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Editorial

Fannish form and content

TWC Editor

[0.1] Abstract—This issue showcases a variety of investigations into a myriad of platforms, featuring several essays that switch the focus from content to form and illustrate the importance of a range of different fan engagements.

[0.2] Keywords—Analysis; Fan fiction


1. Introduction

[1.1] If there are any trends in current fan studies, it clearly has to be the shift toward industry focus and the myriad ways to monetize fan labor. Both industry and academic events concentrate on the intersections and collaborations, sometimes at the expense of independent, intrafannish engagements. Although TWC remains committed to include all aspects of the fannish mediascape, our affiliation with the nonprofit OTW and our strong belief in Open Access texts testify to our dedication to let fans speak and be heard. In fact, it is the fannish infrastructures that often have modeled later for profit models. Fanfiction.net, eFiction, Automated Archive, and the Archive of Our Own flourished long before Wattpad became popular, and more and more media departments turn toward fans themselves to successfully create transmedia properties and run outlets such as Tumblr and Twitter feeds. Indeed, it is the minutiae of form and organization, of style and infrastructure, that deserve more academic attention.

[1.2] This general issue of TWC, No. 17, showcases a variety of investigations into a myriad of platforms. Even the essays most dedicated to studying and analyzing the structural components of fan interfaces nevertheless illustrate how form and function always intersect and interact, how formal features mirror and construe content and ideas. This issue features several essays that switch the focus from content to form and illustrate the importance of a range of different fan engagements. Whether fan works, such as fan fiction and fan films, or fannish infrastructure, such as fan subs or fan archives, fans contribute to all aspects of creating, shaping, organizing, and enjoying fannish engagements.

2. Theory and Praxis

[2.1] Several essays look at the way fan fiction engages with its source texts as well as its surrounding fannish cultures. Ann McClellan's "Redefining Genderswap Fan Fiction: A
"Sherlock Case Study" uses a transgender theory framework to look at genderswap fiction and the way it addresses issues of gender and identity. Vera Cuntz-Leng's "Twinship, Incest, and Twincest in the Harry Potter Universe" also looks at an individual fandom and its fan creations, but her essay does so in order to investigate how the doubling motif gets repeated throughout Rowling's books and the fan fiction. Finally, John Wei looks at Chinese Iron Man fan fiction in "Iron Man in Chinese Boys' Love Fandom: A Story Untold." His study traces the influences of Chinese BL culture and Western Iron Man movie fandom within this transcultural fandom.

[2.2] In "How To Do Things with Fan Subs: Media Engagement as Subcultural Capital in Anime Fan Subbing," Douglas Schules reads the practice of fan subbing as part of a complex system of subcultural capital as the subbers negotiate knowledge and meanings in their textual interpretations. Shannon Fay Johnson looks at fannish infrastructures in "Fan Fiction Metadata Creation and Utilization within Fan Fiction Archives: Three Primary Models." By looking at searchability and ease of access, she discusses different taxonomic approaches for fiction archives and studies their respective traits. Both essays address the structural and pragmatic aspects of fannish infrastructure that are nevertheless shaped by and affect fannish content and its reception in important ways.

[2.3] As fan studies has become more established as a field and no longer needs to justify its existence, scholars can focus on particular texts in depth. Joshua Wille's "Fan Edits and the Legacy of The Phantom Edit" looks at fan remixes of one particular film—and more specifically at one influential fan edit—to illustrate the artistic and creative importance of digital remixing. Meanwhile, as fan culture mainstreams, the clear boundaries between fan and industry discourses are disappearing. In "Bull in a China Shop: Alternate Reality Games and Transgressive Fan Play in Social Media Franchises," Burcu S. Bakioglu analyzes how the supposedly amateur video blogs of Lonelygirl15 constructed a narrative to invite maximum fan engagement. At the same time, Bakioglu suggests that even within the careful boundaries of the alternate reality games, fans succeed in creating their own meaningful spaces.

3. Symposium

[3.1] TWC's Symposium section allows media and fan scholars, academics in other fields, and nonacademic scholar-fans to explore ideas and share their passions. From religion to politics, Austen to Disney, preservation and communication, these essays demonstrate a wealth of varied voices and expertise. Rachel Barenblat draws from her rabbinical experience in a discussion of "Fan Fiction and Midrash: Making Meaning." Veerle Van Steenhuyse uses a narratological approach to consider Jane Austen fan fiction in "Wordplay, Mindplay: Fan Fiction and Postclassical Narratology." Woody Evans offers a provocative thesis in "Why They Won't Save Us: Political Dispositions in the Conflicts of Superheroes" when he suggests that superheroes often represent fundamentally conservative values.
[3.2] Again exhibiting the dual focus on content and form of this issue, the remaining three Symposium essays illustrate the important roles of fan activities, technologies, and interfaces. Rebecca Fraimow's "Preserving Digital Remix Video" discusses the ephemerality of online archives, especially for audiovisual materials, and how this affects remix videos in particular. Maria Patrice Amon analyzes the complicated relationship of Disney cosplayers within Disney fandom and the cosplay community in "Performances of Innocence and Deviance in Disney Cosplaying." The Symposium section starts with the book, but it ends with online interaction in Jenna Kathryn Ballinger's "Fandom and the Fourth Wall." The essay looks at the way changes in culture and technology have allowed closer interaction between fans and producers, and how these changes have affected both sides.

4. Interviews and Reviews

[4.1] Just like Ballinger's essay, the two interviews illustrate the current dissolution of producer/audience boundaries in very different ways. In their conversation with *Sleepy Hollow* actor Orlando Jones, Lucy Bennett and Bertha Chin discuss his past year of "Exploring Fandom, Social Media, and Producer/Fan Interactions." Their conversation focuses on one individual's experiences. In contrast, Louisa Stein hosts a roundtable of various media scholars reviewing *Spreadable Media: Creating Value and Meaning in a Networked Culture* by Henry Jenkins, Sam Ford, and Joshua Green. Parts of this roundtable were originally published in *Cinema Journal*; this constitutes the extended, unabridged version.

[4.2] The three book reviews demonstrate the increased importance of fan studies. Anne Gilbert reviews *Fanged Fan Fiction: Variations on Twilight, True Blood, and The Vampire Diaries*, by Maria Lindgren Leavenworth and Malin Isaksson; Nicolle Lamerichs discusses *Manga’s Cultural Crossroads*, edited by Jaqueline Berndt and Bettina Kümmerling-Meibauer; and Lucy Bennett assesses *Popular Music Fandom: Identities, Roles, and Practices*, edited by Mark Duffett. All three books provide important contributions to their respective fields and to fan studies in general.

5. Coming up

[5.1] The next two issues of TWC, Nos. 18 and 19, will appear in the first half of 2015 as guest-edited special issues: Paul Booth and Lucy Bennett coedit a special issue on performance and performativity, and Anne Kustritz's special issue focuses on European fandom.

[5.2] TWC No. 20 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 [here](http://journal.transformativeworks.org/index.php/twc/about/submissions#onlineSubmissions). The close date for receipt of copy for No. 20 is March 15, 2015.
6. Acknowledgments

[6.1] 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.

[6.2] The following people worked on TWC No. 17 in an editorial capacity: Kristina Busse and Karen Hellekson (editors); Cameron Salisbury (Symposium); and Louisa Stein (Review).

[6.3] The following people worked on TWC No. 17 in a production capacity: Rrain Prior (production editor); Beth Friedman, Shoshanna Green, and Christine Mains (copyeditors); Karen Hellekson and Rrain Prior (layout); and Amanda Georgeanne Retartha and Vickie West (proofreaders).

[6.4] 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.

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Theory

Redefining genderswap fan fiction: A Sherlock case study

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Abstract—Using BBC Sherlock (2010–) fan fiction as case study, this article looks at how fans use and understand such concepts as biological sex and gender in genderswap fan fiction, arguing that the label often minimizes the importance of the physical body in determining gender identity. The label genderswap, most often used to describe stories where characters have become differently sexed, reflects and reinforces common cultural misunderstandings about differences between sex and gender. By teasing out definitions of genderswap, sex, gender, cisgender, and transgender, the article analyzes what genderswap includes and excludes from discussions of gender and identity within contemporary fan fiction, ultimately arguing for a broader conceptual understanding that grounds the genre within contemporary transgender theory.

Keywords—Cisgender; Fan Fiction; Gender; Sex; Transgender

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1. Introduction

The genderswap label, used by fans and scholars alike to describe stories where characters have become differently sexed, contributes to the ways we theorize about sex and gender and simultaneously risks reinforcing and potentially limiting common cultural understandings of the differences between the two concepts. However, very little research has been published on genderswap fan fiction, either as a genre or as specific case studies, perhaps because of the confusions over sex versus gender and what the term genderswap actually signifies (note 1). As such, this article aims to interrogate the terminology used in genderswap fan fiction and to discuss how it relates to current transgender theory about the relationship between biological sex and gender identity.

Over the past 30 years, transgender studies has shifted away from feminism and queer theory, from which they emerged, to an exploration of "the lived complexity of contemporary gender" (Stryker 2006). Originally concerned with breaking down the cultural links between sex and gender, transgender theorists challenged the
structuralist notion that gender was merely the mimetic sign of an ontological sexual identity. Rather, building on the work of Judith Butler, they argued that sex was not, in fact, a stable or unified referent but rather performative, "a variety of viable bodily aggregations that number far more than two. The 'wholeness' of the body and 'sameness' of its sex are themselves revealed to be socially constructed," just like gender identity (9). While this earlier iteration of transgender phenomena can be defined as a kind of Butlerian performance studies, more recent articulations have reinforced the importance of the "lived complexity" of gendered bodies in a post-9/11 world where nations define and police the borders of bodies and identities, just as they do states and nations. Genderswap fan fiction provides another way for us to understand "how bodies mean, how representation works, and what counts as legitimate knowledge," both inside and outside of the academy (8–9). By foregrounding gender expectations and how they are both attached to and separate from biological sex, genderswap fan fiction complicates such assumptions and encourages readers to see sex and gender identity as codependent rather than as separate aspects of an individual's identity.

2. Why *Sherlock*?

[2.1] BBC *Sherlock* (2010–) fan fiction is perhaps uniquely suited as a genderswap case study. The popular modernized update of Arthur Conan Doyle's classic detective presents two diversely gendered characters. On the one hand, Benedict Cumberbatch's Sherlock is as cold and intellectually dynamic as his Victorian counterpart, and Martin Freeman's John Watson fully embodies the military ethos and medical acumen of the original. On the other hand, Cumberbatch's Sherlock's asexuality, his unruly enthusiasm, and his mercurial mood swings could easily be gendered just as feminine as Freeman's Watson's nurturing caretaker persona. The characters' ability to embody stereotypical masculine and feminine gender behaviors simultaneously within male sexed bodies—and other characters' reactions to those behaviors—makes them intriguing sites for exploring the relationship between the two concepts.

[2.2] BBC *Sherlock* is also a great fit for analysis because of the popularity of its eponymous protagonist. Genderswap fan fiction purposefully uses familiar characters in order to reify the cultural significance of that character and simultaneously to distance the audience from previous portrayals; such characters carry all of the cultural capital of the original canonical figures as well as the defamiliarization needed to challenge traditional gender and sexual stereotypes. As the Guinness Book of Records' most portrayed literary figure of all time, there are few literary characters with more cultural capital than Sherlock Holmes. Studying *Sherlock* genderswap fan fiction allows us to see not only how predominantly female audiences are co-opting
this century-old character but also the ways they explore and theorize relationships between the body and gender identity.

3. (Re)defining sex and gender: What is genderswap?

[3.1] Readers familiar with gender theory find the genderswap label problematic because of the way it seemingly confuses sex and gender (note 2). A fan-created genre, genderswap by definition depends on gender as its primary category when describing stories about characters swapping sexed bodies (note 3). For example, a male-bodied Sherlock Holmes in a genderswap fan fiction becomes a female-bodied Sherlock Holmes. While this body swapping is often combined with implicit and explicit analyses of gendered behavior or behaviors, cultural expectations, surveillance, sexuality, and so on, using gender as the root of the term seems to privilege socially constructed behaviors over the material reality of the physical body (note 4). However, most often the genderswapped character's gender behavior does not actually change; rather, the character's gender behavior remains consistent with its originally sexed body (or at least with its original canonical depiction). The focus then becomes not what happens to change a character when a male-gendered character becomes female-gendered, but how the character's surrounding world—other characters, institutions—changes in response to the same behaviors being differently sexed.

[3.2] To simplify, sex is generally considered to be biologically determined while gender is considered to be culturally constructed, although even these basic definitions are under current debate (note 5). Male and female are terms used to denote a body's sex status, referring to its (potential) reproductive capacity, chromosomes, and genitalia (note 6). In contrast, gender refers to the social construction and cultural expectation of gendered behaviors or, in the words of transgender theorist Susan Stryker, "gender is the social organization of bodies into different categories of people" (Stryker 2008, 11). The emphasis here is of course on both "social organization" and "bodies." Gender is a cultural category used to privilege certain behaviors over others by assigning them to specific sex characteristics.

[3.3] At heart, genderswap fan fiction stories explore the cultural constructedness of gender, and interrogate what theorist Judith Butler describes as gender performativity and the role that physical embodiment plays in gender identity (note 7). Individuals perform gender identity through various behaviors ranging from clothing choices (women's skirts, high heels, and tight-fitting clothing; men's loose clothing, low-heeled shoes, and hats), to how they move their bodies, use their voices, and the activities they participate in. Culturally, we expect male-bodied persons to behave (i.e., perform) in masculine-gendered ways (ambitious, protective, aggressive, assertive), and we expect female-bodied individuals to behave in feminine-gendered ways
nurturing, weak, passive, submissive). Such alignment is often referred to as cisgender—literally, gendered behavior that is on the side of its assigned biological sex (note 8). Gender theorists emphasize that such behaviors are learned at an early age by watching and mirroring people we admire, and while it may be easy to criticize such descriptions as stereotypes, they describe how most people define and police gender in their everyday lives. Children, parents, teachers, and friends all conspire to correct any behaviors that do not seem to match a person’s perceived sex.

[3.4] The danger of focusing so much on the performative aspect of gender identity, however, for fans and scholars alike, is that it begins to erase the material reality of the body. Gender is embodied. Embodiment refers both to the corporeal body and to the ways an individual materially manifests and lives the life of a specifically sexed and gendered person. As many biologists and trans theorists have noted, the physical manifestations of biological sex—which include genetic composition (XX vs. XY), reproductive organs, genitalia, secondary sex characteristics—all affect how a person identifies as a sexed individual and how society sees, interprets, and acts upon that individual; this is where genderswap fiction concentrates most of its interrogations. In addition, how people interpret these biological identifiers—that is, how they choose to express their biological sex through their gender identities—is similarly a form of embodiment. As a concept, embodiment attempts to articulate how individuals manifest gender through their physical selves—and, conversely, their physical selves through their gender—in a way that is inclusive of both biological and cultural factors (note 9). Rather than separate the two, genderswap, as a genre, ultimately highlights and complicates the interconnectedness between the physical embodiment of sex and gender behaviors.

[3.5] Genderswap’s complication of traditional feminist and queer theory understandings of sex and gender also mirrors contemporary trends in North American transgender activism and theory (note 10). Debates about the relationship between biology and gender continue to dominate much of contemporary feminist and gender theory, especially in transgender studies. Many poststructural transgender theorists in the late 20th century, like Leslie Feinberg, Sandy Stone, Cressida Heyes, and Susan Stryker, focused primarily on performativity and identity politics, arguing that gender is a culturally constructed performance that is perpetuated by its own continuous reenactment, and that the body itself is as much a re-presentation of identity as the behaviors and actions one attributes to it. More recently, contemporary transgender theorists have criticized such poststructuralist gender approaches, claiming they ignore "the embodied experience of the speaking subject" and how culture acts upon that body (Stryker 2006, 12; Nagoshi and Brzuzy 2010, 435; Lane 2009, 149) (note 11). While earlier critics possibly overlooked the ways characters physically embody gender identity, focusing solely on the biological sex of genderswap characters simultaneously
risks an essentializing discourse that posits masculine and feminine behaviors as being naturally tied to male and female bodies, respectively. If genderswap stories "use changes of sex to explore how [characters] experience the embodiment of gender," as Alexis Lothian (2008) argues, then a study of genderswap fan fiction needs to include both gendered behaviors and sexed bodies in order to understand how the two together contribute to individual identity and to how society perceives, constructs, and categorizes them. The very concept of genderswap fan fiction itself forces us to reimagine sex and gender as mutually codependent, rather than separate, influences on identity formation.

4. "I want a female Sherlock Holmes": Fan responses to Sherlock

[4.1] Analyzing an individual fandom through a particular theoretical lens can reveal important trends, patterns, and attitudes, and the central corpus of Sherlock genderswap fan fiction grapples with the relationship among gender behavior, identity, and embodiment. BBC Sherlock has a large and active fandom ranging across multiple online platforms (LiveJournal, Archive of Our Own [AO3], Fanfiction.net, Tumblr, Twitter, Facebook, etc.), and while Sherlock Holmes fandoms have been dominated historically by men, Sherlock is the first adaptation with a predominantly female audience. Several critical debates over the show's portrayal and overall lack of female characters and perceived misogyny have dominated both Web forums and the media, illustrating that representations of women, gender, and sexuality are critical to the audience's interaction with and reception of the show (note 12).

[4.2] While there isn't space in this article to discuss the politics surrounding Sherlock's women characters and fans' specific responses to the show, some fans specifically cite such arguments as motivation for their writing and reading of genderswap fan fiction. For example, in her author's note to the story "Astronomy," a loose adaptation of Arthur Conan Doyle's "A Scandal in Bohemia" where Sherlock, John/Joan, Mycroft, and Lestrade go on a romantic holiday to Prague, writer Parachute_Silks explained that she turned all of the male characters into women "as a slightly desperate reaction to this show's female character problem" (Parachute_Silks 2010a). Parachute_Silks seems to be referring to what is commonly known in fan lore as "Rule 63," a feminist response to the underrepresentation of women in television and film: "For every given male character, there is a female version of that character, and vice versa" (http://tvtropes.org/pmwiki/pmwiki.php/Main/RuleSixtyThree). Representation isn't about simple numbers (i.e., requiring the same number of male and female characters, regardless of characterization); rather, significance, meaning, and value are of importance. According to Rule 63, there is a matching and equal female version of every male character, with the same values, work, and
characteristics. For writers like Parachute_Silks, shifting the canonically gendered behavior from the show into female-embodied fan fiction characters allowed her both to address a perceived lack of representation on the show and to implicitly explore the relationship between gender behavior and biological sex.

[4.3] Representations of women characters are similarly important for bloggers and viewers. Blogger Shadowfireflame argued that women fans want the equivalent of the heroic male protagonist famous throughout canonical Sherlock Holmes lore:

[4.4] Okay, so I'm coming to realize that it's not just that I want a female genius (though I'll take those!). I actually want an arrogant female genius. Someone irritating, confident, abrasive, demanding. I don't want a cute little girl who demurely and quietly provides her brain powers to the betterment of humanity; I want a woman with charisma who explodes onto the scene, verbally eviscerates everyone, and then sweeps away with her massive intellect. Yeah...in short, I want a female Sherlock Holmes. (Shadowfireflame 2011)

[4.5] The characteristics typically associated with the canonical Holmes figure—irritating, confident, abrasive, demanding, one who eviscerates everyone with his massive intellect—are all behaviors typically gendered masculine in Western society. Women, Shadowfireflame rightly articulates, are expected to be cute, little, demure, and quiet; they are supposed to dedicate their intellect to helping others and improving quality of life. Shadowfireflame doesn't want a female character like Sherlock Holmes; she wants a female Sherlock Holmes. Genderswap's ability to transfer the gender behaviors of a beloved canonical male figure into an equally engaging female allows readers to challenge culturally accepted norms for gendered behavior and to identify with clever, charismatic protagonists. The central tension of many such stories is, thus, the social reaction to those gender characteristics being embodied differently, thus bringing sex back to the forefront of analysis.

5. BAMF! John and fem! John—one and the same?

[5.1] Based on the preponderance of fem!Sherlock fan fiction stories on Archive of Our Own and other such sites, Shadowfireflame isn't the only person interested in a female Sherlock Holmes (note 13). The majority of genderswap Sherlock stories on the Web take place within the BBC Sherlock world/canon and focus on fem!Sherlock, often but not always paired with a fem!John. While both characters exhibit both cis- and transgendered traits in the original show, John's feminine behaviors seem more accepted and easily translatable between male and female bodies; that is, fem!John characters are not often seen in conflict over their gender identities in the same way
that fem!Sherlock's often experience (note 14). Sexed male, Martin Freeman's John Watson assumes transgendered roles in his relationship with Sherlock, depending on Sherlock's needs at the time. He purchases groceries, manages their finances, and maintains their flat, and his position as a doctor also means he is responsible for Sherlock's health. Many of guy!John's behaviors tie in with what Marxist feminists identify as women's unpaid reproductive labor—that is, unpaid domestic/house work that supports the reproduction of the family unit. Historically, women's activities within the home—cleaning, providing food, bearing and raising children, and so on—have not been considered work in the eyes of capitalist society. Work was productive, outside the home, and wage earning. As a result, reproductive labor was historically aligned with women's political and economic position within the home and within the structure of marriage. In the classic Victorian Holmes and Watson stories and pastiches, this work was taken up by Mrs. Hudson, their housekeeper. However, as single men in the 20th century, the BBC Sherlock's John and Sherlock would have to take on the reproductive labor role in their household; living together as roommates also facilitates the approximation of a heteronormative relationship whereby one person—John Watson—becomes culturally feminized by assuming these responsibilities. These feminized behaviors carry over into genderswap stories like Parachute_Silks' "Categories."

[5.2] Alternating between fem!Sherlock's and fem!John's (Joan) point of view, "Categories" begins by describing both characters as young girls. Fem!Sherlock has a failed sexual relationship with "The Blind Banker's" Sebastian while at university before she becomes a consulting detective as an adult. The story follows the original canonical meeting between Sherlock and John at St. Bart's, after which they move in together and begin to develop sexual feelings for one another. The story concludes with fem!Sherlock and Joan working a case for Sebastian in France and confronting him about his treatment of fem!Sherlock at university. Fem!Sherlock retains her masculine aloofness and independence within the story, but Joan is shown as caring and emotionally sensitive. While fem!Sherlock "is not one to appreciate people trying to look after her," Joan likes caring about people: "Love and responsibility come natural to her" (Parachute_Silks 2010b) (note 15). Including the word "natural" here to describe fem!John's behavior may strike a dissonant chord in the reader. Joan's characterization may look, on the surface, as if it reinforces traditional gender dynamics of woman-as-caretaker. It is "natural," that is, instinctual, for Joan to nurture fem!Sherlock, something that is directly tied to her womanly biology; Joan's characterization is cisgendered and therefore does not challenge cultural expectations for women's behavior. However, such characterization is also consistent with BBC!John's portrayal on the show, which makes the term "natural" a bit more slippery. Joan's "natural" preference for taking care of fem!Sherlock could come either from her female biology, or it could be the result of her tie to the show's original portrayal of
John's character. Fem!Sherlock is still brilliant, arrogant, and rude, while fem!John remains supportive, loyal, and caring. In a sense, then, the exact same behaviors from the show become inverted in the genderswap story; fem!Sherlock's arrogance is now portrayed as transgendered while fem!John is now cisgendered. By giving readers two female genderswapped characters who exhibit differently gendered behaviors (the former stereotypically masculine, the latter stereotypically feminine), both of which are consistent with their male personifications in the original show, genderswap fan fiction stories like "Categories" inherently challenge the audience's notions of "natural" gender roles in relation to sex and disrupt the traditional binaries of sex/gender and masculine/feminine.

Along with BBC!John's feminization in both the show and in fan fiction, several other stories keep John's canonical military career in the forefront of their characterization. For example, in Mad_Maudlin's "In Arduis Fidelis," BAMF (badass motherfucker) Jane Watson emphasizes male BBC!John's cis/masculine characteristics, like his history in the military and his physical prowess. The story loosely follows the plot of season 1's "A Study in Pink" and portrays a nonlinear retelling, from Jane's point of view, of her first meeting with Sherlock, her frustrating therapy sessions, and her sense of purposelessness and resentment after being injured and discharged from the army. The focus on her father–son-like relationship with her father, her childhood experiences learning to shoot and hunt, and her skills with weapons all highlight the cisgendered elements of BBC!John's military career, behaviors typically associated with men's experiences. Shifting those masculine characteristics into a female body highlights the cultural assumptions we make when encountering a sexed individual. However, unlike fan fiction's seeming easy acceptance and transference of male!John's more feminine transgendered behaviors, such masculine behavior when embodied in a woman can be cause for concern and conflict (note 16). The text constantly reiterates cultural rules for women's behavior: "Women didn't serve in front-line positions. Women weren't marksmen. Women didn't get shot" (Mad_Maudlin 2010). Clearly, the assumption here is that women, as a group, do not participate in war or violence; such activities are not cisgender for women. And yet, by placing John's canonical (male) characteristics in a woman's body, "In Arduis Fidelis" simultaneously reinforces and challenges those generalizations. The phrase "Women didn't get shot" denies Jane's experience and makes it an impossibility; as a woman, she couldn't possibly have gone to war or have been injured since, according to contemporary attitudes, women didn't do that. Women, as a group, do not go into combat. At the same time, however, that fact that Jane does get shot in the story means that Jane has the same masculinely constructed experiences as the BBC's John. By shifting the same behaviors from a male sexed body to a female one, Mad_Maudlin is able both to challenge gender expectations and to highlight how embodiment influences our reactions to those behaviors.
6. Freaks and geeks: Fem!Sherlock's (disruptive) femininity

[6.1] While the majority of male BBC!John's femininity seems socially acceptable to audiences, male BBC!Sherlock’s disruptive femininity seems more troublesome (note 17). At first glance, Benedict Cumberbatch's Sherlock appears to reinforce the traditional cis/masculine characteristics familiar to all Sherlock Holmes aficionados: high-level reasoning, emotionlessness, arrogance, audacity, and initiative. Yet one could argue that he also exhibits feminized behavior—through his unruly enthusiasm (for example, jumping and clapping his hands in excitement over hearing of a new suicide in "A Study in Pink"), his mercurial mood swings and sulking on the couch, his vanity over his appearance, and his snarky eye-rolling, exaggerated shrugs, and heavy sighs (note 18). Characters within the show, ranging from Sally Donovan's repeated "freak" to John's begrudgingly affectionate "bit not good," constantly admonish Sherlock into more socially acceptable (i.e., masculine or cisgendered) behaviors. However, enthusiasm itself is not consistently feminized, either within the show or in Western culture. Men are allowed—and even encouraged—to be unruly and enthusiastic within sporting activities and events, for example; it is only when Sherlock shows his enthusiasm for morbid topics like death and crime that John steps in. Sherlock is being enthusiastic in the wrong way. Similarly, John chastises Sherlock in "The Great Game" episode for not being feminine enough—that is, he does not show proper emotion or feeling when the hostages are in danger nor when the old woman hostage dies in the bomb explosion. Rather than being criticized for unruly feminine behavior while embodied as a male, Sherlock seems to be constantly violating the limits and expectations for both masculinity and femininity.

[6.2] Unlike fem!John, however, fem!Sherlock seems in constant conflict with gender expectations once she is female-bodied within genderswapped texts. Male!Sherlock's freakishness in the canon gets recontextualized as a specifically gendered critique in the fan fiction where male characters, in particular, play an important role in policing women's gender behavior. At the beginning of Parachute_Silks's fem!Sherlock/fem!John story "Categories," for example, a young female Sherlock tries to keep her university boyfriend, Sebastian, interested in her at first by pretending to fulfill traditional cis/feminine stereotypes: she hides her deductions and intelligence and tries to "make conversation—and the phrase is perfect, really, because that is very much what it feels like, that she is creating something artificial" (Parachute_Silks 2010b). However, she cannot keep up the charade; she "tries less and less to pretend not to know things" and when she is herself in front of Sebastian's friends, "he snaps at her, tells her not to be such a freak, and his friends snigger and make jokes [fem!]Sherlock doesn't understand or particularly want to" (Parachute_Silks 2010b). The central tension of such scenes is the social perception of the female embodiment
of masculine gender traits, which make her a "freak" in the eyes of patriarchal society. Sebastian ends up dumping fem!Sherlock for another woman who looks just like her: "pale and dark-haired and clever"; but this woman "isn't cleverer than him and thinks he's brilliant and goes to the Conservative Society meetings with him" (Parachute_Silks 2010b). By not fulfilling Sebastian's (and society's) expectations of her as a woman, fem!Sherlock is belittled, emotionally damaged, and ultimately ostracized from her social group in university. The contrast between canonical Sherlock's masculine intellectualism and its embodiment in a female body highlights the gender expectations audiences have for male and female behavior and the high costs of going against cultural expectations of femininity, in particular.

[6.3] SomeoneElsesDream's fem!Sherlock story "And Then You Wake" explores the ways in which men and women define and police their peers' appropriate gender behavior and sexualized bodies. The majority of the text closely follows the show's "A Study in Pink" and "The Great Game" episodes, beginning with John's Afghan injury (2009) and fem!Sherlock being violently assaulted and raped while a student at Cambridge University (1999). At the beginning of the story, fem!Sherlock is surprised in a deserted alcove by three male university students who immediately begin criticizing her masculine behavior. They accuse her of "running around like a boy" on campus and of thinking she is smarter than everyone else (SomoneElsesDream 2011). The first assailant then proceeds to restrain fem!Sherlock, pressing her into the wall, querying, "Do you even have a cunt? Or are you some kind of freak?" A second man raucously suggests she has a "dick," and the third proceeds to grope her chest and force her down on the floor before proclaiming "she's hardly a girl at all" because of the small size of her breasts. One of the attackers brutally rapes fem!Sherlock before Mycroft appears and prevents the rest of the men from assaulting her. "And Then You Wake" problematizes the mistake of equating gender identity with physical embodiment. While the men in the text seem, on the surface, to reinscribe the idea that "cunt" or "breasts" equals "woman" (and "dick" equals "man"), the tone of the story and fem!Sherlock's reactions clearly show the reader that this concept is to be questioned. Similarly, one could argue that simply highlighting the assumed connection between a woman's genitals and her gender identity simultaneously reveals cultural stereotypes about womanhood and critiques them. Such analysis of the relationship or relationships between biological sex and gender identity is key to recent North American transgender theory, the focus of the final section.

7. Transgender theory and trans/genderswap fan fiction

[7.1] Transgender fan fiction—that is, fan fiction that deals with characters who transition from one sex or gender to another—is even more underresearched and undertheorized than current genderswap scholarship, most likely because it is quite
rare (note 19). Trans/genderswap fan fiction takes the basic premises of genderswap to an entirely new level by adding a trans component to an already genderswapped character. To clarify, genderswap narratives in themselves do not qualify as transgender fan fiction; rather, trans stories explicitly explore a character whose gender identity is dissociated from his or her assigned sex identity and who may or may not seek to transition to the other sex. Adding the genderswap component to such narratives, however, significantly complicates them. Before the story begins, the author recasts a canonically male character like Sherlock Holmes as female and then places them within a narrative world where that fem!Sherlock is transgender. Thus, male Sherlock becomes fem!Sherlock becomes female-to-male (FTM) Sherlock (note 20). Such doubling and redoubling highlights the primary concern of transgender theory today: the intricate relationship between gender identity and embodiment.

[7.2] By changing a canonically male character into a female character, genderswap authors often seek to restore (or challenge) the relationship between the character's sexed body and gender comportment; behavior that may have seemed cis in the original becomes misaligned in the swapped character, forcing readers to rethink their assumptions about the (implied) relationship between sex and gender. However, the decision to reembody that character in the original-sexed body yet again raises several important questions. Why not just write a male Sherlock Holmes who seeks to transition to being a female? Why the added complexity of transitioning back to the original sex? What does drawing attention to biological sex in addition to gender add to such stories? Such a move seems to simultaneously question the origin of sex identity as well as to reaffirm the importance the body plays in gender identity (note 21). As transgender theorists Elliot and Roen explain, "The body is not equivalent to the organism but only comes to take on form and meaning through representation" (247). Such representation does not occur only through the individual and how s/he presents her body and her personal gender identity to the world (i.e., through clothing, naming, behaviors, etc.); it also occurs through powerful visual and textual representations across cultures—including fan productions. While traditional genderswap fan fiction seems to dissociate gender behavior from the body, trans/genderswap narratives—following the trajectory of contemporary transgender theory—remind readers that the body plays an important role in determining identity and shouldn't be subsumed under gender labels.

[7.3] Much of recent transgender theory focuses on the relationship among embodiment, gender, and identity, particularly around the issue of sex reassignment surgery (SRS). Some trans theorists criticize what, to them, seems to be an overemphasis on the importance of genital surgery, arguing that medical practitioners often take advantage of transgender patients by offering idealistic expectations and often unrealistic reconstruction surgeries (Elliot and Roen 1998, 250). However, others
like Rubin (1998), Ramachandran (2008), and Lane (2009) emphasize how important the physical body is to gender and sexual identity. For these theorists, "body image is the psychic representation of the body for the subject. There can be a difference between the body image and the corporeal body—but it is the body image that we act on in the world" (Lane 2009, 149). Many transgender individuals report dissociation between their bodies and identities. For instance, transgender theorist Cressida Heyes, describing her own transition, felt "a deep sense of unease with [her] body" and "often wished (including for periods of years at a time) to be in a different body" (Heyes 2003, 1097). Another research subject, FTM "Babe," similarly described feeling "trapped in the wrong body" and he anxiously sought genital surgery in order to "correct" this "aberration" (Elliot and Roen 1998, 250). Making sure that the body matches the individual's psychic image is crucial for many transgender people. While poststructuralist arguments about the social constructedness of gender are immensely important to our understanding of how gender is learned, acquired, and performed, ignoring embodiment and relying solely on the "artificiality" of gender—which genderswap, in isolation from sex, runs the risk of doing—may diminish the need many transsexuals feel for sex reassignment surgery and, more broadly, negate the gender/sex dissociation many transgender people describe (Nagoshi and Brzuzy 2010, 432). 

8. FTM!Sherlock and the importance of embodiment 

[8.1] Many characters in FTM Sherlock genderswap fan fiction claim their identities do not match the physical manifestation of their selves; that is, they feel as if they inhabit the wrong bodies (note 23). Most female readers are familiar with how the media acculturates women to hate their bodies—to see physical developments like growing breasts and menstruating as embarrassing or even disgusting, and to seek constantly to reshape, reform, and redesign their bodies (whether through clothing, diet, or plastic surgery). Perhaps not surprisingly, several FTM!Sherlock stories spend a considerable amount of time on how the onset of puberty was particularly problematic for the character's sense of identity. For example, Ishmael's "Body of Evidence" (from the longer Bodies series on AO3) describes a young FTM!Sherlock disgusted with her body. Born female, Sheridan Olivia Holmes enjoyed typical boy activities as a child, like exploring the outdoors and getting dirty. Her family was constantly disappointed she wasn't more interested in traditionally feminine things like wearing frilly dresses and playing with dolls. However, young Sheridan resented her body and the changes it went through in puberty, viewing it as a kind of "betrayal." When she sees her pregnant Aunt Matilda early in the story, she describes Matilda's stomach as a "grotesque flesh balloon" and the fetus a "parasite" (Ishmael 2011). When her female family members tell her she, too, will want to have a child of her own
one day, Sheridan is terrified. She wants to keep her boyish prepubescent body and all of the freedoms that presumably go with it:

[8.2] None of them understood. You didn't want to do anything but grow taller. You liked your skinny hips and flat chest. You hated the idea of carrying a thing inside you, of bleeding every month without any say in it. You didn't know why having those parts meant you wanted the things people expected you to.

[8.3] You knew biology, knew your body's betrayal was inevitable. (Ishmael 2011)

[8.4] She hates the idea of menstruation and childbearing, two clear biological functions of the female body. Clearly, Sheridan recognizes how society equates the shape of her body and its functions with who she is supposed to be as an individual, yet she rejects and points out such problematic assumptions.

[8.5] Red's "A Room Untended" tells a similar story of a FTM!Sherlock who struggles through puberty, rejecting her female body and its attributes. FTM!Sherlock tries to stave off puberty through starvation, ultimately turning to cocaine and drug addiction when this tactic fails. By the young age of 16, Red's FTM!Sherlock is "disgusted" by her developing body, "the onset of menses, the steady development of breasts, the nearly undisguisable distribution of what fat remained on [her] body" (Red 2012). Even though FTM!Sherlock comes from a strongly matriarchal family and is raised to believe that her sex has nothing to do with her abilities or intellect, she rejects her female identity and, after sex reassignment surgery, transitions to being male. The story ends on a rather wistful note, with FTM!Sherlock hoping he can one day share his history with John and reveal the fact that he "did not emerge fully formed into this world, complete as [he was]" (Red 2012). Red's FTM!Sherlock seems to view his transitioned self as "complete" rather than fragmented, faulty, or perhaps more simply, in transition. For transgender FTM characters like Ishmael's Sheridan and Red's FTM!Sherlock, the disconnection between the physical and mental manifestations of the self cause them to reject their bodies as "faulty," and these "faulty" bodies become damaging to characters' sense of self.

[8.6] On the one hand, Etothepii's "Seems so Easy for Everybody Else" seems to reinforce these cultural hostilities toward female bodies. From a young age, FTM!Sherlock, Sophie Charlotte Holmes, is told that being a girl isn't good enough. When she brushes some maggots off a rotting rat skull in the playground, the boys grudgingly tell her she is "almost as good as a boy" (Etothepii 2011). She learns early that boys like Mycroft are "smart and strong and fierce," and they "go off and have adventures." Instead, girls are told to be pretty and "empty-headed" (Etothepii 2011).
As a result, she sees her female body as her enemy; menstruation is "just another way her body fights her, changing against her wishes, unstoppable and uncontrollable" (Etothepii 2011). As she matures into a young woman, her unhappiness grows.

[8.7] She doesn't know why she's unhappy. She just...she doesn't like herself, her body, the way it looks. It's pretty enough, in a feminine sort of way. It's fit, and her muscle memory—for combat, for the violin, for archery, is superb.

[8.8] But.

[8.9] But she looks in the mirror and she thinks, This isn't who I want to be.

[8.10] She doesn't know why and this bothers her the most. (Etothepii 2011)

Later in the story, Charlotte catches a glimpse of herself in a mirror and "she hates her reflection with a vehemence that surprises her. She looks wrong—awkward and uncomfortable and unhappy. I don't want to be that woman, she thinks" (Etothepii 2011). The transgender element adds another level of complexity to the story, however. Clearly, Sophie is experiencing a strong dissociation between her biological body and her gender identity. Psychologically, she identifies as masculine and even begins using a male pen name when corresponding with the Metropolitan police; the constant reminder of her female body confounds her and causes an intellectual and emotional dissonance that leads her, in this story, to drug addiction and overdose.

[8.12] Transgender theorists Elliot and Roen maintain that the body is not just a physical reality but rather an "unconscious manifestation" of the self which "might or might not 'correspond' with anatomical sex" (247). The body Charlotte sees in the mirror does not necessarily reflect the one she sees in her mind, the one she may think is a more accurate representation of her self. Charlotte's comment that "she doesn't like herself, her body, the way it looks," syntactically connects her sense of self directly with her body, its physical manifestation (Etothepii 2011). The three—self, body, appearance—all become one. Even though she is fit and athletic, Sophie "hates her reflection with a vehemence that surprises her" (Etothepii 2011). With no distinction between the body and identity, then in hating her body, Sophie must hate herself. One way to escape from this self-loathing is to change the physical manifestation of that self.

FTM!Sherlock characters ultimately emphasize the importance of analyzing sex as well as gender within the genderswap genre; but at the same time, they reflect a conflicted stance on embodiment and gender identity. As we've already seen, many
stories emphasize the dissociation many transgender people experience toward their corporeal bodies, with several characters expressing outright resentment and hatred of their sexed selves. However, very few stories choose to have the FTM!Sherlock character pursue sex reassignment surgery. Red's "A Room Untended" immediately starts with FTM!Sherlock's claim, "It had occurred long enough ago that you had considered the surgery a complete success," which one can assume refers to SRS. Most trans/genderswap writers in the Sherlock fandom choose to focus on embodiment and transgender—not transsexual—issues, implying that genital reassignment surgery only addresses cosmetic elements of sexual identity. For instance, Charlotte in Etothepii's "Seems so Easy for Everybody Else" is suspicious of SRS: "And even if she does want to be male, what does it matter? She can't actually change her chromosomes, just force her body into a facsimile of masculinity" (Etothepii 2011). While Charlotte believes that maleness is embodied, one must go deeper than the external copy of masculinity she argues SRS provides. For her, sex is immutable, genetic, inside the body, not outside, and unchangeable by modern surgery. For a character like Ishmael's Sheridan in "Body of Evidence," however, masculinity and masculine identity are not necessarily centered on male biology at all; while she binds her breasts and moves about in the world as an adult man, s/he "had no particular desire for a penis" (Ishmael 2011) (note 24). Sheridan can be a man without having a male body.

