows are grassroots and multimodal; they connect citizens in countries shunned by multinational conglomerates who see no opportunities for profit and where media circulation has thus been imbalanced and uneven. Spreadable transnational media offers welcome opportunities for cross-cultural understandings, but it also brings frictions and misunderstandings. Thus, until access to the technologies and skills of spreadable media increases globally, we cannot be sure whether spreadable transnational flows will motivate audiences to learn about other cultures or whether they will "speak past each other" (289).

[12] *Spreadable Media* will not be an earth-shattering read for those already engaged in the debates and practices of participatory culture. These readers may be frustrated with the practical nature of the book, which often overshadows its progressive aims. Thus, although Jenkins, Ford, and Green mention in many instances that spreadability has enormous political potential, it is not until the concluding chapter that the authors state outright that the long-term goal of their spreadability model is "to create a more democratic culture" (304). At times, it seems that the authors sidestep the political

importance of their arguments, particularly in the chapters that discuss civic engagement and transnational media flows, so as not to put off media professionals in the audience, who may be interested in spreadability for increased profit, not democracy.

[13] *Spreadable Media*'s insistence that the digital media environment has enabled all audiences to engage in participatory cultures will please those who wish to open up the term *fan* to a wider variety of identities and practices and will trouble those who wish to retain the specificity of the term. Jenkins, Ford, and Green engage the long-standing debate over the assumed passivity of the mass audience; their assertion that through digital media more audience members can adopt fannish behaviors raises critical questions. If the demonstration of fannish behaviors redeems the assumedly passive mainstream audience, how should we conceive of those who either cannot or do not wish to participate in spreadable digital culture? And if, through spreading media content, audiences have adopted behaviors previously specific to fan cultures, how can (or should) the fans who engendered participatory cultures remain distinct? It may be tempting to answer these questions in ways that reassert the divide between audiences and fans, but *Spreadable Media* offers the opportunity to think deeply about the assumptions that have shaped the scholarship and cultural practices that have evolved from the way we have defined these constructs.

[14] Overall, Jenkins, Ford, and Green's message, "If it doesn't spread, it's dead" (293), is designed for media professionals—the group that most needs to hear it. To reinforce its message, the book's web site, [spreadablemedia.org](http://www.spreadablemedia.org) (<http://www.spreadablemedia.org>), offers more than 30 exclusive essays that expand its conversations, with extended examples from experts on a range of topics.

[15] *Spreadable Media* is an important read for media scholars and members of participatory cultures alike because it shakes up assumptions about media audiences and asks all readers to envision the future of our media cultures. Although it is unclear what new system will develop once the broadcast model finally dies, *Spreadable Media* is an appeal to those who currently hold the most power to rework the commodity logic that structures the ways they create and distribute media content in the hopes of creating a more democratic system. If we agree that "the spreading of media texts helps us articulate who we are, bolster our personal and professional relationships, strengthen our relationships with one another, and build community and awareness around the subjects we care about" (304), then loosening media producers' tight grips on media content could have profound impacts on our cultural lives. For this reason, *Spreadable Media* is a valuable tool for all who wish to influence our media environment. I hope its message spreads far!

Book review

Reclaiming fair use: How to put balance back in copyright, by Patricia Aufderheide and Peter Jaszi

Joshua Johnson

University of Minnesota, Morris, Minnesota, United States

[0.1] *Abstract*—Patricia Aufderheide and Peter Jaszi. *Reclaiming Fair Use: How to Put Balance Back in Copyright*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011, paperback, \$17.00 (199p), ISBN 978-0-226-03228-3.

[0.2] *Keywords*—Codes of best practice; Copyright; Digital copyright; DMCA; Fair use

Johnson, Joshua. 2013. *Reclaiming Fair Use: How to Put Balance Back in Copyright*, by Patricia Aufderheide and Peter Jaszi [book review]. *Transformative Works and Cultures*, no. 14. <http://dx.doi.org/10.3983/twc.2013.0489>.

Patricia Aufderheide and Peter Jaszi. *Reclaiming fair use: How to put balance back in copyright*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011, paperback, \$17.00 (199p), ISBN 978-0-226-03228-3.