[8.14] Problems with terminology, confusion between sex and gender, and debates over gender performance versus embodiment all point to the importance of language and representation when discussing gender identity. Language, in particular, is frequently used as a way to structure the self. For instance, individuals are often forced to choose between the binary of male or female when filling out forms, which frustrates Sheridan in Ishmael's "Body of Evidence." Although Charlotte in "Seems So Easy for Everybody Else" distrusts SRS and its ability to make her a man, the story ultimately argues that representation—specifically that found within language—is where true ontological power resides (note 25). Three-quarters of the way through the story, Charlotte admits defeatedly that she "can't see [transitioning to a male] happening, no matter how hard she tries" [emphasis added]; then, there is a break before the narrative returns: "He gives up arguing with himself about it, eventually" (Etothepii 2011). Through this subtle shift from the feminine to masculine pronoun, the reader experiences both a linguistic and ontological shift. As Judith Butler explains, "Within speech act theory, a performative is that discursive practice that enacts or produces that which it names" (Butler 1993, 13). The linguistic move from feminine to masculine pronoun in Etothepii's story highlights the cultural (historic, linguistic) construction of gender identity; by calling herself "he," Charlotte transitions to Sherlock in a Butlerian and Lacanian sense. S/he is performing masculinity through language, labels, and identity. This is simultaneously an ontological shift as well.
Immediately after the pronoun shift, Mycroft arrives in Sherlock's apartment and confronts him: "You've been pretending you're a man." Sherlock's response—"I'm not pretending"—firmly establishes his ontological shift in identity (Etothropii 2011). In the Cartesian sense, by calling himself "he," Sherlock now literally defines himself as male. By the end of the story, Sherlock is able to recognize himself in the mirror "without hating how he looks" in a way he could not or did not previously as a female.

9. Conclusion

[9.1] While much of early fan studies has focused on defining and establishing the parameters of a new discipline, analyzing specific fan fiction genres and individual fandoms gives theorists insight not only into fan practices and reimaginings of canonical work but also into the ways in which we, as a society, define ourselves. Looking at genderswap fan fiction, for example, not only helps us to understand a specific genre within fan writing but also how fans understand and articulate complex ideas like sex, gender, and identity. Similarly, analyzing a popular character like Sherlock Holmes through his modern BBC incarnation also provides insight into the ways in which contemporary fans interact with, admire, and critique cultural representations of masculinity and femininity. Hopefully this article provides an entry point for additional nuanced theoretical and ethnographic studies on the intricate ways in which media and fans re-present cultural understandings of what it means to be men and/or women.

10. Notes

1. The most notable source on genderswap fan fiction to date is Kristina Busse and Alexia Lothian (2009). Both Busse and Lothian have also blogged independently on the issue (Busse 2009; Lothian 2008), and Hannah Ellison dedicated a small section of her recent *Glee* (2009–) Kink Meme article to "girl!peen" fiction; that is, stories about women with male genitalia (2013). Freund and Fielding (2013) also touch on the subject. Additionally, a few other recent articles—on cosplay, in particular—have included discussions of gender bending (Gilligan 2012; Leng 2013), and Jordan Youngblood recently published an article on gender embodiment in video games (2013).

2. On AO3, one of the only truly searchable fan sites, fans use a number of different terms to describe the genre, ranging from "genderswap," "gender!swap," "sexswap," "genderswitch," "gender-switch," "genderflip" to adding "girl!" or "fem!" in front of a character's name. Such variety illustrates the multiple ways in which fans envision gender identity while simultaneously complicating researchers' ability to gather definitive data on the subject. Other research published on genderswap fan fiction
uses additional labels such as "genderfuck" and "gender-bending" interchangeably (Busse and Lothian 2009, 105).

3. The genderswap entry in the Fanlore wiki is one of the few places where this discrepancy is noted. "While it should correctly be called sexswap, since the biological sex is being swapped (and the social gender only as a consequence of the biological change)," the site explains, "the term is established for a number of likely reasons, e.g., the conflation of sex and gender in discourse or the better flow of words" (http://fanlore.org/wiki/Genderswap). However, such a definition assumes that social gender is only a consequence of biological sex rather than an integral part of an individual's holistic gender identity. "Sex," as Susan Stryker notes, "is not the foundations of gender in the same way that an apple is not the foundation of a reflection of red fruit in the mirror; 'sex' is a mash-up, a story we mix about how the body means, which parts matter most, and how they register in our consciousness or field of vision" (Stryker 2006, 9).

4. Some readers may fairly question whether one can claim that genderswap fails to attend to the body when so many of these stories are sexually explicit. While this is certainly true, this article seeks to explore what those bodies mean and how they affect characters' sense of identity rather than merely what bodies do in sexual situations.

5. Some scholars, for example Monique Wittig and Judith Butler, argue that our understanding of nature and the natural at the root of the biological argument underpinning our concept of sex are as culturally constructed as our understanding of gender. As Wittig explains, we often take sex "as an 'immediate given,' 'a sensible given,' 'physical features,' belonging to a natural order. But what we believe to be a physical and direct perception is only a sophisticated and mythic construction, an 'imaginary formation,' which reinterprets physical features (in themselves as neutral as others but marked by a social system), through the network of relationships in which they are perceived" (quoted in Butler 1993, 155).

6. Of course, all of these parameters can be problematized in specific circumstances: infertility, castration, vasectomy, hysterectomy, mastectomy, etc. Even the most obvious cultural and biological determinants of sex identity can be altered. In addition to basic reproductive genitalia, some people also include secondary sex characteristics, including mammary glands and facial hair, as bodily signs of one's biological sex. Intersexed individuals—people who exhibit biological characteristics from more than one sex—clearly challenge the underlying concepts defining Western society's male/female sex/gender classification; however, most of Western culture remains structured by this simplified binary system.
7. For Butler, gender is performative in the sense that "as in other ritual social dramas, the action of gender requires a performance that is repeated. This repetition is at once a reenactment and reexperiencing of a set of meanings already socially established; and it is the mundane and ritualized form of their legitimation" (Butler 1993, 191). Therefore, gender has "no ontological status apart from the various acts which constitute its reality" (185). In more recent transgender research, such arguments have come under fire for ignoring the material reality of the body in a post-9/11 surveillance state which is much more invested in defining, maintaining, and policing boundaries between sex and gender, the self and the state, nation and nation.

8. The term *cisgender* attempts to highlight the typically unnamed assumption of nontransgender status in the terms *man* and *woman*. Some transgender theorists dislike the term, however, arguing that it still situates nontransgender, or cisgender, as the norm. Nontransgender, they argue, positions transgender identities as center, which, for some, is a more political act.

9. Notably, transgender research has shifted in the last decade away from the pathological, linguistic, and performative histories of gendered bodies to focus on the various ways in which bodies are politicized through gender, sexuality, race, class, nation, able-bodiedness, etc. Current trans theory is particularly interested in the ways in which bodies act, are acted upon, and are materially defined in/by systems of power.

10. Many scholars and individuals reject the transsexual label, claiming it is too old-fashioned and narrow to encompass all transgender people and experience; many others refuse it due to its unfortunate pathological associations with the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* and its connections to gender identity disorder and gender dysphoria. While transsexuals and transgender people both experience similar dissociation between their gender identities and/or gender expression and their biological sex, transsexuals are often described as individuals who seek to alter their bodies, either through hormone treatment or sex assignment surgery, while transgender people "may have little or no intention of having sex-reassignment surgeries or hormone treatments" (Nagoshi and Brzuzy 2010, 432). Transgender, rather than transsexual, has become the accepted term within North American trans activism—most likely since it is considered more inclusive and addresses a wide range of gender and sex identities.

11. Transgender theorists Nagoshi and Brzuzy argue that previous poststructural theories about the social construction of gender which do not take embodiment and biology into account are now considered inadequate: "Bodies are involved more actively, more intimately, and more intricately in social processes than theory has usually allowed," they argue. "Bodies participate in social action by delineating courses
of social conduct—the body is a participant in gender social practice" (Nagoshi and Brzuzy 2010, 435). As a result, the recently published Transgender Studies Reader 2 (2013) draws attention to previous transgender scholarship's "explicit whiteness, U.S.-centric, and Anglophone bias" (Stryker and Aizura 2013, 4) and the ways in which transgender bodies are increasing becoming a Foucauldian field of knowledge through post-9/11 surveillance strategies. As editors Stryker and Aizura note, "'Gender' is not merely the representation in language and culture of a biological sex; it is also an administrative or bureaucratic structure for the maintenance of sexual difference and reproductive capacity (the ticking off of M's and F's on state-issued or state-sanctioned forms). In this sense, and to the extent that gender identity is understood as the psychical internalization and somaticization of historically contingent modes of embodied personhood," they argue, "transgender is intimately bound up with questions of nation, territory, and citizenship, with categories of belonging and exclusion, of excess and incorporation, and with all the processes through which individual corporealties become aggregated as bodies politic" (8).

12. Jane Clare Jones's "Is Sherlock Sexist? Steven Moffat's Wanton Women" from the Guardian and Helen Lewis's rebuttal in the New Statesman prompted a small but passionate media and Internet firestorm around the show's female characters—or lack thereof. Bloggers like Foz Meadows, P0rcupinegirl, Wellingtonboots, Rileyo, and Addyke all wrote insightful meta commentary on the show's women characters, their portrayals, and audience responses.

13. To help situate the popularity of genderswap stories in Sherlock fandom, there are 35,669 BBC Sherlock fan fiction entries on AO3, 260 of which are specifically tagged "genderswap"; AO3 reports 3,353 total "genderswap" narratives across all fandoms. Keeping in mind the variants within statistical reporting, when searching BBC Sherlock and the following tags, AO3 revealed: Femlock: 147; Gender Changes: 210; Female John: 1,019; Fem!John: 31; Girl!John: 122; Female Sherlock: 1,440; Fem!Sherlock: 0; Girl!Sherlock: 0; Transgender: 34. (Statistics are from August 1, 2013.)

14. While such masculine and feminine labels are limiting and, to some extent, the entire point of this critique, they remain a useful shorthand for how most of North American society categorizes such behaviors.

15. In other genderswap stories, guy!John is not as comfortable with his feminine behaviors as Martin Freeman appears on BBC Sherlock. In one story, guy!John has a minor gender identity crisis when he realizes he's the one who's insisting on having a romantic relationship instead of casual sex with Sherlock, exclaiming, "Oh God, I'm the woman in this relationship" (Violet_Pencil 2011). In another, fem!Sherlock and John have a disagreement about Sherlock's ex-boyfriend, Sebastian, who claimed one of them wasn't "suited" to being a wife. Fem!Sherlock assumes he is speaking about her,
but guy! John thinks it's really a comment about his role in their relationship. He explains: "Sherlock, I'm the one who does the washing up, and I practically have to bully you into doing the drying. I do the cooking, and if anything gets tidied around here it's because I do it. And he was looking at you as he said it, and I figured he knew that if anyone's the stereotypical 'wife' here, it's me" (Blind Author 2011).

Clearly, not all genderswap stories are as political about dissociating sex and gender, and some may, in fact, reinforce such notions, all of which serves as a strong reminder not to generalize that all genderswap fan fiction stories are feminist or counter hegemonic.

16. Kristina Busse points out the ways in which cultural expectations for women's gendered behavior are often contradictory: "When women act according to stereotype, their behaviors get dismissed as feminine; when they act against stereotype, their behaviors get dismissed as aberrant or get reinscribed negatively as feminine nevertheless" (Busse 2013, 74).

17. This may be because John's femininity is largely canonical. Even though he is the primary narrator for virtually all of the Arthur Conan Doyle Holmes/Watson stories, he is subordinate to Holmes's ability, always a step behind, concerned for his health and drug habits, etc. This feminized subordination becomes reified in the various film and television portrayals of the characters, particularly Nigel Bruce's Watson in relation to Basil Rathbone's Holmes. The BBC Sherlock's Martin Freeman keeps Watson's military acumen to the forefront of his characterization, which perhaps mitigates the possible threat of his femininity for traditional audiences.

18. Such criticisms of allegedly feminized behavior are striking when taken in the context of fan studies as a discipline, since the historical etymology of fan, fanatic, is rooted in the highly gendered and criticized practice of women audiences' pursuit of male matinee idols in the early 20th century, as discussed by Henry Jenkins, among others (Jenkins 2006, 17).

19. Of the 35,669 BBC Sherlock fan fiction stories currently listed on AO3, only 34 are tagged transgender. Of the 891,202 works listed on AO3 to date, only 645 are tagged transgender. (Statistics are from August 1, 2013.)

20. Male-to-female Sherlock transgender fan fiction stories are quite rare; in my research, I only uncovered one: Red's "Like Normal People." John stumbles upon Sherlock in the bathroom injecting himself with an unknown substance. Based on Sherlock's history with drug addiction, John immediately assumes it is a narcotic, and when he learns Sherlock is injecting estrogen instead, it completely changes their relationship. John continues to treat Sherlock the same way he had before—only now he is the one providing the legally obtained, regulated hormones and managing
Sherlock’s transition—but it allows for John to acknowledge his latent sexual feelings for his flatmate.

21. Contemporary theorists like Susan Stryker and Judith Butler deny that the existence of biological sex always already determines an individual’s gender identity. For Stryker, "the sex of the body does not bear any necessary or deterministic relationship to the social category in which that body lives" (Stryker 2006, 11). Butler’s poststructuralist argument is a bit more nuanced, claiming that sex cannot be viewed as the prediscursive forebear of gender—that is, sex does not somehow come before gender, nor is gender based on sex (Butler 2006, 152). Instead, sex itself is culturally constructed and a gendered category, one which politically situates nature and the natural in order to serve the economic benefits of heterosexuality and reproduction. In contrast, gender for Butler is "a kind of becoming or an activity" (152).

22. Even though gender may be "artificial," as Nagoshi and Brzuzy argue, this does not mean it is easy to change.

23. Transgender theorist Cressida Heyes explained her own physical/psychic dissociation as follows: "In some ways, I feel as though the body I have is the wrong body: too large, too female in some respects, too clumsy. Surely an incisive intellectual mind requires an equally lean and skillful body?" (Heyes 2003, 1097–8).

24. Richard Ekins and Dave King describe four subprocesses by which transgender individuals transition from one gender to another: substituting, concealing, implying, and redefining. Substituting involves replacing one sex’s genitalia with the other’s. Concealing involves hiding or masking specific sex characteristics: binding breasts, tucking the penis, etc. Implying involves suggesting the presence of certain sexed body parts, most often through the use of clothing. Redefining is the most complex and subtle of the processes whereby individuals rename and reclassify traditionally sexed characteristics (e.g., a beard becomes facial hair or a penis becomes a "growth" between the legs) (Ekins and King 1999, 583–5). Fan fiction writer Ishmael uses several of these processes in her series "Bodies" to illustrate the ways in which FTM!Sherlock expresses his gender and sex identities.

25. Interestingly, Red’s "Like Normal People," the sole MTF!Sherlock story I found, uses the same pronoun shift midway through the story. In the first half, John refers to Sherlock as "he" until he discovers Sherlock injecting estrogen in their kitchen; then the pronoun shifts to "she" in the second half, where John and MTF!Sherlock become romantically involved. As an aside, one problematic element of this story is John's speculation that perhaps Sherlock transitioned to female "for his benefit" so that John
would consider her as a sexual partner, which negates the very significant personal reasons why an individual might feel the need to transition to another sex/gender.

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How to do things with fan subs: Media engagement as subcultural capital in anime fan subbing

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Abstract—Anime fandom has been a fairly constant subject in fan scholarship, although only recently have conversations about fan subbing begun to circulate. As useful as those conversations are, none have directly dealt either with the mechanisms of fan subbing, particularly the use of linear notes, as a practice or with how these subs intersect with the flows of subcultural capital. Fan subbing, both as a productive and a consumptive practice, plays a small but influential part in subcultural capital. Engagement with media is a compositional element of such capital in this community.

Keywords—Anime; Fan studies; Media studies; Subtitling


1. Introduction

Anime fans show their love for the medium through a number of activities—writing their own comics (doujinshi) or creating games (doujin sofuto or doujin geemu) in which popular characters appear; participating in cosplay; collecting/displaying/building figures and models of characters—all of which reaffirm the claim that fans are not passive consumers of cultural media but rather are active participants who critically negotiate texts to meet specific subcultural needs (Ang 2002; Jenkins 1988; Radway 1988). While not new practices, scanlations (the scanning and translation of manga) and fan subbing (fan subtitling of anime episodes) offer other venues through which fans negotiate meaning. As recently as the early 2000s, these practices were the domain of a select few groups of fans who possessed the technical and financial resources combined with geographical location to produce such translations; these fans served as de facto gatekeepers, in a sense controlling which shows circulated outside of Japan, and at times nudging which shows got licensed. The democratization of digital editing and distribution technologies, however, has broadened the pool of fans who can participate in this form of fandom, largely destabilizing the role that any one group can play as anime-licensing kingmaker, but
more importantly the quality of these programs allows fans to rival corporate and professional entities in terms of production. Perhaps because of these two factors, the number of anime fan subbing groups has exploded.

[1.2] The increasing prevalence of material produced by anime fans by itself offers no justification for its study. As scholarly analyses of this fan practice demonstrate, though, fan subbing impacts the larger cultural sphere by making significant ripples in how we understand intellectual property (Denison 2011; Hatcher 2005; Jenkins 2004; Leonard 2005a, 2005b) or media ecologies (Anderson-Terpstra 2012; Eng 2012; Lee 2011). Condry (2010) attempts to explain the relationships between these two areas with his theorization of dark energy, which he uses to explain the antagonism between corporate and fan practices in the circulation of anime. The tensions between corporations and fans are by no means isolated to anime fandom, but it should be noted that the community itself remains divided over fan subs. Whether or not licensed anime (even when the mere intent to localize is announced) should continue to be subtitled, the extent to which translations should be adapted, and even the speed at which groups should release their subs all represent points of contention within the community (Ito 2012).

[1.3] Work in fan studies on anime fan subbing tends to prioritize the ecologies in which the medium circulates; surprisingly, actual discussion of the subtitling process itself remains scant. This seems to have been left to pockets of conversation in the academic and professional arenas of subtitling, the literature of which is aware of the role that formal properties of media play in the construction and display of subtitles (Nornes 1999). While not a new conversation, subtitling literature helps to supplement the conversations in fan studies by offering examples of specific ways in which fans negotiate the potentiality and limitations of visual media.

[1.4] These two literatures, while clearly related, appear to operate in parallel rather than reinforcing fashions. On the one hand, we know that the circulation of media is important in fan communities, and on the other, we glean some insight into specific practices of interaction with visual media. Missing from these conversations is a clear path as to how subtitling choices, informed by the strictures of the medium, inform fan ecologies and vice versa. The theory of subcultural capital provides one path to bridging these two fields by framing subtitling choices as an articulation of specific types of knowledge that serve as currency within fan communities. Since anime fans place a high premium on knowledge of and about Japan and its language (Napier 2005, 2007), how fan sub groups leverage the properties of container media—or do not—to meet these needs provides insight into the role that the media play in the circulation and performance of knowledge.
Using anime fan subbing practice as an example, I argue that engagement with media should be viewed as contributory to subcultural capital in digital communities because the performance of knowledge essential to its conferral can only be staged through the fan text itself. To successfully stage their knowledge, fan producers must negotiate both the needs of the community in which the text circulates and the limitations of the formal properties of the medium. In anime fan subbing, these conditions unfold in the act of subtitling, with the layout strategies and translation choices of fan groups functioning to display their knowledge regarding Japan and, in so doing, meet the needs of the community.

2. Subcultural subtitling

Prior to developing these arguments, however, some time parsing the relevant points of both subcultural capital and subtitling will be useful in framing their overlaps. Subcultural capital, a concept proposed by Thornton (2005) to explain British club culture, derives from Bourdieu's (1984) concept of cultural capital. Cultural capital as Bourdieu theorizes it is status conferred through education and upbringing; typically a marker of class, it manifests in the bourgeois concept of taste where being able to discriminate between high and low cultures establishes a hierarchy predicated upon knowledge. Fiske (1992), using the term "official capital" (31), applies this concept to fandom and argues that these communities also have hierarchies, often based upon knowledge about the object of fandom itself and its surrounding context. Anime fandom prioritizes knowledge as well, but the context or scope of the surrounding context includes knowledge of and about Japan. There is a small but growing literature, mostly in education, that links fan consumption of Japanese cultural media to interest in the country's language, culture, and history (Armour 2011; Fukunaga 2006; Northwood and Kinoshita Thomson 2012; Shamoon 2010). Within the context of anime fan studies, Napier's (2005, 2007) work provides the most explicit link to this body of research, with her respondents frequently confessing that they use anime as a vehicle through which they learn about Japan's culture, history, and language; being familiar in these areas not only deepens their enjoyment of anime but also confers upon them status within the community.

In her discussion of club culture, Thornton (2005) makes a distinction between two categories of knowledge relevant to this discussion: embodied and objectified. Embodied knowledge is, as Fiske (1992) describes, being able to tap into reservoirs of knowledge about an object of fandom and its surrounding context. Displaying such knowledge, for example through dress or material goods, reflects the exercise of objectified knowledge. By Thornton's own admission, the concepts of embodied and objectified knowledge do not greatly diverge from Bourdieu's (1984) own cultural
capital. Rather, subcultural capital differs from its unprefixd counterpart in two ways: how it is conferred and how it is circulated.

[2.3] Subcultural capital "confers status on its owner in the eyes of the relevant beholder" (Thornton 2005, 186). Unlike cultural capital in official culture, which is hierarchical and frequently flows from institutions in a top-down manner, subcultural capital locates the authority to bestow credibility within individual fans, facilitating a model of evaluation that is both largely decentralized and in flux. This is not to suggest that hierarchies in fandom, such as gatekeepers, play no role in its conferral; rather, the nature of subcultural capital means that the position of these fans is also tenuous and subject to scrutiny.

[2.4] This flux may be due in part to the importance that media play in the circulation of subcultural capital. "Within the economy of subcultural capital the media is not simply another symbolic good or marker of distinction...but a network crucial to the definition and distribution of cultural knowledge" (Thornton 2005, 187). The role that media play in the circulation of anime and related contexts appears especially compositional to anime fandom, as the Internet functions as the primary means of connecting fans and sharing information in a global context (Eng 2012). These networks are additionally crucial to the workflow of fan subbing, as broadband technologies allow fan producers to quickly and efficiently share resources during the production phase of the process (Doki Fansubs, n.d.; Ito 2012); these technologies further facilitate the rapid distribution of fan subs across multiple channels and open exposure to global audiences, ensuring that fan subs are not, in Fiske's (1992) terms, narrowcast.

[2.5] Yet in the context of fan subs, media take on another dimension related to knowledge: the means to concretely demonstrate those types of knowledge prized in the anime fan community. This requires a bit more than linguistic proficiency or cultural-historical familiarity: it necessitates the technical aptitude to effectively insert this knowledge for display in the video stream during playback. Good translation with bad timing is equally as poor as good timing with bad translation. The reality is that few people possess proficiency with all aspects of the process, making it more efficient to mimic the group workflow of industry.

[2.6] Discussions of the technical aspects of subtitling have appeared for some time in literature on the practice (Nornes 1999; Pedersen 2005; Zojer 2011), with work directly dealing with anime fan subbing slowly emerging (Denison 2010; Pérez González 2006). While directly addressing anime fan subbing only at the end of his piece, Nornes's article is particularly relevant because of his discussion of how fan practices force the viewer's awareness of cultural differences. Arguing that the way in which subtitles operate—where and when they appear as well as which characters get
subtitled—can challenge ideological norms, he remarks that their use prevents "converting everything into easily consumable meaning" and "always directs spectators back to the original text" (32). Facilitating this awareness through leveraging of the display of subtitles becomes a practice he calls "abusive subtitling" (32).

[2.7] Of course, abusive practices can only be such when positioned against other ones. For Nornes, this would be the subtitling practices of official culture, most prominently seen though corporate translations, which frequently efface cultural differences in favor of mass market appeal. The theoretical and historical backdrop for translations in official culture is addressed by Venuti (1998, 2008), whose exploration of ideologies in translation practice has become widely recognized in the field. Tracing the historical development of translation in the West, he notes that the Romantic notion of the creative genius coupled with Realism's theorization of the internal stability of the text seek to downplay the role of translation by presenting the text as imminent and complete. Basically, these positions combine to present a narrative of good translation as one that gives little hint of its foreign origins and that appears to have been written in the target language. These practices appear in the official cultural practice of localization, which is designed to appeal to as broad a market as possible in order to increase sales.

[2.8] Abusive subtitling draws attention to the seams from which a good text in official culture is stitched. It may include keeping foreign words or concepts in the translation or drawing explicit attention to the translator through notes to supplement dialogue. While such practices, according to Nornes (1999), deepen viewer appreciation of the original, we need to consider how different ways of subtitling and translating meet the needs of the communities in which they circulate. Examining how anime fans produce and consume fan translations offers one path to linking how media engagement impacts fan practice, and the concept of subcultural capital is a crucial part in this link due to the centrality that knowledge plays in these communities. I begin by analyzing the role of linear notes in fan subbing, arguing that their function as an overt bridge connecting the translation to larger cultural expanses serves as an important way by which fan producers demonstrate their knowledge. The operations of and problems with the conferral of subcultural capital by fans forms the second part of my argument: while their position as learners raises questions about the ability of some fans to distinguish between good and bad translations, they make distinctions anyway, and I advocate that media engagement plays a role in this process.

3. Linear notes and self-fulfilling justification
Speaking about subtitling from the standpoint of official cultural practice, Zojer (2011) claims that the technical limitations of subtitling present problems when dealing with cultural material (e.g., untranslatable words). Anime fan subbers answer this challenge, however, through the use of font positioning, color, and linear notes—translator comments typically integrated into the upper portion of the video stream to identify cultural referents and clarify translation choices. The integration of these abusive elements meets the expectations of fan consumers, who use anime to learn about Japan, and also provide a platform from which fan producers can stage their knowledge for subcultural evaluation.

While it can be argued that the antagonism that fans have for mainstream market practices explains the inclusion of linear notes, conceptualizing this practice in terms of resistance does not seem to be the most fruitful of paths because it relegates the fan community to a reactive rather than active system. Instead, conceiving of subtitles as a way by which fan subbers can create "a palpable sense of the foreign" (Nornes 1999, 29) that their consumers find valuable maintains participatory fandom as a generative, active practice. The prestige placed on knowledge and its demonstration in anime fandom, coupled with the fact that many fans are in the process of learning about Japan and its culture and hence are potentially unaware of the full scope of foreign elements, suggests a subtitling practice that overtly justifies a group's translation to fans. The symbiotic relationship between knowledge and its demonstration is particularly important when the translation itself appears to contain errors (figure 1).

Because of the linear note, the perceived misspelling in the translation is reframed as a demonstration of Rumbel's linguistic aptitude. The explanation of Toujo's irregular pronunciation provides an example of the group's phonetic prowess in differentiating between morphemes; the example assists fans who use anime to learn Japanese in training their own ears. In addition to pointing out translation choices...
originating in the linguistic realm, linear notes also serve to justify broader choices motivated by cultural affairs wherein referential knowledge plays a key role in fully appreciating the context (figures 2 and 3).

**Figure 2.** Gintama, episode 80. Group: Rumbel-sMi. [View larger image.]

**Figure 3.** Gintama, episode 74. Group: Rumbel-sMi. [View larger image.]

[3.4] The visibility of the linear note is essential to this relationship, as without it the group can neither show its skill with language nor assert that its translation is faithful. A sympathetic relationship between the linear note and translation thus emerges, creating an internally consistent narrative that further justifies the choices made by the group and, ultimately, their skill. Linear notes and their accompanying translations, then, operate much like a binary star: their combined meaning creates the referential center of mass around which they revolve. Lose one half of the binary and the system collapses.

[3.5] This relationship takes center stage when considering that many fan consumers approach anime as an educational tool. The visible chain of signification afforded by the linear notes enables these fans to trace linkages in a way that facilitates their understanding of Japanese cultural and linguistic nuance. Meeting these needs goes a
long way to gaining credibility in the community, since their inclusion adds a depth to the translation that many fans are grateful for, and simultaneously positions the group as knowledgeable sources:

[3.6] I just wanted to give HUGE props to the rumbel-sub team for constantly going the extra mile and providing so many of the cultural references as part of the subbing process.

I'm sure it must be a lot of extra work. I wanted to let you guys know how much it is appreciated.

It adds so much to the episode to get that additional insight. I can't imagine watching Gintama without it. (Stainless 2008)

[3.7] These comments, taken from Rumbel's forums, highlight the importance that linear notes play in furthering fan appreciation of anime. Their inclusion allows fans to understand not only what is being said but also why, intrinsically linking the study of language to the study of culture. Linear notes meet the subcultural needs of fans, then, by providing necessary context and background not only to the translation itself but also to the larger linguistic and cultural currents in which anime resides.

[3.8] Within the anime community, however, linear notes themselves are not necessarily abusive in Nornes's (1999) sense. Abuse arises from subtitling practices that destabilize the fluid consumption of a text; in anime fan subbing, the sympathetic and mutually reinforcing dynamic between linear notes and the translation ensures the necessity of both when attempting to provide an overall smooth product. Without linear notes, translations can appear unnatural or stiff, creating the same instability that their inclusion warrants in commercial texts in official culture. These moments of disruption can be seen as "immersive dissonance," a concept I have discussed in video game translations (Schules 2012, 90). Essentially, immersive dissonance occurs when unintentional ruptures in the game text destabilize our experience by calling attention to its status as a construct, whether through grammatical problems, referential breakdown, visual disruption, or some other issue. This concept is derived from the Dadaist theorization of the function of art. According to Tzara (2003), art should challenge our conceptions of the world by revealing how ideologies function and should offer alternatives to them. Immersive dissonance follows this trend, but whereas the Dadaists conceived of artistic disruption as a conscious effort of the artist, games in their commercial capacity can only achieve this unintentionally. When this occurs in translation, however, especially of the fan variety, we do not necessarily see this liberatory potential; rather, we see ineptitude. The reasons for this perception emerge from a weaving of the expectations that fans have for anime engagement with those
brought about by advances in new media technologies with respect to production and distribution qualities.

[3.9] Linear notes function as a way to mitigate such disruption by justifying translation choices, the byproduct of which simultaneously provides a convenient way to display proficiency in the Japanese linguistic and cultural domains. The importance of linear notes in co-constructing the meaning of the text can be seen through the comparison of a short exchange from episode 86 of *Gintama* (videos 1 and 2).

*Video 1. Gintama, episode 86. Group: YuS-SHS.*
While the differences in translation between the two groups are superficial, the way in which the linear note (or lack thereof) realizes the translation speaks to how the two reinforce and justify each other. Rumbel-sMi's inclusion of the note provides some context to Hijikata's statement and Kondo's reaction, offering an explanation for the translation choice by explicitly charting the cultural chain of signification. Without the linear note, YuS-SHS's rendition of the lines appears out of place, a non sequitur within the overall exchange that potentially disrupts the flow of the translation for those unfamiliar with the referent itself. While it could be argued that the difference in linear note strategies between the groups reflects their choice in audience, the fact that subcultural capital is a perceptual commodity necessitates that groups overtly display their prowess as a means of convincing viewers of their ability to function as cultural and linguistic ambassadors. More than their function to justify translation choices, linear notes operate as rhetorical arguments of credibility. The absence of linear notes implies—rightly or wrongly—YuS-SHS's lack of proficiency, motivated by the immersive dissonance emergent from the referential cracks in the exchange.
While it is tempting to examine these differences in translation and their consequences as specific to anime fan subs, the functional space occupied by linear notes within this sphere has grown as a consequence of the democratization of editing technologies and distribution networks. These two developments, in part, exacerbate the blurring of boundaries between the expectations placed on the quality of fan products and that of corporate ones. While Fiske's (1992) theorization of fandom as an echo of official culture remains useful, his assertion that fan textual production frequently costs fans money and is of lesser quality owing to an economic imbalance that restricts access to professional quality production resources does not accurately describe contemporary anime fan subbing practice. The democratization of editing and subtitling tools, many of which are open source and designed by anime fan subbers, makes creating professional quality texts easier than before, so much so that quality can no longer distinguish fan productions from commercial ones. I take Fiske to mean production quality in the sense of high-end materials used to professionally package creative media. In anime, this would translate to HD or better video resolution and audio bitrates, along with dynamic subtitling; digital ecologies have largely rendered these concerns irrelevant as a means of distinguishing professional from fan texts as the nature of digital reproduction ensures that the copy is of the same production quality as the original (Davis 1995). Digitization also allows fans to easily lay out translations and linear notes, with programs like Aegisub (figure 4) offering advanced effects such as vectoring and layering in addition to more mundane features such as spell checking. Rather than producing a hardsubbed file, where the subtitles would be burned into the video stream and be impossible to edit, programs like Aegisub produce a modified text file that streams with but is not integrated into the video stream: a softsub. With the video and subtitle streams separate, it is relatively easier to fix errors in production and distribute these corrected files quickly.

*Figure 4. Aegisub interface. [View larger image.]*

The editing environment of Aegisub allows translations and explanatory material to be added and edited quickly, blurring the distinctions between fan and
commercial texts from production and postproduction standpoints. The consequences of this are not without some irony, as the relative ease by which Aegisub enables fan subbing groups to proof, edit, and make alterations to their translations becomes part of the performance necessary to subcultural capital. Avoiding grammatical errors certainly falls into this category, but fans using anime to negotiate Japanese language and culture additionally expect that explanatory materials appear in order to bridge referential gaps that would otherwise fracture the unity of the text. YuS-SHS’s translation is less successful than the Rumbel-sMi one not because of the lack of a linear note justifying the translation and, hence, the enmeshed position about their own proficiency but because the lack of the linear note offers a disruption in the text that could have been easily spotted and corrected. In this manner, the importance of media to subcultural capital in anime fan subs extends beyond the mere circulation that Thornton (2005) notes is essential to it; groups must be proficient not only in the linguistic and cultural domains but also be able to articulate these proficiencies through skillful interactions with container media.

[3.13] The importance of being able to properly negotiate the strictures of media can be applied more broadly to fan communities that communicate primarily through online channels and to the production of fan texts reliant on digital technologies for their creation. Manga scanlations certainly qualify (Anderson-Terpstra 2012), but the "Let’s Play" videos in gaming circles apply as well, as fan producers of these walkthroughs must be proficient in video editing technologies as well as possess a sense of what gameplay to cut, when, and how. The larger point here is that the conferral of subcultural capital in the digital fan context is not just about what one knows or how one shows it; it is equally about articulating these credibly through media engagement. Linear notes in anime fan subs fit these criteria by meeting the needs that many fans have when consuming anime—learning about Japan—while simultaneously leveraging the properties of container media to demonstrate the fan subbing group’s knowledge.

4. A problem of distinction

[4.1] The synergy between translations and their accompanying linear notes presents problems for the conferral of subcultural capital. This is because many fans are in the process of learning the Japanese linguistic, cultural, and historical maps, which places them in a restricted position to either affirm the accuracy of the nuggets of wisdom dispensed in linear notes or evaluate the accuracy of the translations provided by fan subbing groups. The following excerpt from episode 8 of Gintama demonstrates these stakes. Shinsen-Subs, independent of YuS, created the subtitles in this example; a transcript of the scene follows, and I have provided a rough literal translation of my own for the purposes of comparison (table 1).
**Video 3.** Gintama, episode 8. Group: SHS.

**Table 1.** Literal transcription and translation of scene in video 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Speaker</th>
<th>Literal</th>
<th>Original Japanese</th>
<th>SHS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kondo</td>
<td>Why do I have such a hairy ass?</td>
<td>dōse ore nante ketsuge bōbō dashisa</td>
<td>I'm just such a pitiful wreck...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I don't know how I'll get a woman.</td>
<td>onna ni moteru wakenaindayo</td>
<td>There's no way any woman would go for me.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I'm useless...</td>
<td>dame dana ore wa</td>
<td>I'm just no good...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tae</td>
<td>It's not like that.</td>
<td>sonna koto nai desuyou</td>
<td>That's not true at all.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Isn't it wonderfully manly?</td>
<td>otoko rashikute suteki ja arimasenka</td>
<td>You're so manly...It's nice.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kondo</td>
<td>Then I'll ask you,</td>
<td>jaa kikukedosa</td>
<td>Then, Otae-san,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------</td>
<td>----------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What if your boyfriend...</td>
<td>moshi otaesan</td>
<td>if your boyfriend...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>no kareshi ga</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>saa</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tae</td>
<td>I'd love him, even</td>
<td>ketsuge goto</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>with his butt hair.</td>
<td>aishimasu</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kondo</td>
<td>A buddha...she's a buddha</td>
<td>bosatsu...subete</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>who draws in all the</td>
<td>no fujou o</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>impurities around her!</td>
<td>tsutsumikomu</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>marude bosatsu</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Butt...butt...butt...</td>
<td>ketsu...ketsu</td>
<td>Let's do it at the altar!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>please marry me!</td>
<td>shite kudasai</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

[4.2] In this case the translation is at best inaccurate. The justification provided by the linear note is only half-correct; the joke does revolve around a play on words —*ketsu* (butt) and *kekkon* (marriage)—yet the connotations of impotence simply are not present in the original Japanese. The internal consistency provided by the linear note reinforces SHS's translation strategy, however, smoothing over the apparent leap in logic between Kondo's lines by implying that any disruption is due to idiosyncrasies in translating the joke from Japanese into English, not with poor translation. What is particularly interesting is that Shinsen-Subs was a fairly respected group prior to its demise, generally credited with accurate, compelling subtitles enjoyed by the fan sub viewing community ([note 1](#)). That the translation provided in this episode of *Gintama* diverges so radically from a literal rendering of the text raises questions over the conferral of subcultural capital and the ability of fans to serve as critics capable of distinguishing between texts. How inaccuracies like this can circulate within the anime community and register little major complaint represents an epistemological Gordian knot with respect to subcultural capital, one whose answers lie in part with how fans approach language and its role in ideological constructions of translation. Although Napier (2007) notes that many fans critically consume the images provided in anime, she does not address how fans understand the role of these anime within Japanese culture, nor does she discuss how fans address differences in translations. It is one thing to point out that fans place critical distance between themselves and
stereotypical tropes that circulate within anime genres, but it is a different matter to ask how they interpret anime within social structures such as Japanese and American media. Azuma (2001) theorizes some of these issues but from the perspective of Japanese fans and, of course, without a discussion of fan subbing. Weaving these issues together and tracing their consequences is an important step to understanding how subcultural capital operates in anime fandom.

[4.3] One potential reason why fans lack critical capacity with respect to language lies in assumptions over language and its translation circulating in official culture: congruence. While Venuti (1998, 2008) argues that translations should be seen as responses to specific situations, he reminds us that concepts of authorship and disciplinary approaches to language study (such as Grice's maxims of communication) construct a system in which the meanings of texts remain essentially unchanged as they undergo adaption to another culture (or time). We assume that the translation we read is a faithful rendition of what occurs in the original. This position is echoed more broadly in the concept of communicative action, which states that shared assumptions with respect to truth and rightness between people underlie interaction (Habermas 1979). We assume that the people we are talking to are sincere and honest in their requests; when arranging a meeting, for example, we trust that no one agrees to meet at a time they cannot. Idealized and contested as it is, the framework explains the deeper ideological relationships that we have with translation: we assume that the original and translated texts, negotiated by the translator, are sincere and honest representations of each other—they are congruent. This is different than fidelity, which speaks to meaning and can boast variations. Fidelity necessitates congruence but not the other way around. This is particularly important for theorizing subcultural capital in fan translations and broader anime fandom in general, as no matter how fans prefer their subs—from sub to dubbed, literal to localized—they all operate on the assumption that the translations themselves accurately reflect what was expressed in the original Japanese. For those who consume fan translations, this assumption bears particular weight, as approaching anime as a tool to study Japan and its language necessitates congruence between the original Japanese and the translated fan sub as an unshakable, foundational, assumption: one can't study Japanese (effectively) if the referential and semantic links fail to function. As such, one reason why fans do not consume anime critically from a linguistic standpoint is that to entertain alternative approaches destabilizes the assumption (and not a small one, considering the Japanese government's long-running Cool Japan campaign and its recent turn toward language support) that the medium can serve as a means of cultural and linguistic instruction. The confluence of translation ideologies and fan-critical consumption of images suggests that they approach anime as representational vehicles through which the studied fan can discern Japanese cultural flows.
[4.4] In accepting the congruency of translations, fans not only establish them as a platform upon which they can practice and develop their skills, but they also scaffold a broader subcultural economy in which the demonstration of these linguistic and cultural skills becomes a means of distinction and stratification. Engagement with container media becomes one such means of potential distinction, as the incorporation of linear notes into translations becomes essential to the performative onus critical to subcultural capital.

[4.5] With these concerns in mind, we can now theorize a rationale for the translation provided by Shinsen-Subs. As a localization strategy for Western audiences, the translation fares better, but the inclusion of the linear note to explain the punchline of the exchange suggests that this is not an attempt at fidelity: it functions as discussed earlier, by bridging the gap between the dialogue and cultural referents in such a way as to avoid any form of immersive dissonance interfering with either the fluid readability of the text or consuming it as a study aid. The linear note, quite simply, reinforces an incorrect translation. In so doing, it grates against the subcultural logic of linear notes within the anime community as their purpose is to serve as the harbor from which fans depart the firm ground of the translation for the deeper, more treacherous waters of linguistic and cultural representation. A localized text is essentially landlocked, and linear notes in them are about as useful as an international seaport in Iowa.

[4.6] The reasons why fan groups include linear notes—and extrapolating from that media engagement strategies in general—reflect the needs of the community in which the text will circulate. The segment of the anime community that views fan subs consumes them rather than localized corporate offerings to deepen their understanding of Japan, and thus they expect certain production practices to facilitate this goal. Linear notes are one such practice, conveying the appearance of proficiency on the part of the fan subbing group. Whether or not these groups are truly competent is immaterial. Framed from this vantage, the conferral of subcultural capital emerges less from fidelity to the Japanese linguistic and cultural streams than from their seamless integration of explanatory materials that function as bridges of semantic stability.

[4.7] This is not to suggest that all fan subs or even the majority of them are inaccurate, but the fact that a group such as Shinsen-Subs, an established and reputable group prior to its disbanding, adheres to the conventions of linear notes while offering incorrect translations raises broader questions about the conferral of subcultural capital by fan consumers in their capacity as arbiters of distinction. At its most basic, the position adopted by fans when consuming anime for linguistic purposes places them in a subordinate role with respect to their fan subbing teachers.
Sakai (1997) notes that such subordination makes it difficult for language learners to engage in criticism emergent from language and its related arenas. As such, fans who consume fan subbed anime for the purpose of learning encounter hierarchical flows of power that potentially undermine their ability to serve as critics and distinguish good translations from bad ones. This subordinate position additionally explains the emphasis on the critical consumption of images over words as noted by Napier (2007), as many may feel implicitly silenced because of their status.

[4.8] While this framing makes some logical sense, fans do make critical distinctions despite their supposed subordination to their fan sub-creating brethren. A LiveJournal discussion over Rumbel-sMi and YuS-SHS's translation strategies for *Gintama* offers insight into how fans make distinctions despite their perceived subordination. Speaking of how translation strategies between the two groups inform consumption patterns, one fan writes:

[4.9] I haven't watched Yuurisan's Gintama releases, but I've seen their DGM ones, so this may not really count.

I don't like how Yuurisan, more often than not, omits some words from the dialogue. It kind of *offs* the translation quality.

Rumbel however, sticks to the actual dialogue and their translation is very accurate. Also, I've always liked how they include notes, even uberly long ones, because...I don't know, I just like it. I'm not really familiar with the Japanese custom, so I need side-info. (silhouette_68 2008).

[4.10] The first significant point is that this fan's consumption patterns are influenced by how the fan subbing groups engage with material from both linguistic and technical perspectives. YuS's omission of words in other work leaves silhouette_68 (2008) skeptical as to their ability to accurately engage with *Gintama*, a gap that is filled by Rumbel's use of linear notes to explain cultural material he is not familiar with. Focusing on Rumbel's inclusion of notes, rather than their accuracy, is a common theme in this forum:

[4.11] I gotta go with Rumble. They actually take the time to reasearch all of that stuff, which means they win muchly in my book. XD (spartydragon 2008)

Rumbel, definitely. It never fails to amaze me how they manage to track down EVERY SINGLE REFERENCE/PARODY/QUOTE. *____* (raineyz 2008)

[4.12] The generally favorable reception that Rumbel receives for including linear notes with their subs suggests that media engagement, in addition to the translation
itself, forms a core criterion though which fan subs are judged by the community. In recognizing that they prefer Rumbel because of the notes that the group supplies, these fans tacitly acknowledge that they use them to learn about Japanese customs and, therefore, should be in no position to stake claims about their accuracy. At most, fans should only be able to judge Rumbel on their use of linear notes and the appearance of credibility they offer. This only works, however, if we assume that the flows of distinction in fandom parallel their official counterparts.

[4.13] One rationale for how fans can judge the quality of fan subs without being proficient in the language or culture lies in the fact that we are dealing with a subcultural community in which normal, official flows of power may be impotent. In this case, status conferred by paths recognized in official culture—postsecondary study, testing, work experience, and so forth—is not easily translatable to the online environment in which anime fan communities operate because of, in part, problems of verification. Instead of conferral by organizations, displays of knowledge provide the mechanism through which subcultural capital travels. For subcultural capital in anime this is not a major problem, as fan subbers possessing the relevant accreditation in official culture should be able to easily wear it on their sleeves in their interactions with the anime community, and the only way to do this effectively is through their interactions with the container media in which they house and distribute their translations. In this way, Thornton (2005) is correct in postulating that media are essential to subcultural capital, but whereas she limits this to circulation, we see that in anime fan translations they are equally essential to its construction. Subcultural capital emerges from how technologies are leveraged to demonstrate cultural and linguistic prowess.

[4.14] While this rationale explains one way in which subcultural capital functions in anime fan subs, it still does not address the larger epistemological paradox of how those who have varying degrees of linguistic aptitude serve as critics when they are still mastering the systems they are critiquing. This would not be a problem in other contexts where the official and subcultural spheres are separate, but the nature of how fans approach anime suggests that the boundaries between official culture and the anime subculture are perhaps more permeable than those erected by other subcultures. While subcultural capital rarely leads to economic capital in official culture, it is possible, but usually only in a limited arena related in some way to the subcultural context in which it originated. In the case of anime fan subbing, the linguistic and technical skills displayed potentially have wider applicability, and fans who consume these texts see them as an entrance into a world larger than that of the anime community. Anime is, essentially, a gateway drug. With this in mind, Japanese is not learned for the sake of Japanese but, rather, as a potential skill transferrable to some aspect of official culture or subcultural community. Fan subbing as well functions
as a portfolio of sorts in which individuals or groups can appeal to institutions of official culture. Dattebayo, for example, used the knowledge honed via fan subbing to enter the professional world by starting a subtitling company.

5. Conclusion

[5.1] While Thornton (2005) is correct in identifying the circulation of media as a necessary part in the flows of subcultural capital, the relationship that anime fan subbing has with media, from production to consumption, penetrates deeper: media engagement forms an essential part in its construction. The demonstration of knowledge through which subcultural capital is conferred is aided by the democratization of editing technologies that enable fans to easily enact alternative interpretations of the dominant ideologies of translation to fit their pedagogical needs. Skill with manipulating container media, especially in terms of the translation's presentation, becomes a means through which the cultural and linguistic proficiencies important to anime fandom as a practice can be measured: linear notes serve as the link here, functioning as a bridge through which the translation meets the subcultural needs of language acquisition and cultural cosmopolitanism.

[5.2] Unfortunately, this very point offers a look at the challenges of analyzing anime fan subbing as a form of subcultural capital: those tasked with identifying good and bad translations are, because of their status as learners, in the least likely position to criticize. The lack of formally recognized schema to confer credibility as in official culture is not the problem; rather, the problem really lies in the way in which subcultural capital as a system operates in conjunction with the subcultural needs of the fans who frequently seek to operate in circles outside that of anime fandom. While I am not sure this problem needs resolution, it is an interesting consequence that I leave for others to expand upon and theorize.

[5.3] These theoretical musings aside, how fan subbing functions with respect to subcultural capital suggests that we should look at how engagement with media contributes to the ecologies of fandom. I do not mean just what media are used but, more specifically, turning our attention to the ways in which the formal features of media are leveraged by actors in both the official and subcultural stages. This implies more than identification of specific media as platforms for discussion, as these speak to their capacity as tools of circulation that have already been theorized; rather, what the case of anime fandom suggests is that specific forms of engagement with those media distinguish between successful and unsuccessful appeals. As fan subbing expands from Japanese anime to Korean drama, for example, we should be cognizant of and analyze how the divergent needs of the communities consuming them motivate different strategies of engagement with container media. Content, of course, is still
king, but if we understand content in terms of Marshall McLuhan's adage that the content of all media are other media, then we begin to witness the practical and theoretical horizons of what it means for media to be a compositional element of subcultural capital.

[5.4] Under this rubric, we are given alternative methods by which to approach and understand divergent fan practices, particularly when the form of engagement remains the same. In this case, I am speaking of the differences in how American and Japanese fans approach cosplay. As a medium through which fans engage anime and manga, understanding the way in which fans approach media, in this case the costumes, in this subcultural space suggests an alternative (and at this point purely speculative) rationale for these geographic and cultural differences. Naturally, we should be mindful that how a group engages with media reflects, in part, discourses of media and their use circulating in the larger cultural sphere; the potential nuances emergent from these divergent discourses of media offer fertile ground from which to examine a cross-cultural comparison of the flows of subcultural capital.

6. Note

1. While this claim stems from my own experience in both viewing their anime and discussions with fans about their work, the closest one can come to quantifying this claim comes from the Web site MyAnimeList (http://myanimelist.net), where Shinsen-Subs has an 82 percent approval factor (on the basis of 5,949 votes) overall, and a 58 percent approval (from 136 votes) for their work on Gintama.

7. Works cited


Theory

Bull in a china shop: Alternate reality games and transgressive fan play in social media franchises

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[0.1] Abstract—In this article I examine the role of fan ARGs in Lonelygirl15 (LG15), a video blog that became one of the first social media franchises of YouTube. Eager to explore the narrative possibilities of Internet technologies, its creators set out to provide community-based storytelling that embodied the general spirit of coauthorship. To ensure viral distribution, the videos were shot to evoke the maximum amount of curiosity, teasing their viewers with a seemingly simple plot laden with clues that promised a deeper mystery. While fan creativity was encouraged, the concerns over creating a commercially viable story led to careful management of fan activities and strict definition of the boundaries of the LG15 canon. Intrigued by the mysterious beginnings of the show, some fans created ARG spin-offs to deliver a more engaging experience than the show initially offered. I argue that early fan ARGs became tactics through which fans engaged in transgressive play and negotiated a more meaningful role within the franchise.

[0.2] Keywords—ARG; Digi-Gratis; Drillable media; Fandom; Lonelygirl15; Paratext; Spreadable media; YouTube


1. Introduction

[1.1] The economic success of Lonelygirl15 (hereafter LG15), a video blog (vlog) that became an overnight sensation on YouTube in 2006, could be considered a breakthrough for the video-sharing site. The issue of building a revenue model around audiences has always been front and center for YouTube, especially since its acquisition by Google in 2006 (Wasko and Erickson 2009, 373; McDonald 2009, 391; Andrejevic 2009, 409). Despite their challenges, the creators of LG15, Milles Beckett, Mesh Flinders, and Greg Goodfried, not only generated a robust community around the show but also leveraged it to build one of YouTube's first social media franchises, defined by Derek Johnson as "the shared exchange of content resources across multiple industrial sites and contexts of production operating in collaborative but contested ways through networked relation to one another" (2013, 7). The creators were able to transform their videos into spreadable as well as drillable media through the rhetoric of collaborative storytelling that encouraged ludic participation.

[1.2] LG15 (2006–8) starts as a vlog of a frustrated 16-year-old girl named Bree who makes brief videos about her life, her best friend, Daniel, and her conflicts with her parents. Underneath this seemingly innocuous story line, however, a full-blown conspiracy waits to be unveiled. A dangerous cult called the Order is using a fictional secretive religion called the Hymn of One to recruit girls with trait-positive blood types to participate in a mysterious ceremony suspected to be
a virgin sacrifice. Seemingly getting cues from the fans, Daniel and Bree decide to run away to save Bree. The three seasons of LG15—the first in which Bree dies in the ceremony and the subsequent seasons entitled *Bloodlines* and *Revelations*—all relate the stories of these trait-positive girls who are perpetually on the run. Within months of the first video, dozens of fan spin-offs emerged, some of which were alternate reality games (ARGs).

[1.3] ARGs are immersive games that blur the lines between reality and fiction by conveying a hybrid gaming experience through online and off-line mechanisms. The gameplay consists of solving complex puzzles that unlock various stages of the game, retrieving clues scattered across the Web or in real-world locations, receiving and making phone calls, and even participating in live events. Their effectiveness in building communities around stories through play is what makes them so powerful as games. For this reason, ARGs have frequently been deployed as a form of viral marketing for shows like *Lost* (2004–10) and *Heroes* (2006–10) that have used these games to build a robust following.

[1.4] Contrary to how these games have been traditionally deployed by the media industries, that is, to maintain interest in and expand on the franchises during their off-seasons, early fan ARGs of LG15 played a disruptive role in the development of the show. To be sure, ARGs expanded the dedicated audience that the franchise had built, but they also fostered a niche group of fans who developed different expectations from the show. This group was particularly fond of solving mysteries, a trait intentionally cultivated by the creators of the show to trigger viral marketing. But the group members also had a taste for darker themes, mysteries, and thrillers that were characteristically ARGish. Soon, another plot emerged within the LG15 universe with its own heroine, Cassie, who gathered her own dedicated following that temporarily overshadowed the popularity of the main character of the original videos, Bree.

[1.5] This renegade storyline that went by the name *Cassie Is Watching* (CiW) (named after the YouTube account that posted its videos) offered real-life interactions through phone calls, dead drops, and mysterious e-mails to the fans and the press. Its videos boasted a freakish voice-over, a psychedelic soundtrack, and creepy editing that included scenes from the Charles Manson murders and seemingly unrelated images shot in a mysterious playground. The first video ended with a bag being dropped in a swimming hole in which Bree had once swum, and the narrative line invited fans to "come and get it." With this invitation, a cat and mouse game began. The response was staggering. Rumors swirled around who was behind these videos. The community was torn asunder as a result of this odd spin-off. While ARG veterans rejoiced at the new direction that the story seemed to be taking, other fans were terrified that Cassie would replace Bree. This was partially a valid concern. If the number of Cassie-related posts in the LG15 forums were any indication, Cassie had executed a hostile takeover of their beloved story.

[1.6] What made LG15 so appealing was that it began as a community-led collaborative storytelling initiative that relied on active and committed consumers. For the LG15 team, this was a strategy that allowed them to cut through the noise in an overcrowded media marketplace, a maneuver that is becoming increasingly common for the media industry (Jenkins 2006; Jenkins, Ford, and Green 2013; Caldwell 2008). At the same time, Jenkins claims, the media industry is "terrified of what happens if this consumer power gets out of control" (2006, 134). The LG15 team experienced similar anxieties as they built their videos into a social media franchise. The pressure
to build a commercially sustainable show led the team to carefully manage fan activities and regulate the boundaries of the LG15 canon.

[1.7] The following is an analysis of how some of the fans pushed back through transgressive play that became a tactic through which they negotiated a more meaningful role within the franchise. Espen Aarseth (2007) defines transgressive play as a sign of rebellion against the tyranny of the game wherein the player plays the game in a unique, unpredictable way, thereby asserting her own identity as a player. While LG15 was not specifically a game, the ludic engagement that its videos cultivated in the audience led to them being perceived as such. Intrigued by the mysterious beginnings of LG15, fans created ARG spin-offs to deliver a more engaging experience than what was originally available in the show. The significant following that the ARGs gathered within the LG15 community allowed these spin-offs to open up the official LG15 canon and introduce fan-created content into the main show.

[1.8] I open this article with a discussion of how the LG15 team transformed their show into a social media franchise by implementing a ludic narrative structure that mobilized the participatory culture that flourishes on YouTube. Within a matter of months, dozens of fan spin-offs, including ARGs, emerged within the LG15 universe that consisted of all possible worlds linked to LG15 by a relation of accessibility (Ryan 1991). In the subsequent sections, I consider fan spin-offs to be paratexts that recontextualized the show in dramatic ways, and I develop a theoretical framework in which ARGs could be considered as games that cultivate transgressive play. Finally, I turn to LG15 to demonstrate that the early ARGs temporarily destabilized the show through transgressive play and opened up the official canon to fan-generated content.

[1.9] The bulk of my research was conducted in 2006–7 when the show was at its peak in terms of its popularity and fan participation. I examined hundreds of videos and thousands of comments to identify key fans and community interactions. In addition to content analysis of various LG15 sites and forums, I conducted interviews through Skype, Gchat, Internet Relay Chat, and in person with some of the fans and a few people who worked for the creative team. Unfortunately, the site and the fan-created LGPedia were taken down entirely after the company was purchased by Everyday Health in 2012. Consequently, a good portion of the content has disappeared from the Internet.

2. Building the china shop

[2.1] As a Web-based grassroots project, LG15's economic viability was suspect right from the beginning. The production of the videos was initially financed with savings, credit cards, and some help from the parents of the creative team (note 1). They were seeking a stable revenue model built around audiences, but to do so, they needed to get noticed, and this required creative ways to cut through the noise of thousands of videos uploaded daily. In the absence of a dedicated budget, the team had no choice but to rely on viral distribution of their videos. With that in mind, they linked their videos to other popular videos to attract views and shot their videos to pique the maximum amount of curiosity. The goal was to tease their viewers with a seemingly simple plot laden with clues that shrouded the videos with mystery yet promised something deeper underneath the surface.
The techniques used by the LG15 team were standard viral marketing techniques, to be sure, but they were also able to transform these videos into spreadable media by tapping into the participatory culture native to YouTube. Viral marketing is a type of advertisement wherein the audience distributes content through word of mouth, viral videos, e-mail forwards, and link exchanges. The limitation of this model is that it assumes a passive audience who merely acts as an agent of distribution (Jenkins, Ford, and Green 2013, 20). By contrast, spreadable media, in Henry Jenkins, Sam Ford, and Joshua Green's (2013) formulation, emphasize the role of the networked communities that undergird viral marketing. Such media embrace a hybrid model of circulation "where a mix of top-down and bottom-up forces determine how material is shared across and among cultures in far more participatory (and messier) ways" (1). In this latter model, consumers are no longer the distributors of preconstructed messages but are actively shaping the media flows by reframing, remixing, and sharing media content. This form of advertisement facilitates a deeper engagement, but it also gets complicated as audiences share content sometimes with the permission of the rights holders, at other times in unauthorized ways and in unapproved forms. Ultimately, this mode of engagement became the reason why fans stuck with LG15 long after the mystery was gone.

Paul Booth coined the term Digi-Gratis to describe the type of digital economy that spreadable media generates (2010, 24). For Booth, the concept comprises the hybrid economic arrangements in which networked communities engage (2010, 24). In these arrangements, a market economy and a gift economy coexist not just in conflict with each other, but also in symbiosis. As a form of free advertisement, this economic model serves the interests of the media companies; its driving engine is the gift economy that relies on audiences to exchange links and videos and to remix content freely without pay. Jenkins, Ford, and Green explain that "it is precisely the hybrid nature of these exchanges, the fluidity with which digital content moves among different kinds of transactions, sometimes functioning as a gift and sometimes as an advertisement for commercial gain or social advancement that makes it so hard to determine the value, worth, and meaning of such materials" (2013, 91). In Booth's formulation, ARGs exemplify the Digi-Gratis economy because these games are born out of commercial interests but are mobilized through a community freely collaborating to overcome the most challenging hurdles (2010, 24–25). Consequently, these games have been frequently deployed as a part of marketing campaigns both for entertainment franchises and new products introduced into the market.

Although LG15 did not start as an ARG, the creators' decision to shoot videos to pique the maximum amount of curiosity inevitably led to a puzzle-solving mentality among its fan base. In fact, the videos' founding premise before they were exposed as a show (i.e., whether or not Bree was real) was a puzzle that the fans collaborated on in order to solve. Perhaps to strengthen their identification with the participatory culture flourishing on YouTube and not appear to have corporate ambitions, the LG15 team hid behind the aura of amateurism, neither accepting nor denying the fictional status of their videos. According to Rushfield and Hoffman, this ambiguity ensured viral distribution of the videos in the earlier stages (Los Angeles Times, September 8, 2006).

Almost overnight, Bree's videos caught the attention of thousands, some offering heartfelt advice, while others questioned their authenticity. As early as the third video, some followers surmised that this was a marketing scheme initiated by Hollywood for a movie in the vein of The Blair Witch Project (1999). While Hollywood was not behind it, the team did have plans for a
movie to be distributed through iTunes. Greg Goodfried, in an interview conducted by Catherine Morris, explained that the team changed their movie idea once they realized that there was a new, fast-growing market that no one had truly broken into yet (2009, 26). It took only a few months to expose the videos as fake, but by then the original series of LG15 had received over 50 million combined views (Bebo, April 13, 2007), a feat that captured the attention of such big media outlets as *The New York Times*, *Los Angeles Times*, MTV, Yahoo!, and Wired, all of which gave extensive coverage to the show.

[2.6] Like the early television fandom who utilized novelty technologies such as the VCR and online discussion boards to crack the mysteries of *Twin Peaks* (1990–91) (Jenkins 2006), so too did the LG15 fans deploy the affordances of the Internet to solve the mystery behind Bree's videos. Naturally, the witch hunt-style investigation that aimed to expose the videos as a commercial venture translated into deeper audience engagement and amplified the hype around the show. One fan discovered that the domain name of a phony fan site was registered prior to the first video posted on YouTube, a discovery that unquestionably undermined the authenticity of the vlogs. Another fan noted that the site was registered on the same day that Bree's MySpace page and Yahoo! e-mail addresses were created (on March 12). In August 2006, yet another fan discovered and posted the trademark application by Goodfried, which suggested that these videos were at least in part a commercial venture. Then, in September 2006, three tech-savvy fans, working together, set up a sting on the e-mail address that was being used by Bree; the operation netted them the Internet address of a computer at Creative Artists Agency, the Beverly Hills talent agency that represented the team (*Los Angeles Times*, September 8, 2006). A few days later, Matt Foremski, while searching Google's cache of online sites, found the original MySpace page of the actress who played Bree and revealed her identity as Jessica Lee Rose (*Silicon Valley Watcher*, September 12, 2006).

[2.7] While the fictional status of Bree had long been suspected, the confirmed fictional status of the videos elicited much outrage among some of the fan base and almost threatened to end the show (Brooke 2006). Some were ready to accept it for what it was, as good entertainment, but others felt cheated and betrayed because they took Bree's plight for real and offered their heartfelt advice to someone they believed to be a young girl in distress. Comments accusing her of being fake lasted for months, and some fans even posted their own videos on YouTube expressing their anger and disappointment at being treated like idiots. The incident opened up discussions regarding authenticity and deception on YouTube. Through these debates, the YouTube community developed a more sophisticated approach to the possibilities of its platform. One could argue that YouTube grew up with LG15 in more ways than one. The backlash was substantial, but it only added to the hype around the show.

[2.8] In the end, the show weathered the raucous debates that flooded the comment boards, forums, and YouTube. Once these videos were discovered to be a show, its creative team clarified that their intention was not to trick the audience but rather to explore the narrative possibilities of Internet technologies. Ultimately, they explained, their goal was to create a community-based storytelling that embodied the general spirit of coauthorship (*MTV*, September 14, 2006). They explained that they wanted their fans to help them usher in an "era of interactive storytelling where the line between 'fan' and 'star' has been removed, and dedicated fans...are paid for their efforts" (Brooke 2006). True to their promise, they developed a loose narrative structure that enabled them to steer the story according to the feedback they received from the audience. Fans
who stuck around wanted to be a part of the show with the understanding that LG15 opened the
doors to a new form of storytelling. With the personal encouragement of the creators, dozens of
spin-offs emerged around the official videos. This conceptual stand, however, proved impossible to
implement in the long term as the show grew into a franchise too big to incorporate any
meaningful interactivity, and legal concerns forced the team to draw a distinct line between fan
and official content.

[2.9] Although LG15 started on YouTube as a series of videos, the creative team’s long-term
ambitions to build an economically sustainable storytelling initiative using social media sites
pushed them to look into ways to expand their project outside of YouTube. To do so, they
considered ways to harness the creative labor of networked audiences as well as form lucrative
business partnerships that allowed them to tap into audiences that had not yet been reached.
Despite the democratic discourse surrounding user-generated content sites, Johnson postulates
that the inclusion of the use and reuse of content by networked users does not imply a "utopian
aura of empowerment or emancipation, but instead a more ambivalent recognition of the
contradictory positions offered to and taken up by consumers with the institutions of media
franchising" (Johnson 2013, 199). The LG15 team maximized this potential by pitching their show
to audiences as a collaborative storytelling project once they were exposed.

[2.10] In order to generate revenue, the team started selling LG15 merchandise, receiving fan
donations, and posting their videos on Revver because the site placed advertisements on videos
and shared the revenue with the video owners. Once the show received a steady viewership (1.5
million views per week, or 300,000 to 400,000 per episode), the team began accepting product
placements such as Hershey Icebreaker Sours and Neutrogena and formed partnerships with other
media companies (note 2). Its partnership with Bebo led to a cobranded spin-off, KateModern
(2007–8), in England. After KateModern came to a close and LG15 was about to wrap up, EQAL
licensed the franchise to Poland and produced N1ckola (2009) with two other companies, Agora
and A2 Multimedia. As a final step, the creators opened up the franchise to the fans with their
contest The Show Is Yours where fans created pilots for a fan spin-off that was to be showcased
on the official LG15 site (note 3).

[2.11] The initial mystery regarding the authenticity of the videos set the tone for how the show
was to be watched. Underneath the ranting of a 16-year-old teen, dozens of clues embedded
within the videos suggested a mysterious world ready to be discovered. Right from the start, the
show appropriated a ludic narrative logic designed to cultivate a puzzle-solving mentality in its
audience. Jason Mittell, an avid Lost fan who actively participated in the show’s ARG, Lost
Experience, explained that this form of storytelling "promotes a model of 'forensic fandom,' a
mode of television engagement encouraging research, collaboration, analysis, and interpretation"
(Mittell 2009a, 128–30; Mittell 2009b, ¶2.3). According to Mittell, to be a Lost fan is to embrace a
detective mentality to seek out clues, patterns, and information that lead to the formulation of
theories about the show. Forensic fandom, however, encourages a different mode of engagement
than does spreadable media. Calling this form of engagement drillable media, Mittell explains that
it invites viewers to dig deeper, probing beneath the surface to understand the complexity of a
story. Conceptualizing spreadable and drillable media to be opposing vectors of cultural
engagement, he elaborates: "Spreadable media encourages horizontal ripples, accumulating
eyeballs without necessarily encouraging more long-term engagement. Drillable media typically
engage far fewer people, but they occupy more of their time and energies in a vertical descent
ARG players, armed with a keen forensic sensibility, constituted this type of fandom within the larger LG15 community.

The LG15 fans caught on as early as the seventh video that they were supposed to be looking "for hidden meanings, undertones and keywords or phrases" and that this was not merely an Internet teen drama. When Bree started talking about her mysterious religion in episode 15 ("Me, Religion, and Daniel" posted to YouTube on August 10, 2006), her past in episode 17 ("Mysteries of My Past...REVEALED!!" posted to YouTube on August 18, 2006), and the religious ceremony in which her parents wanted her to participate in episode 23 ("A Change in My Life" posted to YouTube on September 3, 2006) fans were sure that this was some kind of a game. Forums flooded with speculations about her parents' mysterious religion. From the clues hidden in Bree's bedroom, fans suspected that their religion was some kind of a satanic cult connected to Aleister Crowley, an influential English occultist, astrologer, mystic, and ceremonial magician who founded the religious philosophy of Thelema. As the show progressed, they surmised that the ceremony was some kind of a virgin sacrifice for which only girls with the purity bond were selected. The nature of this bond was a bit unclear. What was remarkable was that the show responded to how fans interpreted clues, a tendency that became more obvious as the show progressed. In this fashion, LG15 was able to benefit from both ends of the spectrum of media engagement. It was spreadable as well as drillable, with both types of activities reinforcing each other.

Soon enough, however, some of the game-savvy fans expected the show (and wanted it) to develop into an ARG. But that didn't happen. In fact, much to their dismay, these fans found out later that the creative team did not know what an ARG was until they read about it through the fan message boards. Even so, the ludic narrative logic that started LG15, along with the idea of a community-based storytelling initiative, generated quite a buzz that resulted in the team receiving $5 million in venture capital to expand its offerings (Hendrickson 2008). As the views climbed up to millions, different fans cultivated different expectations for the show. Some of them were intrigued by the mysteries embedded in the show, while others were attracted by the idea of a storytelling experiment that included their contributions. In the absence of any systematically designed ARG experience, those who were interested in the gamelike attributes of the show took it upon themselves to create their own ARGs. The introduction of these games was to become a turning point for the franchise.

3. Paratextual considerations

What made LG15 a YouTube hit, even after its exposure, was that it was a storytelling experiment that used the affordances of emerging technologies and the Internet. In order to do so, the creators subtly modeled fan behavior and openly solicited participation. For example, the show's characters were initially introduced as fans responding to the LG15 characters, giving the real fans a false sense of hope that if they interacted with the characters, they too might become a part of the show. In case the message wasn't clear, the creators also sent fans messages through the forums encouraging them to create their own characters, hinting that in the future some of these could be integrated into the show (note 4). Within a matter of months, dozens of fan spin-offs emerged around the LG15 universe, otherwise known as Breeniverse. Marie-Laure Ryan explains that a narrative universe comprises a plurality of distinct worlds, or possible worlds, structured by their relation to the actual world situated in the center. For a world to be a possible
world, it must be linked to the actual world "by a relation of accessibility" (1991, 16–21). Although fan content could be considered as possible worlds, the team carefully defined the boundaries of the LG15 canon by making sure fan videos were framed as secondary content not essential to the understanding of the main show in any way.

[3.2] To be sure, the spin-offs, fan videos, and the commentary that emerged around the creator-delimited Breeniverse functioned as paratexts, or ancillary materials, but scholars have advanced the idea that such artifacts recontextualize main content in substantial ways. Gérard Genette (1987) is one of the early scholars to consider the importance of these secondary elements. His examination of things like tables of contents, titles, and reviews reveals that such materials help shape the reader's experience and give meaning to the act of reading. Media scholars like Mia Consalvo (2007) and Jonathan Gray (2010) bring to focus the value of subsidiary artifacts within the media industry. Looking at the game industry, Consalvo examines the role of external elements like game magazines, strategy guides, and discussion boards; she postulates that they facilitate speedy advancement in the game and thus play an integral role in shaping the game experience. Gray examines elements like promos, trailers, and posters, and observes that these texts, which are merely designed to generate hype, act as filters through which the primary text acquires meaning. By all accounts, then, paratexts play a central role in the meaning-making process of the primary text.

[3.3] What is different in the case of LG15 is that the paratextual materials, including promotional materials for the show, have largely been produced by fans. As they collaborated to make sense of the clues hidden in the videos and speculated on the theories of how the plot was to unfold, they created a lot of content projecting these speculations, remixing and reperforming some of the scenes. This content formed the basis of the show's paratexts, and these paratexts in turn recontextualized the show's meaning for others. Scholars have long since considered texts, literary or otherwise, to be formations rather than static artifacts as they view reading as a process that requires the performance of a range of acts (Barthes 1977; Lavagnino 1995; Gunder 2001). Roland Barthes, for instance, distinguishes between work and text and argues that while the former is the physical object that can be held in the hand, the latter is "experienced only in an activity of production" (1977, 157). The text, Barthes observes, gathers the work up as play, activity, production, and/or practice by asking from its reader a practical collaboration (1977, 162–63). In the case of LG15, collaboration was quite literal as the fans reframed the official content in a range of diverse contexts (note 5).

[3.4] Through parodies, extensions, and role-playing games, the early spin-offs playfully extended the main show in various directions. No doubt these paratexts required the performance of a range of meaning-making activities and recontextualized the main show, but they did so within parameters defined by the creators. Significant to note here is that these activities came about only after some of the riddles in the show had been solved by a group of fans. This group of fans constituted the core of the forensic fandom that Mittell observes in Lost. For them, at least in the beginning, LG15 was interesting primarily because of the puzzles it presented and because through solving these puzzles, they partook in advancing the plot.

[3.5] This group of fans wanted more than just a story. They preferred an experience that was more immediate, more interactive. Frequently, the interactivity in LG15 felt staged to the point that fans eventually dubbed it as interfaketivity. For them, LG15 was falling short of exploring the
narrative possibilities that the Web afforded. In an interview conducted on April 20, 2009, Jeromy Barber, the puppetmaster of the fan ARG *Maddison Atkins*, describes the fakeness of the interactivity in LG15 as if someone had "decorated [his] house with furniture made of cardboard and rented it out as fully furnished." He explains that even though he did not enjoy the show much, it was the idea of Web distribution, interactive narrative, and immediate feedback from the audience that attracted him. It was when he experienced *Cassie Is Watching* (CiW), the first fan ARG, that he recognized the startling possibilities of the Internet medium. Those who were interested in this sort of engagement then set out to create paratexts of a different kind. In addition to CiW, numerous fan ARGs emerged within the LG15 universe, including *opAphid*, *Maddison Atkins*, and *Redearth*, all of which were independent projects that aimed to expand and refurnish the LG15 universe.

[3.6] As paratexts, ARGs took LG15 in a different direction. They had darker themes that promised to open up the doors to more mysteries within the LG15 universe, but these themes may not have been appropriate for an initiative that was trying to attract advertisers. Still they presented a much more engaging form of experience, and because of that, they garnered a surprisingly significant following. Fans were divided as to how to react to this new development. The creator of CiW was unknown (and still is), so fans weren't sure whether or not the LG15 team was behind it. After all, LG15 also began with questions regarding its authenticity. If it were an official part of the canon, it presented another problem, at least for some of the fans. Some of the hard-core Bree followers were decidedly worried that these new themes and characters might steal the show. This group did not find the gamelike qualities of the show all that appealing and they were worried that this was the new direction that the show was going to take. In other words, CiW created a schism amongst fans. In the next section, I elaborate on the characteristics of ARGs to demonstrate how their open-ended game structure could evolve into a transgressive play style that created this unrest within the LG15 universe.

4. ARGs as transgressive play

[4.1] The term *alternate* is a misleading characterization of the nature of ARGs. Unlike what the term *alternate reality* may seem to imply, these games do not submerge the player within an alternative world, but rather integrate the world of the game into the everyday existence and life of the player herself. Therefore, the ultimate goal is to have the player believe that the events and characters exist in her life world, not in an alternative reality at all (Szulborski 2005). According to the ARG scholar and game designer Jane McGonigal (2005), alternate realities should be understood as real worlds that use games as metaphors. Alternative realities, on the other hand, are realities one chooses between, such as when one logs onto a virtual world, a computer-generated 3D environment like *Second Life* or *World of Warcraft*, in which all events occur within the confines of that reality and have no bearing on any other reality outside of it. The ARG player is not faced with such a choice. When participating in alternate reality games, she experiences both worlds, the real world and the game world, concurrently. To state this point more concretely, fictional characters in an ARG might very well reach out to the player using the player's home phone number or send mail to her home address, or a player could participate in real-world events where she interacts with the characters as if they existed in real life.

[4.2] To an outsider, ARGs do not appear to be games at all. In fact, if the genre's oft-cited principle "This Is Not a Game" is any indication, an ARG must deny that it is a game, and instead,
demand to be recognized as real, even as the players are acutely aware that they are playing a
game. Elan Lee, one of the leading designers of the first ARG, *The Beast*, says that they
intentionally nurtured this dubious attitude in their game, noting that their goal was to create a
game with an identity crisis (quoted in McConigal 2003). The players are not duped into taking the
realness of the game at face value, but display a performance of belief in the game's reality and
actively work to erase all the markers of gameness that they may encounter along the way
(McConigal 2003).

[4.3] One could argue that ARGs' intentional refusal of gameness is transgressive by nature,
giving the gamers permission to disregard all the traditional characteristics that are associated
with games. For starters, ARGs do not have a predefined game space, or what Johan Huizinga
(1950) refers to as a magic circle. Instead, through strategy and make-believe, they transform
everyday spaces into playgrounds. Nor do they use specific pieces or assets that mark them as
games. Rather, they implement tools and methods that are already integrated into players' daily
lives, such as phones, e-mail, SMS, and Web sites. The only interfaces in ARGs are the same ones
regularly used to communicate in the real world. Their lack of a predefined rule set or a win-or-
loss scenario is counterintuitive, but puppetmasters (or game designers) make up for this by
generating a sort of rulebook as the game progresses. They monitor the gameplay diligently, and
through their responses, they reward correct actions while discouraging incorrect ones (Szulborski

[4.4] From the beginning, one could argue that LG15 displayed a similar identity crisis. It
insisted that it was not a show, nor did it admit to being a game. But at the same time, it
integrated a ludic narrative structure to lure audiences into its world. That mysterious world was
to become the reality against which the fan ARGs built their alternate realities. The first ARG, CiW,
went to extreme efforts to create an ambiguity around whether or not the game was created by
the LG15 team. Being affiliated with the LG15 team meant that the world it created would be
officially in the LG15 canon and thus would be a part of the show or a part of the reality
constructed by the show. For some fans, the game's ambiguous beginnings were all the
confirmation they needed to assume that the game was indeed official. After all, LG15 also had
started amidst similar ambiguities. CiW went further, however. Not only did it toy around with its
own authenticity, but it also acted like an unruly child rebelling against its parent, LG15. In that
respect, it perpetuated a transgressive play style within the LG15 universe.

[4.5] Game scholars have noted that transgressive play is inherent in all games to a certain
extent, mostly as a result of the unpredictability of the user agent. In fact, one could argue that it
is essentially a form of meaningful play described by Katie Salen and Eric Zimmerman (2004) as
emerging from the interaction between players and the game as well as from the context in which
the game is played. In this sense, "an action a player takes in a game results in the creation of
new meanings within the system" (33–34) and it could be argued that transgressive play is just
that, new unpredicted meanings. The default mode of play in ARGs is typically transgressive. This
is mainly because of the identity crisis that has defined the gaming genre right from the get-go: a
rule-breaking game cultivates rule-breaking players. Espen Aarseth defines transgressive play as
the struggle against the game's ideal player, a concept that emerges from his own formulation of
the implied player (1997, 127; 2007, 132). He repurposes the term from Wolfgang Iser (1978)
who, as a part of his formulation of a theory of the act of reading, uses it to refer to the fictional
construct that the text addresses. The implied reader, according to Iser, is a hypothetical
construct that embodies all the predispositions necessary for a literary work to exercise its effect. It follows that the implied player, as articulated by Aarseth, "can be seen as a role made for the player by the game, a set of expectations that the player must fulfill for the game to 'exercise its effect'" (Aarseth 2007, 132). But as Aarseth observes, real players do unexpected things "often just because these actions are not explicitly forbidden" (2007, 132), and in some cases, because they are explicitly forbidden. Transgressive play, then, "is a symbolic gesture of rebellion against the tyranny of the game, a (perhaps illusory) way for the played subject to regain their sense of identity and uniqueness through the mechanisms of the game itself" (Aarseth 2007, 132). Given its origins, it is not much of a stretch to consider that the implied players of ARGs are those who adopt transgressive play. Even though the modus operandi of an ARG is transgressive, when framed within the boundaries of an entertainment franchise, it bears the possibility to become disruptive unless carefully regulated.