[1] Patricia Aufderheide and Peter Jaszi's 2011 text *Reclaiming Fair Use: How to Put Balance Back in Copyright* offers a deeply valuable discussion of copyright law, creative practices, and the place of fair use in the life of the digital citizen. Though nominally a how-to book, *Reclaiming Fair Use* provides a detailed historical narrative of fair use and copyright law. In addition, it is part educational tool kit for individuals and communities in need of fair use help and part analytical history for scholars interested in the origins and ideological ramifications of copyright law. Although Aufderheide and Jaszi's text is important in its own right, the recent round of DMCA exemptions and the discussions surrounding them give this book a special significance and importance. The 2012 exemptions upheld the previous rulings that allowed "college and university professors, film and media studies students, documentary filmmakers, and noncommercial vidders" to circumvent DVD encryption for fair use reasons and also expanded the list to cover "K-12 educators, all college students, multimedia e-book authors, and professionals who have been commissioned to make videos for nonprofit purposes" ("2012 DMCA Rulemaking," <https://www.eff.org/cases/2012-dmca-rulemaking>). *Reclaiming Fair Use* is a necessary text following these exemptions, especially since Jonathan McIntosh, a well-known political remix artist and vidder who

testified at the DMCA hearings, has recently been plagued by several takedown notices from Lionsgate, mediated through YouTube, for his fair use vid "Buffy vs. Edward." Aufderheide and Jaszi's text is an accessible and useful way to begin understanding these significant events in the status of digital copyright law in the 21st century.

[2] *Reclaiming Fair Use* includes exercises or activities meant to practically test the reader's knowledge of fair use. Aufderheide and Jaszi have titled these small divergences "Fair Use: You Be the Judge," and each one features a scenario in which a creator/educator/artist is attempting to negotiate copyright law in regards to his or her current activity. The authors invite readers to make a decision based on the material already covered, which allows for a short, fun method of applying the concepts in *Reclaiming Fair Use*. In addition to these exercises, Aufderheide and Jaszi include short "True Tales of Fair Use" to liven up sections of the text that are necessarily dry or lengthy. One such "True Tale" chronicles the story of Sut Jhally, a media studies professor who runs the Media Education Foundation. Jhally describes how the MEF, a group that extensively utilizes fair use, began in the 1980s when he developed some video materials for a course he was teaching at the time. Unfortunately, Jhally's videos caught the attention of MTV, who sent him a cease-and-desist letter. Far from ceasing or desisting, Jhally went on to assert his rights under fair use and form the MEF. Jhally's story is especially useful for the project of *Reclaiming Fair Use* because it provides a narrative in which a citizen successfully navigates the seemingly labyrinthine realm of digital copyright law. If Aufderheide and Jaszi's goal is to educate the average digital citizen to a point where he or she can at least interact with media without fear, then stories like Jhally's provide an encouraging model for people who have done just that.

[3] Following its 10 chapters (plus introduction), *Reclaiming Fair Use* contains a robust set of appendices, which include the Documentary Filmmaker's Statement of Best Practices in Fair Use, a template for individuals or communities interested in creating their own code of best fair use practices, and a discussion of the myths and realities of fair use.

[4] The introduction and first two chapters set up Aufderheide and Jaszi's primary point, which is that the combination of strict copyright law and weak fair use creates a culture whose very notion of creativity is truncated and restricted. The authors draw on the poet William Blake's image of "mind-forg'd manacles" to characterize the ways in which a culture that does not utilize fair use actually hobbles its present and future possibilities (ix). In both the first chapter, "The Culture of Fear and Doubt, and How to Leave It," and the second chapter, "Long and Strong Copyright: Why Fair Use Is So Important," Aufderheide and Jaszi mine the image of mind-forg'd manacles to create a sense of cultural exigency for a deeper understanding of fair use. Indeed, the authors

argue that a public that has knowledge of fair use can ultimately break these figurative manacles and generate a healthy, creative culture. To support this belief, Aufderheide and Jaszi argue for a return to a copyright system based on providing "incentives to create culture," which can't be done if future creators don't believe they have access to current cultural material (16).

[5] Chapter 3, "The Decline and Rise of Fair Use: The Back-Room Story," chapter 4, "The Decline and Rise of Fair Use: The Public Campaigns," and chapter 5, "Fair Use Resurgent," each charts the path fair use has taken in the past and present of copyright law. Fair use, Aufderheide and Jaszi argue, has had a rocky and erratic trajectory in the history of copyright. The authors paint a detailed picture of the large business interests that fought to keep copyright long and strong as well as the public, sometimes grassroots, groups that rose up in opposition to form what is often known as the copyleft. In chapter 5, Aufderheide and Jaszi strike on a position they uphold throughout the rest of the book, which is that fair use allows for major progress via changes "in behavior in the field—rather than legislation" (72).