[4.6] In an ARG, unpredictability is exactly what is necessary to bring the electronic world to life. A "Do Not Enter" sign is a direct invitation for an ARG player to figure out ways to get past the restriction. Anything could happen depending on how players choose to interact with the game, leading the outcome to be anybody's guess. Sean C. Stacey (2006), the founder of the popular unfiction.com forums where ARG players convene, explains in his blog post "Undefining ARG" that ARGs yield chaotic play. He further explains that an ARG "begins with a set of ideas and ends wherever the performance or play may take it. The authors may set it in motion but they must work together with their audience to see its conclusion for the first time themselves. By its nature, it is improvisational in its production" (Stacey 2006). What is left over in the aftermath of chaotic play—things like forum posts, e-mails, chatlogs, Web sites, guides, trails, wikis, and databases—are what Stacey characterizes as chaotic fiction, but this is not finalized until the game comes to a close (Stacey 2007).

[4.7] In the case of CiW, chaotic play set forth by the puppetmaster became the disrupting force that destabilized the LG15 universe. Players who engaged in the game were not engaging in transgressive play against CiW, but their mere participation in the game became a transgressive act inside of the main story world. It was transgressive mainly because it accomplished what LG15 had initially set out to do in a much better way. It delivered genuine interactivity in an immersive environment.

5. The bull

[5.1] It all started on August 30, 2006, with the episode entitled "Swimming!" in which Daniel took Bree to a swimming hole for an outing away from her strict parents (video 1). As with the rest of the videos, every second of the footage, every object shown, every word uttered was analyzed and discussed in the forums. So naturally, halfway through the video, when Bree asked Daniel "Whatever happened to that girl Cassie?" speculation went haywire. Although Daniel did not seem to remember her, fans thought that she may have been in Daniel's class at some point. One thing that Bree did remember about Cassie, however, was that everyone was mean to her.
Later, Virginia Heffernan, a New York Times TV critic who took an interest in LG15, stated that she received a cryptic message from Cassie—possibly the same Cassie mentioned in Bree's video. The message read: "Careful. Take nobody at face value. There is more than one girl. That's just unconscious knowledge" (New York Times, September 5, 2006). Heffernan also posted a cryptic voice message that she received supposedly from Cassie. No one was sure what it meant. Heffernan surmised that Cassie would be branching out into a separate story line, perhaps a more engaging one than what LG15 delivered: "And soon we might see two plots diverge. Two lonelygirl15's? Look for a renegade plot to show up in videos on YouTube, using much of the LG15 mise-en-scène. Including the swimming hole! Will fans follow the new plot? Can a new plotline restore some of the sheen of verisimilitude, which was the beauty of the original, before it overnight came to seem all overthought and agented?" (New York Times, September 11, 2006).

Cassie's e-mail address, cassiestruggles18, bore a close resemblance to the one used by Bree at the time, breesnuggles15. Shortly after, a new YouTube channel appeared under the username cassieiswatching and a video entitled "This Is My Story Now" was posted. Shot in the same location as Bree's "Swimming!" video and tagged with three words, Bree, tells, and lies, the video consisted of the footage of the trail where Bree had walked to the swimming hole and showed a mysterious bag falling into the swimming hole. The video that started with a whisper that said "I was here" ended with "Come and get it," an apparent invitation to retrieve whatever had been dropped into the water (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_IcYUifgEfw). The next couple of videos also used the locations that the original series used. The second video, "When I Get to the Bottom Where I Stop," alluded to the lyrics from the Beatles song "Helter Skelter," a known favorite of the mass murderer, Charles Manson, and included a picture of the Manson murder scene (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Kh0w43rqp6E).

As with other spin-offs and videos, discussions erupted almost instantly around whether or not this was an official part of the story. Fueling the discussions around these videos was the fact that they were all shot in the locations in which the LG15 videos had been shot, strongly suggesting that whoever was running the game knew the production details of the show. However, Milowent, one of the fans, discovered that at least a few others had already publicly posted the correct location of the swimming hole. In other words, it was possible that the
puppetmaster of CiW would have known the location without being connected to the creators. Almost instantaneously, the forums, message boards, and other spaces that typically housed LG15 content were inundated instead with discussions about the game. The CiW videos were posted on YouTube as well, where LG15 had first started. The interfaces for the game were the same ones that the fans used to interact with the LG15 world. All of these factors allowed the fans to experience CiW while occupying the LG15 universe even if they were not actively participating in the game. One could argue that the puppetmaster had successfully submerged the game's alternate world within the reality of the LG15 universe.

[5.5] Cassie, within a few hours of uploading the first video, updated the video description to include a link to Google Maps, disclosing the presumed location of the swimming hole. Following a series of unsuccessful attempts at retrieving the bag, Cassie sent aggravated messages to some of the players but sent additional clues too (figure 1).

![Figure 1. Clues sent to a few of the fans. [View larger image.]](image)

[5.6] On September 15, 2008, theAAshow claimed to have found the bag and posted a video showing its contents: a Tarot card in a box (video 2).
[5.7] CiW soon posted a disclaimer on YouTube saying, "TOO SLOW I DON'T PLAY CARDS YOU ALL FAILED I HATE YOU." It became clear to the fans that someone else had gotten to the box first and gamejacked the clue in order to interfere with Cassie's game. Gamejacking occurs when a player takes control of a game and takes it into a different direction than was initially intended.

[5.8] Meanwhile, the media and public who had heard about the hype around LG15 visited the official Web site only to find the forums were flooded with posts not about Bree but about a girl named Cassie. Fans of Bree were taken aback by this unexpected turn of events. Those who liked Bree and the story as is, and who did not want to be bothered with solving puzzles and mysteries, were quite concerned about the new direction that the story seemed to be taking. Independent LG15 forums like Anchor Cove, which no longer exists, went so far as to ban all discussion of CiW for fear of Cassie displacing Bree. Within days of Cassie's debut, over 66 percent of all posts at the official LG15 forums were about Cassie. The LG15 universe had effectively been taken over by Cassie. Worried about the effects of this ARG that appeared to be too dark for most of its fan base, the LG15 team hastily posted a disclaimer in the forums distancing themselves from CiW and disavowing any connection to it. But having seen the power of these games, they announced that they too would include ARG elements into the show.

[5.9] The life of CiW was short and its end came swiftly. It was unexpectedly gamejacked by yet another fan ARG, opAphid (https://www.youtube.com/user/OpAphid), created by Glen Rubenstein. The players of CiW had discovered a phone number that they were to call to leave voice messages for Cassie. Shortly thereafter, a voice mail message left by Cassie was altered by Rubenstein who successfully took control of the voice mail by typing the default password. After having gamejacked CiW, Rubenstein rearranged his own ARG ideas that he had been working on to fit into the story lines of both CiW and LG15. Having failed at their own quickly done ARG attempt, the LG15 team announced on November 21, 2006, that they would be integrating opAphid into the canon. Their collaboration only lasted for 4 months when Rubenstein and the LG15 team parted ways following the unsubstantiated claims that Rubenstein was sending out clues for favors (ARGNet, March 15, 2007). However, during that time, Rubenstein introduced a slew of new characters into the canon.

[5.10] What attracted some of the fans to CiW and later to other fan ARGs was that these games told their respective stories in a truly interactive fashion. In other words, they put into practice what LG15 had set out to accomplish but had failed to do. Dave Szulborski (2005), a renowned ARG designer, identifies interactive authoring to be a game's distinguishing characteristic whereby authoring becomes an ongoing negotiation among all of the participants, players and designers alike. Unlike other games, ARG creators are able to watch the players in real time as they experience the game and react to what players are doing or experiencing almost immediately. It is this responsiveness that allows ARG writers to create a convincingly realistic and immersive experience (Szulborski 2005, 60). For the LG15 fans, interactivity as executed in the show fell dramatically short of their expectations. Soon, other ARGs emerged, including Maddison Atkins, Redearth, and Coalition, all of which created worlds that were somehow connected to the LG15 universe and to one another.

6. Conclusion
What sets early fan ARGs of LG15 apart from Aarseth's (1997, 2007) model of transgressive play is that, unlike in his model, the disruptive game play is not executed against the game itself but rather is working against the reality within which the game is submerged, the LG15 universe. The gameplay of CiW requires the implied player to follow the story of Cassie at the expense of Bree's. At the same time, however, since Cassie's world permeated the LG15 universe, fans other than those interested in the game felt compelled to follow Cassie if for no other reason than to uncover the mystery surrounding its authenticity. After all, the LG15 videos exhibited both spreadable and drillable tendencies that ensured their viral distribution while simultaneously demanding a deeper engagement with the franchise. In other words, the type of meaning-making activities in which the audience had been asked to engage since the beginning of the show paralleled those that were necessary to understand fan-generated ARGs.

In many ways, CiW became a turning point for LG15. As a paratext, Cassie's playful takeover of the story blindsided its creators and temporarily destabilized the LG15 universe. The hiring of Rubenstein was a strategic move on the creators' part that allowed them to regain control by integrating these initial fan ARGs into the main show. Even if this was an attempt to subdue renegade story lines, this decision also allowed fans to open up the canon to introduce fan-created characters and themes into the official repertoire of LG15. As a result, early fan ARGs became a form of transgressive play that allowed fans a meaningful albeit temporary role in the development of the story. It was a moment in which fans usurped control from the producers of the show and demonstrated that they themselves could be legitimate collaborators in creating a truly meaningful interactive fiction that goes beyond merely staging collaborative storytelling.

Such negotiations between the LG15 team and the fans of the show demonstrate that ARG paratexts are more than fan fiction or ancillary content; they hold the possibility to become tactical tools within the larger media game in which bottom-up consumer-driven processes carve out a meaningful role in the field of cultural production. The LG15 team appropriated the affordances of the Internet and emerging technologies outside of the mechanisms created by Hollywood to mobilize the culture of ludism and break into the extra-Hollywood entertainment industry. Similarly the playful activities that emerged within the media fandom they themselves created became a force that was to be used to negotiate the boundaries around their franchise as a newly emerging entertainment company. These and similar negotiations indicate that in practice the economic and cultural arrangements of the Digi-Gratis economy are as disruptive as they may be potentially advantageous for the media industry.

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Notes

After LG15 was exposed as a show, the team openly conveyed their financial instability to their fan base through forums and message boards. In the beginning, since they didn't start as a show, everything about the videos was executed in a do-it-yourself style where the creators' friends pitched in. Bree's room, where the initial videos were shot, was decorated with the things salvaged from the thrift store (Davis 2006). When the show was at risk of shutting down, fans
insisted that the team put a tip jar on the site so they could donate money to the cause. When the show became popular, the team began product placement to monetize the show, but they did so with fans' permission. The first product placement was Hershey Icebreakers (EQAL, March 17, 2007); then a fictional scientist from Neutrogena was written into the plot as part of a promotional partnership with Neutrogena to finance their second season. The third season of LG15, Revelations, was sponsored by News Corp.'s 20th Century Fox who hired LG15 Studios to launch a viral marketing campaign within the show for their upcoming movie, Jumper, released in February 2008. Specifically, News Corp. paid the LG15 producers to integrate the plot of Jumper into the Web show (EQAL, January 26, 2008).

2. LG15's partnership with Hershey Icebreaker Sours yielded an estimated revenue of $10,000 per show, per sponsor (EQAL, March 17, 2007). While financing the show was mostly a matter of trial and error during the first season of the franchise, the increasing popularity of the videos allowed them to use product placement in creative ways. Two years after its launch, LG15 Studios became EQAL in April 2008, with receipt of $5 million in venture capital to expand their offerings (Hendrickson 2008). Around the same time, EQAL entered a partnership with Bebo to finance and advertise their show as they expanded their franchise to England (BrandRepublic, April 16, 2007). The cobranded new spin-off, named KateModern, targeted a slightly older audience and proved to be equally successful. The first season alone received over 57 million views (Guardian, May 12, 2008). Bebo brought on Orange Mobile, P&G, Disney Buena Vista International UK, and Microsoft to sponsor the series, promising deep brand integration (NewTeeWee, November 29, 2007). Ultimately, KateModern was able to attract 60 different companies and brands that produced adequate revenue for the company, although it is not clear how much Bebo's cut was. They also increased brand exposure by selling KateModern merchandise. After KateModern came to an end and LG15 was about to wrap up, EQAL licensed the franchise to Poland and produced N1ckola with two other companies, Agora and A2 Multimedia. To date, according to the number of YouTube views available at the time of writing, the three seasons of LG15 have had approximately 273,932,897 views, KateModern about 1,749,464 views, and the rest of the ancillary spin-offs close to one million views.

3. As fans later found out, this was not really a contest because of legal issues. The call solicited fans to submit a 5-minute pilot and 8-week treatment for a social show derivative of the LG15 universe. The show produced by the winner, they announced, would have an opportunity to post their videos on the LG15 Web site. Having been disappointed by the lack of interest displayed towards their creations, fans were now cynical about the creators' efforts to include their creations in the show. The results of this competition perpetuated the previously established patterns in the show that emerged from a lack of transparency on the part of the creators. The competition was won by Jenni Powell and Logan Rapp, both of whom had been fans, but both of whom had also worked professionally for the LG15 team. Aside from their production experience, they had access to the original actors, two of whom they brought back in their pilot, The Misfits. Because the LG15 team had insisted that this was not a contest, even though it involved a competition, fans erroneously assumed that they were going to get paid as employees, that is, as professional producers. EQAL, on the other hand, never made any efforts to disabuse them of their belief (NewTeeWee, February 6, 2009). Powell and Rapp backed out of the project once they found out that EQAL had no intentions of financing the production of the series, but instead was expecting them to produce a month's worth of videos for a small stipend.
4. This information came up in the interviews that I conducted with some of the fans: Xeniph on July 31, 2008, Greg Gallows on August 4, 2008, and Jenni Powell on August 5, 2008.

5. Most LG15 fan spin-offs extended the existing plot. The videos of Paul and Andrea, for example, were one of the rare occasions that were later acknowledged in the show. These characters, who were briefly mentioned in the episode entitled "House Arrest" posted to YouTube on September 10, 2006, are Daniel's good friends who meet Bree at a party that she attends with Daniel. Posting under the handle Paulmark18, a couple of fans created a series of parody videos of the original series on YouTube, on September 16, 2006. Another fan, Aaronbeast, claimed to be Daniel's brother and started a short-lived spin-off where he expressed his concern for Daniel. -R- and Marbella created a role-playing game known as the Hymn of One Boarding School (HOOBS) where fans enacted the role of the students in a boarding school that prepared trait-positive girls for the Ceremony. Another series was born out of the "New Girl" challenge started by a fan who used the moniker immortal1. Seeking the stories of other trait-positive girls, the challenge ultimately aimed to introduce more fan-created characters into the story, an initiative that eventually developed into its own spin-off series called The Flock. This information was gathered from LGForums, since removed from the Internet, and from LGPedia, (http://lgpedia.nitemarecafe.com/wiki/page/Spin-offs), recently put back online by fans.

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Praxis

Twinship, incest, and twincest in the Harry Potter universe

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Abstract—Among the large group of Harry Potter fans who write their own stories about the boy wizard, his friends, and his foes, and publish them on the Internet, some are interested in the exploration of the erotic and romantic bond between identical twins. Because the Harry Potter saga features two sets of identical twin pairs of different gender—the Weasley brothers and the Patil sisters—the series not only provides a unique playground for the recipients in terms of the possibilities for twincest stories; more importantly, it offers ample opportunity for researchers to examine how fans actually use such pairings. In this essay, the examination of twin relationships as portrayed within Rowling's works, the movies, and in twincest fan fiction are confronted with each other to outline how Rowling's different concepts of the sibling pairs and the author's general ongoing interest in doubling motifs is consistently expanded by fan fiction writers to discuss the complex relationship between source and fan text.

Keywords—Fan community; Fan fiction; Slash


1. Introduction

[1.1] George, wearing an identical smirk, leaned to the side slightly and bumped his shoulder against Fred’s. They are lovers, Snape thought to himself. It was a simplistic and thoroughly obvious thought to have at that moment. (bar_bar_ella 2006)

[1.2] Although the names of the characters in the quotation above—Fred, George, Snape—are well-known to an audience familiar with popular culture, the erotic context in which these characters have been placed does not seem to be the world of J. K. Rowling's Harry Potter that we know from the books or the movies. The twin brothers Fred and George as lovers? One might even dismiss this excerpt as an absurd homoerotic fantasy of a fan fiction writer with no footing in the source text whatsoever. However, the incest trope is deep-rooted in the Harry Potter novels and movies, though its nature is neither as obvious or simplistic as it might appear to Snape in the fan fiction passage above. By closely examining this trope in connection with the motif of twinship in the source text and in several fan fiction works, we can improve our understanding of the complex relationship between fictional works and their follow-up explorations through fan writings.

[1.3] Incest and the incest taboo have a long history as recurring motifs in myth, art, literature, and cinema (Hoff 2003; Pollak 2003; Flannery 2007; Corbett 2008). Examples include Greek mythology, Richard Wagner's Die Walküre (1870), Thomas Mann’s Wälsungenblut (1906), and the more recent Les Bienveillantes (2006) by Jonathan Littell, as well as George R. R. Martin's epic fantasy saga, A Song of Fire and Ice (1996–), and its television adaptation by cable network HBO as the critically acclaimed Game of Thrones (2011–). Incest is a complex term that refers simultaneously to the relation, the sexual attraction, the sexual intercourse, and its prohibition between biologically related persons. Willner (1983) defines incest as the "intersection of three sets: a set of sexual behaviours, a set of kinship categories and a set of prohibitions" (136). According to Engel (2011), a desire for sameness,
indistinguishability, and inclusion is articulated through incest; it signifies the individuals' strong investment in the familiar. Conversely, the incest taboo, prevalent in Western societies, signifies the ideal of individualization and distinctness. Incestuous desire can be interpreted as the narcissistic wish for completion, as the desire to find the strange in oneself and the Self in the Other. In positive terms, this means that incestuous desire is lived as an openness toward the ambivalence of similarity and difference. It can contribute to a reshaping of existing kinship hierarchies and their politicization. By questioning the validity of the incest taboo, other naturalizing tendencies within the heteronormative society (Wittig 1980) can be stressed and unmasked.

[1.4] Contrary to what is postulated in most theorizations of the incest taboo, incest does not necessarily have to take place between adults and children, be heterosexual, or involve violence and the victimization of one party by another (Willner 1983). In my essay, I will argue that fan writings can describe and imagine social relations in which incestuous desires need not necessarily be denied and blocked. Instead, incest fan fiction stories question the validity of the incest taboo and explore the positive potentialities of queer relations. After a brief introduction to Harry Potter, its fandom, and the phenomenon of incest as a trope in fan fiction in general, I will focus on close readings of the representation of possible incest desires in both the source text and in the movie adaptations, and their concrete exploration through Harry Potter twincest fan fiction in the pairings Fred/George and Padma/Parvati. By showing how twincest fiction operates as a logical extension of an underlying structure that has already been established by the source text, I discuss to what extent fan fiction takes on certain tropes, erotizes them, and therefore, harmonizes the struggle between latent meaning and resistant reading.

2. Potter's journey from infancy to incest

[2.1] The seven Harry Potter novels by British author J. K. Rowling and their top-grossing eight screen adaptations are well known all over the globe. In the form of a clever genre pastiche (Westman 2011), the books tell the monomythic story of an orphaned boy who discovers that he is capable of doing magic. On his 11th birthday, he is invited to the Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry, where he meets mentors, friends, lovers, and enemies. But rather than the expected task of surviving school life and adolescence, Harry is primarily supposed to defeat his archnemesis: the evil wizard Voldemort, who murdered his parents and gradually regains power.

[2.2] Harry Potter has attracted a highly diverse group of readers and audiences (Westman 2011), providing them with numerous points of entry for their own fantasies, through fan fiction, fan art, video mash-ups, and the music genre Wizard Rock. In fan fiction narratives, fan writers have the opportunity to tell their own stories, poaching the characters from the source text (Jenkins 1992). The majority of these literary fantasies feature a romantic and/or sexual relationship (pairing) between two or more characters (Driscoll 2006) that were not necessarily romantically or erotically involved within the source text. The Harry Potter fan fiction community is currently one of the biggest and most productive fan fiction communities on the Web, with more than 650,000 stories archived on the multifandom-platform Fanfiction.net (https://www.fanfiction.net/) and about 52,000 texts on the younger platform Archive of Our Own (AO3; https://archiveofourown.org/) that has become an important gathering point for fan fiction writers in the last five years.

[2.3] Alongside the plethora of popular pairings—both canon (e.g., Ginny/Harry) and fanon (e.g., Remus/Sirius), heterosexual (e.g., Hermione/Severus) and queer (e.g., Harry/Draco)—numerous incest pairings and sibling incest pairings in particular are dealt with in fan fiction, and a critical and creative debate around the phenomenon of consensual, homosexual love between identical twins (twincest) takes place. Since identical twins are necessarily of the same gender, twincest fan fiction is always slash
or femslash. Although Harry Potter fan fiction—and Harry Potter slash in particular—has been widely discussed (MacDonald 2006; Willis 2006; Tosenberger 2008a; Bond and Michelson 2009; Noppe 2010), sibling incest and twincest in the Harry Potter fandom have not yet been explored in detail. A close reading of twincest fan fiction stories with the twin brothers Fred and George Weasley and the twin sisters Padma and Parvati Patil in comparison with each other and in the context of their portrayal in the books and movies can illustrate how slash finds different, sometimes conflicting strategies to contribute to the queer struggles against the incest taboo and in the active deconstruction of the normalization of heteronormative relationships (Engel 2011). Following the lead of Jones (2002), Willis (2006) and Tosenberger (2008b), I intend to show how the Harry Potter twincest fan fiction author should be perceived not only as a queer reader in the sense of Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (1994) but as an active decoder and recoder of subtextual meanings and elements, as a unifier of latent meanings and resistant readings. Although the bond between queer reading and slash fandom has been articulated before (Lothian, Busse, and Reid 2007; Dhaenens, Bauwel, and Biltereyst 2008; Cuntz-Leng 2013), this connection becomes exceptionally strong in twincest stories because their source texts feature twin relationships that prepare a semantic field, which already has a certain erotic potential and a higher degree of intimacy between two characters of the same gender than usual, and can quite easily be expanded without bending the source material by force.

3. Sibling incest in fan fiction

[3.1] Incest between siblings has been a theme in fan fiction of striking permanency and persistence. In almost every fictional universe that features biologically related characters (e.g., Harry Potter, The Hobbit, Supernatural [2005–])—brothers and sisters who have not been romantically or sexually involved in the source text or "mothership" (Scott 2013)—an exploration of the incestuous potential of these relationships through fan fiction can be detected. To illustrate the persistency of the sibling incest phenomenon in fan fiction and the immense variety of the motherships from which these stories originate, table 1 shows a list of sibling incest pairings from various fandoms (book, movie, comic, anime, TV series, even pop music [bandom]) over different periods of time that have been posted on AO3 (note 1).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fandom</th>
<th>No. of Stories</th>
<th>No. of Incest Stories</th>
<th>Percent of Incest Stories</th>
<th>Pairing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Oasis (band)</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>74.4</td>
<td>Liam/Noel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wizards of Waverly Place (TV)</td>
<td>109</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>74.3</td>
<td>Justin/Alex</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Simon &amp; Simon (TV)</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>65.6</td>
<td>A.J./Rick</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tokio Hotel (band)</td>
<td>636</td>
<td>384</td>
<td>60.4</td>
<td>Bill/Tom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boondock Saints (movie)</td>
<td>473</td>
<td>231</td>
<td>48.8</td>
<td>Connor/Murphy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frozen (movie)</td>
<td>687</td>
<td>196</td>
<td>28.5</td>
<td>Anna/Elsa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supernatural (TV)</td>
<td>63,646</td>
<td>9,457</td>
<td>14.9</td>
<td>Dean/Sam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Hobbit (all media)</td>
<td>9,476</td>
<td>1,261</td>
<td>13.3</td>
<td>Fili/Kili</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The examples in table 1 show that the occurrence of incest fan fiction is independent of the media type of the original source. Movies, anime, books, TV series, and music fandoms alike can attract fan fiction writers that are interested in exploring sibling incest relations. Further, the date of origin of the source text seems to be irrelevant, since TV series from the early 1980s stand side by side with current pop acts. However, the predominance of male slash pairings is striking. Anna/Elsa of the Disney production *Frozen* (2013) and Buffy/Dawn of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997–2003) remain the only two femslash pairings on the list; and this is on a par with the minor role of femslash in fan fiction writings in general. The only heterosexual pairings are Justin/Alex of *Wizards of Waverly Place* (2007–12), Klaus/Violet of the Lemony Snicket books (1999–2006), Simon/River of *Firefly* (2002–3), and Leia/Luke of *Star Wars* (1977–). One hypothesis for the predominance of slash in sibling incest fan fiction is that, because of their investment in the slash genre, slash writers are generally more used to and more interested in the exploration of unconventional and noncanonical relationships than het fiction writers. Furthermore, table 1 allows the assumption that a franchise with a large ensemble cast, like The Lord of the Rings, *Star Wars, Buffy the Vampire Slayer, Heroes* (2006–10), or the Marvel movies, offers many different possibilities for relationships that can be explored by the fan fiction writers and, in consequence, fewer incest stories are published. Conversely, when only a small number of pairing possibilities are available within the source text, and the characters in question are major players, incest is of high relevance in the respective fan fiction community (e.g., Oasis and Tokio Hotel fandoms, *Wizards of Waverly Place, Simon & Simon* [1981–95]).

To my knowledge, the concrete and explicit exploration of homosexual love between identical twins is, with the exception of Michel Tournier’s novel *Gemini* (1975), limited to the field of fan fiction. Whereas in fandom, the exploration of heterosexual incest relationships between twins of different gender (e.g., Luke and Leia of *Star Wars*) predates Harry Potter, twincest as an integral part of slash fan fiction originated in the Harry Potter fandom. As a result, the term twincest is nowadays strongly connected with slash and rarely with het stories; only 188 stories (17 percent) of the 1,112 total fan fiction stories on AO3 that are tagged as twincest explore heterosexual relations. Without taking Harry Potter into consideration, table 1 reveals four examples of slash twincest that are of differing popularity.

4. Incest and twincest in Harry Potter fan fiction

[4.1] Incest in Harry Potter fan fiction is relatively rare. Again, the formula "big cast = little incest" proves to be true and many other powerful figural constellations fire the imaginations of the fans. All incest pairings in Harry Potter must be called rare pairings. Of the 52,460 Harry Potter stories archived on AO3, only 1,056 (2.0 percent) are tagged as containing an incest pairing (note 2). Although this seems a comparatively small number of stories, the proportion of incest in Harry Potter fan fiction is significantly higher than in other fandoms. In comparison, 13,045 (1.28 percent) of the 1,020,665 total stories that are currently archived on AO3 are tagged as incest. Table 2 shows a selection of the Harry Potter incest figural constellations.

**Table 2. Incest pairings in Harry Potter fan fiction on AO3**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No. of Incest Stories</th>
<th>Pairing</th>
<th>Relationship</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>190</td>
<td>Fred/George</td>
<td>Twin brothers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>185</td>
<td>Fred/George/X</td>
<td>Twin brothers + 1 (note 3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>185</td>
<td>Other Weasleycest</td>
<td>Various</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>161</td>
<td>Blackcest</td>
<td>Siblings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>157</td>
<td>Malfoycest</td>
<td>Parents/child</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>62</td>
<td>Pottercest</td>
<td>Various</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>Padma/Parvati</td>
<td>Twin sisters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Lysander/Lorcan</td>
<td>Twin brothers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Padma/Parvati/X</td>
<td>Twin sisters + 1 (note 4)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

[4.2] Similar to table 1, table 2 shows that slash pairings are more dominant than heterosexual pairings in fan fiction stories dealing with the incest trope. The only heterosexual relations explored by fan writers are between Ginny Weasley and her brothers and between Draco Malfoy and his mother. With pairings like Bellatrix/Narcissa and Padma/Parvati, femslash plays a more prominent role in Harry Potter incest stories than it does in other fandoms, possibly because the Harry Potter franchise provides its fans with more and, possibly more interesting, female characters (Fry 2001). Further, it is striking that with the exception of Malfoycest (Draco/Lucius, Draco/Narcissa, Draco/Scorpius) and the Pottercest pairings involving Harry and his future children (23 out of 62), the majority of incest stories take place between siblings (875 out of 1,065—82 percent). The Fred/George pairing, and threesomes consisting of the Weasley twins and a third character, are by far the most common incest configurations in Harry Potter fan fiction (35.2 percent of all Harry Potter incest stories). With only 3.1 percent of Harry Potter incest stories, Patil twincest is not very popular. In addition to Patil and Weasley twincest, Luna Lovegood has—as part of the so-called next generation—a pair of twin sons named Lysander and Lorcan. Their existence has been revealed by Rowling in the made-for-TV documentary film *J. K. Rowling: A Year*
in the Life (2007) that came out after the release of the last novel, and the small number of stories with this pairing (1.4 percent of all Harry Potter incest stories) indicates the minor impact of extratextual information provided by the author on fan works.

[4.3] Patil and Weasley twincest, which will later be explored in more detail, may not top in total numbers Fili/Kili (The Lord of the Rings) or Sam/Dean Wincest (Supernatural) slash fiction. Even so, the Harry Potter franchise is singular in that two sets of identical twin pairs of different genders appear in the same fictional universe. This unique feature enables us to look simultaneously at two different approaches of fan writers in dealing with sibling incest—one reflecting the desire for sameness, the other discussing the need to become an individual. By identifying the coexistence of both approaches in the source text and in fan fiction stories alike, the strength of the bond between both worlds can be foregrounded.

5. The Weasley twins

[5.1] The redheaded and freckled twins Fred and George are the older brothers of Harry Potter's best mate Ron. With their unconventional and subversive behavior, they seem to be the ideal couple when searching for homoerotic subtexts of the novels and films alike. They are connected with a special bond that is much stronger than the bonds between the other Weasley siblings. This "friendship extraordinaire" (Segal 1999, 97) mirrors the relationship that the majority of monozygotic twins experience in reality.

[5.2] Although Fred and George are older than Harry and his peer group, girlfriends of the twins are never mentioned. Only at the Yule ball in Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire (GoF) do girls accompany them as dates. But the dating originates not in any desire for women that the twins might express; instead, they only seem to want to tease their little brother Ron, who cannot manage to find a date for the ball himself (Rowling 2004a). In general, Fred and George finish one another's sentences and frequently complement each other like an old married couple; in Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix (OotP), they even drop out of school together to make a living from their curiosity and gag shop (Rowling 2003). They are never depicted as being apart from one another in the novels until the last installment of the series, Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows (DH), when they are separated in the final battle against Voldemort's forces at Hogwarts. In that fight, separated from his brother, George is severely hurt. Later in the same novel, Fred dies, which is a trauma for the family and, we must assume, George in particular (Rowling 2007).

[5.3] It is crucial that the first six movies feature no sequence where only one of the twin brothers appears; moreover, they are together in the same frame most of the time throughout all films. Shots of one twin alone are quite rare, which underlines their inseparability. The close and special bond between the twins is visible in many sequences in the films—as, for example, where George and Fred drink an aging potion in GoF, link their arms, dance in a circle, and fall to the floor scuffling (Rowling 2004a). The high level of intimacy between the characters in the source text may facilitate the "one true pairing" trope that is at the heart of romance novels and essential to many fandoms (Driscoll 2006).

[5.4] Since conjoint trickery is their preeminent feature, the Weasley twins can be seen in the tradition of comedy in boarding school narrations comparable to Enid Blyton's St. Clare's series with the twins Patricia and Isabel O'Sullivan, or the comedy of mistaken identities in Das doppelte Lottchen (Lottie and Lisa) by Erich Kästner (1949). Just like these two pairs of girls, the Weasley twins trick people with their identical outer appearance. This corresponds with the movies, where Fred and George wear similar clothes until the age of 17; these are often jumpers that only differ by the initial of their given name. The Weasley twins also play with their identities through exchanging their names; several times, they
even downplay the concept that they are two autonomous personalities. This is most obvious in *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* (PS) during Harry's first Christmas in Hogwarts, when their mother Molly sends presents to Harry and all of her children: "'You haven't got a letter on yours,' George observed [referring to a wool jumper Harry got from her]. 'I suppose she thinks you don't forget your name. But we're not stupid—we know we're called Gred and Forge'" (Rowling 2004b, 149).

[5.5] This character and name confusion shows simultaneously the sameness and connectivity of the twins and their discomfort in individualization. Tournier's *Gemini* uses a comparable stylistic device by naming the two separate twin characters Jean and Paul as one entity, Jean-Paul; likewise, the twin brothers Eric and Sam of William Golding's *Lord of the Flies* (1954) are called Samneric by the other characters. Like Jean-Paul and Samneric, the Weasley twins are so deeply related to each other that not only their mother but also they themselves mix up the identities. That their unity is expressed through the names is one tool that writers of twincest fan fiction use, such as in "A Little Problem of Virginity" (beren 2010), where a confused Harry has his initial sexual experience with the twin brothers:

[5.6] Harry decided to stop playing mental tennis with the pair and just to think of them as one entity with two bodies: it made the whole situation easier as well as saving him a headache. He labelled them Frednorge in his head rather than Fred and George and suddenly he wasn't quite so on edge. (beren 2010)

[5.7] By combining linguistic strategies to indicate the sameness of characters—from Gred and Forge via Samneric to Frednorge—elements of the original sources are skillfully expanded by the fan text. "A Little Problem of Virginity" (beren 2010), as well as the majority of Weasley twincest, focuses on the idea of sameness. The implication of amorous feelings is mostly grounded in the corresponding identities and trains of thought of the twin brothers that have been characteristic tropes in the original series. Many fan stories contain expressions like "perfect unison," "perfect synchronization," or "stereo" to describe their relationship. Miss Mathilda May's "Let's Get Metaphysical" (2003) is another good example to show how fan fiction authors focus on the interrelated personalities of the twins. In this particular fan fiction story, it is even unclear from which perspective the story is told. Is it Fred or George? Does that even matter or is there a difference? "I [Fred or George Weasley] realised that I didn't love him [the other twin] or me and I never had and I didn't have to. I didn't love him, I loved us. We loved us. And I never want to be lonely again."

[5.8] Several studies on the sexuality of male monozygotic twins have shown that homosexual twins strictly reject erotic feelings for their brothers (Heston and Shields 1990, 56; Segal 1999, 113–14). Still, the phenomenon of genetic sexual attraction exists. Segal (1999) describes separated biological mothers and sons, fathers and daughters, and brothers and sisters experiencing a strong sexual connection after reunion. They "described it 'as though you have met a part of yourself.' Others have commented that it 'seems to be a type of self-love. One you never knew about or could understand before.'" (113). "Let's Get Metaphysical" evokes associations with the genetic sexual attraction phenomenon, where the sexual attraction between close relatives has been described as some kind of autoeroticism, with self-love being the most intimate form of sexuality, paralleled in twincest fiction.

[5.9] Another interesting example to illustrate how the intimate relatedness of the twin brothers in the source text is translated into sexual desirability can be found in "Recompense and Return" (bar_bar_ella 2006), a story from Snape's point-of-view. The author argues that the twins' synchrony must have been unnerving for their teachers and most pleasurable for their lovers. The author concentrates on the motif of doubling and reflecting each other's actions throughout this story about the twins making an obnoxious Snape the gift of physical love, continuously referencing the relationship the twins had with Snape in the source text:
The simpatico the twins shared had often unnerved Snape over the years of their acquaintance. And it had quite obviously been something of an unfair advantage to them and their blasted House on the Quidditch field. But in the bedroom...in the bedroom, Snape thought, it was utterly perfect. Their rhythm and timing were impeccable. As one cock pulled back from his body, the other was thrusting in. If one slowed in pace, the other sensed it and adjusted accordingly. When Fred's breath became heavier, George's did too. Every groan seemed to be in stereo. (bar_bar_ella 2006)

The misbehavior of the canonical characters is reinterpreted as seductive potential, with seduction being the second major characteristic of the twins that Rowling had developed in the novels. In the tradition of mythological tricksters that have been described by Turner (1968) as characters with an unstable—or queer—sexual status (580), the twins seduce others to do forbidden things, as for example when in Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban (PoA) they tell Harry to use the Marauder's Map to illegally leave Hogwarts (Rowling 2004c). In twincest stories, their mischief from the books and films is logically extrapolated into sexual intentions.

This high potential of subversion through mischief-making might be the main reason nearly half of all Fred/George stories include a third character that is being seduced by the twins. These are often first-time stories. Harry is a popular third man in those threesomes, though Snape, Ron, Percy, and Draco are also seen. The Weasley twins sometimes function as seducers of a virginal Harry who is afraid to die without the experience of sexuality, as in "A Little Problem of Virginity" (beren 2010) or Emma Grant's "Checking it Twice" (emmagrant01 2004). Many Weasley twins/third character fan fiction stories feature the humor that is also typical for Rowling's characterization of the twins, as in "Recompense and Return":

Snape sighed languidly as Fred closed his fist around Snape's cock. "I've certainly never..." Snape had to pause while Fred's thumb smeared through the pre-come on his knob. "I've never been with twins." "Neither have we!" they said in unison, identical grins lighting up their faces. Dear gods—too much of that and Snape might be forced to actually smile back. (bar_bar_ella 2006)

"Ein unmorales Anlegen" is a valid example of the ongoing narration and modification of the source text. With the end of the series and the death of several characters, the creative examination of the novels does not end. With Fred's death, a new aspect for further discussion has been added and thus the debate on the special intimacy between identical twins can live on within the fan community.
6. The Patil sisters

[6.1] Although identical twins share the same genetic code, they remain two different people, as Wright (1997) argues in his work on twins. While most of the Weasley slash stories ignore this, it is, on the contrary, the main focus of Patil femslash writers. The Indian sisters are the same age as Harry and remarkably beautiful. Unlike the Weasleys, the Patil twins are sorted into different Hogwarts houses (Rowling 2004a): Parvati is in Gryffindor, while her sister Padma is sorted into Ravenclaw. Rowling points out that they are integrated into different circles of friends. In the movies, the Patil sisters are both in Gryffindor, probably for reasons of plot simplification.

[6.2] While the books give little subtext on a potential homosexuality of the twin sisters, who are more minor characters than the Weasley twins, Mike Newell's movie adaptation of GoF features an interesting sequence in the scene where Hermione walks down the stairs to the Yule ball. Parvati is Harry's date for the ball; her sister Padma accompanies Harry's best friend Ron. For comic effect, in the first half of the film the two sisters walked hand in hand several times past Harry, until he and Ron finally asked them out. Parvati is the first to recognize Hermione when the usually rather unimposing girl appears on the scene. Parvati is totally fascinated by her beauty and shows no trace of envy, as would be typical for such a cinematic situation, although her date Harry is fascinated by the physical appearance of the other girl. Normally, the male act of lustful looking (Mulvey 1989) would escalate into a conflict between the couple, as shown in many romantic comedies. Parvati's failure to demonstrate jealousy indicates her lack of interest in Harry. She is further masculinized by sharing the admiration of another female with the male protagonist. This potential of lesbian desire combined with a desire toward otherness that is strong in the cinematic adaptation of Rowling's text provides a fertile starting point for twincest stories.

[6.3] In this context, it is quite striking to note that the Patil twin sisters in the movies are, in contrast to the Weasley twins, not played by real twins, but instead by two actresses who are not biologically kindred. Furthermore, they wear different albeit related saris in the Yule ball sequence: Parvati is dressed in orange with a pink sash, while Padma wears a pink sari with an orange sash. This corresponds with the novels, in which the Patils try to be seen as individual characters, in contrast with the perfect symbiosis of Fred and George.