[6] The first half of *Reclaiming Fair Use* seems to be written for media studies scholars who are interested in the historical path fair use has taken to get to its current position. Despite the small activities sprinkled throughout, the majority of the first half establishes an audience most likely already familiar with both the subject of the book and the present discussion around fair use. Although Aufderheide, a communications professor, and Jaszi, a copyright law professor, are careful to limit legal jargon and carefully explain the bits of specialized discourse they do include, the primary thrust of their book does not seem to make much of an attempt to court or help the fan vidder, independent filmmaker, or remixer who might pick it up. Chapter 6, "Fair Use in the Courtroom: How Judges Think Now," chapter 7, "Documentary Filmmakers: Pioneering Best Practices," and chapter 8, "Codes of Best Practices Catch On," continue this trend of providing a mostly historical narrative, replete with detailed examples.

[7] The ninth chapter, "How to Fair Use," is set up to be the capstone of the book, and this is where the subtle potency of the book's structure is made manifest. It functions as a practical how-to guide for anyone interested in either utilizing fair use in an individual project or creating a code of best practices to inform an entire community of creators. Nearly everything Aufderheide and Jaszi include in this chapter seems self-evident, but it quickly becomes clear that the historical narratives they had previously been exploring are the key to understanding how fair use came to be; knowledge of these historical narratives becomes the primary way to arm oneself in the fight for fair use. Aufderheide and Jaszi's suggestion that fair use is a state of mind that can break the mind-forg'd manacles must be informed by a rigorous knowledge of

one's own rights within the present and historical context of fair use. The authors are careful to point out that just as fair use is about behavior and not legislation, any attempt to affect the industry's approaches to fair use has to begin with the creator/artist communities who need fair use. Put another way, behavior leads to changes in (perception/enforcement of) law, not the other way around. In this way, the previous eight chapters provide the setup for Aufderheide and Jaszi to capitalize on a historical portrait of fair use in order to argue for the importance of copyright and fair use education.

[8] Aufderheide and Jaszi highlight documentary filmmakers' negotiations with fair use. This focus on documentarians offers insight into media creators' investment in notions of creative protection; further, the decision to focus on documentary filmmakers is especially useful because these artists are much more prone to encounter a seemingly endless stream of situations demanding fair use knowledge, making them good examples. Aufderheide and Jaszi do note, however, that documentarians can and sometimes do demonstrate the ways that creators who need fair use can also continue to privilege the "genius creator" mentality that led to the problems of a long and strong copyright in the first place. The authors note that although many documentary filmmakers express a need to gain access to the cultural material already circulating (commercially and noncommercially), they also often believe that their own work should be protected from those same kinds of access. Fan and game scholars have similarly identified some fan creators' ambivalence toward the practices of remix; for example, as Derek Johnson observes, some video game modders believe in their absolute right to video game content, and yet they don't want their own creations to be modded or remixed. Aufderheide and Jaszi negotiate these seemingly hypocritical notions of ownership and access carefully, though the validity of authorial claims aren't given much weight or consideration despite the authors' earlier apprehension to support an entirely open-source cultural space. Although Aufderheide and Jaszi seem uncomfortable with a culture free of authorial ownership, they are quick to move past a discussion of how these documentarians are contesting content ownership for corporate groups while maintaining their own authorial ownership of their own creations.

[9] Within the context of its field, *Reclaiming Fair Use* is perhaps most useful as a repository of textual references and aggregated research. Though the larger argumentative thrusts of the book may be a little too basic for experts in the field, Aufderheide and Jaszi do draw from myriad sources and studies, and that collection of research is a useful reference. For fan scholars and amateur creators of media, the real value of *Reclaiming Fair Use* is as an educational tool. For digital citizens, being able to create confidently is of paramount importance, and Aufderheide and Jaszi

succeed in demystifying copyright law and fair use enough to give amateur creators enough knowledge to create with confidence.