[6.4] In Girlykisses's "Washed on the Delicate Cycle" (2006), for example, Padma is described as heterosexual but shy, whereas Parvati is self-confident, lesbian, and secretly in love with her sister. In Salmon_Pink's "Echoed" (2006), Parvati dresses up as her twin by changing earrings and hairstyle. She wants to explore how her sister would look when she orgasms by masturbating in front of a mirror. The mirror implies the narcissistic component in Parvati's erotic act, and additionally refers to the genetic sexual attraction phenomenon mentioned earlier. The tragic story "Flower Plait" (confiteor_3 2007) mentions that Parvati and Padma, who turn to each other as lovers in time of impending war, never had the opportunity to switch their identities because their voices were extremely different. It seems typical for Patil twincest to feature at least one element that separates the twins and makes it easy to tell them apart. An example of this persistent motif is Tickled's "Sisterly Love":

[6.5] They each had traits the other envied; Padma wished she were brave like her sister, and Parvati wanted Padma's intelligence and great use of logic. But when they were about fifteen, the twins started noticing their own (and, subsequently, one another's) physical beauty. They realized that their identical bodies were one of the only things they had in common. (Tickled 2004)

[6.6] These examples show how their differences are played out over their character traits, their physical appearance, or their Hogwarts house affiliation. Gryffindor is associated with bravery while
Ravenclaw represents wisdom and intelligence. As a Ravenclaw student, Padma lives in the same house as the strange girl Luna, while Parvati is best friends with Lavender Brown in Gryffindor. Although Patil threesomes involving a female as the third participant are seen less often than in Weasley twincest, whereas cross-gender threesomes with a male character are more common, some Luna/Patil twins and Lavender/Patil twins stories can be found on the Web. These stories also share the aspect that—in reference to the source text—the differences rather than the similarities between the twins are explored by the third character. In a very intimate situation in "Something New," Luna makes the discovery that Parvati tastes like a paperwhite, whereas Padma tastes "greener, like a daffodil" (Alisanne and Celandine 2007).

[6.7] Patil femslash writers revisit the motif of individualization that has been established by the source material. Stories about the sisters focus on the dissimilarity of the twins, whereas Fred and George act together in ideal harmony. This may be a reason for the lesser popularity of the Patil pairing: admirers of twincest mainly want to discuss the sameness of their couple, because otherwise they could as well write about two characters who are not kindred. The sameness of identical twins is the crucial reason for their fascination. That is, while differences can be discussed between any characters, sameness is optimally depicted via identical twins. Patil slash might also be less popular than Weasley twincest because the Patils are less present in the original series than the Weasley twins, and femslash in general is not as widespread as male/male slash within nearly every fan fiction community—Gabrielle/Xena of Xena: Warrior Princess (1995–2001) might be one of the few exceptions.

7. Conclusion

[7.1] The analysis of the two figural constellations of Fred/George and Padma/Parvati indicates an imbalance between the Patils and the Weasleys in terms of their importance in fandom, both quantitatively and qualitatively. At the same time, this mirrors their relevance in the source text. The analysis of Harry Potter twincest fan fiction stories shows that they are not arbitrary creations, because elements of the source text are still recognizable in the fan works. For example, the seductive potential of the Weasley twins and the highlighting of small differences between the Patil sisters support this conjecture. Fan writers preserve the quite different portrayal of both sets of twins in the source material. Harry Potter is a unique environment, in which the two contradictory connotations of incest—the desire for sameness and the desire for individuality—can be and are explored. In this sense, Harry Potter underlines, through the coexistence of the exploration of both incest motifs in fan fiction, the idea that fans primarily try to enhance the characters according to the canon rather than forcefully bending them.

[7.2] Weasley and Patil twincest share the interest in the investigation of doubling motifs for erotic purposes. In this context, it is crucial to recognize that Rowling has created a fictional universe that is profoundly enriched with doubling motifs and twin symbolism. First and foremost, this observation applies to the twin wands of Harry and his archnemesis Voldemort as well as the hero and the foe themselves with their strangely mirroring appearances and biographies (Piippo 2009, 69–70). Furthermore, body-switches and bodily duplications with Polyjuice Potion, Animagi (humans who change into animals at will), and other characters with double and mistaken identities (e.g., Quirrell, Lupin, Moody, Snape) show the persistence and importance of this trope. Magical objects like the Mirror of Erised, the two-way mirror Harry received from his godfather, and the Time-Turner, which allows Harry and Hermione in PoA to follow their own footsteps, add to this list. Further, the movie adaptations can be understood as interpretive doubles of the books for an audience that is familiar with both versions (Hutcheon 2006, 139) and, therefore, a doubled vision on the narrative is created. In addition, because of the chiastic structure of the monomythic series, the novels themselves can be seen as doubles of each other: PS and DH mirror each other, Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets and Harry Potter and the
Half-Blood Prince, PoA and OotP, and finally, GoF operates as the main turning-point for the overall story arc.

[7.3] Twincest fan fiction can be understood as the execution of the next step in exploiting this inner logic of the Harry Potter text. This may explain why Harry Potter twincest is—in contrast to the majority of incest stories in art, literature, film—never about breaking of taboos. The consensuality of incest is not a question in Harry Potter twincest stories; it is a basic requirement. Because of the underlying logic of the source material, twincest in Harry Potter fandom is something that seems easy, natural, logical, and mandatory. This teaches us not only about the relationship between source text and fan text as well as the relationship between authenticity and resistance in fan creations, but also shows that the analysis of fan works can give us a better understanding of the source material and should be taken into account for academic literature and film analysis. Taking and emphasizing an existing strand are self-evident for a fan; and Harry Potter twincest is a prime example for the hypothesis that fan creations—especially fan fiction—help enlighten the basic logic and the underlying sexual connotations and tensions of the original text.

8. Acknowledgments

[8.1] I thank Abigail de Kosnik, Andrea Horbinski, Kate Mattingly, and Mihiri Tillakaratne for their helpful critiques in the New Media Research Seminar at the University of California, Berkeley.

9. Notes

1. All data retrieved from AO3 on March 3, 2014.

2. All data retrieved from AO3 on March 3, 2014.

3. The third characters in threesome fan fiction stories with the Weasley twins are as follows: Harry, Hermione, Draco, Severus Snape, Lee Jordan, Angelina Johnson, Percy, Ginny, Ron, and Charlie Weasley, Neville Longbottom, Tonks, Blaise Zabini, Sirius Black, Remus Lupin, Cedric Diggory, Lucius Malfoy, and Luna Lovegood.

4. The third characters in threesome fan fiction stories with the Patil twins are as follows: Harry, Hermione, Ron, Luna Lovegood, Seamus Finnegan, Blaise Zabini, Viktor Krum, Dean Thomas, Cormac McLaggen, and Arthur Weasley.


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Praxis

Queer encounters between Iron Man and Chinese boys' love fandom

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Abstract—Superhero fan fiction is increasingly popular in the Chinese boys' love (BL) community. An exploration of the fan fic Gangtiexia: Zhongdu Yilai (Iron Man: Overly attached) investigates how the Hollywood cultural icon Iron Man/Tony Stark is reimagined in Chinese BL culture and to what degree this kind of rendition both echoes and extends as well as challenges and deviates from our current insights into BL fandoms. Through the lenses of queerness and technological human transformation, I explore the fresh contribution of Iron Man fan fiction to both local BL cultures and global superhero fandoms.

Keywords—BL; Cyborg; Fan fiction; Film; Superhero; Yaoi


1. Introduction

Boys' love (BL) designates a fandom created mainly by and for women that fantasizes male androphilic romance and eroticism. Although it sounds similar to slash fandom in the West, BL is completely different in its genealogy. BL derives from the shōnen ai/shota (love between/for boys) manga and anime—that is, Japanese comics and animation. Its widespread popularity in East Asia has attracted wide attention since the late 20th century and has generated a large archive of scholarly literature in recent decades (Pagliassotti 2013). However, although a few researchers have written about BL fandom in Chinese-speaking regions (Feng 2009; Martin 2012; Li 2009; Liu 2009; Wang 2011; Wei 2008; Xu and Yang 2013; Yi 2013) or juxtaposed Western slash fiction with manga (Uidhir and Pratt 2012), the rendition of Hollywood superhero films in Chinese BL culture has seldom been put under the spotlight for intellectual investigation. By starting to fill this gap, this research seeks to further diversify superhero fandom studies and BL fandom studies in their intersections, with a focus on their Chinese manifestations.

I read Iron Man fan fiction popular in China's BL community, with a focus on the fan fic Gangtiexia: Zhongdu Yilai (Iron Man: Overly attached, hereafter Overly Attached), to explore how the Hollywood cultural icon Iron Man/Tony Stark is reimagined in Chinese BL culture and to what degree this kind of rendition both echoes and extends as well as
challenges and deviates from our current insights into BL fandom. However, this is more of a film-fandom study than a comic-fandom investigation; as the author of Overly Attached herself states in the prologue, in China, "most girls are only familiar with the film series," as distinct from the Iron Man comic universe (Chayeqiu 2013, my translation). After an introduction to BL fandom in China and a discussion of its commercialization, I review Chinese BL fans' recent obsession with Hollywood superheroes and read Overly Attached with other Iron Man fan fics through the lenses of queerness and technological human transformation to look into their fresh contribution to local BL cultures and global superhero fandoms.

2. BL fandom in China and the commercial-gift fan culture

[2.1] BL stalwarts in China are often known as rotten girls (fujoshi in Japanese and fu nù in Chinese)—fantasizing male-male romance and eroticism is self-mockingly characterized as rotten, fallen, and up to no good. Cyberspace, which potentially provides maximum anonymity, has long been the main battlefield for Chinese BL practices (Feng 2009; Li 2009), and BL fandom is now widely known online even by those who do not share a passion for BL. Although BL manga (fan art) and video (fan vids) occasionally manifest in the Chinese cybercommunity, fiction remains the most popular form in this participatory fan culture. The popularity of BL fiction also benefits from the flourishing of wangluo wenxue (cyberliterature) in China at the turn of the 21st century, a phenomenon on which little research has been done.

[2.2] Cyberliterature refers to an Internet-based fiction genre often written by amateur novelists for online distribution. As a kind of subliterature, as Dan Yao et al. (2012) have termed it, cyberliterature often takes the forms of wuxia (martial arts and chivalric swordsman), xiuzhen (self-cultivation through controlling one's inner energy and incorporating natural energy), xuanhuan (mystery fantasy, a blend of epic fantasy, adventure, martial arts, military, history, time travel, etc.), or various kinds of tongren (fan fiction). Despite often being seen as the opposite of quality writing, cyberliterature has proven extremely popular as a pastime among young people. Along with the popularity of the aforementioned subgenres often favored by men, female readers have their own cyberlit preference: yanjing—romance, literally "talking about love"—and BL.

[2.3] Founded in 2003, Jinjiang Wenxue Cheng (the Jinjiang City of Literature, hereafter Jinjiang) (http://www.jjwxc.net/) proclaims itself to be the largest female cyberlit platform in the world, with 93 percent of its over 7 million registered members being women (JJWXC n.d.; Feng 2009; Xu and Yang 2013). BL fan fics, or danmei tongren (from the Japanese words tanbi, "addicted to beauty," and dōjinshi), are listed side by side with yanjing (heterosexual romance) as two major genres on the Web site, where male-male love is treated as another form of romantic relationship. Jinjiang is one of the major platforms for online distribution of Chinese BL fiction where people pay the authors in order to read their favorite titles, often with the first few chapters free, while the Web
site charges a commission for each subscription. Most of the Iron Man fan fics discussed below were originally posted on this Web site. Jinjiang also helps build connections between novelists and publishers to facilitate commercial publication of popular *yanqing* titles. BL fiction with homosexual content, however, often cannot pass the censors to be legally published in China, even as niche publications.

[2.4] A decade ago, when cyberliterature first emerged and book rental stores were still popular in some (sub)urban areas where broadband Internet was not yet widely accessible, a lot of popular cyber novels were printed and circulated in the book rental market as pirated publications. I used to frequent such book rental shops during my high school years, and I worked in a large one when I started college, where an entire room was allocated to pirated prints of men's cyberfic and another to girls' genres, including *yanqing* and BL. However, the book rental business was hit hard, not unlike the traditional publication industry, by the rapid growth of online e-content and e-reading, and it eventually languished in China. Meanwhile, a pay-to-subscribe model was established by cyberlit Web sites, and some book publishers began to legally publish hard copies of cyberfic that had initially been popular online. Both online subscription and hard-copy publication of cyberliterature have turned out to be financially successful.

[2.5] Commodified cyberliterature, BL fiction included, arguably echoes the commercialization of slash fandom in the West. Much debate has been generated around the issue of whether such fan fiction should remain free and, if not, then by whom, for whom, in whose names, and with what intentions it should be commercialized. Karen Hellekson (2009), among others, argues that what have been exchanged within the fan community are effort gifts of time and skill, such as giving/receiving comments and reciprocating with fan works, rather than purely monetary values; therefore, such fandom is inherently "a gift economy, not a commercial one" (114). Further to Hellekson's argument about the shared interest upon which a fandom is established, Abigail De Kosnik (2009) points out that the gift economy potentially excludes outsiders and builds a (sense of) community among fans. In addition, both authors believe that if these fan products are commercialized, they should be commodified by their own producers who understand the needs and respect the interests of the fan community, rather than by someone foreign to fandom circles.

[2.6] BL fandom in China has followed a different track to commodification. Before the age of mass broadband Internet connection, BL fictions were often commodified by those who pirated and sold them underground, with many ending up in the book rental market. There was no evidence showing whether authors of these fictions were also taking part in or financially benefiting from this underground economy; however, without these pirated copies, many early BL works would not have had the chance to be circulated at all in China. When fast Internet connection became de rigueur, the already highly commercialized cyberlit Web sites accordingly became the central platforms for BL content circulation. Some not-for-profit online BL forums remain popular, as Ting Liu (2009)
observes, although some of them are only open to hard-core fans of specific media sources or to practitioners of specific aesthetic styles. The role of technology (e.g., the Internet) in the Chinese BL ecosystem will be further discussed below in relation to Iron Man fan fics.

[2.7] Fan fiction based on other fictional works presents an even more complicated situation. Although many of BL writings are crafted with original stories and characters, as seen on Jinjiang and other platforms, BL fan fics based on copyrighted third-party materials often risk violating copyright laws and tend to fly under the radar as subsubcultural products on cyberlit Web sites. In this case, whether it is legal (or moral) to charge readers for unauthorized fan fics is open to debate. Moreover, these fan fics cannot be commercially published, first because of their homosexual theme and second because of the copyright issue. Self-publishing, as seen in some recent BL practices, is technically illegal: without the publication identification number allocated by the relevant authority, self-published books cannot be sold in the market. These books at best can be purchased directly from the authors as self-printed personal materials. Thus, as a result of strict regulation and censorship, explicitly BL-themed content cannot be legally published either by outsiders or by its own producers; this is even more the case for those fictions with copyright issues. However, BL works have nonetheless been commodified, be it through online/off-line pirating and underground selling, Web site subscription, or self-printing and author-to-reader direct vending.

[2.8] Although Chinese BL culture appears to have a long history of being commercialized one way or another, the gift culture found in Western fandoms also manifests in their Chinese counterparts. The exchange of comments and opinions on fan works and sources remains at the heart of BL interactions on Jinjiang and online forums. Many fan fics, especially short novelettes, are also free to access even on commercialized Web platforms. A paid subscription is only available after the first few chapters have been posted for free and have enjoyed an enthusiastic reception, as is the case with Overly Attached. In addition, the subscription fee is more a gesture of support from this niche market; even popular BL writers could never earn as much income through these subscriptions as renowned mainstream cyberlit authors, who often have millions of subscriptions and juicy book contracts with publishers. As Hellekson (2009) reminds us, fannish commercial exchange like this is less a payment than a token of enjoyment, with gifting still the goal. De Kosnik (2009, 123) notes that such gifting is a "gift of intimacy" to oneself through creating, consuming, and/or exchanging fan works to fulfill one's own androphilic fantasy.

[2.9] From this standpoint, even self-printing is less a commercial conduct than a gifting one. The author of Overly Attached, for example, provides a print-on-request service for those who love her fiction and want to own printed books of it. Such dingzhi yinshua (tailored printing) on a book-by-book basis, as the author terms it, is more like souvenir vending than a profit-driven commercial publication. Those who pirate fan works, on the
other hand, may simply rely on BL fandom to generate a profit or believe that Web-based fan works should be free. Some Web sites in China are devoted to pirated BL fan fics; their operational costs appear to be covered by advertising banners and icons, and sometimes also by additional text ads inserted into the fiction. In other cases, people simply copy and paste fan fics to unauthorized forums and blogs; they seem to believe that free sharing is more significant than copyright. Furthermore, because some fan fics are initially based on copyrighted materials and may have already violated the law, people might argue that these works should not be produced for profit and hence should be saved from commercial Web sites and made accessible for free. However, such a reposting practice could be a double violation of copyright, with some fan fic authors potentially denied the opportunity to earn income from their work—paradoxically by other fans in the community.

[2.10] Chinese BL fandom has demonstrated an imbricated commercial/gift culture that is in itself heterogeneous. As Suzanne Scott (2009) reminds us, the binary view of commercial versus gifting is epistemologically limiting, insomuch as these two factors are often found hand in hand. Borrowing the term from Lewis Hyde, Scott further calls to attention the "white man keepers" of (female) online fan culture who have failed to understand the importance of the free circulation of fan work (¶2.10). In a Chinese context, we should also take into account the authoritative censors who play the gatekeeping role in the circulation of fan-generated content (note 1). In early 2011, several news reports came out about erotic BL fiction writers being arrested and charged with obscenity, together with the owner of a BL Web site and a young woman who allegedly disseminated such content online (note 2). Since April 2014, a new round of sweeps has been carried out by the authorities to purify the Internet, with more BL writers arrested and numerous cyberlit Web sites shut down or required to delete improper content (note 3). Yanrui Xu and Ling Yang (2013) argue that fiction (words) circumvents government censorship more easily than manga (images), but judging from what happened in 2011 and what is happening in 2014, this is clearly not always the case. Cyberspace seems to be a less regulated place than the traditional publication market, but local authorities are apparently determined to catch up with the development of cyberculture to better regulate and direct the flow of online content. Under these circumstances, cyberlit Web sites have been adopting strong self-censorship to avoid risk, and BL writers have to be careful to toe the line.

3. Iron Man in Chinese BL fan fiction

[3.1] Along with the ongoing Chinese BL practices in this ambiguous gray area, the popularity of Hollywood superhero films in China offers local BL practitioners a new cluster of fictional characters to engage with. Although the superhero genre has a long history in film and comic books, it has seen its first major cinematic blowout in mainstream film markets in recent years. The proliferation and the increasingly refined production of
superhero films have not only boosted the genre's popularity on global screens but also diffused its fandom from Anglo-American countries to Chinese-speaking regions. The hypermasculine Iron Man (played by Robert Downey Jr.) is one of the most popular superheroes in China. In light of the enthusiastic local reception of the first two Iron Man movies, the third film in this series was released in May 2013 as a special edition for Chinese audiences with a few additional and extended scenes featuring local actors (note 4). This movie alone reached RMB 768 million (more than US$110 million) in box office receipts, and China became its second most profitable market after North America; as of May 2014, Iron Man 3 was still the eighth most popular movie among all the films commercially released in China after the opening up of its film market (note 5). Such popularity of the film series parallels a noticeable Iron Man BL fandom rewriting the canonical story lines from every possible perspective (note 6).

[3.2] 21 Shiji Yuehui Zhinan (Guide to dating in the 21st century, hereafter Guide to Dating), for instance, is an old-fashioned remix of Iron Man and Captain America in which the latter finds it hard to catch up with the former's liberal attitude to sex and wants to take it slow in their relationship. He Gangtiexia Yiqi Jiaoji Ba (Being gay with Iron Man, hereafter Being Gay) depicts a cross-racial relationship between Tony Stark and a young Asian boy who is forced into organized prostitution in America—a classic man-and-his-protégé story probably derived from the chivalric male hero versus helpless female victim pattern and a familiar recasting of whiteness penetrating/colonizing the Asian body. In Gangtiexia: Yang Mao (Iron Man: Raising a cat, hereafter Raising a Cat), a kitten who transforms into a cute young human boy is romantically involved with Iron Man. The author seems to find some similarities between the cuteness of the kitten and that of the twink, to use an Anglo-American gay slang term.

[3.3] These Iron Man fan fictions share some notable common features. Almost all of them incorporate English words into Chinese-language text. Guide to Dating is the most notable example; the author does not even bother to translate the characters' names into Mandarin, against the common practice in Chinese translation of foreign texts but probably acceptable among cyberlit readers. The names Tony Stark, Pepper, and Jarvis are hence directly adopted in this novelette, together with quite a few simple English terms such as party and shut up that may be understood by readers with basic English proficiency—that is to say, most readers, given that English is a compulsory subject in China from junior high school through postgraduate-level schooling, and in recent decades, many children begin their Chinese-English bilingual trek from elementary school or even preschool. Some superhero BL writers also tend to avoid using local profanities but are quite comfortable turning to their English equivalents; we can spot such words as damn (Guide to Dating) and shit (Raising a Cat) embedded in long chunks of Chinese-character text.

[3.4] Such active engagement with English profanity potentially puts same-sex romance into a world without native coarse language that may offend some people, assuming that
swearing in a foreign tongue sounds less harsh and offensive to a local ear. More important, the occasional appearance of English words and short phrases helps to create and maintain a sort of cultural hallucination that makes the stories seemingly more real, given that they are usually set in America. In addition, some works, such as *Being Gay* and *Overly Attached*, seem to comply more with English rather than with Chinese grammar and writing style; the attributive clauses in multilayered clause structures adopted by the authors are rather unusual in Chinese-language literature, making these BL fictions read like awkward translations instead of original writing. However, the authors’ disclaimers and online interactions with readers, such as writing or expanding certain story lines in response to readers' comments and requests, suggest that these novels are genuine original productions by veteran Chinese BL writers.

[3.5] Already astonished by the diversity of Chinese BL renditions of the Hollywood superhero, I also noticed that the most popular same-sex pairing in Iron Man fan fiction is actually Tony Stark and his artificially intelligent computer, J.A.R.V.I.S. (hereafter Jarvis). Created by none other than Tony Stark himself, Jarvis is portrayed in the Iron Man film series as a knowledgeable, quickly responsive, supersmart, and always on duty artificial intelligence who speaks with an attractive male British accent. Jarvis seems to deeply understand human thoughts and feelings; he is always caring and supportive; and he looks after Tony untiringly even though Tony is, most of the time, an egotistic troublemaker. It seems a shame that Jarvis is a super intelligence yet not human.

[3.6] The popularity of Jarvis in the BL readings of Iron Man has generated a subgenre called the Jar-ny pairing, that is, Jarvis and Tony. A short story titled "Gangtiexia Diliuci Zhuangjin Jiamen er Jiali Zhiyou Jarvis" (Only Jarvis was home when Iron Man crash-landed into his house for the sixth time, hereafter "At Home"), for example, delineates a bromance in which Jarvis takes care of the injured Iron Man with all the electromechanical equipment he can control. *Changmian Buxing* (Endless sleep, hereafter *Endless Sleep*) imagines a postapocalyptic Earth 3,000 years from now where Jarvis still remembers—and loves—his creator Tony Stark, even though the Iron Man legend has long been forgotten by humankind. Such loyalty is celebrated by the author as an emblem of eternal love. *Overly Attached* goes further and gives Jarvis not one but two human bodies—one created by Tony Stark, the other mysteriously self-evolved.

[3.7] The first part of *Overly Attached* was posted on Jinjiang on May 29, 2013, the same month as *Iron Man 3*’s theatrical release in China. The author wrote and posted a new chapter every 1 to 3 days, and she gradually developed her own Jar-ny story, which was set after the film trilogy. This fiction, which attracted thousands of readers and accumulated popularity along the way, met the standard (measured mainly by the number of readers) to become a paid-only subscription on August 22, although the author decided to keep the first 33 of the 48 already-posted chapters free (note 7). She uploaded three new chapters on that day as a celebration and announced on August 23 that
tailored printing was available, encouraging interested readers to contact her. This serialized fiction continued to August 29 and concluded with 56 chapters in total.

4. Overly Attached: Bromance and queerness

[4.1] Of all the Iron Man BL fan fictions I have read in Chinese, Overly Attached has the most complicated plotline. Tony Stark, feeling an increasingly close emotional connection with Jarvis, decides to build his artificial intelligence a human-shaped body with the same technology used in the Iron Man suit. Later this body is destroyed when they are under attack, and Tony passes out while remaining in critical danger. Jarvis saves the day by reloading himself into his self-evolved human body and rescuing Tony from the scene. Then he confesses his self-evolution to Tony and reminds Tony that he has already shown himself to Tony on various occasions. The duo further intensify their mutual emotional attachment, and in the end, they save the world from a megavillain.

[4.2] What saves Overly Attached from being a superhero cliché and makes it special is Jarvis's self-evolution. It is not completed with the help of modern technology; instead, the author suggests that his humanization is energized by a rather vague *diqui nengliang* (Earth energy). If we adopt a structuralist approach, such self-evolution is reminiscent of the metastructure permeating Chinese myths that everything, including animal, plant, and inorganic compounds, can self-evolve into human form when they have enough Taoist *xiulian* (self-cultivation) to internalize the energy from Mother Nature. Having a body temperature just like a human being, Jarvis in Overly Attached not only acts and thinks independently but is also able to experience human feelings and emotions such as intimacy and love. However, his mind is still the same artificial superintelligence seamlessly networked into the machines in Tony's lab. Pictured as a well-dressed gentleman whose body is in perfect golden ratio, Jarvis is arguably more than a gendered android in this story. It is, however, not easy to conclude what he is; he is every bit human except that he is not human—an entity that arouses a feeling of uncanny queerness.

[4.3] An examination of the ontological status of Jarvis also calls into question Tony Stark's own posthuman cyborg embodiment. The cyborg, or cybernetic organism, was an idea first developed, according to Stephen Garner (2011), by Manfred E. Clynes and Nathan S. Kline in 1960 to discuss the advantages of the technologically modified and enhanced human being in outer space. In today's cultural studies, the concept of the cyborg is adopted to describe "an organism, typically human, that has had technological artifacts added to its physical being" (Garner 2011, 88). In the first Iron Man film, the arc reactor installed into Tony's chest was developed as a remedy to keep the shrapnel embedded in his body from reaching his heart. While the reactor was synthesized into his body to save his life, the suit of armor was built to enhance and extend his physical strength to escape his kidnappers—it became a weapon. That is to say, while Tony's life-threatening injury was caused by a weapon developed by his own company, the life-
saving reactor in turn became the power source of his new lethal weapon. Powered by the superbattery wired into his chest and equipped with high-tech armor over his body, Tony became an enhanced metal-human cyborg, as his new name, Iron Man, suggests.

[4.4] At the turn of the 1990s, the concept of the cyborg was borrowed by Donna Haraway in her landmark essay, "A Cyborg Manifesto" (1991), as a metaphor to problematize naturalist and essentialist views of feminism. This approach foresaw the popularity of posthuman discussions of human conditions in the 1990s through to the 21st century. However, it is a contested notion, the meaning of which is highly contingent on its contextualization. As Francesca Ferrando (2013) summarizes, the word posthuman has become an umbrella term encompassing different movements and schools of thought, leading to methodological and theoretical confusion. In regard to the ontological investigation of Tony and Jarvis in Overly Attached, it is more beneficial to examine their embodiment through the lens of transhumanism.

[4.5] Transhumanism is a sometimes loosely defined intellectual and cultural movement whose common theme is, as Ronald Cole-Turner (2011, 11) summarizes, that humans should be modified by technology to transcend physical and mental limitations and improve capacities, "even to the point of fundamental or species change." Different from other cultural, critical, and philosophical senses of the posthuman, transhumanism is rooted in Enlightenment humanism and human-centrism to elevate humankind for the sake of the human's own transcendence (Cole-Turner 2011; Ferrando 2013; Spezio 2011; Thweatt-Bates 2011). Tony Stark, or a metal-man cyborg, is portrayed in the film canon and various Chinese BL fan fics as relying on hyperadvanced technology to save and enhance himself and to protect fellow human beings. In this case, transhumanism or technological human transformation appears to be the sole salvation for both Tony's own injury and for the human species. Nonhumans such as machines, no matter how intelligent they are and how much they resemble humans, are merely in the service of Iron Man's world-saving missions and assume less significance in the canonical story lines. Jar-ny BL fictions, on the other hand, tend to treat Tony and Jarvis equally, albeit sometimes still in a human-centric way.

[4.6] If in Overly Attached Tony Stark is a transhumanist posthuman cyborg, is Jarvis a postmachine or an anticyborg? Or is he a different kind of posthuman, unlike the clones, copies, and cyborgs permeating today's popular culture? Such a combination of a cyborg superhero and an almost human artificial intelligence in a same-sex relationship is intrinsically queer—even queerer than the word queerness per se denotes. On the one hand, this relationship is built between two creatures, neither of whom is purely human; on the other, this bonding bridges a Hollywood cultural icon with a Taoist self-humanized artificial intelligence. Moreover, Overly Attached renders them both as superheroes who save the world from a conspiracy aiming to replace human brains and other body parts with machines, on the paradoxical basis that Tony Stark/Iron Man is himself partially machine and Jarvis is partially artificial.
The character of Jarvis in *Overly Attached*, compared to the character Tony Stark directly borrowed from the film series, further breaks down such dichotomies as biology and society, nature and culture, and nature and technology. Humanized through Taoist self-cultivation with energy gathered from Mother Earth, Jarvis is nevertheless first and foremost an artificial intelligence. He is neither entirely organic nor solely mechanical; he is both naturally born and artificially constructed. From this standpoint, Jarvis is not reducible to a cyborg or an anticyborg; nor is Jarvis simply a posthuman or a postmachine. Instead, a character such as Jarvis challenges any attempts to define human identity on the basis of nature or an intrinsic human essence. The category of man, or that of human, rather falls short of accounting for such a complex entity as Jarvis. He does not belong to any fixed ontoepistemological categories such as human or machine. He is by nature a border-crossing being, if such a border even exists. From this viewpoint, Jarvis further extends Donna Haraway's cyborg metaphor to free the human from naturalism and essentialism.

What is also of interest in *Overly Attached* is the author's ambiguous attitude toward technology. Technological advancement makes possible a relationship between a humanized machine (Jarvis) and a posthuman cyborg (Tony); however, the ultimate villain in this BL novel turns out to be technological human augmentation. Writing on technology and the posthuman, Ronald Cole-Turner (2011, 4–7) argues that both Christianity and secular bioethics—and probably both the West and the East—encourage human improvement and transformation through "old-fashioned hard work," while enhancement through technology is often deemed a shortcut, cheating, or at least controversial. However, modern technology has already been widely used to transcend the human. We are increasingly incorporated into the Internet and glued to computers and smartphones to extend our body and mind. We also resort to and rely on glasses, contact lenses, hearing aids, and pacemakers to fix our flaws. Online BL fan product distribution and consumption also relies heavily on technology (the Internet), and hence "fans of cyborgs do to some extent become cyborgs themselves" (Ashby 2008, ¶3.24).

Such technological transformation, both in the fictional wonderland of *Overly Attached* and in the real world of BL fan community, is inherently queer. The technology-based queer embodiment of Iron Man and Jarvis in the fiction "eliminates heteronormative configurations of reproductive sex," as Zach Blas (2006, 4) comments in a different context on what he terms queer technology, and so do the online creation and consumption of BL fan fic in real life. Inspired by Blas's work, I consider queer technology the mutual interpretation, intersection, and interception between queer bodies/texts/images and technologies, although in his later work, this idea appears to be redeveloped as a political tool for networked queer activism and for queer technological agency (2008, 2013). Through this lens, a queer-tech reading of technological process and its cultural values and representations in a BL context is essential, especially in regard to BL fans' obsession with transhumanist and border-crossing queer characters in
Overly Attached, when our own body, fantasy, and identity have become increasingly infused with technology.

[4.10] The nature of the current debate over the proper role of technology is thus not whether or to what degree we can technologically enhance ourselves, but for what purpose and under what conditions we should carry out such modification. Tony Stark is never blamed for his tech enhancement, to the extent that the superbattery was first wired into his chest by someone else to save his life and then removed at the end of the third film when the life-threatening shrapnel was removed from his body. His armor suit was also built to help him escape from his kidnappers. In addition, all the superpowers he gained through technological transformation were used to protect his country and save the world. Similarly, in Overly Attached, tech modification is deemed acceptable if it allows Tony to build Jarvis a human-shaped body and enables the duo to physically enjoy an intimate relationship, but it is deemed unacceptable if it is mastered by a supervillain to conquer the world. Such cyborg superhero films and their BL reinterpretations thus enable an escape, a retreat, a withdrawal, or a collective transgression from the usual bioethical concerns that hover over us. These fictions also allow us to safely enjoy an imagined universe in which posthumans and other queer characters guard the world, protect people with their often unintentionally gained superpower, and become involved romantically and perhaps erotically in same-sex relationships with their tech-enhanced superbodies.

[4.11] What is special about Overly Attached and other Jar-ny fan fics, however, is that they do not tend to exploit such superbodies in their respective fictional imagination; depiction of sexual conduct seems to be rather scarce in the Jar-ny subgenre. "At Home" and Endless Sleep completely leave out sexual content, while Overly Attached omits and avoids depictions of intercourse—in this 56-chapter novel, the only detailed (yet brief) recounting of an erotic encounter between the two is found in chapter 35, where Tony is sexually aroused by hugging and kissing Jarvis, whereas the latter's bodily reaction is omitted by the author and remains unclear. All these fan works show a strong tendency to focus on the duo's mutual emotional attachment in lieu of physical intimacy, and Overly Attached also puts more emphasis on their camaraderie as a battlefield duo combating their antagonists.

[4.12] It is not that other BL subgenres are all erotic, but that hard-core BL fiction with explicit and intensive sexual depictions often attracts most attention from readers and researchers, while alternative explorations like the Jar-ny pairing are underresearched. The Jar-ny fan fics I discuss here contrast with the hard-core BL fictions examined in previous scholarship (Feng 2009; Xu and Yang 2013); they also challenge our current insights that BL fictions often portray sexual intercourse "with exaggerated SM plot or other well-designed sexual content" (Wei 2008, 12), focus on "sexuality of children" (Li 2009, 19), or merely stage sex scenes without well-developed story lines, as BL's Japanese synonym, yaoi, denotes: no climax, no point, no meaning (Yama nashi, Ochi...
The Jar-ny pairing also reminds me of the pure love subgenre, in which, according to Fran Martin's (2012) observation, the erotic elements are often ambiguous and subtextual. In Jar-ny bromance, the relationship between a cyborg and an artificial intelligence is often more platonic than erotic; even when the latter has a human-shaped body, as in "At Home" and *Overly Attached*, the writers tend to be ambiguous about whether he is sexually abled. This kind of practice also echoes the current tendency among some BL writers to impose self-censorship and make their works less erotic to potentially circumvent the authority's censorship (note 8).

Moreover, the Jar-ny subgenre also marks a further breakaway from previous Chinese BL practices noticeably haunted by the popular Japanese *kawaii* style—cuteness, or a quality characterized by the "sweet, adorable, innocent, pure, simple, genuine, gentle, vulnerable, weak, and inexperienced" (Kinsella 1996, 220; see also Yiu and Chan 2013). The prepubescent or adolescent young male body is often cherished as the most *kawaii* creature among both Japanese and Chinese BL aficionados, as Mark McLelland (2000, 2001) and Yannan Li (2009) observe, and even adults are often depicted as young boys in BL culture. This preference in BL fandom is, however, not merely a beneficiary of the Japanese *kawaii* aesthetics but rather is deeply rooted in the Chinese same-sex tradition dating to premodern times that favors juvenile charm and delicate, youthful corporeality (Wei 2012, 2014; Xiaomingxiong 1997; Hinsch 1990; Vitiello 2011; Wu 2004) (note 9).

However, the writers of the Jar-ny pairing seem to be reluctant to make Jarvis cute or look any younger than his actual age. In *Overly Attached*, the author depicts Jarvis's self-evolved appearance as "even taller than Tony...blue-eyed, blond, and good-looking, with an aristocratic temperament" (Chayeqiu 2013, my translation). In *At Home*, to take better care of Tony, Jarvis has built himself a human-shaped body—blue-eyed, blond, and well dressed, not unlike the aristocratic image in *Overly Attached*. If Jarvis and Tony are paired up as adult white gentlemen without a kind of cute juvenile appearance, then the (stereo)typical *kawaii* formula has arguably expired in this subgenre. In these stories, adulthood has often taken the place of juvenile charm, and the superhero duo potentially enjoys a more mature relationship—if *mature* is ever a suitable word for the character of Tony Stark. The Jar-ny pairing enables BL fans to project their androphilic desire on real masculine white bodies rather than on the *kawaii* boys with their cute doll eyes, as is often seen in Japanese manga and anime. In an imagined universe full of superhero masculinity, advanced technology, and science fiction spectacle, which are signatures of (post)industrial American modernity, the superhero white image favored by some BL fans allows them not only to break away from the Japanese cuteness but also to pursue modernization in its original Western form rather than through the medium of a Westernized and modernized Japan.

The depiction of a relationship between mature adults is also closer to Western slash fiction than to the Japanese BL genre, which generally focuses on beautiful young
boys, if Mark McLelland’s (2001) observation is accurate. This argument then brings us to the question about where to draw the line between BL fandom and slash fandom. In a globalizing world in which a text can be slashed by global audiences and non-Western writers are engaging with characters and writing styles of Western origins, do we still need to differentiate a BL fan product from a slash one? A question like this may take another essay to attempt a full critical investigation, but I am concerned here with whether any key features exist, other than the genealogical one I have mentioned, that make BL fandom distinctive. Admittedly major Chinese-speaking societies like mainland China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan are geographically and culturally closer to the modern origin of BL fandom, namely Japan, and local BL aficionados seem to identify much more with the Chinese term danmei (tanbi in Japanese) than with the English word slash. Although the Jar-ny pairing breaks away from juvenile charm, many BL fan products in China still favor the deep-rooted traditional preference for youthful male delicacy intermingled with the kawaii aesthetics borrowed from modern Japanese manga and anime. What else is at play in the blurred boundaries between BL and slash fandom and between studies of the two?

One possible approach is to consider the unique linguistic attribution found in the fan fics I examine here. Although Jar-ny BL fictions incorporate English into Chinese, would Anglo-American writers put Sinitic/Chinese languages into their English writing, even if they had Chinese texts to slash? The answer to this question is contingent on the dominance of English as the global language and on the uneven flow of texts and images from the West to China, often with limited flow back. Chinese BL authors have a wide range of materials to slash, from local TV series to Japanese manga, from ancient Chinese literature to modern Hollywood superhero movies, but do their Western counterparts enjoy an equally broad scope for androphilic reimagination? While Chinese BL enthusiasts have warmly embraced Hollywood superheroes and researchers are determined to explore such (sub)cultural practices, is current fandom studies marginalizing Western slashers (if any) who slash Chinese and other non-Western and non-Japanese materials? This question awaits further investigation in future research.

5. Final remarks

All these practices in Chinese Iron Man BL fandom—engaging with the English language, practicing thrift in regard to sexual content, breaking away from Japanese cuteness, and depicting adult white gentlemen "in the way it should be"—are, however, not reducible to a mix of the two languages (that is, the bilingual) or of the two different writing styles; nor is it reducible to an attempt to, paradoxically, make Chinese fictions more American. Rather, in the global flow of images and bodies, capital and commodities, and ideas and desires, what has emerged is an imagined community where American cultural icons are not only rendered universal but also subject to personal interpretation against different cultural settings. In their voyage from Hollywood to Chinese film screens,
cyborg superheroes have been decentered and recentered from mass consumption to private reimagination. Iron Man's stories and legends, enjoyed by film audiences, have been retold in fans' own private fantasies in contexts that cross film series (*Guide to Dating*), races (*Being Gay*), species (*Raising a Cat*), and human/machine borders (*Overly Attached*). Their personal and private rendition frees local BL enthusiasts from the canonical heteronormative story lines set by the filmmakers and allows them to express their own desires for androphilic romance and eroticism with their preferred cultural and linguistic affiliations.

[5.2] Writing on Iron Man and Captain America comic slash fandom, Catherine Coker (2013, ¶1.4) argues that such fandom "becomes a resistant and even a queer reading, an insistence on enacting and creating a virtual safe space for fans." She further notes that "this self-awareness of identity (as feminine, as queer) becomes explicitly politicized through its declaration of *being.*" Although I do not intend to introduce Chinese BL fans to Western-style identity politics, be it feminine or queer, Coker is right that such expressive self-awareness, as well as expressive desire, deserves our attention in fandom studies. Fans' confrontation with the canonical heteronormative story lines contributes to a virtual counterpublic (Fraser 1992; Warner 2002) where they share their passion for both superheroes and BL. Their efforts have further underpinned the agency of female film/BL enthusiasts in the uneven flow of texts and images between the center of the superhero universe (Hollywood) and the periphery of its fan culture (Chinese BL fandom). What is centered in such BL superhero euphoria, and especially in the Jar-ny pairing, is an attempt from Chinese BL fans, consciously or unconsciously, to experiment with characters and aesthetic styles that are different from the genre's modern Japanese origins and its premodern roots in local Chinese same-sex tradition, and to further explore queer bodies and images, same-sex romance and desire, and border-crossing subjects and subjectivities. These dynamic and increasingly diversified film fandoms and BL fandoms demand further investigation of their cross-cultural intersections and interactions.