[10] Though the larger message of *Reclaiming Fair Use* may get lost amid the examples and anecdotes, a focused reader with real concerns will certainly come away with good advice. Unfortunately, because Aufderheide and Jaszi have attempted to provide material here for both scholars of copyright law and amateur creators struggling with fair use, they are sometimes not fully successful in reaching each audience. This certainly doesn't mean *Reclaiming Fair Use* is completely ineffective, but it does mean that some readers may go through large chunks of text that may not be especially useful to them before getting to something more individually valuable. The authors' key points, however—that behavior is instrumental in influencing fair use/copyright law; that a basic working knowledge of fair use parameters is enough for an amateur creator; that the true danger of long and strong copyright law is a stunted creative culture—are echoed often enough to be efficacious. If Aufderheide and Jaszi's primary goal in *Reclaiming Fair Use* is to educate creator/artists to instill in them a sense of self-assurance to utilize their fair use rights, then the authors are ultimately successful.

Book review

Genre, reception, and adaptation in the "Twilight" Series, edited by Anne Morey

Amanda Retartha

New York University, New York, New York, United States

[0.1] *Abstract*—Anne Morey, ed. *Genre, Reception, and Adaptation in the "Twilight" Series*. Surrey: Ashgate Publishing, 2012. \$99.95 (236p) ISBN 978-1-4094-3661-4.

[0.2] *Keywords*—Antifandom; Fan studies; Film adaptation; Genre; Reception studies; Romance

Retartha, Amanda. 2013. *Genre, Reception, and Adaptation in the "Twilight" Series*, edited by Anne Morey [book review]. *Transformative Works and Cultures*, no. 14. <http://dx.doi.org/10.3983/twc.2013.0534>.

Anne Morey, ed. *Genre, Reception, and Adaptation in the "Twilight" Series*. Surrey: Ashgate Publishing, 2012. \$99.95 (236p) ISBN 978-1-4094-3661-4.

[1] Given the recent surge of mainstream and scholarly meditations on *Fifty Shades of Grey* and its origins in the Twilight fan fiction community, the release of an edited volume that, in part, examines the generic problems of romance in Twilight as well as the complexities of its fandom is, for an academic publication long in the works, incredibly good timing. Though an essay on *Fifty Shades* wouldn't be out of place among the collection that editor Anne Morey has brought together in *Genre, Reception, and Adaptation in the "Twilight" Series* (April 2012, Ashgate), this volume covers plenty of ground as it is, engaging with everything from *Jane Eyre* to Lacanian psychoanalysis in an effort to explore Twilight's cultural position from points both close to the text and deep in the heart of fandom. Its goal appears to be to take a wide view and put some of the loudest gripes from the series' detractors—its perceived antifeminism and support of Mormon values, its neutering of the vampire novel, and its attraction of young, rabid, and/or unsophisticated fans—into a more balanced perspective, foregrounding the text's productive possibilities and reading its popularity as proof enough of the stakes at play.

[2] Morey has divided the 13-essay collection into three parts, signaling those divisions in her introduction rather than providing any definitive breaks or section

headings. The first section focuses primarily on genre and gender, and comprises six essays, including Morey's own contribution; the second section, with four essays, examines the reception of the series and its fandom, with an essay by Matt Hills (*Fan Cultures*, 2002); and the third section of three essays addresses filmic and international adaptations of the text. Though clearly a top-heavy volume (almost to a fault), concepts introduced in that first, long section, like fulfilled and subverted generic expectations, the reader-narrator relationship, and the hierarchy of taste, continue to resurface throughout, justifying Morey's choice to eschew clear section breaks.

[3] As anyone even peripherally familiar with *Twilight* knows, the series' final novel, *Breaking Dawn*, was explosively divisive among readers and is the fuel for some of the most vitriolic criticism of Meyer's purported conservative agenda. So it's intriguing, and fitting, that every essay in section one uses *Breaking Dawn* as the complicating element of its argument. This is in part because *Breaking Dawn* troubles the series' generic associations as well as its relative feminisms—issues with which five of the six essays engage (with Alexandra Hidalgo's "Bridges, Nodes, and Bare Life: Race in the 'Twilight' Saga" as the outlier).

[4] Morey leads off the section and the volume with her essay on *Jane Eyre* as an unacknowledged intertext for *Twilight*, linking the two through their plot and thematic parallels before foregrounding their primary difference—*Twilight*'s explicitly fantastic element—as that which offers a distinctive spin on gender politics. While wisely refusing to enter into a battle of Jane as feminist versus Bella as feminist, Morey does point out that neither text has a straightforward relationship with feminism as such, and ends up positing Jane in her female rage and Bella in her female suffering as two halves of one whole romantic heroine. Morey suggests that Bella's eventual vampirism mitigates her physical suffering, but in doing so speaks to the impossibility of uncomplicated female empowerment. Complementing Morey's approach is Kristine Moruzi's essay, which argues that *Twilight*'s blending of gothic and romance genres mirrors the complexities of the postfeminist subject position, with the dark and dangerous elements of the gothic revitalizing the stability of the romance narrative. Moruzi also attributes the popularity of the series to its ability to represent such complexities, with the Bella of *Breaking Dawn* proving that her roles as wife and mother do not exclude her from an equal partnership with her husband.