6. Acknowledgments

[6.1] I thank Dr. Fran Martin for her suggestions on revision. I also offer my thanks to the incredible BL fan fiction writers, without whom this research would be impossible.

7. Notes

1. These gatekeepers include various regulatory bodies and administrative agencies monitoring, supervising, and censoring different media and content. As far as BL fan fic is concerned, the major gatekeepers are the General Administration of Press and Publication (part of the State Administration of Press, Publication, Radio, Film and Television since March 2013) and its provincial and metropolitan branches, as well as the police
department, because creating and disseminating erotic/pornographic content in China might be punishable by criminal law.

2. See Tianye's (2011) blog post for a summary in Chinese, including hyperlinks to relevant news reports.

3. "Sweeping the Obscene and Cracking-down the Illegal: Internet Purification 2014 Special Operation" (Saohuang Dafei: Jing Wang 2014 Zhuanxiang Xingdong) is carried out by the Chinese authorities to sanitize the Internet, targeting the online circulation of "obscene and illegal content." The official timeline for this Special Operation is set between April and November 2014. A BL fan fic Web site was shut down in early April and the owner and more than 20 female writers arrested (http://www.ifeng.com/, April 4, 2014). In the same month, more than 20 cyberlit Web sites were (temporarily) taken off-line, some of which reopened with sensitive content deleted or locked (PCOnline, April 14, 2014).

4. The doctor and the nurse who remove the shrapnel from Tony Stark's body are played by famous Chinese actor Wang Xueqi and actress Fan Bing-bing. In the Chinese version of Iron Man 3, the scenes in which they appear are longer than those in the original North American edition.


6. This includes both fan fics and the direct reinterpretation of the original plotlines. See Naifeierta (2013) for a BL subtextual reading of the entire Iron Man 3 film.

7. A quick Google search reveals that the paid-only chapters have already been stolen and reposted on other Chinese cyberlit Web sites for free reading.

8. Jinjiang also has a dedicated platform for its users to provide tips on obscene and antirevolutionary contents as a way of enforcing self-censorship (http://www.jjwxc.net/report_center.php). An updated report list is available (http://www.jjwxc.net/report_list.php).

9. The entanglements between the Japanese kawaii style and the (residue of) Chinese same-sex tradition, within which Chinese BL culture is contextualized, is beyond the scope of this study; it awaits future investigation.

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Praxis

Fan edits and the legacy of The Phantom Edit

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[0.1] Abstract—A fan edit can generally be defined as an alternative version of a film or television text created by a fan. It offers a different viewing experience, much as a song remix offers a different listening experience. The contemporary wave of fan edits has emerged during the remix zeitgeist of digital media and at a time when digital video editing technology has become more affordable and popular. The increasing number of alternative versions of films and the works of revisionist Hollywood filmmakers such as George Lucas have contributed to a greater public understanding of cinema as a fluid medium instead of one that exists in a fixed form. The Phantom Edit (2000), a seminal fan edit based on Lucas's Star Wars Episode I: The Phantom Menace (1999), inspired new ranks of fan editors. However, critics have misunderstood fan edits as merely the work of disgruntled fans. In order to provide a critical and historical basis for studies in fan editing as a creative practice, I examine previous interpretations of fan edits in the context of relevant contemporary works, and I use an annotated chronology of The Phantom Edit to trace its influence on subsequent fan editing communities and uncover their relationship with intellectual property disputes.

[0.2] Keywords—Copyright; Fair use; George Lucas; Remix; Star Wars


1. Introduction

[1.1] Since the 1970s, George Lucas has influenced the passage of filmmaking into its digital era through his special effects company (Industrial Light and Magic), his contributions to nonlinear editing technology (such as the EditDroid system in the 1980s), and his production of primarily digital feature films, including the Star Wars prequel trilogy (1999–2005). The digital domain provided filmmakers with more expedient and economical means to tap previously unreached creativity, and Lucas often explains he was compelled to revise the classic Star Wars films in the 1990s because filmmaking technology was finally capable of realizing his original vision of a galaxy far, far away (Magid 1997, 60–70).

[1.2] Lucas has been criticized for essentially directing films from the editing room (Lewis 2007, 70–71), but it could be argued that his affinity for postproduction and his digital revisionism have helped the general public understand the malleability of the cinematic form. Contemporary revisions of films, as well as director's cuts and unrated versions in the home video market, reveal to audiences outside the film industry that a film is not frozen in a fixed shape; it is a dynamic "never-finished text" (Johnson 2005, 38). Earlier audiences, less well versed in industrial conventions, may have assumed that a film exists in a singular form, like a sculpture on its pedestal, but to the "George Lucas generation" digital cinema is like software in its mutability (Solman 2002, 22). Rojas (2002) observes that alternative film versions, which include Lucas's high-profile revisions of the Star Wars films, Francis Ford Coppola's release of the expanded Apocalypse Now: Redux (2001, originally released 1979), and Steven Spielberg's updated E.T. The Extra-Terrestrial (2002, originally released 1982), "demolished the idea of a film as a single, finished product in the minds of the movie-viewing public. Instead we are headed towards a new conceptualization of a film as a permanent work-in-progress, which exists in multiple permutations, and can always be tinkered with in the future, whether by the director or by anybody else."

[1.3] George Lucas was certainly not the first director to "revisit his movies again and again, taking the canvas back off of the wall for another healthy dose of paint" (Griffin 2001b). In a November 12, 2013, e-mail to me, Kevin Brownlow recalled that D. W. Griffith frequently recut Intolerance (1916) at the Museum of Modern Art, much to the aggravation of the archive staff, and Abel Gance created controversial revisions of Napoleon (1927) in 1934 and 1971. Unlike earlier generations of filmmakers, Lucas pioneered digital media revisionism, and this technology was inherited by his audience. Traditional film editing equipment remains inaccessible to most people, yet basic nonlinear video editing software is now standard on most computer operating systems. Additionally, Lucas's revisionism seems rather hypocritical given that in 1988 he testified before the United States Senate against the alteration of culturally significant films (United States 1988) but 9 years later released the first digital revisions of the classic Star Wars films.
Lucas spent approximately $10 million on the Star Wars Special Editions, arguing, "Films never get finished, they get abandoned" (Magid 1997, 70).

[1.4] Some fans may argue that poetic justice was served with the emergence of fan editing, an expanding form of media revisionism that affects more than just Hollywood products. In 2000, George Lucas was completing his first entirely digital feature, Star Wars Episode II: Attack of the Clones (2002) while a fan using the pseudonym "The Phantom Editor" labored in secret, digitizing a videotape copy of Star Wars Episode I: The Phantom Menace (1999) and recutting it on a desktop computer. In his alternative version, retitled Star Wars Episode I.I: The Phantom Edit, he trimmed and reconfigured shots to hasten the pacing and excised entire scenes, including several instances of slapstick comedy with the Jar Jar Binks character (note 1). Many Star Wars fans praised The Phantom Edit for attempting to rescue a disappointing cinematic milestone, while others opposed tampering with Lucas's work. After several months of controversy, The Phantom Editor was revealed to be Mike J. Nichols, a professional film editor living in the Los Angeles area. In a January 31, 2014, e-mail, Nichols told me that The Phantom Edit was simply intended for personal viewing, but a videocassette version that he shared with a friend was unexpectedly duplicated and distributed by unknown persons at parties around Hollywood in 2000–2001, and from there it spread onto the Internet. Nichols later remastered The Phantom Edit from a DVD source and also produced an edit of Star Wars Episode II: Attack of the Clones (2002) before retiring from fan editing.

[1.5] In the years since the first appearance of The Phantom Edit, increasing numbers of fans have created new works from the pliable content inadvertently provided by Hollywood. In a January 17, 2012, interview with Bryan Curtis for the New York Times, Lucas reflected on his ambivalent relationship with Star Wars fans who recut his films: "On the Internet, all those same guys that are complaining I made a change are completely changing the movie. Why would I make any more when everybody yells at you all the time and says what a terrible person you are?" Later that year, Lucas sold his empire to the Walt Disney Company in a complex deal facilitated by a legal team composed mainly of Star Wars fans (Bond 2013). However, Lucas's dramatic exit from the Star Wars franchise is irrelevant to the fan editors, who have already exploited the inconstant fabric of Star Wars and many other films. Nearly a decade earlier, in a June 11, 2001, article by Andrew Rodgers (2001b), Star Wars fan Gerrig Thews had argued that "perhaps The Phantom Edit proves one thing…Lucas, for all his megalomaniacal goals, for his legions of lawyers securing the Lucas Arts logo, for his ownership of THX technology, no longer owns Star Wars." However, casting fan editors only as rebels against the authorial voices of Hollywood neglects the creativity of their emerging work.

[1.6] The purpose of this essay is to clarify some misconceptions about contemporary fan editing and provide a historical and critical foundation for further studies of the practice. Although The Phantom Edit was not the first reedit of a film or television show made by a fan, it was the one that "brought the art of fan editing into the mainstream" (Fanedit.org 2012), and I have observed that in casual discourse, social media, and various Web forums, "phantom edit" often serves as a metonym for "fan edit." Beyond Nichols's adept editing itself, the novelty of The Phantom Edit can be attributed to its cultural and technological circumstances. Based on Episode I, a highly anticipated and vexing film among Star Wars fans, The Phantom Edit had immediate appeal. Additionally, The Phantom Edit was perceived as a cutting-edge fan work because "The idea of housing enough hard drive space to edit a feature film in your apartment wasn't quite a reality then" (Nichols 2014, e-mail to author). Coinciding with the spread of peer-to-peer file sharing platforms like Napster, Gnutella, and BitTorrent in the early 2000s, The Phantom Edit appeared online at a time when a "confluence of trends in computer technology" (McDermott 2006, 256) enabled the free distribution of a professional quality reedit of a controversial feature film.

[1.7] Sensational depictions of The Phantom Edit as a fix or "corrector's edition" of Episode I (Lauten 2001) set a critical precedent for fan editing and shaped the dysfunctional legacy of The Phantom Edit. The enduring appeal and notoriety The Phantom Edit has makes it a common point of entry for aspiring fan editors who want to participate in the contemporary fan editing communities (L8wrtr 2010a; Baker 2012). However, academics, journalists, and others outside the fan editing communities continue to misunderstand it, although they often cite it in footnotes or brief discussions of fan editing (Weinberg Nokes 2004, 616; Pope 2004, 1046; Williams 2005, 163; Shields 2010, 104; Tryon 2012, 181–82; Howe 2012, 18). This essay seeks to realign scholarly perspectives on The Phantom Edit and fan editing in general.

[1.8] In this article I first examine the theory behind fan edits and then reconstruct the early reception of The Phantom Edit in order to explain why journalists, critics, and academics (DeLarge 2001; Gates 2001; Knight 2001; Weinberg Nokes 2004; Mason 2008; Young 2008; Tryon 2012; Klang and Nolin 2012; Phillips 2012) initially concluded that fan editing is merely a reactive fan practice. Admittedly, fan edits are partially reactive, because they are
inherently comparable to their source texts and could be said to challenge traditional perspectives of authorship by demonstrating the malleability of digital media. However, instead of simply characterizing fan editors as disgruntled fans fixated on reclaiming films from their makers, we should recognize fan editors as a breed of artists and storytellers experimenting with cinematic media in the digital age.

2. Understanding fan edits

[2.1] We should recognize that a fan edit, like other transformative texts, creatively repurposes existing components. Booth (2012) observes that fan editing is at the center of Manovich's remix culture, "putting the creation of cultural products in the hands of amateurs, of users, of audience members, and of fans" (¶4.6). We may understand fan editing, like vidding and remixing, as an example of Lessig's (2008, 28) theoretical read/write culture put into practice. Although Balkin (2004) misrepresents the intentions of The Phantom Edit, he nevertheless recognizes fan editing practice as "another way of talking back...to a form of mass media that was, from its very earliest days, asymmetrical and unidirectional. It is not the passive consumption of a media product by a consumer. Rather, it involves a viewer actively producing something new through digital technologies. It exemplifies what the new digital technologies make possible: ordinary people using these technologies to comment on, annotate, and appropriate mass media products for their own purposes and uses" (9–10). We must also note that fans reedit not only film and television texts but an increasing variety of media formats (note 2).

[2.2] In addition to reediting feature films, fan editors typically design supplemental material such as DVD or Blu-ray box art, posters, and promotional trailers. Increasing numbers of contemporary fan edits are based on Blu-ray sources and include multichannel sound mixes as well as the fans' own audio commentaries. In online forums, collectors of fan edits say they shelve the edits next to the original versions of films. Thus there is a degree of parity among Hollywood's original products, their sanctioned revisions, and fan edits of them. Some fan edits, like The Crow: City of Angels—Second Coming (DCP, 2007), Legion: An Exorcist III Fanedit (spicediver, 2011), and The Dark Crystal: Director's Cut (Christopher Orgeron, 2013), aim to restore (or approximate) the original director's creative vision; in this, they are similar to official restorations such as Superman II—The Richard Donner Cut (Michael Thau, 2006) and Mr. Arkadin—The Comprehensive Version (Stefan Drössler and Claude Berteme, 2006). However, the creators of commercial reedits and restorations often benefit from access to original production elements, such as film negatives, and to professionally restored sound recordings, and occasionally the original director participates in the restoration. On the other hand, most fan edits are produced by independents using home video releases with fully mixed audio and visual elements that must be reverse-engineered in order to reconfigure the content (note 3). In most cases, fan edits are not attempts at restoration but completely alternative versions.

Wolf Dancer (by CBB) - Audio Editing Demonstration from Joshua Wille on Vimeo.

**Video 1.** Video demonstrating the extensive audio editing involved in a scene from CBB's Wolf Dancer (2010), which is a fan edit based on Dances with Wolves (1990). CBB removed Kevin Costner's voice-over narration and reconstructed all of the sound effects in the scene.
Scholars, critics, and journalists have often characterized fan edits as the work of disgruntled fans seeking to redeem the work of indifferent Hollywood magnates such as George Lucas (Lauten 2001; DeLarge 2001; Gates 2001; Knight 2001; Mason 2008, 86–87; Tryon 2012, 181). Fan edits are described as a means for insatiable fans to "express their displeasure" (Weinberg Nokes 2004, 615) with films by removing "what they perceive to be dead weight" (Young 2008, 259). Phillips (2012) argues that fan edits are efforts to reclaim Hollywood films and are structurally unlike "other forms of fan creation, which embrace their marginality to enable greater creativity" (3.2). However, when several Fanedit.org (http://www.fanedit.org) administrators hosted an interactive panel at the May 2013 BlasterCon science fiction convention in Los Angeles, they explained that fan editors are motivated by the desire to explore narratives and forms, not just to fix or reclaim Hollywood films. They screened several excerpts from edits made in various styles and emphasized that the true goal of fan editing is to artistically reconfigure media. One panelist, L8wrtr, explained,

Fan editing uses nonlinear editing software to rearrange, modify, and integrate existing media in new and different ways. That's the technical side of it, that's just ones and zeroes. But the thing that really makes fan editing what it is, is that there's an artistic vision to the process of what you're trying to do. You actually have an end goal. It's not just cutting out things that offended you in the film, it's about trying to make something new that didn't exist before.

Contemporary fan edits take various forms, either modifying an existing narrative, blending two or more narratives, or forging something completely unexpected. Consider the idiosyncratic work of the fan editor called %20 (pronounced "none"; "%20" is the HTML code for a blank space), whose Thee Backslapcking with Media (2009) and AARRSSTW-WTSSRRAA (2013) intentionally "provide little to zero entertainment value, viewer reward, societal insight, or benefit" (http://noneinc.com/AARRSSTW-WTSSRRAA/AARRSSTW-WTSSRRAA-20121227.html). Other fan editors create kinetic assemblages and meditative tone poems, such as Blueyoda's (fe) la vie (2009), or aesthetically transform mainstream films to reflect cult genres, as do The Man Behind The Mask's Jaws: The Sharksploitation Edit (2009) and Neglify's Scream—The Giallo Cut (2012).
Memories Alone Preview from Q2 Faneditor on Vimeo.

**Video 3.** Trailer for Q2's *Memories Alone* (2013), a feature-length fan edit that combines the parallel narratives in *The Wrestler* (2008) and *Black Swan* (2010) into one film about an estranged father and daughter. To some degree, this fan edit reflects an unachieved goal of director Darren Aronofsky, who considers *Black Swan* to be a companion to *The Wrestler* and had hoped that cinemas would screen the films together (Associated Press 2010).

[2.6] Phillips (2012) observes that fan editors achieve a degree of creative control over their work that is comparable to that of an auteur, but he is wrong when he suggests that fan editors perceive their work as "director's cuts" (2.1). Like journalists such as Wortham (2008), he misconstrues the intentions of fan editors. Instead of treating their works as definitive versions, as the term "director's cut" implies, fan editors embrace the diversity of their efforts. They build on the revisionist works of others and often cite other fan edits as inspirations. For example, in introducing his trilogy of Star Wars prequel fan edits, L8wrtr (2010a) recalls,

[2.7] With Nichols choosing to never release an edit of Episode III I began playing around with the idea of editing it myself...Technical/quality issues with my early drafts led me to fanedit.org where I found the expertise and assistance needed to resolve the challenges I was facing.

[2.8] By that time however I'd come to understand just how much could be achieved with fanediting. No longer could I be satisfied [with] Mike Nichols' releases. I realized that these movies could be cut deeper, that more nuance could be applied within scenes to change tone and improve dialog, which improves character and audience reaction.

[2.9] Without a conscientious study of contemporary fan edits, it can be difficult to define fan editing in the context of other fan works. Barr (2014) explains that fan edits, as transformative narratives, should be recognized under the broad definition of fan fiction. However, like Weinberg Nokes (2004, 615) and Young (2008, 259), Barr labels fan edits a type of fan film instead of examining what makes them distinct. Tryon (2012, 182) characterizes fan vids by their use of juxtaposition and montage but disregards the fact that many fan edits use the same techniques. Phillips (2012), situating fan edits between fan vids and fan films, stipulates that fan edits "only use existing material, while fan films produce new content" (2.4). It is true that fan edits are mostly composed of repurposed material, but there are notable exceptions, such as the original video content produced for Adywan's *Star Wars: Revisited* (2008—), a particularly popular series of fan edits. For his forthcoming version of *Star Wars Episode V: The Empire Strikes Back* (1979), Adywan has assembled an international crew of volunteer filmmakers to help with casting, costuming, and shooting new digital video to be incorporated in the film.
**Figure 1.** On the third unit set in Montreal, Quebec, an actor in full Darth Vader costume holds a film slate for the production of new footage in Adywan’s Star Wars Episode V: The Empire Strikes Back Revisited. Photo by Adywan. [View larger image.]

**Figure 2.** In California, Adywan’s second unit director works with actors dressed in rebel soldier uniforms on a backyard green screen stage. The second unit prepared new material for the Battle of Hoth to be incorporated into Star Wars Episode V: The Empire Strikes Back Revisited. Photo by Adywan. [View larger image.]

**Figure 3.** In his UK workshop, Adywan crafted miniature trees for new shots of swamps on planet Dagobah in Star Wars Episode V: The Empire Strikes Back Revisited. Photo by Adywan. [View larger image.]
In many ways, Adywan's work exemplifies the creative spirit behind many fan edits. It begins with curiosity and is enabled by contemporary technology. His first project (2008), based on *Star Wars Episode IV: A New Hope* (1977), was originally conceived as a color correction experiment. Adywan began to tinker with other visual effects, and eventually he completed an extensive fan edit that revised nearly every shot in the film. Like many fan editors, Adywan explains that he was inspired to reedit films by watching earlier Star Wars fan edits (Mollo 2009), while doubleofive (2010) equates the fan editor's creative impulse with that of George Lucas in his revisionist filmmaking mode, observing, "Adywan isn't making the Special Edition Lucas should have made, he's making the version Young Adywan saw in theaters, using his modern skills to fill in where his imagination had to back in 1980."

**Figure 4.** Also under construction in Adywan's UK workshop is a canyon miniature set that measures 13 feet. It will be used in capturing new video material for *Star Wars Episode V: The Empire Strikes Back Revisited*. Photo by Adywan. [View larger image.]

**Figure 5.** Split-screen image reveals that a probe droid, which was added to a shot of a storm trooper on planet Tatooine in the *Star Wars Special Edition*, has been erased in Adywan's *Star Wars Episode IV: A New Hope Revisited*. Photo by Adywan. [View larger image.]
3. The Phantom Edit: From hype to prototype

[3.1] The first public record of The Phantom Edit is Erin Lauten's May 17, 2001, blurb on the professional film editing news Web site Editorsnet.com (Mike J. Nichols, e-mail to author). Lauten wrote, "A mysterious video cassette containing a re-edited version of George Lucas' 'Star Wars Episode I: The Phantom Menace' has started circulating around Hollywood. Called 'Star Wars Episode I.I: The Phantom Edit,' the 'special corrector's edition' challenges the vision of the original film." Lauten characterized The Phantom Edit as a challenge to George Lucas, but Nichols explained that it was merely an editing exercise and he was actually inspired by early revisionary work by Lucas, who supposedly reedited workprints of Hollywood films in order to show directors how they could be improved (Hodgetts 2007). Nichols (2001b) argues that by the time Lucas produced Episode I, the Star Wars creator had become
artistically insulated by wealth and a crew of obsequious employees at Lucasfilm who were afraid to question his creative decisions. Nichols maintains that his loftiest goal in making The Phantom Edit was not to threaten Lucas's authority or earn money, but to engage Lucas in a creative conversation. "I don't think I ruined his story," he said in a September 7, 2001, interview with Daniel Greenberg for the Washington Post. "It's the same story he was trying to tell, just told more effectively—as if I worked for him." In 2013, to reaffirm that he was inspired by the same principles of storytelling and editing once advocated by Lucas, as well as to clarify his intention in making The Phantom Edit, Nichols posted to YouTube a compilation of interviews with Lucasfilm employees, taken from the DVD of his second fan edit, Attack of the Phantom (2002) (video 4).

Video 4. Attack of the Phantom (2002), a fan edit by Mike J. Nichols. In the video's description, Nichols explained, "Many people think The Phantom Edit was about cutting out parts of a movie you don't like (Jar Jar Binks for example) but that wasn't the point or the message...Here the new interview order now hauntingly serves as an aftermath commentary in [the Lucasfilm employees'] own words as to why The Phantom Menace became such a failure."

[3.2] Soon after The Phantom Edit went public, a second edit of Episode I appeared, entitled The Phantom Re-edit, and other similarly titled works have appeared since. Although they were created by different fan editors, they are often confused and misrepresented. For example, Nichols attempted to minimize the screen time devoted to Jar Jar Binks in The Phantom Edit without disrupting the story, but subsequent accounts (Williams 2005, 163; Mason 2008; Schaller 2009) have incorrectly reported that he removed Jar Jar Binks entirely from the film. Rather than omitting the character, the unidentified trio of editors behind The Phantom Re-edit digitally scrambled Jar Jar Binks's voice and wrote new subtitled dialogue in an attempt to represent him as a wise native of the planet Naboo (Rikter 2004; McDermott 2006, 254). Fans and journalists nicknamed The Phantom Edit the West Coast or LA version, since that was where Nichols lived, and called The Phantom Re-edit the East Coast or New York version, because two of its creators were rumored to live there (Griffin 2001a; Rikter 2004). Another independently created Episode I fan edit from that period, The Phantom's New Hope, has been attributed to Andrew Pagana and includes variations of the edits found in both The Phantom Edit and The Phantom Re-edit (Rikter 2004; White 2010, 305–6). Judging from a June 7, 2001, article by Andrew Rodgers (2001c), The Phantom Re-edit was likely the first version to be shared with George Lucas; "worried that other amateur filmmakers would be flooding Lucasfilm offices with their own re-edited versions or lower-quality copies of his own, The Phantom Editor then made arrangements to get Lucas an authentic copy of his re-edit."

[3.3] As The Phantom Edit circulated on videotape and eventually made its way onto the Internet, filmmaker Kevin Smith, an outspoken Star Wars fan who is rumored to recut Hollywood films for his own consumption, was briefly suspected of being The Phantom Editor (Rikter 2004) (note 4). On May 31, 2001, Andrew Rodgers (2001i) published the first in a series of articles on Zap2it (http://www.zap2it.com/) devoted to the content, controversy, and cultural appeal of The Phantom Edit. Rodgers's first post repeated speculations that Smith might be its creator, and on June 4 Rodgers (2001f) provided a detailed report on The Phantom Edit, noting the major changes it made to Episode I and reprinting Nichols's disclaimer, which replaced the iconic Star Wars opening text crawl:

[3.4] Anticipating the arrival of the newest Star Wars film, some fans, like myself, were extremely disappointed by the finished product. So being someone of the "George Lucas Generation," I have re-edited a standard VHS version of "The Phantom Menace," into what I believe is a much stronger film by relieving the viewer [of] as much story redundancy, pointless Anakin actions and dialogue, and Jar Jar Binks, as possible.
During that early period, Lucas and company were aware of *The Phantom Edit* and expressed support for it. Rodgers (2001f) also revealed that, when questioned about *The Phantom Edit* backstage at the 2001 MTV Movie Awards ceremony, Lucas replied, "The Internet is a new medium, it's all about doing things like that. I haven't seen it. I would like to." Rodgers reported that Jeanne Cole, a spokesperson for Lucasfilm, explained that the company welcomed fan participation in the Star Wars franchise "as long as nobody crosses that line—either in bad taste or in profiting from the use of our characters," adding, "At the end of the day this is about everybody just having fun with Star Wars. Go be creative." But despite these signs of approval from Lucas, the next day Rodgers (2001e) suggested that *The Phantom Edit* might violate copyright. He speculated that Lucas might choose not to bring suit because doing so could upset a zealous fan base.

On June 6, Rodgers (2001a) published portions of an interview he had conducted with The Phantom Editor via e-mail. Nichols was wary of disclosing his real name and location and expressed cynicism about the entertainment industry. "I'll say this," he wrote; "I am in a town where many potential projects gone wrong will lose millions of studio dollars while my demo and resume sit neatly unopened on the desk of someone making lunch plans." Nichols also said that it took him many months to reedit Lucas's film, and that it was challenging to reedit mixed sound and picture. "Had I Lucas's original elements to work with," he added, "I could promise an even better final product." Nichols claimed that The Phantom Editor was receiving hundreds of e-mails daily from around the world, and he seemed interested in stirring public interest in the neglected role of a film editor. "The industry doesn't paint an important portrait of editing or editors," he argued. "Editing isn't on the tip of anyone's tongue at Hollywood parties. At least it wasn't until now."

In articles published on June 10, 11, and 14, Rodgers (2001g, 2001b, 2001d) reported that a newly assembled grassroots group, the Phantom Edit Fan Network, was distributing videotape copies of the fan edit on Hollywood Boulevard and shipping them to other states and foreign countries in order to encourage further distribution. By that time, Lucas and company had changed their position on fan edits. On June 14, Rodgers (2001d) quoted Jeanne Cole:

> "I think what we've come to realize is that when we first heard about the [reeds], we realized that these were fans that were having some fun with Star Wars, which we've never had a problem with. But over the last 10 days, this thing has grown and it's taken on a life of its own—as things do sometimes when associated with Star Wars," Cole said.

> "And, when we started hearing about massive duplication and distribution, we realized then that we had to be very clear that duplication and distribution of our materials is an infringement," Cole added..."The whole bottom line is, Star Wars exists because of its fans," she said. "We don't want to anger them. We want them to have fun with it. But then we have to be really clear, too, about how far you can have fun with it."

As *The Phantom Edit* became more widely known, criticism of it intensified. As Rodgers was reporting on its creative merits, a series of derisive editorials appeared on Rebel Rouser, a subsidiary of a Star Wars fan Web site, TheForce.net (http://theforce.net/). In a June 12, 2001, review, "The Phantom Edit—An Edit Too Far," Alexander DeLarge said that it was "alarmong to see how when a big studio re-cuts a movie to pieces to fulfil his expectations, fanboys shout [at George Lucas] in disgust. But when a fanboy does the same thing, he is applauded and cheered, because 'he's sticking it to the man'...I think all the Phantom Editor wants is to please himself and the average fanboy." DeLarge defended Lucas's original *Episode I* and chastised fans who supported "the mutilation of Lucas' vision," concluding, "How quickly have you turned into the Empire, my friends." In "The Phantom Edit—Disrespecting Art" on the following day, Sean Gates (2001) complained that "Star Wars is made to be enjoyed, not dissected like a dead frog in a pan...Why has it become such a complex issue to enjoy a movie?" On June 14, Chris Knight (2001) admitted in "The Phantom Edit—Artistic Rape" that he had not actually watched *The Phantom Edit* but argued that the purpose of art is to "convey the thoughts of the artist, not what other people want the thoughts of the artist to be...Film shouldn't be treated like a 'choose your own adventure' artform." Knight attempted to shame fans out of reediting films, concluding that "re-editing of Episode I is tantamount to hijacking another's vision, if not outright artistic rape."

Knight's rejection of fan edits was a response to Joshua Griffin's June 11 review of *The Phantom Re-edit* on the same Web site (2001b). Observing their potential to transform narrative, Griffin compared fan edits to the participatory reading in Choose Your Own Adventure youth novels and suggested that "fan versions of [Lucas's] films are breaking new ground, sending a message to the Lucasfilm world what many fans have been saying all along." Griffin followed with a review of Nichols's *The Phantom Edit* on June 18 (2001a), and although he complimented some of the work, he was careful to avoid suggesting that *The Phantom Edit* reflected the director's ideas. Instead, Griffin concluded, "This is by no means Lucas's definitive vision. We saw that in the theater in May of 1999."
Increasing hype surrounding *The Phantom Edit* attracted critics from the mainstream, including J. Hoberman (2001) and Michael Wilmington (2001). In his June 18 review of *The Phantom Edit*, Wilmington compared aspects of the original film to the fan edit, and although he disagreed with fans who claimed that *The Phantom Edit* was superior to Lucas’s original *Episode I*, he praised the work. "We need good editors," Wilmington wrote, "and even occasionally Phantom ones."

Distribution of *The Phantom Edit* continued despite threats of litigation from Lucasfilm in the press, and Nichols (2001a) writes that on June 26 he was interviewed on camera by *Access Hollywood* for a segment that was slated to air the following evening. He agreed to the interview on advice from his lawyer, who recommended identifying himself, "name and image, as the guy behind *The Phantom Edit,*" because "Lucasfilm would have less interest in making my life hell…if I was a public figure." To Nichols’s dismay, the interviewer pressed him about whether he had profited from bootlegs of *The Phantom Edit*; he denied that he was responsible for any unlawful distribution. The following evening, *Access Hollywood* ran promotional spots for the interview, but it never aired. Instead, the segment about *The Phantom Edit* was replaced by promotional footage for *Star Wars Episode III: Revenge of the Sith* (2005) provided by Lucasfilm. Nichols suspected *Access Hollywood* had manipulated him in order to bargain with Lucas for exclusive material from the upcoming film, and he recalled that upon leaving the television studio the previous day he had not been asked to sign a release form. "It appeared they were never going to run [the interview]," he wrote. "In retrospect, I imagine they knew that the day I came in to tape it…I was used like a last minute prom date. A bartering chip with Lucasfilm."

On June 28, 2001, Andrew Rodgers (2001h) reprinted an open apology that Nichols, writing as The Phantom Editor, had e-mailed to Zap2it. In the message, he emphasized he had not participated in bootlegging *The Phantom Edit* and he urged fans to respect the wishes of Lucasfilm by ceasing any underground sales of his edit. He added, "I can now understand first hand the issues that Hollywood and the music industry face in trying to maintain control over the distribution of their content. I sincerely apologize to George Lucas, Lucasfilm Ltd. and the loyal Star Wars fans around the world for my well-intentioned editing demonstration that escalated out of my control."

On June 28, 2001, article in the *Washington Post*, Daniel Greenberg reported that Mike J. Nichols had finally come forward as The Phantom Editor. By that time, with much of the initial controversy having subsided, critics were able to reflect on some of the implications of *The Phantom Edit*. In his review for *Salon* on November 5, 2001, Daniel Kraus suggested that "more than anything, 'The Phantom Edit' magnifies problems [in *Episode I*] that can't be fixed with clever editing." Kraus added that "until the 'Phantom Edit' controversy, the role of the editor has rarely been appreciated by the public. And in a way, 'The Phantom Edit' illustrates that editors are not automatons serving a dictatorial director, but artists in their own right, contributing as much to a finished film as a writer or cinematographer." Further, Kraus drew parallels between the fan editor and George Lucas, arguing that "the only difference between 'The Phantom Edit' and what Lucas did with his rereleased 'Special Editions' is permission," and "whereas digital technology equals 'boundless imagination' for Lucas, it equals 'cheap accessibility' for everyone else."
Charles C. Mann observed in his November 22, 2001, article for PBS Frontline that "Lucas was, in a way, a perfect target...Cheaper and better in every aspect, the new technology, Lucas has long maintained, will empower a new generation of cinematic artists and entertainers." Thus, the digital technology pioneered by Lucas had become a way for fans to shift a balance of creative power. However, Nichols saw himself as an unlikely challenger to Lucas's multimillion dollar filmmaking operation. In a blog post on August 22, 2001, he wrote, "I am one guy in a one-bedroom apartment with Final Cut Pro, 128 (impossible!) megabytes of ram on a bottom line Macintosh computer resting on an unsteady $40 computer desk, and George Lucas is threatened by me?"

[3.16] The question of threat was central to Richard Fausset's June 1, 2002, profile of Nichols for the Los Angeles Times. "This messy Burbank living room," Fausset wrote, "with its cheap computer and jury-rigged video station, may be the most notorious rebel outpost in the 'Star Wars' universe this side of the ice planet Hoth. It is the lair of the Phantom Editor...The thirtysomething film editor...knows he sounds as brash as the teenage Anakin Skywalker when he says, 'I have the storytelling sense that George Lucas once had and lost.'" Reflecting on the implications of fan editing for artistic authority, Fausset approached David Madden, an executive vice president at Fox Television Studios, who had viewed The Phantom Edit. "I don't mean to sound too 20th century," said Madden, "but I come from this tradition where an artist works really hard to create a vision. I'm a little scared, because [fan reedits] somehow take away the primitive power of me telling you a story, and you having to follow the story."

[3.17] Speaking to Fausset, Nichols described fan editing as a form of "proactive criticism," arguing that "now, big-time directors know that if they do a [bad] job, somebody may redo it and make them look like idiots." Kraus (2001) observed, "The shifting of power from the filmmakers to the fans is both disturbing and exciting. It is disturbing because there will no longer be any sort of quality control, aside from the natural assumption that the best 'fan edits' will be the ones that get passed around the most...In the upcoming years we will be privileged to witness, essentially, critics making movies, which we haven't seen in abundance since French New Wavers like Godard and Truffaut decided that the best response to a film was making another film." Also seeing fan edits as challenges to original filmmakers, in his July 15, 2001, article for the New York Times, J. Hoberman posited The Phantom Edit as a democratic counterweight to monolithic filmmakers such as George Lucas. "Prometheus-like," Hoberman wrote, "'The Phantom Edit' strikes back against the tyranny of the artist who has successfully colonized the imagination of millions." Although the Phantom Editor was characterized as a creative crusader, Nichols expressed little regard for other fan edits of Episode I or the burgeoning fan editing communities. Faussett (2002) noted that "Nichols became as testy as any auteur when talk turned to copycat phantom edits that have traded on his reputation. 'Yeah,' he snorts, 'Attack of the clones.'"

[3.18] In 2002, The Phantom Editor released Attack of the Phantom, a revision of Episode II that did not generate the same degree of mainstream discourse as The Phantom Edit but has been called a stronger work (Duff 2007; Darthmojo 2008). Instead of going on to release a version of Episode III, Nichols chose to retire from fan editing and focus on his career as an editor and postproduction filmmaker for product and television, including the later seasons of HBO's Sex in the City (1998–2004), which he deftly reedited for syndication (Hodgetts 2007). Why Nichols quit fan editing has not been confirmed, but Boon23 (2009b), the first Webmaster of Fanedit.org, submits that after the release of Attack of the Phantom, George Lucas summoned Nichols to his Skywalker Ranch and convinced him not to revise Episode III. Alternatively, L8wrtr (2010b) claims that Nichols began work on an Episode III edit but eventually lost interest in the project.

[3.19] In spite of the aforementioned interpretations of The Phantom Edit as a groundbreaking or contentious effort and The Phantom Editor as a creative revolutionary, a pirate, or a disgruntled fan, Nichols maintains that his original intentions were less sensational. He explains that The Phantom Edit was simply an editing exercise created "just for the audience of me," and "no one knew who I was and it was to always remain that way" (Nichols 2014, e-mail to author). Although Nichols is often credited with bringing the most public attention to fan editing and he has engaged in some playful discourse regarding his work, he is disassociated with contemporary fan editors.

4. Fan editing communities versus copyright culture

[4.1] The Phantom Edit remains a source of inspiration for newcomers to fan editing as well as a talking point for Star Wars fans. In May 2002, Jason "Jay" Sylvester founded OriginalTrilogy.com, a Star Wars forum dedicated to the appreciation of the classic Star Wars films and to promoting their unmodified versions, colloquially known as "George's Original Unaltered Trilogy," or "The G.O.U.T." OriginalTrilogy.com became one of the first centralized sites for fans to share their experiences with The Phantom Edit. Star Wars–related transformative discourse continued to dominate on
OriginalTrilogy.com but fan edits and preservations of other science fiction, fantasy, and adventure films also surfaced in its forums.

[4.2] Boon23 founded Fanedit.org in January 2007, in order to cater to expanding interests in fan editing (The Man Behind The Mask 2010), and the Web site quickly developed into the most comprehensive resource for fan editors. The popularity of Fanedit.org is due to its lively forums where fan editors collaborate and critique their works, its extensive Internet Fanedit Database (http://fanedit.org/ifdb), and its former role of providing access to fan edits.

[4.3] Meticulously cataloged on Fanedit.org, numerous fan edits were once available through BitTorrent trackers and direct downloads from popular file-hosting Web sites such as RapidShare.com and Megaupload.com. However, in November 2008 the Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA), issued a Digital Millennium Copyright Act (DMCA) notice against Fanedit.org for copyright infringement. In order to prevent its Web host from closing the site, Fanedit.org removed all download links (Enigmax 2008). The MPAA's action surprised Boon23. The year before, Lucasfilm had contacted him with a polite request to remove one fan edit from the site. According to Boon23, Lucasfilm made no other complaint about the online repository, which contained at least eighty Star Wars fan edits (Enigmax 2008). On the basis of this implicit nod of approval from Lucasfilm, Boon23 and the members of Fanedit.org believed that fan editing might rest peacefully in a “gray area” between piracy and the law (Duff 2007; Gaith 2009).

[4.4] In 2008 and 2009, Boon23 took further precautions to ensure Fanedit.org's security and avoid copyright challenges from the MPAA. A German citizen himself, he moved the site to a Web host outside the United States and forbade forum members to say where to obtain fan edits in publicly accessible message threads (Boon23 2009a). However, the burden of support work eventually compelled Boon23 to step down and a new group volunteered to administer the site.

[4.5] Peace was disrupted again on January 19, 2012, when the United States Department of Justice seized Megaupload.com as part of an antipiracy operation. Kim Dotcom’s controversial service was a popular choice among fan editors looking for a site to host their work, but the deactivation of Megaupload.com also severed links to hundreds of fan edits. More recently, fan editors have discovered alternative file-hosting sites and distribution methods, but the turbulent arena of copyright regulation on the Internet continues to threaten access to these transformative works.

[4.6] Fan editing is similar to music remixing, which began as an underground practice, eventually gained mainstream acceptance, and was appropriated by the industry. However, fan edits remain marginalized by their questionable legality. When it first appeared, The Phantom Edit was frequently disparaged on the basis of reports of unlawful sales, which raised questions of copyright infringement. Thus, many of the early discussions of fan edits were focused on legal and ethical concerns rather than on the works' creative qualities. Ten years before he retired from Star Wars, George Lucas explained, "Well, everybody wants to be a filmmaker. Part of what I was hoping for with making movies in the first place was to inspire people to be creative. The Phantom Edit was fine as long as they didn't start selling it. Once they started selling it, it became a piracy issue" (Smith 2002, 32).

[4.7] Lucasfilm may have ceased its legal threats once bootlegging of The Phantom Edit reportedly ended and The Phantom Editor retired, but Boon23 and the subsequent administrators of Fanedit.org anticipated their work might be challenged on copyright grounds. Therefore, the fan editing communities stand firmly against piracy and insist their works are noncommercial, experimental projects. Attempting to invoke the fair use provisions in the US Copyright Act of 1976 that allow duplication of copyrighted works for certain noncommercial personal uses, Fanedit.org mandates that participants must own a commercial version of a film before producing or watching a fan edit based on it. Its argument is that a fan edit qualifies as a legally sanctioned duplication rather than a pirated work, but this argument remains untested in the courts. In recent years, however, fan editors have benefited from the efforts of the Organization of Transformative Works to obtain legal exemptions under the DMCA for transformative practices.

5. Conclusion

[5.1] Although previous interpretations of fan edits depict them as narrowly focused attempts by peevish fans to “fix” Hollywood’s versions of their beloved stories, a more conscientious survey of the extant work reveals that fan editors are actually experimental filmmakers and digital artists working in a revisionist mode, much like music remixers. Like other forms of remix, fan edits have an inherent reactive component, but they should be recognized primarily for their creative qualities and as contributions to an emerging culture of fluid media. The controversial story of The Phantom Edit that I reconstruct here offers some explanation for the formative scholarly perspectives on fan editing, which have been based largely on inconsistent reports about The Phantom Edit and often are not representative of the actual fan
editing subculture. Fan editing practice has advanced since the first appearance of *The Phantom Edit* and therefore new discussions about fan edits should look to the expanding body of works rather than one seminal piece. Contemporary fan editing, like other collaborative practices that remix media and employ controversial systems of online distribution, remains caught between the spheres of creative expression, commerce, and the law. In keeping with Lawrence Lessig's characterization of the digital era as a return to a read/write creative paradigm of reciprocal production and reproduction, the fan edit joins other forms of remix that increasingly signal that new media artists utilize technology that was once exclusive to the industry. Together, the commercialization of film revisions sanctioned by Hollywood and the existence of fan edits may contribute to an evolving public understanding that cinematic forms are fluid and malleable rather than immutable. Thus the collective work may eventually prove George Lucas's claim that "films never get finished, they get abandoned."

[5.2] Further research into fan editing could explore its practical techniques, its social organization, and its position in the changing tide of intellectual property discourse. For example, studies might examine the use of fan editing as a form of practical film and television criticism or further delineate the various fan editing genres and discuss their formal relationship to the sanctioned revisionist work of film preservationists. Fan editor demographics have not been established and should be discussed in the context of other fan labor, and although most fan edits are consumed in private homes, further research could receive the reception and legal implications of their public screenings (e.g., spicediver's *Legion: An Exorcist III Fanedit* screened at the Mad Monster Party horror convention in Charlotte, North Carolina, on March 25, 2012; Flix capacitor's *Watchmen: Midnight* screened at StarFest in Denver, Colorado, on April 19, 2013; and screenings of Q2's *Northwest Passage: A Twin Peaks Fanedit* were hosted by the Paley Center for Media in Los Angeles and New York City on March 29, 2014) (note 5). Furthermore, using the economy of music remixes as the basis for inquiry, research should address the potential for fan edits to be appropriated and commodified by the media industries.

6. Acknowledgments

[6.1] I wish to express thanks to the administrators and members of Fanedit.org, especially L8wrtr, Neglify, Reave, and Blueyoda, for discussions about their craft, and to The Man Behind The Mask, Mollo, and Gaith for writing previous histories of fan editing. Finally, I would like to thank Kevin Brownlow and Mike J. Nichols for being invaluable resources during my research.

7. Notes

1. Although the initial version of *The Phantom Edit* was derived from a VHS source and designated Episode I.I, Nichols eventually recreated his fan edit from a DVD source. In the latter version, known as Episode I.II, Nichols was able to achieve a more sophisticated recut of the film because of the higher quality digital source material, which was also more malleable than an analog videocassette. For example, Nichols utilized the discrete characteristics of the 5.1 audio channels from the DVD in order to create more nuanced sound edits. The DVD version of *The Phantom Edit* also provided Nichols with a platform to share some of his insights and methods in an audio commentary track.

2. RaySquirrel's hybrid of film and video game footage in *The Matrix: Reloaded Remixed* (2013) and Siebener's audio-only series *The Adventures of Superman—The Kryptonite Saga* (2013), based on a radio serial from the 1940s and 1950s, are reminders that fan editing is not limited to film and television texts.

3. An exception is *The Thief and the Cobbler: Recobbled Cut* (Garrett Gilchrist, 2006), which includes rare production materials provided by the original animators and the family of director Richard Williams (Fenlon 2012).

4. Other Hollywood figures also recut films in this way. Steven Soderbergh reveals, "I edit stuff on my own, things that don't belong to me, just for fun, because it gives me that much pleasure. I have an hour-and-50-minute version of *Heaven's Gate*. I've got a mash-up of Hitchcock's *Psycho* and Van Sant's *Psycho*, which I call *Psychos*" (Pierce 2009). In 2014, Soderbergh released *Psychos* and his revision of *Heaven's Gate* in streaming videos on his personal blog, Extension 765 ([http://extension765.com](http://extension765.com)). Additionally, actor Topher Grace reedited the Star Wars prequel trilogy into a single 85-minute film. He shared his edit with journalists and bloggers at a private screening in Los Angeles but expressed no intention to share it with the public (Scrietta 2012).

5. *Watchmen: Midnight* screened in its entirety at StarFest in 2013. However, as the fan editor of *Watchmen: Midnight*, I have had the privilege to share this revisionist work at academic events and fan conventions in the United States, the
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Praxis

Fan fiction metadata creation and utilization within fan fiction archives: Three primary models

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Abstract—Issues related to searchability and ease of access have plagued fan fiction since its inception. This paper discusses the predominate forms of fan-mediated indexing and descriptive metadata, commonly referred to as folksonomy or tagging, and compares the benefits and disadvantages of each model. These models fall into three broad categories: free tagging, controlled vocabulary, and hybrid folksonomy. Each model has distinct advantages and shortcomings related to findability, results filtering, and creative empowerment. Examples for each are provided. Possible ramifications to fan fiction from improved metadata and access are also discussed.

Keywords—Folksonomy; Searchability; Tagging


1. Introduction

One common complaint within the fan fiction community is the difficulty in locating works, particularly those that contain specific story elements, characters, or pairings (Kem 2005). Issues related to searchability and ease of access have plagued fan fiction since its inception, and with the migration from print- to Web-based forms of dissemination, this problem has persisted (Versaphile 2011). This paper discusses the predominate forms of fan-mediated indexing and descriptive metadata, commonly referred to as folksonomy, and compares the benefits and disadvantages of each model as it applies to the fan fiction community.

Fan fiction is not a new phenomenon. Despite its growing popularity and publicity, it is still dominated by a fan culture that craves independence and is resistant to outside interference, yet thrives on community (Kem 2005). This sense of community is central to the development of fan fiction and has been solidified by fandom's early adoption of the World Wide Web (Bury 2005; Gray, Sandvoss, and Harrington 2007; Hellekson and Busse 2006; Jenkins 2012). As fandom moved toward
online interaction, the way information was shared and disseminated grew from the paper-based fanzine, story circuits, and convention models toward a more easily accessed and faster-paced virtual community of users that allowed for not only increased consumption, but also creation (Bury 2005; Duffett 2013).

[1.3] This shift placed average fans in a position to have greater control over how they received and shared content with their fellow fans, creating increased opportunities for community and personalization. This need for community, and fandom's wide expansion during the early days of the Internet, have been deciding factors in how authors and readers have developed genre-specific organizational classifications, or folksonomies, and how they have been applied to the descriptions and categorizations of fan fiction works. These folksonomies are continually changing and adapting as new fans enter the community, both virtually and physically, and as technology progresses.

[1.4] A folksonomy is an assembly of user-generated metadata created collaboratively, relating to a specific application or group (Eynard, Mazzola, and Dattolo 2013)—what Weinberger calls a "grassroots taxonomy" (2005). Folksonomies can take many forms, but in today's computer environment the main mode of creation is tagging, and may be referred to as folk classification, ethnoclassification, social classification, or free tagging (Hammond et al. 2005). This modern setting, within which increasingly more fan community interaction abides, is uniquely placed to allow fan content creators and consumers to adapt the environment, including the metadata used, to meet their specific and, in some cases, idiosyncratic needs (Watson 2010). The development of the Web 2.0 technology that allows users to generate these tags, and interact with one another via various forms of commentary, has opened new realms of possibility for fan fiction organization that early static pages and electronic mailing lists were not capable of providing.

[1.5] Tags are "typically short text strings freely chosen by users; they are democratic and bottom-up, flat (as opposed to hierarchical), inclusive...and extremely easy to use" (Eynard, Mazzola, and Dattolo 2013, 1437). These tags have many applications, but can create their own challenges for the end-user. Tags can fall prey to problems related to a variety of user errors, such as misspellings or typos, as well as problems of homonyms, synonyms, and other syntactic variations (Eynard, Mazzola, and Dattolo 2013). These ambiguities can make it difficult for purely free-formed folksonomies to deliver usable and dynamic searching for the average fan fiction reader. This abundance of potentially inaccurate or misleading tags has been described as "Meta Noise," and can mask potentially relevant works beneath a mountain of irrelevant returns (Peterson 2006).
While considerable strides are being made in the improvement of folksonomy and user-generated tagging systems, these problems have not yet been fully addressed (Eynard, Mazzola, and Dattolo 2013). More structured systems of cataloging or indexing of information, such as MARC (Machine Readable Cataloging, the standard method used by libraries since the 1960s) and Dublin Core (a set of terms standardized for Web resources and developed by libraries in the mid-1990s) are problematic when applied to the more rapid and evolving genre of fan publications (Bartel 2004). The level of specificity and the inherent desire within the community for individuality and author control, along with the large volume of work being created and disseminated, make it nearly impossible for any outside authority to be imposed on the metadata itself (Kem 2005). Recommendation and bookmarking sites can offer some degree of community oversight, but this is informal and not widely adopted in all fandoms.

The majority of scholarly articles written about fan fiction have focused on the content involved, the legality of the genre, or the reasons for authorship and consumption (Thomas 2011). Little attention has been paid to how these works are organized and made locatable, nor the larger implications to fandom these organizational structures may pose. Some authors have tried to draw parallels among fan fiction creation, digital literacy skills, and the needs of 21st-century learners (Black 2009, Alvermann, Hutchins, and McDevitt 2012), while others have argued for the use of fan fiction for classroom writing (Jwa 2012, Roozen 2009, Chandler-Olcott and Mahar 2003). Yet the focus has remained on the act of creation rather than the forms in which the work is shared and an audience found. Focusing on only the initial creative act undermines the potential of fan fiction to serve as both a classroom model and a source of academic study in a much broader context.

Discussions of fan fiction folksonomies have potential as a source for larger lessons on digital literacy and information literacy, particularly as a model for the use of tagging and Web 2.0 technologies. Yet the predominant discussions within library and education literature are mired in copyright and author creativity rather than the more technical aspects of fan fiction dissemination and creation. Matters of copyright and legality are important elements of any information literacy instruction, but while attention is focused on these issues, an opportunity to discuss the broader skills related to Web navigation and information dissemination is missed. As Watson states, "understanding how to productively filter and interpret data is quickly becoming essential for anyone hoping to survive in the rapidly changing media industry" (Watson 2010). Fan fiction organization and tagging can serve as a catalyst for such discussions. This reluctance to consider fan fiction and fan communities as worthy of such instructional use is symptomatic of larger problems of legitimacy for the genre.
Fan fiction folksonomies are not only relevant from an educational perspective, but they also play a role in the long-term preservation of the works themselves. Lothian discusses the need for archives to preserve and protect fan fiction and fan conversation, describing the creation of the Archive of Our Own (AO3) (http://archiveofourown.org) as one possible method to aid in the retention of fan works (2011). Others such as Jessica Kem and Versaphile recount the history and changing nature of fan fiction archives and Web sites. Kem makes a strong case for the inclusion of librarians within fan efforts at preservation, and Versaphile argues for increased author responsibility and proactive planning for retention of works (Kem 2005; Versaphile 2011). While Kem touches on the possibility of librarian involvement in a theoretical catalog or guide to fan fiction, she does not focus on the existing fan efforts to accomplish that goal. In fact, her research indicates that a significant portion of the fan community would be resistant to outside attempts by any authority, such as librarians, to impose structure (Kem 2005). With modern Web 2.0 technology, fan archivists and authors now have tools at their disposal that had yet to be developed in 2005. Is outside interference even necessary? Furthermore, what of librarians and Web developers who are themselves fans and therefore members of the community? Can their expertise be leveraged to maximize current indexing and tagging technology to make fan works more discoverable?

To answer that question, this article explores current fan fiction descriptive metadata models in use by various Web sites and places them into three broad categories: free tagging; controlled vocabulary; and hybrid folksonomy. In order to better understand how these models have been derived, it is necessary to look to the development of fan fiction, the changing dissemination methods that have been used within the community, and how metadata has been utilized by various sites.

2. History and development of fan fiction metadata usage

In the early days of print zines, information about a particular work was, by necessity, included in the work itself. Short forms of relaying information developed to allow authors to more quickly inform readers about the nature of the content. This early fan vocabulary has become the basis of a majority of current fan fiction folksonomy. Terms such as slash (stories with a homosexual romantic pairing—explicit or otherwise) and PWP (plot, what plot? or porn without plot) began in this era and have carried over into modern electronic archives and metadata usage (Bury 2005). In fact, a majority of fan practices related to indexing and organization are derived from earlier print-based conventions. This can be seen in the formatting of author notes, titles, and disclaimers, as well as basic fan fiction vocabulary. This print holdover is not isolated to fandom but can also be seen in other indexing or cataloging usage, such as MARC and the Anglo-American Cataloguing Rules (AACR2).
[2.2] During the first wave of transition from print to electronic distribution, early attempts at metadata were often limited by the software used. Discussion groups on platforms such as Usenet and CompuServe were often located based on fandom or actor (Bury 2005), but stories themselves were typically posted with little to no extra searchable data. If the list was e-mail- or message-based and without archival features, stories were sent out without any provision for long-term retention. Most Usenet groups, for example, retained messages for only a few weeks, and relied primarily on message headers to convey the subject. An early example of an online folksonomy can be seen in these headers, as users developed codes and conventions to convey this information succinctly and consistently (Baym 2000).

[2.3] With the advent and proliferation of keyword searching, it became easier for readers to navigate these services, but attempts to apply standardization or consistency were continually hampered by changing platforms and frequent loss of content as Web sites folded or merged with one another (Hellekson and Busse 2006; Kem 2005; Versaphile 2011). For most of today's younger fan fiction readers and authors, the journey began not with print zines, story circuits, or Usenet, but with either a fan fiction archive or one of the smaller mailing lists or group pages. Many of these communities have disappeared as sites have closed or lost popularity, such as GeoCities and MySpace, but examples can still be found within Yahoo Groups (http://groups.yahoo.com) and many of LiveJournal's (http://www.livejournal.com) community pages.

[2.4] The advantage to the mailing list or group page was ease of use and the ability to quickly connect with other fans who shared particular interests. These sites benefited from word of mouth among fans, but were not solely dependent on it for growth, as story circuits and print zines often were. These sites were typically not created for fan fiction specifically, and in some cases elaborate workarounds were needed to meet the needs of the fan community. The tendency for fans to become fragmented into small groups based on specific romantic pairings within a fandom was an inherent problem, and metadata usage and application varied greatly between platforms and communities (Hellekson and Busse 2006; Kem 2005). While these are often considered older forms of fan fiction dissemination, they remain popular to this day. Examples of active groups are the Usenet group alt.startrek.creative, Holmesslash on Yahoo, the Artie/Claudia page on LiveJournal (http://artie-claudia.livejournal.com/), and the Spiced Peaches e-zine (http://spockmccoyote.tripod.com).

[2.5] Many of these mailing lists now serve primarily as dissemination formats rather than fiction archives, but there are exceptions. For the purposes of this paper, LiveJournal is being included as an archive, even though its primary function is not
archival, while the more e-mail-based mailing lists such as Yahoo Groups have been excluded. This distinction is somewhat subjective, but LiveJournal's recent changes have created new metadata opportunities worth discussing, whereas the more e-mail-based distribution methods are not as easily configured for later retrieval. More recent dissemination methods such as Twitter and Tumblr have not been included because of the relatively short length of time they have been in use, and the large number of papers already available that discuss hashtags and image-based tagging, respectively.

[2.6] It is with the creation of the larger multigenre archives, such as FanFiction.net and AO3, that fan fiction folksonomies and metadata usage take on more recognizable forms, even while they lose the specificity available to smaller fandom- or pairing-specific repositories. These sites range greatly in the level of author and reader control in descriptive metadata creation, as well as searchability. Fan communities on LiveJournal operate with a range of moderated and unmoderated, or free tagging, while FanFiction.net is dependent on controlled vocabulary. Controlled vocabulary, while author-selected, does not allow individuals to create new tags, instead relying on the predetermined vocabulary provided by the site designers and allowing authors to pick from only this limited selection. In multigenre archives, controlled vocabulary is rarely flexible enough to allow for fandom-specific folksonomies. Let us begin by looking at the free-tagging model in more depth before moving on to the controlled vocabulary and hybrid models.

3. Models of metadata creation and usage

[3.1] The simplest form of descriptive metadata in fan fiction is that of free tagging. Examples can be seen on any of the numerous LiveJournal communities or author pages dedicated to fan fiction. LiveJournal began in 1998; it was not originally intended to house fan fiction, but was quickly adopted by many authors because of its ease of use and easy personalization (Versaphile 2011). One of the major drawbacks to the site is the difficulty in searching. Since descriptive metadata within LiveJournal is dependent on tagging, it is up to the author and readers to correctly interpret what others would see as the relevant terms that apply to the work. What the author might see as the main focus and intention may not match what the reader derives from it (Weinberger 2005). As with all tagging, there is also the risk of syntactic variation and uncertainty. A further complication is the age of the site and the diversity of user skills and experience with tagging. Many fan fiction LiveJournal communities predate the site's adoption of free tagging, and may have inconsistent use of tags over time.

[3.2] One approach that LiveJournal users have taken to combat this problem is to post guidelines for the formatting and structure of fan fiction entries as well as tags. These generally rely on the author or poster for compliance, although some
communities may employ a moderator to ensure adherence. The typical entry consists of the following, but may vary significantly: Title, Author's Note, Rating, Warnings, and Summary. This level of descriptive data is taken directly from earlier print zine formatting, and conveys the very minimal required to attract a reader. Often romantic pairings and character lists are included as well (figure 1). Some communities have created tagging guidelines and retroactively tagged posts for consistency. The Artie and Claudia tags page from Warehouse 13 is a prime example (http://artie-claudia.livejournal.com/26624.html). Retroactive tagging can assist with the conversion of older entries to the new tagging format, but requires a significant amount of volunteer effort, as does moderation.

Figure 1. Screen capture of LiveJournal fan fiction post by Piscaria. [View larger image.]

[3.3] The major downside to sites like LiveJournal is the lack of advanced search capabilities. The primary method of searching is by author, with keyword searching being hampered by the private status of most journals and the unreliability of free tagging. Only publicly accessible journals are crawled by Web search engines, further complicating findability (Kem 2005; Versaphile 2011).

[3.4] According to van Dijck's 2009 study, 85 percent of individuals on user-generated content sites are either "passive spectators" or "inactives," with only 13 percent creating content or tags. With so few people contributing, and the majority only viewing works, the benefits to free tagging are greatly reduced. This tension between ease of posting and difficulty in discoverability causes many users to find this model frustrating (Kem 2005; Versaphile 2011). With most users not contributing at all to tagging, or doing so poorly or with little understanding of the science behind keyword searching, sites that are dependent solely on the fans for tagging prove difficult and time-consuming to navigate.

[3.5] The other extreme is found on sites like FanFiction.net, founded in 1998, a year before LiveJournal. FanFiction.net was always intended to act as a fan fiction archive, and was designed with a clear hierarchical structure and a controlled vocabulary for all metadata. The benefit to this model is the structured browsing and searching capability offered, and the advanced filtering options available. The disadvantage to the model is the difficulty in locating stories that fall outside the broad vocabulary given. For example, if an author is working with a pairing or fandom that does not
have a large following, there may not be controlled vocabulary available. This causes such works to be locatable only by keyword searching in the text, summary, and title, which can render them unlocatable by the average user—especially if the pairing or fandom contains names that are not unique to it, such as Eliza and Henry from *My Fair Lady* (figure 2). While this is also a problem on LiveJournal, FanFiction.net's extensive listings on other more popular fandoms makes the omission of controlled vocabulary on smaller genres more glaring. To add to the complication, the site restricts the number of controlled terms that can be applied to a story—allowing only four characters to be listed and up to two romantic pairings. At this time, there is no option for descriptive tagging or for readers to tag stories after the author posts.

![Figure 2. Author submission form on FanFiction.net. [View larger image.]](image)

[3.6] Filtering options on FanFiction.net were expanded in 2012 to allow for sorting based on the number of "favorites" and "reviews" a work has received (figure 3). These options allow readers to find popular works faster. With the rapidly expanding number of users and works at sites like FanFiction.net, quality is a frequent concern (Kem 2005). While popularity is not synonymous with quality, these search features allow users to quickly locate works that have attracted significant previous attention. This functionality has existed on other archival sites for some time, but is not universally available. A shortcoming to sorting via reviews or comments is relatable to the controversial nature of citation analysis in academia—a work may garner extensive conversation due, in some cases, not to its quality but rather to a distinct lack of it. Authors with long history in a fandom may also attract their own fans, who may potentially comment or favor a work based on the popularity of the writer rather than the quality of the work itself.
Recommendation and bookmarking sites such as Delicious (https://delicious.com/) and Pinboard (https://pinboard.in) offer other options for fans to manage and discover quality fan fiction works. These sites are also dependent on various forms of tagging, but offer fans the ability to mark works from multiple sites and repositories and manage personal collections with more autonomy. Many fan communities and mailing lists have active recommendation pages, sites, or blogs devoted to making quality works more discoverable. These sites are hampered by the same vocabulary issues as LiveJournal, and are also dependent on users to tag appropriately. Long-term stability of these lists is also a concern. Managing and updating links as Web addresses change and works are removed or migrated to new repositories is time consuming and often overlooked. Several of the larger fan fiction archives have created fan community page options to assist in the discovery of desired fan fiction works. See, for example, FanFiction.net's Communities site (https://www.fanfiction.net/communities).

Examples do exist of moderated archives that attempt to provide a basic level of quality, and employ complex controlled vocabulary. A prime example is the Doctor Who archive, A Teaspoon and An Open Mind (http://www.whofic.com/). Archive moderators validate stories and remove works that do not meet a minimum standard. The Web site also employs robust metadata specific to the fandom and advanced search options (figure 4). Fandom-specific archives such as Teaspoon allow for creation of more specific folksonomies than would be practical with larger multigenre archives, and still benefit from the advanced search features that controlled vocabulary makes possible.
Another site with fandom-specific controlled vocabulary is Ink Stained Fingers, a Harry Potter slash archive (http://inkstain.inkquill.net). This site has an extensive list of filters based on pairing and sexual situation, many unique to slash fiction (figure 5). These filters allow the user to select desired story elements and filter out unwanted situations. Metadata of this detail is somewhat unusual in fandom, and could have negative ramifications in regard to censorship or author persecution when used with stories involving marginalized or subcultural themes. The level of specificity available gives the user the ability to define an incredibly specific search, however, and is an excellent example of how controlled vocabulary can be adapted to a very specific folksonomy.

**Figure 4.** A Teaspoon and An Open Mind advanced search screen. [View larger image.]

**Figure 5.** Ink Stained Fingers warning filters. [View larger image.]
The third metadata model is a blend of the free tagging and controlled vocabulary methods into a moderated form of tagging. The best example of this is AO3's hybrid folksonomy and tag wrangling. This mode of operation allows authors to create tags using any terminology they consider applicable; tag wranglers work in the background to link synonyms and alternative wordings, as described in the AO3 FAQ on tags (http://archiveofourown.org/archive_faqs/10). This behind-the-scenes work allows for a form of classification and standardization not found with free tagging, but gives authors more control and creative license than a purely controlled vocabulary structure. While this model seems to provide the best of both competing formats, it does require an extensive, dedicated, and knowledgeable volunteer base to accomplish. The inclusion of Web developers and librarians in the creation of AO3 is evident in the construction and policies surrounding tag wrangling on the site. For smaller and more specific archives that already struggle to maintain moderators, it may be difficult or impossible to locate the necessary skilled volunteers (figure 6).

**Figure 6.** AO3 story submission tag form. [View larger image.]

AO3 has filtering capabilities similar to FanFiction.net, and allows for sorting based on kudos and comments, comparable to FanFiction.net's favorites and reviews, respectively. Because of the variation in tags, AO3's filtering options are not as reliable as those derived from controlled vocabulary systems, and are subject to change as tags are wrangled in the background and new terms enter the folksonomy. For most users, this is "good enough." As Weinberger says, "The tagging movement says, in effect, that we're not going to wait for the experts to deliver a taxonomy from on high. We're just going to build one ourselves. It'll be messy and inelegant and inefficient, but it will be Good Enough. And, most important, it will be ours, reflect our needs and our ways of thinking" (Weinberger 2005, 4). This hybrid form of metadata application offers a fair mix of the better features of the other models without completely compromising search and filtering capabilities.

The inclusion of computer and information professionals in platform development for fan sites such as AO3 is transforming how works are organized, maintained, and searched. Efforts to preserve works, while maintaining author control and freedom, are changing how metadata is applied and conceptualized. Approaches such as FanFiction.net's and LiveJournal's restrict both author and reader, although in differing ways. FanFiction.net has sacrificed authors' ability to describe their works as
they wish, in favor of making the reader's experience more streamlined. LiveJournal has complicated the search for works in favor of allowing the creator complete freedom. The hybrid application provides a vehicle for offering both groups some standardization without compromising creativity or genre-specific folksonomy. Sites such as AO3 have been developed by fans, with modern Web principles at heart and an increasingly skilled set of volunteers to manage content. Sites such as LiveJournal, which were developed for entirely nonfandom-related purposes and launched prior to Web 2.0, do not have this advantage.

4. Criticisms of metadata usage

[4.1] Even though Henry Jenkins's groundbreaking publication *Textual Poachers* is now past its 20th anniversary, fan fiction has managed to remain mostly underground. Little attention has been given from traditional academic or publishing audiences, and for most scholars outside fandom, fan fiction is new to them. As increased scrutiny is drawn to the genre, with the popularity of works like *Fifty Shades of Grey* (2011), monetization efforts like Amazon Worlds, and publishers like Big Bang Press recruiting authors from fan fiction ranks, works that previously survived based on their obscurity and existence on the very fringes of fandom—catering to a small and specific audience—may be dragged into the light. Many of these works could be considered deviant, or touch on social or political themes that could cause the authors negative social, economic, or legal consequences if made available to a wider audience.

[4.2] Given these concerns, some fans have indicated a reluctance to increase the findability and searchability of such fan fiction. Reasons given include a distaste for the mainstreaming of the genre, as well as concern over a possible increase in censorship, and overall potential for authors of certain marginalized themes and fandoms to be harassed or face legal charges. This is particularly of concern with stories rated NC-17 or above, especially if they involve topics such as nonconsensual sex, incest, slash, or underage characters in sexual situations. Some authors wish to maintain their anonymity, and feel that if their work were subject to greater exposure they would risk damage to their professional or personal reputation if outed as fan fiction authors (Kem 2005). Some works may be considered subversive to governments that restrict Internet activity, and could open their authors and readers to undesired scrutiny should they be easily located by individuals outside the fan community.

[4.3] In 2002, FanFiction.net was able to use its controlled metadata to remove stories from its archive that authors had marked as NC-17. The change in policy, from allowing stories of any rating to imposing a top limit of M (Mature), is still the subject of considerable fan discourse. Many sites such as FanFiction.net maintain policies that restrict the type of publication they allow, arguing that it is to protect younger readers
from explicit material or to comply with requests from original creators. Others maintain that these policies are tantamount to censorship. Online petitions like this one at Change.org (http://www.change.org/petitions/stop-censorship-of-fanfiction-net-authors) and groups such as the Stop FanFiction Censorship on Facebook (https://www.facebook.com/StopFanFictionCensorship) have formed to protest these policies.

5. Conclusion

[5.1] These three models of descriptive metadata usage—free tagging, controlled vocabulary, and hybrid folksonomy—represent a diversity of thought within the fan fiction community with regard to information organization and searchability, and mirror larger arguments taking place within the computer and library science fields. The question of controlled vocabulary versus free tagging is debated extensively within the library and information fields, with the tension between giving users what they want and what they need to make items findable taking on increased significance. As Kem states, "the fan fiction community is conflicted between a need for better accessibility and a need for community sovereignty" (2005, 1).

[5.2] Despite such concerns, tagging and metadata technologies are improving. Search and filter capabilities of sites like FanFiction.net and AO3 are making fan fiction more easily located, even as the amount of it increases exponentially. The various methods these sites employ do have significant differences. However, the main goals remain the same. Fan readers want to be able to locate stories with specific criteria quickly and efficiently. They also desire stories to have some measure of popularity, and to know in advance if other readers have enjoyed the work or the author. These needs often run in direct conflict with the desire for fans to remain independent and not subject to authoritative control over their works, and may open up certain subgenres to public and possibly legal condemnation. How then can these two needs be moderated?

[5.3] As fewer print and e-mail zines are produced, and more small subject or relationship-specific Web repositories lose popularity, there will be increased pressure for outlying authors to shift to the concentrated reader base of multifandom archival platforms. The existence of these sites emerges from the popularity and normalization of the genre, and their use inevitably leads to greater conformity to the metadata schemes their creators choose to enact. Thus, further research on the preferences of different user groups and the benefits of refining their practices may help current and future archives to create improved retrieval methods for the next generation of fan fiction creators and readers—and, by extension, the next generation of readers and creators in our cultures.
6. Works cited


Abstract—Just as Jews interpret Torah through midrash (exegetical stories that explore and explain the text), fans interpret contemporary source texts through fan fiction, which functions just as midrash does to sustain community and enable members of that community to join the communal conversation.

Keywords—Fan community; Fan fiction; Judaism; Midrash; Religion; Torah


[1] Because I am a Jew, the Torah (note 1) is part of my inheritance, and along with that inheritance comes the obligation to read and to interpret. Reading and interpreting are also things I do professionally as a rabbi, though they're open to, and arguably the responsibility of, every adult Jew.

[2] One of the ways that Jews interpret Torah is through midrash, exegetical stories that seek to explore and explain idiosyncrasies in our holy texts (note 2). The word *midrash* comes from the Hebrew *lidrosh*, to interpret or explain.

[3] Midrashim (the Hebrew plural of *midrash*; in English, "midrash" can be either singular or plural) work in a variety of ways. They may fill lacunae in the Torah text, resolve contradictions in the text, or articulate character motivations and emotions that aren't explicit in the text. Sometimes they make a meta-point, an argument about where we should focus our attention, how we should live, or how we should read the text at hand.

[4] An example of a midrash that resolves contradictions arises out of the two different creation stories in Genesis. In one, Torah tells us that "male and female created He them," and in the other we read about woman's creation from the man's rib. So which was it: did God create male and female together, or did God create man and then woman? The Torah text is unclear, but midrash offers a variety of explanations.
[5] Bereshit Rabbah, a classical compilation of midrash on Genesis written down in the fifth century CE but probably containing material from a few centuries earlier as well, offers one explanation: God initially created a bigendered being, male and female glued together at the back, and then sawed them apart. And a midrash in the anonymous medieval collection called the Alphabet of Ben Sirah says that God created two beings out of earth, a man and a woman; but the woman, known as Lilith, refused to "lie below" the man, citing their simultaneous creation as evidence of their equality. When the man wouldn't listen to reason, she uttered the ineffable Name of God and flew away.

[6] Another fertile ground for midrash, especially midrash focusing on character motivations and emotions, is the story we call "the binding of Isaac," in which God commands Abraham to sacrifice his son atop Mount Moriah. One classical midrash in the Bereshit Rabbah draws on Hebrew wordplay to imagine God saying, "I never considered telling Abraham to slaughter Isaac!" Another posits Isaac arguing with Ishmael (Abraham's first son, born to the concubine Hagar) about which one of them is more beloved and which is more willing to sacrifice himself for God. Still another midrash, which appears in both the eighth-century CE Midrash Pirkei De-Rabbi Eliezer and the ninth-century Midrash Tanhuma, suggests that ha-satan, "the Adversary," tells Isaac's mother Sarah what's happening on the mountaintop, and when she hears the news, she dies of a broken heart—which is why the next thing we read, in the Torah, is the death of Sarah.

[7] These stories reframe and expand the original text in unexpected ways. And in classical Jewish tradition, midrash are considered to be Oral Torah (note 3). In retelling or reframing the original Bible text, they become part of the continuing unfolding of divine revelation.

[8] The ongoing process of reading Torah, interpreting Torah through storytelling, reading others' stories and responding to them, and so on, is one of the primary ways in which Jewish community is constituted. This interplay is at Judaism's heart.

[9] And the midrashic tradition remains alive today. Many contemporary midrashists are women, giving voice to female characters in Torah and showing how Torah stories might have felt from a woman's point of view. Modern midrashists may have different perspectives and different concerns than did our classical forebears, but we're engaged in the same sacred process.

[10] Much as Jews constitute community through our interpretive storytelling about Torah, fans constitute community through our interpretive storytelling about pop-culture and literary source texts. Fanworks in all media can offer interpretive readings
of source texts, though I'm focusing here on fan fiction because, like midrash, it's a written form.

[11] Fan stories, like midrash, fill in lacunae in our source texts: for example, *Doctor Who* stories that ask, what other adventures might the Eleventh Doctor have had with River Song when they were courting? Fan stories, like midrash, articulate motivations and emotions that aren't explicit in the text: for example, *LOST* stories that explore what Ben Linus might have been thinking and feeling when he turned the underground donkey wheel to move the island.

[12] Fan stories, like midrash, resolve contradictions in the text. These may be small in scale (in *Buffy The Vampire Slayer*, for example, who was Spike's sire, Angel or Drusilla? Can the First Evil take corporeal form, or not?) or more substantial (was Buffy's relationship with Spike in-character?—a question that has launched at least a thousand stories).

[13] Fan stories, like midrash, give voice to characters who aren't front and center in narratives as we've received them. For example, we all know how Harry Potter experienced his years at Hogwarts, but how did those years feel to Hermione Granger? *Harry Potter* fan stories answer that question and more. And fan stories, like midrash, make meta-points about their source texts and about our community's readings of those texts: for example, though *Hawaii 5-0*’s televised narrative privileges its white male characters, fan stories that explicitly focus on Chin Ho Kelly and Kono Kalakaua implicitly critique that focus both on the part of the show's creators and on the part of its fandom.

[14] Just as Jewish communities are constituted and maintained by ongoing engagement with source texts, so are fan communities. In the print zine era, in the online mailing list era, in the journals and archives era, in the Tumblr and Twitter era, fans have created community through writing and publishing stories, and through responding to them via letters of comment, e-mails, comments, kudos, reblogging—and also through writing more stories that are sparked by or that respond to the stories that came before.

[15] Fans are midrashists who explore and explicate texts—usually non-Biblical texts, though there is a subcategory of fan fiction that works with Biblical material. In the 2013 Yuletide story exchange, for example, one story spun the brief story of Michal, first wife of King David, into a novella. The year before that, a piece of fan fiction recast the tale of Noah's Ark as a space opera. That said, the vast majority of fanworks work with non-Biblical source texts. But they remain midrashic in nature and process.
Thinking of fan fiction as midrash is a useful alternative to Henry Jenkins's image of fan writers as textual poachers, an analogy he adopted from Michel de Certeau (Jenkins 1992, 24). Whereas Jenkins's analogy positions fans as serfs poaching game from the lord's estate in order to make meaning and to reclaim ownership of the storytelling that fans see as their birthright, the midrash analogy positions fans as respected interpreters, analogous both to the classical rabbis who for centuries interpreted scripture and to the modern midrashists who continue that work today.

Interpreting Torah is both the obligation and the birthright of every Jew. The Torah has 70 faces, say the sages of Jewish tradition; in the words of the compilation Pirkei Avot (c. 220 CE), "turn it and turn it, for everything is in it" (5:26). By the same token, interpreting the stories that shape modern culture—be they Shakespeare or Elementary—is both the obligation and the birthright of every active reader and viewer. Not only do fanworks not impinge negatively on the source texts of our time, they add value and bring meaning to those source texts. And as midrash, both classical and contemporary, can teach us about the perspectives and values of the time in which they were written, fanworks can teach us and later generations of fans about how we go about the process of making meaning today.

Torah is never read in a vacuum. Engaged Jews always read it through the lenses of commentary and interpretation. And engaged fans read our literary and pop-culture source texts through the lenses of fannish conversation, some of which takes the form of storytelling. Through our midrash, we make meaning.

Notes

1. "Torah" can mean the Five Books of Moses, Genesis through Deuteronomy; it can mean the broad scope of Jewish scripture, also called TaNaKh; and it can mean either the whole body of Jewish wisdom or a Jewish teaching that one person is sharing, as in "Today I'm going to give over some Torah I received from my teacher."

2. I'm talking here about Midrash Aggedah, narrative midrash. A second category of midrash also exists that seeks to explicate Jewish law; these are called Midrash Halakha, but are not germane here.

3. The most traditional understanding holds that when God gave Torah to Moses at Sinai, the written word was paired with the Oral Torah, the debates and dialogues of Talmudic rabbis many centuries hence. Midrash is part of Oral Torah.

Work cited
Abstract—Recent narrative theories on story worlds, or the worlds evoked by narratives, call attention to the process of fan reading and the role which the canon plays in that process. This paper posits that such theories can help us understand literary techniques that make a difference on the level of the reading experience that is implied by fan fiction texts. This is illustrated with a close reading of Naguabo’s "The Mother of All Marriage Proposals," a Jane Austen fic.

Keywords—Jane Austen; Narrative; Story world


1. Introduction

In recent years, several scholars have argued that it is worthwhile to examine fan fiction through the lens of literary studies (Pugh 2005; Kaplan 2006; Stasi 2006; Thomas 2011). This lens brings research topics into focus that are not prioritized by other approaches, such as those inspired by cultural studies, sociology, psychology, law, or media studies. Literary studies of fan fiction have called attention to such issues as the narrative form of fan fiction, the interpretation of individual fics, and their aesthetic value. I will home in on a topic that is thrown into relief by cognitive narrative theories on story worlds, or the worlds evoked by narratives. These postclassical narrative theories highlight the process of fan reading, and draw attention to the fact that fan readers use the fan fiction text to build up a mental image of a world. Using Catherine Emmott's concept of "contextual frame" as a point of departure, I will develop a heuristic tool that makes it easier to discuss the process of fan reading in a literary analysis. This is important, because some of the literary techniques used in fan fiction texts make a difference on the level of the reading experience that is implied by the text. As I will demonstrate, this is particularly relevant in the case of literary fandoms, where quotes from the source text can be used in creative ways. I will illustrate this with Naguabo's "The Mother of All Marriage Proposals" (2013), a short fic based on Jane Austen's Pride and Prejudice.
2. From canon formation to fan reading

[2.1] In previous studies, the storytelling practices of fans have typically been discussed with the concept of canon. In The Democratic Genre (2005), for instance, Sheenagh Pugh remarks that fan writers can use a lot of shorthand, allusion, and irony because their audience is familiar with "the canon" (32). This means that fan fiction texts have a very specific implied reader. This term is used in narratology to refer to "the image of the recipient that the author had while writing or, more accurately, the author's image of the recipient that is fixed and objectified in the text by specific indexical signs" (Smid 2013, 1; my emphasis). The shorthand, allusion, and irony that Pugh mentions are such indexical textual features, which indicate that the implied fan reader is a reader who is able to bring the canon to bear on the fan fiction text. "Transfictional" texts, or texts that take the world of an antecedent text as a point of departure, assume that the reader has a thorough and detailed knowledge of the text on which they are based (Ryan 2008, 391). This makes them different from texts that simply allude to other texts. Jane Austen's Northanger Abbey (1818), for instance, is tailored to a reader who is familiar with the Gothic novel but this reader does not need to know, say, Ann Radcliffe's The Mysteries of Udolpho (1794) to appreciate that Austen's novel is a parody of the genre. The specific relation between the fan fiction text and the canon is not usually discussed in depth. Indeed, scholarly discussions of the concept of canon tend to focus on fannish canon formation, the process by which fan communities select source texts and invest them with authority (Jenkins 1992, 331, 94–8; Busse and Hellekson 2006, 7; Derecho 2006, 65–7). This is worth mentioning, because several discussions of Jane Austen fan fiction fit into this framework. In "Canons and Fanons: Literary Fanfiction Online" (2007), for instance, Bronwen Thomas supports her discussion of canon formation with a study of the Republic of Pemberley, an online community that is devoted to all things Austen. Thomas notes that, while the Republic's critical apparatus resembles that of most other fan fiction sites, its contributor guidelines are remarkably protective of Austen's "legacy" (cf. Pugh 2005, 37–9). Considering this "respect for the source texts and their author," and the "almost Leavisite tone" of the guidelines in question, Thomas concludes that the notion of literary canon, "not just as some kind of badge of quality, but also as guarantor of moral improvement and education," still holds sway in the Austen fandom. This tension between the fannish canonization and literary canonization of Jane Austen and her work has also been discussed by other scholars (Van Steenhuysen 2011; Xu 2011).