[5] Yet where Moruzi locates the success of the series, Jackie C. Horne locates its failure. Horne argues that Meyer's ultimate ideological move is to recuperate early, heterosexual marriage through a kind of bait and switch: connect with readers' desires, join them with Bella through her narration, and then convince Bella to choose to marry Edward young—her choice being the key element in the equation. But Bella's

desires change dramatically in *Breaking Dawn*, switching from the sexual to the maternal and familial, and while Meyer tries to suggest the possibility of all three coexisting, Horne insists that the move is impossible for young female readers to follow. Horne's essay reads particularly well alongside Rachel DuBois's chapter in section two, in which she examines the reading of *Breaking Dawn* as an essentially traumatic experience that mirrors the trauma Bella herself endures.

[6] All three of these essays make recourse to Bella's narration as one of the keys to understanding the text's position on gender. Sara K. Day takes it one step further in her chapter and posits the reader-narrator relationship as the site in which Bella can safely explore the problem of intimacy, shielded from the sexual and emotional danger of her encounters with Edward and Jacob. Day understands the bond forged between Bella and her readers as one that creates a space of both sympathetic desire and submissive control, with the reader losing agency to Bella and her narrative whims. As Bella begins to relinquish her narrative control in *Eclipse*, she starts denying her readers the kind of intimate emotional details that populated the beginning of the series. And in an illuminating reading of vampire Bella's mind shield—an attribute touched on by several of the volume's essays—Day suggests that *Breaking Dawn's* ending, with Bella willingly letting Edward into her thoughts for the first time, signals Bella's full embrace of intimacy with her husband and relinquishing of her reader-surrogate.

[7] Catherine Driscoll's chapter is a useful transition between the themes of feminism and fandom, examining as it does Bella's relationship to girl culture and the series' ultimate idealization of permanent adolescence. Driscoll fluidly engages with the books and the films, and calls Buffy and other popular texts out of the shadows where they not so quietly lurk. It rounds out the first section nicely, with invocations of the generic convention of gothic romance and the problem of Bella as a model of feminism, and introduces the question of the young female fan taken up in section two.

[8] Inextricably bound up in discussions about *Twilight* is the question of taste, and Hills, Sarah Wagenseller Goletz, and Anne Gilbert all present nuanced approaches to this problem through the lens of fandom. This trio of essays—broken up by DuBois's previously mentioned piece, which may have been more usefully placed as a transition between sections—is obviously the group of most interest to fan studies scholars. All three provocatively pressure the idea of fandom as dichotomy that persists in essentially recuperative or defensive approaches to fandom, whether that manifests as fans against The Powers That Be, or fans against antifans.

[9] Hills at once challenges and supports Cornel Sandvoss's assertion (*Fans*, 2005) that such recuperative approaches are no longer needed now that fandom has become largely mainstream by positioning Summit Entertainment as the source of

encouragement and the denizens of other fandoms as the source of derision for Twilight fan activity, effectively flipping the standard relations of pathologized fandom. Summit's use of official texts and paratexts to sanction the efforts of Twihards is not unproblematic, particularly because of their modeling of certain kinds of fandom, like the privileging of heterosexual desire through the marketing of Team Edward versus Team Jacob, but Hills is careful to note that this involvement in no way inauthenticates the Twilight fandom. In contrast, he notes the interfandom discord is actually premised on the idea that Twilight, as a threshold or feral fandom, is a potentially unacceptable or inauthentic form of fan practice. He focuses on the clashes between Twilight fans and other fans at Comic-Con and the online derision of Twilight fan activity by Buffy and Muse fans, pointing to the ways in which gender and age are at the center of what makes Twilight a somehow illegitimate fandom. At several moments in the essay, Hills mentions the deep irony of this brand of interfandom stereotyping and cautions that not only the media but also fandom itself should be subject to the fan studies scholar's critical eye.

[10] Goletz moves the topic from interfandom to antifandom, applying the affective term *giddyshame* to the complex love/hate relationship that many Twilight antifans have with the text. In a surprisingly compelling move, Goletz brings together the much-maligned fan fiction figure of Mary Sue (a trope also invoked in DuBois's chapter) and Lacan's mirror stage to explain the process of giddyshame, the simultaneous resistance to Twilight's ideologies and inability to fully break free of them. She links Bella and Edward with the two primary functions of a Mary Sue—self-insertion and wish fulfillment, respectively—as well as the two primary positions in the mirror stage—moi or mirror-gazer and Ideal-I. Goletz argues that the series' ultimate drive is the achievement of what is impossible for the reader: the fusion, through Bella and Edward, of two halves of a fragmented whole self.

[11] Rather than seek an explanation for Twilight antifans' paradoxically intense consumption of the text, Gilbert positions her essay as a gut check for fan studies scholars in the manner of Hills's chapter, calling for an understanding of audience participation that exchanges opposition for spectrum, and acknowledges fandom as not necessarily a force of positive resistance. She relates the pleasures of Twihating to those of irony and camp, and frames the problem as ultimately one of cultural definition, of the old battle between high and low. The joy of Twilight antifandom is not one of poaching, but rather of proving one's own good taste through the informed dissection of a bad book.

[12] The third section is abbreviated in both scope and significance in relation to the rest of the volume, but Katie Kapurch and Mark D. Cunningham do provide a needed perspective on the films so important to the explosion of the Twilight franchise.

Kapurch's method harkens back to the focus in the section one essays on Bella's first-person narration, examining the varying use of voice-over in the first three *Twilight* films (with an addendum about the fourth) and the relationship to the directors' goals of audience identification. She argues that the frequency of subjective-internal voice-over in Catherine Hardwicke's *Twilight* encourages an intimate connection between Bella and the viewer that eventually dissolves as the voice-over becomes more distant and less frequent in the films by Chris Weitz (*New Moon*) and David Slade (*Eclipse*). Cunningham's essay on the relative degrees of auteurism and adaptation in each of the first three films takes a similar tack, holding up Hardwicke as the most stylized—yet also the most faithful—of the group, with the other two struggling to leave their distinctive mark on the franchise.

[13] Hye Chung Han and Chan Hee Hwang's chapter on *Twilight*'s reception and adaptation in Korea rightly serves as a capstone for the entire volume, as it underlines how the collection's focus on romance, female fandom, and literary taste can be further complicated by a shift in geography. They attribute the series' success in Korea to its similarities to works of *soonjung manhwa* or highteen romance, and to the conflation of Edward with the idealized, yet slightly feminized, Korean pinup boy. Though Han and Hwang suggest that *Twilight*'s popularity is indicative of larger cultural changes that have encouraged Korean women to publically express their desires, they also point out that there is still a distinct hierarchy of Korean literary genres that relegates women's fiction or highteen romance to the bottom of the pile.

[14] As a scholarly product, *Genre, Reception, and Adaptation in the "Twilight" Series* fits as cleanly in the category of childhood studies as the books it examines do in the category of YA fiction. Like many of the existing academic treatments of Harry Potter—and Harry does pop his head in a few times during this collection—this volume takes its cue from the patterns of consumption that show *Twilight*'s influence reaching far beyond the teenaged set, and frames the relationship between the series and girlhood as only one facet of its larger cultural position. The entirety of the volume reflects a dedication to interdisciplinarity that values not only the juxtaposition of diverse fields and methodologies, but also a connectedness among essays that is sometimes lacking in edited collections. The danger of this connectedness, however, comes when the repeated returns to the same textual moments and the same critical issues stop fostering a sense of dialogue and start becoming redundant.

[15] This volume succeeds at providing smart analysis where heated debate has reigned, and, because *Twilight* is an almost unavoidable commodity for anyone working in pop culture, it could be a useful resource for any scholar wanting a more nuanced understanding of the text and larger phenomenon. Hills's and Gilbert's essays in particular are valuable additions to fan studies, with Hills pushing back on the

almost implicit notion in the field that fandom fights together against The Man, and Gilbert offering a complicating example of Jonathan Gray's antifan—both modeling an approach that treats fandom as an ever-evolving space requiring constant theoretical reassessment.

[16] *Genre, Reception, and Adaptation in the "Twilight" Series* is accessible to scholars of all levels, though given the positive response I received from students who saw the volume sitting on my desk during office hours, it may be particularly useful for introducing undergraduates to methods of analyzing popular texts they may not otherwise view as fodder for scholarship, or conversely, to complex forms of criticism through a more familiar channel.