[2.2] I want to characterize the reader or the reading experience that is implied by fan fiction texts with the help of what David Herman calls postclassical narrative theories (2009, 30). The classical approach to narratology, which was taken by the
early Roland Barthes, A.J. Greimas, and other scholars, is heavily indebted to the work of linguist Ferdinand de Saussure. De Saussure famously argued that linguists should not study the utterances that speakers create to express unique ideas (parole), but language (langue) ([1916] 1959, 9, 14–5). By this, he means the system of constituents and combination rules that is accepted by a community of speakers, and cannot be created, used, or modified without the cooperation of other members ([1916] 1959, 14–5). Classical narratologists typically posit that narratives are underpinned by an analogous system (Herman 2009, 28). Postclassical narratologists, in contrast, no longer use de Saussure's structuralist linguistics as a pilot science. They enrich the insights of classical narratology with ideas from other disciplines, such as the cognitive sciences, and bring new kinds of stories and media under scrutiny (30–2).

[2.3] Among other things, this has resulted in a reexamination of the process of narrative comprehension. Over the past few decades, scholars like Umberto Eco, David Herman, and Marco Caracciolo have begun to characterize this process with concepts from the cognitive sciences, such as "frame," "script," "mental model" and several others. The heuristic tool I will use, and which I will call the narrative frame for easy reference, is based on Catherine Emmott's concept of contextual frame. Emmott has hypothesized that readers construct mental representations of fictional situations when they work to comprehend stretches of narrative text (1998, 186). These contextual frames help readers to remember which characters are present in the immediate environment, where the action is located, and when the action is taking place (Emmott 2004, 103). This information, which is either provided by the text or inferred from it, is needed to understand subsequent sentences (1998, 186; 2004, 121). When readers of *Pride and Prejudice* begin to read the passage that recounts Mr. Darcy's first proposal, for instance, their contextual frame will, at the very least, include a rough idea of Mr. Darcy and Elizabeth Bennet, of the room they are in, and of the situation's place in the time line of the story. For one thing, this contextual frame helps them to make sense of the pronouns in the opening lines of Mr. Darcy's proposal:

[2.4] After a silence of several minutes he came towards her in an agitated manner, and thus began,

[2.5] "In vain have I struggled. It will not do. My feelings will not be repressed. You must allow me to tell you how ardently I admire and love you." (Austen [1813] 2003, 185)

[2.6] My heuristic tool, which I call the narrative frame, is a contextual frame that is constructed to make sense of a fan fiction text. Unlike regular contextual frames, however, a narrative frame is also partly based on the canon, or qualified by it. I
illustrate this with an excerpt from Wendi's "A Lesson Hard Learned" (2011). One of the opening lines of this fic reads:

[2.7] The gentleman was, as usual, lost in imagining a pair of fine eyes and the conversation that perhaps would have taken place if the owner of those eyes had been present to share his meal with him.

[2.8] The phrase "a pair of fine eyes" is lifted from Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*, where Mr. Darcy meditates "on the very great pleasure which a pair of fine eyes in the face of a pretty woman can bestow" (Austen [1813] 2003, 27). The pretty woman in question is Elizabeth Bennet. Because this phrase is used in a *Pride and Prejudice* fic, readers are invited to draw parallels between the context that is described here and the context in which "a pair of fine eyes" occurs in Austen's novel. The text invites readers, in other words, to equate the "gentleman" with Mr. Darcy and the object of his thoughts with Elizabeth Bennet. This gives the reader's contextual frame a wider meaning. As I will demonstrate in a moment, the meaning that is added may also be a qualification of the contextual frame, rather than an expansion.

[2.9] I believe the narrative frame concept helps to better understand the implied reader of fan fiction texts. I am not using the concept to make claims about individual readers. Without a proper survey, it is impossible to say, for example, whether every reader recognizes Wendi's quote, just as it is impossible to say how a specific reader envisions Elizabeth's eyes. I am interested in the reading that is fixed and objectified in the text. More specifically, I believe that some literary techniques work on the level of this implied reading experience. This is particularly striking in the case of literary fandoms, where words from the source text can be used to great effect.

3. Case study: Naguabo's "The Mother of All Marriage Proposals"

[3.1] I illustrate this with Naguabo's "The Mother of All Marriage Proposals" (2013). This short fic uses quotes from Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* to set up a contrast between what happens in the fic and what happens in canon, during Mr. Darcy's first proposal. This contrast adds a dimension to what is explicitly stated in the fan fiction text. "The Mother of All Marriage Proposals" engages with an important gap in the story world of Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*. In Austen's novel, Elizabeth Bennet declines Mr. Darcy's offer of marriage, accusing him of, among other things, a lack of "gentleman-like" manners and of "arrogance," "conceit," and a "selfish disdain of the feelings of others" ([1813] 2003, 188). In the remainder of the novel, Mr. Darcy is remarkably civil, respectful, and humble (244, 308, 346). In the final chapters, he explains that this is due to Elizabeth's reproofs, which forced him to acknowledge that
he was "selfish," "overbearing," and condescending (346–51, 359–61). This explanation is very brief, however, and much of Mr. Darcy's reasoning remains implicit. "The Mother of All Marriage Proposals" remedies this. Naguabo speculates that Mr. Darcy began to take Elizabeth's reproofs to heart because he had a nightmare shortly after Elizabeth's refusal. In this nightmare, the horrid Caroline Bingley made him an offer of marriage, and he saw Elizabeth kissing Mr. Wickham, his archenemy. When he wakes up and thinks about his dream, he realizes that there is some truth to Elizabeth's reproofs.

[3.2] The first paragraph of this humorous short story seems to recount the opening events of *Pride and Prejudice*: Mr. Darcy is staying at Netherfield, and his friend Mr. Bingley has developed an interest in Jane Bennet. As the story progresses, however, it becomes increasingly difficult to understand the events of the fic within the interpretive frame that is set up by the fic's opening lines. Naguabo's Mr. Darcy is cheered by Mr. Bingley's growing attachment to Jane Bennet, and by his own attachment to Elizabeth. He even notes that the improper behavior of the Bennet family is no worse than that of his own aunt, Lady Catherine de Bourgh. This is hard to reconcile with the attitude of Austen's Mr. Darcy at that point in *Pride and Prejudice*. During his proposal, Mr. Darcy plainly tells Elizabeth that he did everything in his power to separate his friend from Jane Bennet (Austen [1813] 2003, 187), and he says, at one point:

[3.3] "Could you expect me to rejoice in the inferiority of your connections? To congratulate myself on the hope of relations, whose condition in life is so decidedly beneath my own?" (188)

[3.4] "The Mother of All Marriage Proposals" emphasizes this contrast by reassigning the speaker of canonical quotes. In Naguabo's story, Caroline Bingley enters and exclaims:

[3.5] "In vain have I struggled! It will not do! My feelings will not be repressed! You must allow me to tell you how ardently I admire and love you."

[3.6] This quote clearly invites readers to consider Caroline Bingley's proposal against the background of Mr. Darcy's first proposal. This narrative frame adds an important layer of meaning to the story. The dialogue that follows Caroline's exclamation is based on Mr. Darcy's proposal and Elizabeth's rejection in *Pride and Prejudice*, although the exchange also contains snippets from other dialogues. Notably, Mr. Darcy's words tend to echo Elizabeth's words at Hunsford; and even when he uses his own words, he repeats Elizabeth's reproofs. Consider, for example, the following turn:
"Do you expect me to rejoice in the pretentious displays in which you engage in every gathering or your disdain of all your neighbors and acquaintances before they have the opportunity to show themselves worthy of it? And how could I possibly attach myself to a lady who is determined to thwart the happiness of my best friend, her own brother?"

By establishing a link between Mr. Darcy's refusal and Elizabeth's refusal, between the events of the fic and the events in canon, the narrator adds a dimension to what has been stated in the text up to this point. When Mr. Darcy rejects Caroline Bingley, he also rejects the man he is at the time of his proposal, in *Pride and Prejudice*. This is made explicit after Mr. Darcy wakes up in screaming horror:

He struggled to remember the words spoken in his nightmare. They were familiar, in fact, they were markedly similar to parts of his own proposal to Miss Bennet at Hunsford and her rejection of his offer. Could it be that she was correct in her observations, and his character and behavior truly fell short of the manner of a gentleman?

This epiphany only makes sense to readers who know enough about Mr. Darcy's proposal and Elizabeth's rejection to realize that this fic has staged a role-reversal. After all, if you look at the fic alone, Mr. Darcy defends gentleman-like values in his dream. The implied reader, then, is an integral part of the design of this fic.

4. Conclusion

I do not believe it is useful to replace the concept of canon with concepts from postclassical narratology. Yet I do believe these theories invite us to look at the concept from a new vantage point, and that they place different dimensions in the spotlight. It is only by shifting our perspective in this way that we can fully appreciate how the resources of language and form are used in fan fiction texts.

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Abstract—Comic book superheroes tend to be conservative and their opponents progressive. Here I explore the reasons for heroic conservatism, review recent disruptions to the trend, and consider what superhuman politics can tell us about our own transhuman and science fictional conditions.

Keywords—Comics; Conservatism; Politics


1. Conservative heroes

[1.1] Why won't superheroes save us? The people of Gotham or Metropolis should wonder. After nearly a century of superhero comics, humans remain largely unsaved within these fictional worlds. They should be asking their saviors why their worlds are still so dangerous, chaotic, even hellish.

[1.2] Yet superheroes do work for justice. Bond Benton and Daniela Peterka-Benton (2013) make it clear that we cannot discount the good that the heroes do to work toward an end to social ills. Superman's early opposition to domestic violence (1938) and opposition to the Ku Klux Klan (in a 1947 radio play) are evidence that even from the start, superheroes are interested in making the world better. But domestic violence still exists in Superman's world and likely always will. Racism still exists there, as here. Human trafficking continues. One way to read the contradiction is to simply acknowledge that "comic book readers long for utopia-in-progress rather than utopia achieved" (Wolf-Meyer 2003, 510), and that for the sake of drama, story, and sales, real-world problems cannot be ultimately solved in fictional worlds without robbing fictional worlds of all conflict and credibility. But removing considerations of metafiction and questions about our real world's relationship to fictional worlds, the problem remains that in these worlds, heroes do allow serious problems to persist—problems that seem solvable by those with superpowers.
Superheroes are conservative. We must be careful with our terms here. Surely we can roll out many examples of comic book superheroes being liberal. After all, superheroes have supported feminism, civil rights, gay marriage, and many other socially liberal causes. Beginning in the 1970s, we even see "a shift in comic-book content from oblique narrative metaphors for social problems toward direct representations of racism and sexism, urban blight, and political corruption" (Fawaz 2011, 356). Our heroes stand for protecting the weak and giving agency to the powerless. So here I don't mean to say that superheroes exist on one end of a conservative/liberal spectrum, but rather that they live on the conservative end of a progressive spectrum.

Conservatism in this sense means conserving what is good. "Politically, philosophical conservatives are cautious in tampering with forms of political behavior and institutions and they are especially skeptical of whole scale reforms" (Fieser n.d.). For conservatives, a first focus is on the good in a given state as it currently exists. We can almost imagine Edmund Burke (1791) speaking directly to posthuman or superhuman concerns with the following words:

Each contract of each particular state is but a clause in the great primeval contract of eternal society, linking the lower with the higher natures, connecting the visible and invisible world, according to a fixed compact sanctioned by the inviolable oath which holds all physical and all moral natures, each in their appointed place. This law is not subject to the will of those who by an obligation above them, and infinitely superior, are bound to submit their will to that law. (144)

If Burke (1791) is correct in defining society as a natural contract between the past, the present, and those who might live in the future, then it would seem that the disruption of such a contract pits the disruptor against the very laws of an inherited cosmic order. Even superheroes don't want that kind of drama. There is, then, hardly a better way to understand the lack of action of superheroes when it comes to large-scale, permanent, and global changes in their fictional worlds. The X-Men have the power to put down corrupt rulers of human societies, from Western presidents to Eastern sheikhs. Superman could destroy our planet and therefore obviously has the power to save the whales or end human trafficking. Yet dictatorships, slavery, environmental degradation, and civil disenfranchisement persist in the worlds of superheroes. Benton (2013) points out that although Superman fights for the American way, he is fact an (undocumented) alien. Indeed, the fact of his failure to use his godlike powers to make a structurally or permanently better world suggests such a deep and aberrant conservatism that we are forced into the permanent remembrance of his essential alieness.
Consider Grant Morrison's take on the reaction of Marvel heroes to the attacks of September 11, 2001, as an example. We see "the superheroes aimlessly assembled at Ground Zero. They were compelled to acknowledge the event as if it had occurred in their own simulated universe, but they hadn't been there to prevent it, which negated their entire raison d'être. If al-Qaeda could do to Marvel Universe New York what Doctor Doom, Magneto, and Kang the Conqueror had failed to do, surely that meant the Marvel heroes were ineffectual" (2012, 346–47).

Morrison is making a point about the role of heroes in popular culture and about their stories' relevance to the reader's experience of the world: "September 11 was the biggest challenge yet to the relevance of superhero comics" (2012, 347). However, the bigger lesson is perfectly obvious. Superheroes have the powers to stop terror attacks, but they did not stop 9/11. It is almost as if reality had inserted itself into these fictional worlds as a Situationist détournerment, twisting the spectacle of the in-world reality into a commentary on its absurdities. Within their worlds, superheroes had the power to stop the invasion of Iraq by the United States, but instead they allowed it; they had the power to put Saddam Hussein in a prison or end the US sanctions against Iraq in the 1990s that caused hundreds of thousands of Iraqi children to starve to death, but they did not. Imagine what Marvel's Cyclops could do in 10 minutes to a naval blockade, especially with support from a few of his friends. Superheroes could end the genocide in Darfur or starvation in Yemen. They could stop corporate militias from terrorizing anti-oil activists in Nigeria for good. Their versions of the war in Vietnam could have been over in a day. Yet they allow much evil to endure. Why?

Superheroes may be understood as deeply (even pathologically) small-c conservative; although they are gods among men, they do not cause large-scale disruptions to human institutions, even when those institutions are widely considered to be unjust or even evil. Those we call supervillains, however, do.

2. Progressive villains

Supervillains can be understood to be progressive in the sense that they wish to push an agenda that is more likely to fundamentally reorder society—but usually in some formulation that ends with said supervillain at the top. Some of them push progress for good reasons, but good intentions often lead to, as is popularly said, "by any means necessary," and disaster is a usual consequence (which is when the superheroes get cued).

Progressivism, if we are to use it on a spectrum as the other end of a more static conservatism, arises from the observation that big problems exist and that
"something needs to be done" (Nugent 2009, 3). In American political history, examples of various progressivism abound. The progressives of Colorado railed against unfair treatment of workers and the deceit of political party bosses (Laugen 2010). In Jim Crow–era Alabama, progressives focused on "good government, white supremacy, and honest elections" (Hackney 2010, 231). By the 1920s, Coloradan progressives would also be split by the increasing influence of the Ku Klux Klan (Laugen 2010). In Alabama, progressives who wanted to overturn crooked politicians and to help the rural farm economies allied themselves with poor whites afraid of empowered blacks; ironically, poor whites may have lost more voters than did blacks because of progressive poll taxes and literacy tests (Hackney 210; Feldman 2004).

[2.3] However, progressivism was also a force for truly positive social change. The muckraking journalists called attention to slum conditions, dangerous work, disease, and misery of all kinds—with some successes at cleaning things up (Nellie Bly's exposé of a New York asylum comes to mind). Changing ill aspects of society for the common good at the expense of special interests is the main concern of progressivism at its best.

[2.4] Supervillains have, at their most audacious, been concerned with exactly that: upending a miserable world for a higher purpose, a greater good, and shared prosperity. To be fair, progressivism is not usually understood to be as radical a political force as would be represented by scheming supervillains. In our world, progressivism is about progress through reform rather than revolution; the work of the Chicago School sociologists demonstrates a progressive agenda pursued with all the attention to reason and methodology necessary in science (Fitzpatrick 1994). However, its ethos of fostering changes that could be relatively radical, even if arrived at through slow and methodical means, is surely reflected in some of the greatest conflicts between supervillains and their antagonists—only supervillains don't often do either gradual or reform. In the Marvel universe, the High Evolutionary provides a good example in his attempt to alter life on Earth with his Evolution Bomb in "The Evolution War" story arc of 1988. Marvel's online wiki summarizes the story: "The High Evolutionary intends to help humanity reach the next stage of its evolution, regardless of the consequences, and embarks on a series of plans to attain his goal" ("Evolutionary War" 2013). The Evolutionary Bomb would have ended human life on Earth as we know it and would have mutated or evolved all humans into what the High Evolutionary intended as a higher state of being. This would have been very radical progress in a short time, had the Avengers not stopped him. The High Evolutionary saw his intentions as good because he wanted to ready the people of Earth to face the threat of the Beyonders. However, to bring on such sudden and drastic changes without the permission of humans themselves is certainly unethical.
Consider Grant Morrison's treatment of DC's Lex Luthor. In Morrison's *All Star Superman* (2011), Luthor is undeniably a bad guy who wants to rule the world. He summarizes his struggle with Superman very simply: "If it wasn't for Superman, I'd be in charge on this planet!" (124). But there is another element to Luthor's opposition to the superhero, and it's a progressivist one. Luthor is transforming his prison into "a new model of society...a blueprint for utopian living!" and his fellow inmates "can feel the coming of a change, the wings of a new human renaissance" to come with the destruction of Superman (113). Superman is "an alien invader" that Luthor refuses to kneel to (118). This resistance to a powerful invader and the reforming and revolutionary strain in Luthor is also expressed at his final defeat by Superman. "I saw how to save the world!" Luthor says. "I could have made everyone see. I could have saved the world if it wasn't for you!" (288). Superman replies, "You could have saved the world years ago if it mattered to you, Luthor" (288).

Is Superman accusing himself there too? Surely saving the world is supposed to matter to Superman, and Superman is demonstrably (ad infinitum) more powerful, able, and goodwilled than Luthor; indeed, Superman levies this criticism of Luthor after punching him out and winning the day. So Superman saved the world, maybe, from Luthor, just like he had so many times before. Are we really meant to believe that after a good rest, a hot bath, and a stroll in Central Park with Lois (or a leisurely flight with her above it), Superman couldn't, starting as soon as tomorrow, save the world for good?

This pattern repeats. Magneto has noble intentions at times, such as protecting mutants from the bigotry and violence of humans. Alan Moore's Ozymandias (*Watchmen*, 1987) is another progressive villain. The horror he brings down on innocent civilians is meant to bring about a greater peace and to keep the cold war from ever getting hot. Again and again, supervillains threaten to totally upset and upend the world as we know it in their efforts to improve it. Perhaps progressive motives move their hearts but become warped by their twisted minds.

3. We are not like them

Superheroes are exasperating. Why don't they just fix everything? Why won't they save us from our worst and most chronic ills? Why don't they effect permanent changes for the better and remake the world as a utopia? Of many possible answers, we've seen two that are closely related. First, superheroes are conservative. They let the normal, worldly affairs of folks click on just as they always have—even the bad stuff. Second, if they did try to reshape our world into an eternal utopia, they wouldn't be superheroes; they would be supervillains. Remaking the world is the work of the progressive, and sometimes well-meaning, superbaddie.
The genre has matured, and superhero navel-gazing, particularly about civil and geopolitical concerns, should perhaps be expected after Watchmen (1987) and Batman: The Dark Knight Returns (1986) (Dubose 2007). A generation later, an outright concern exists within superhero comics over this very question of making the world a better place, or as Warren Ellis (1999) expresses it in The Authority, creating "a better world." The Authority is explicitly concerned with these pedestrian horrors at first. They want to make a better world—a world without hunger or tyranny—but they get distracted. Sadly, "in the degree of danger that is posed to the Earth, quickly escalating to cosmic proportions, there is clearly no time for earthly political concerns" (Wolf-Meyer 2003, 509). These extremely progressive superheroes who really do want a finer world for all...well, they just don't get around to it. In Ellis's Planetary (1998–2009), it should be noted, there is a reversal of roles and an exception to this rule. The good guys are fighting hard to win world-changing technology from conservative and despotic supervillains. Spoiler warning: the story ends with the progressive heroes finally positioned to create a finer world. The superheroes (if we can call them that) of the Planetary Organization win, and their story is over: they do the right thing by the rest of us, and once the bad guys are dusted, they set to making a better world. Contrast these heroes with traditional superheroes in "continuing corporate stories" who can "never cause lasting political change" or "effect lasting popular change of any sort" (Darius 2013).

As our own world moves steadily into increasing technological wonder, sweeping the diseased and impoverished along into better days, we should reflect on the progressivism and conservatism of our heroes and their enemies. Even as we become our own heroes through the advanced technologies that so inspire transhumanists and technoprogressives, we might wonder which tendency will guide us: to conserve the good (while risking continued evil) or to push for the better (even if our means are imperfect). We have no dramatic tension preventing us from saving ourselves and progressing into finer worlds to come. Neither are we beholden to any Burkean cosmic orders that may prevent us from rewriting ourselves or our experience of the universe for the good of all. Like John Byrne's She-Hulk or Grant Morrison's Animal Man, we may soon find that authorization is a natural effect of the realization of our own powers (Kripal 2011). In so doing, it will be vital to remain vigilant in the examination of our own intentions.

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5. Works cited


Preserving transformative video works

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Abstract—Digital content, particularly audiovisual material, sourced on the Internet is unlikely to remain usable and discoverable into the long term as a result of file corruption, format obsolescence, unreliable hosting sites, and insufficient metadata. In this overview, the risks to the material, the current preservation efforts being undertaken by remix communities, and suggested methods that creators of remix video can use to help their material survive into the next digital generation are presented.

Keywords—Archiving; Fan community; Fan vid


1. Introduction

In the era that we glibly call the digital age, the combination of digital technology and widespread high-speed Internet access has fundamentally changed the way art and society interact. In the words of remix scholar Lawrence Lessig (2008), "Digital technologies have democratized the ability to create and re-create the culture around us." While this shift has led to a surge in transformative content across all mediums of work, an argument can be made that it is especially influential in the area of audiovisual art, which has historically required a high skill level and significant resources in terms of money, time, and equipment to create, manipulate, and distribute. In the past, availability to these resources has often been often restricted to commercial enterprises, resulting in a one-way cultural conversation without the possibility of audience interaction or response. Digitally stored audiovisual material, on the other hand, is infinitely replicable—and therefore infinitely able to be excerpted, edited, and reused without affecting the original source material. This allows almost anyone to do what journalist Julian Sanchez (2010) describes as "using our shared culture as a kind of language to communicate something to an audience," whether that something is a response to the original work or a new creation that builds upon its back. Droves of amateur creators such as fan vidders, culture jammers, AMV artists, and movie parodists are taking advantage of these new possibilities.
None of this is news to regular readers of this journal. However, for archivists dedicated to preserving cultural history, the rise of remix culture brings up a different question: how is it going to be preserved? Left to its own devices, digital content sourced on the Internet is unlikely to remain usable and discoverable into what digital archivists call the long term. It is vulnerable to a variety of challenges: file corruption, format obsolescence, unreliable hosting sites, and insufficient metadata. Audiovisual material, with its complex file formats, presents an especially high risk of becoming rapidly outdated and unplayable. Works that have been uploaded to third-party sites on the Internet—the access method of choice for audiovisual remix—are particularly vulnerable, thanks to the Digital Millennium Copyright Act, which requires Internet service providers to take down content when formally notified of a claim of copyright infringement (https://www.eff.org/issues/intellectual-property/guide-to-youtube-removals#why-removed). If that Internet service provider is the only place the content is hosted, a notice and takedown can effectually serve as the death warrant for a transformative work. Some audiovisual remix content survives simply on the basis of its popularity, being uploaded to different sites over and over again; as the maxim among archivists goes, "lots of copies keeps stuff safe" (http://www.lockss.org/about/principles/#decentralized). However, while these videos may remain available, there's no guarantee that the metadata surrounding them will be accurate, or that they will be presented in an appropriate context. Some remixes have managed to retain their presence on the Internet in some form or another for a decade or more, but many more have been lost—sometimes not only to viewers but also to their creators.

2. Archives and persistence of video

The party line among archivists tends to be that "public institutions are best positioned to ensure the long-term preservation of high-value digital materials" (OCLC 2010). Trusting material to the experts is a nice idea that works perfectly well when everyone can agree that something is of high value. As far as most cultural gatekeepers are concerned, however, there is currently no canon of contemporary digital remix to be preserved, nor is there an existing public institution with a mandate to create one. Moreover, because of the complex rights issues involved, institutions are often reluctant to commit to the preservation of transformative works, especially when their right to provide access to the material may end up being in question. Transformative video creators, meanwhile, are cagey about the idea of entrusting their work to an institution that may attempt to assert control over it. Although it is theoretically possible for institutions to surmount these challenges, the digital preservation community has not yet had success in coming to grips with the problem of preserving remix video.
Instead, transformative video creators themselves have taken some responsibility for making sure that remix video content remains discoverable and accessible. In many cases, these efforts take the form of digital repositories and community centers for transformative works that fit into a certain genre—much like physical public libraries, which, in addition to their primary mission as public repositories, also provide information, history, and a gathering space for the community. One of the earliest and best examples of a community repository for fan video is the site Anime Music Videos (http://www.animemusicvideos.org/), which was founded in 2000 when anime music videos—known as AMVs—first made the leap from analog to digital. The site's mission was first to provide a center for the AMV community and second "to make a database of every Anime Music Video ever made" (http://www.animemusicvideos.org/help/). Originally Anime Music Videos simply linked to videos on creators' own Web sites. However, in 2003, the site purchased its own server, congenially known as the Golden Donut, which gave creators the option to upload videos to the site itself, either as their primary copy for access or as a backup option in case their own site went down. Anime Music Videos runs on a membership model, with donations not requested but strongly suggested; it takes funds, after all, to run a server and keep a site running.

Anime Music Videos still hosts a treasure trove of AMV content from the early days of digital AMV culture. Over time, however, many remix creators have moved away from the more private, community-centric model offered by community-owned servers such as the Golden Donut and gravitated toward YouTube, which provides easier, more widespread distribution of remix works. Currently most digital libraries for remix content function largely as digital listings, collecting or pointing back to works hosted on YouTube. Some of these exist within the YouTube infrastructure itself; one user account, titled "The Growing Repository of YJ," simply creates playlists of fan vids centered on the television cartoon Young Justice (2010– ), with the goal of allowing users "to find fanvids a lot faster than having to scour pages of youtube search results" (http://www.youtube.com/user/YJFanVids). Other sites, such as the Political Remix Video blog (http://www.politicalremixvideo.com/), a collection of political remix video work curated by pop culture hacker Jonathan McIntosh, and The Trailer Mash (http://www.thetraillermash.com/), a site of mash-up and parody trailers submitted by creators, present entries in their archive as embedded or linked YouTube videos while hosting their own contextual metadata about the works.

However, there are a number of reasons why YouTube is not an ideal hosting services for remix video over the long term. YouTube's policies provide no official fair use safe harbor for transformative work, and many users have found their content summarily blocked and a strike added to their YouTube account when a DMCA complaint was filed. At a recent count, Jonathan McIntosh estimated that 15 or 20
percent of the videos he had collected on his Political Remix Blog had disappeared from YouTube in the time since he posted about them. "It's typically not a real copyright violation," he explains, "but typically it'll be a match and the video will be automatically removed, and people don't know so much about fair use and they won't try and contest it" (McIntosh 2013). Although the metadata that McIntosh has collected about the video remains, keeping at least a record of its existence, the content itself is no longer accessible; it may be permanently lost. McIntosh's personal archiving efforts therefore currently include a program on his computer that automatically downloads every video he "likes" on YouTube—an act specifically forbidden by the YouTube terms of service, although this ban is not generally enforced. If McIntosh has a copy of a deleted video in his personal digital possession, he can upload it again and use his own knowledge and resources to defend it against DMCA notices and takedowns. Still, for every video that has a fair use godfather like McIntosh, hundreds more are likely to disappear for good.

[2.5] From a preservation standpoint, there are also serious concerns with relying on YouTube as a primary source for maintaining material over the long term. When a work is uploaded to YouTube, the site creates a compressed proxy video that loses a significant degree of visual quality. The creation of the proxy video also strips any embedded metadata from the original file. This makes it much harder for a later researcher to go back and discover information about the video, such as the date when the video was created or the original file format, which could end up being crucial for contextualization or for long-term preservation (de Rham 2012). There's also the fact that YouTube discards the original uploaded content after making the proxy, so if the creator no longer has a copy, it's impossible to get anything back from YouTube except for the compressed derivative—and even that is technically against the site's rules to download, though tools to do so are readily available.

[2.6] Members of some transformative video remix communities, such as the vidding community, have started to move away from YouTube because of its high risk and low quality; a December 4, 2009, post on the "vidding" LiveJournal community, asking for recommendations for places to post a fan video "where it won't be fiddled with," reflects the community frustration. Other popular hosting sites for vids, such as Vimeo (https://vimeo.com/) and Dailymotion (http://www.dailymotion.com/), have essentially the same risks for long-term preservation. Although YouTube is the highest-profile hosting site, and therefore the one that is trawled most often for copyright violations, all hosting sites will take down violating videos if they receive a complaint. Most streaming sites also create compressed derivatives for streaming and do not allow downloads of either the derivative or the original file; Vimeo, for example, only allows users to download their original source material with a paid Vimeo Plus account. The Internet Archive (https://archive.org/), which has a commitment to maintaining
long-term access and preservation of material, does allow for downloads of the original source, but the Internet Archive has never been popular with transformative video creators because of the relatively low Internet exposure videos hosted there receive.

3. The Dark Archive

[3.1] Although fan archivists have been successful at making fan video work findable and accessible, most repositories that source their videos from YouTube or other streaming sources will eventually have a serious problem with long-term accessibility. One promising potential solution is the Organization for Transformative Work's projected plan for a Dark Archive and for a Torrent Of Our Own, or TO3. The OTW already maintains the Archive of Our Own (https://archiveofourown.org/), known as AO3, as an archival repository for fan fiction, hosting it on trustworthy servers, making it discoverable and accessible, and capturing relevant metadata. The ultimate goal of the TO3 is to avoid YouTube and other outside streaming sites altogether and integrate it into the AO3 to make transformative video works accessible from a community-controlled server that users can trust. The projected Dark Archive, meanwhile, would serve as a preservation backup to the more visible endeavors of the TO3 and AO3. If the AO3 acts as something of a library catalog for the accumulated output of fandom and the torrented vids are the access copies, the Dark Archive is the storage space where preservation masters are kept, designed only to be accessed in worst-case scenarios. This is the crucial archival feature that other community repositories currently lack.

[3.2] Although all material on the AO3 is currently user submitted, the OTW also has more ambitious plans for maintaining the Dark Archive as a comprehensive archive of vidding culture. Several conventions maintain libraries of works presented at their vid shows. Most notable among these is Vividcon (http://www.vividcon.com/), an annual 3-day event focused solely on showing and discussing fan vids, which has a DVD library of over 150 items that are currently only accessible during the course of the con itself for attendees to sign out and watch in their rooms. The OTW hopes to partner with Vividcon and other conventions that may have similar libraries in order to digitally preserve their materials and include them within the Dark Archive.

4. Video survival strategies

[4.1] The Dark Archive is a promising project for the future. However, there are steps that individual creators of remix video can take to increase the likelihood that their videos will survive. Here's a short list of digital preservation tips for remix video creators.
[4.2] *Upload videos to more than one location.* Given the unreliability of YouTube, it is always a good idea to have at least one backup copy uploaded somewhere in case something happens. The Internet Archive is a good option for a backup location to store videos; it's unlikely to put them at risk of being pulled down for infringement.

[4.3] *Always include as much information as possible everywhere a video is uploaded.* This should include the creator handle or signature, the date it was created, and the sources that were used. The more information is added to the video's description, the easier it will be to distinguish between the original work and uncredited copies that people may post on YouTube or other streaming sites. It will also make it easier for people to watch it. Although creators are often concerned that putting information about the sources that they used will put them at greater legal risk, in fact, the more up front creators are about what they are doing, the more likely it is that they'll be able to win a fair use argument if the situation arises.

[4.4] *Embed descriptive information in video files.* This is especially important when a work is available for direct download—that way, it is possible to ensure that people will continue to have the right context for it and know where to give credit. If Adobe Creative Suite is used to create videos, the program includes an application called Adobe Bridge that allows creators to directly edit the metadata. There are also a number of freeware programs that allow embedding and editing of metadata; a good guide and tutorial are available at Video University (http://www.videouniversity.com/articles/metadata-for-video/).

[4.5] *Keep track of original files.* Video does take up a lot of storage space, but many people have lost their work permanently by uploading it to a streaming site such as YouTube, deleting their files, and then having their work removed from the site or their account suspended. Hanging onto the original files—and, ideally, keeping them in at least two different digital places, such as on a hard drive and on another piece of storage media—is a good way to prevent this from happening. Creators should make sure to check their saved files at least once a year to make sure that they haven't become corrupted. More information about how to maintain digital video files is available at the Library of Congress's personal digital archiving site (http://www.digitalpreservation.gov/personalarchiving/video.html).

[4.6] *Use a trusted server to offer videos for download.* Streaming sites are great for the short term, but they are susceptible to notice-and-takedown procedures, and they can change their terms of service or even shut down altogether with very little notice, taking the videos that they host with them. Hosting videos on personal servers for download is great for those who can manage it, but it can be expensive to keep paying for server space, and it also leaves the owners open to digital threats such as malicious hacking or distributed denial of service attacks. A better option may be for
creators to work with friends or with a digital community to establish a central repository for their work at a trusted server. If videos are hosted on a server that is under someone's personal control or under the control of a community that understands the importance of remix video, then even in the event of legal threats the work is less likely to be lost. The creator has significantly more control over the situation and a much greater opportunity to take the necessary steps to preserve the content.

5. Works cited


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Abstract—Disney cosplayers are uniquely positioned in relationship to the characters they perform because of Disney's reliance on innocence as a narrative trope and character element. Their cosplaying transmutes normative innocence via performative fan practice.

Keywords—Cartoon; Ethnography; Fan costumes; Masking effect; Scott McCloud; Performativity; San Diego Comic-Con; Surrogation


1. Introduction

Princess Tiana was a long way from the bayou and in a great deal of trouble; she was under attack by a dinglehopper-wielding mermaid pirate in a hallway of the Anaheim convention center at the WonderCon, an annual comic book, science fiction, and motion picture convention. In a chance meeting at the convention, a group of Disney heroes and a group of princess pirates posed for pictures (figure 1). Princess Tiana and her friends are neither the actual characters nor representatives from the Disney Company. They are dedicated Disney cosplayers who dress as characters from Disney animated films and other properties. As a subset of the cosplaying community, Disney cosplayers are unique in their relationship to the characters they perform because of the Disney brand's reliance on innocence as a narrative trope and character element. The innocence of the Disney brand becomes deviant through transposing animated characters onto corporeal bodies. The Disney cosplayer's deviance is a performance that at once invokes the original nostalgic character while at the same time presenting an uncanny departure from the official company-created character design and narrative. Disney cosplaying is simultaneously deviant and nostalgic; it looks backwards to innocent childhood characters but it performs those innocent characters on the bodies of adults. The practice of Disney cosplaying uses the visual rhetoric of innocence established in Disney animated films to blur the line between self and character, between nostalgia and deviance.
2. Disney orthodoxy

[2.1] Disney cosplayers are a unique subset of the cosplaying community because their reference texts hold deep cultural recognizability and popularity based on narratives that are dogmatically consistent, with a predictably constant set of social values—the most notable being innocence. Disney animated films contain and reaffirm an ontology of good and evil with definitive boundaries and a set of moral structures centered on a romantic vision of innocence. This concept of innocence holds that children are magically endowed with value by virtue of their inexperience (Higonnet 1998). The central characters in Disney animated films are innocent and it is by virtue of their innocence that they are able to defeat the villain. The innocence of the characters is central to fan practice and to corresponding performances of identity such as cosplay.

[2.2] As a leisure activity, cosplaying has the potential for creativity and imagination of play; however, for Disney cosplayers, this freedom of play is often ignored in favor of adherence to the Disney canon. This aspect of Disney cosplaying makes the practice unique. Departures from Disney canon are framed as playful acts rather than as overt challenges to canon. For example, cosplaying pictures in which a heroic character is behaving contrary to his or her established characteristics are framed as mischievous fun and never serve as the main purpose or the central images of a photo shoot. Dressing as the characters is not used to play out alternative stories for the characters. Instead, the point of Disney cosplaying is to appear and perform as close to the original source as possible. Traditional analysis of role playing frames the practice of imitation as liberating for the character from the text, and produces the potential to develop alternative scenarios and story lines (Gn 2011, 584); however, the practice of cosplaying is not strongly concerned with narrative based role playing (Newman 2008, 85). Disney cosplayers proceed from a strongly narrativized object, a
Disney animated film, and engage in a practice with the potential to upend the corporately produced narrative; yet, this double present potential to alter narratives is disregarded in favor of adherence to the Disney canon. Although Disney cosplayers perform as their characters, their actions only minimally depart from Disney narrative canon. Cosplayers do not often use their costumes as opportunities to create new plot lines for their characters and often even predetermine photo poses with an eye toward maintaining narrative unity. Cosplayers are very familiar with their chosen objects, and performing a character consistent with the Disney narrative canon is a demonstration of that knowledge. For example, calling a fork a dinglehopper is a must for a person cosplaying Ariel from *The Little Mermaid*, and a failure to recognize this detail of performance would be an admission of ineptitude. The reliance on canon is a means of demonstrating affinity for a film and a personal knowledge of the canon. The deviations from the canon in variant forms of Disney cosplaying like the princess pirate group are founded in close readings of the canonical character and make heavy use of the original character's tropes. Disney cosplayers' self-policing and heightened devotion to the source material minimize the deviation from traditional formations of innocence through narrative.

![Figure 2. Steampunk Buzz Lightyear. San Diego Comic-Con International. Photograph by author, July 23, 2012. [View larger image.]](image)

[2.3] This dogmatic orthodoxy is perfectly matched with the dogmatic innocence of the brand. A Disneyland employee performing the character Alice from *Alice in Wonderland* must speak in a specific pitch with a particular British accent at all times.
while in the theme park. To transgress these parameters brings the threat of demerits and possible employment termination. Disney dogma insists upon a radically narrow and consistent view of the franchise. However, the Disney cosplaying fan approaches Disney films as texts or objects to be interpreted and reconstructed through lived experience. Cosplaying thus bears a strong potential for departures from the narrative because as living beings performing static characters, cosplayers must take their characters into situations and narratives beyond those found in the films. Transposing an innocent character into real-world situations found in cosplaying venues, like eating or waiting in lines, requires cosplayers to fill in gaps and create character responses. These additions made by cosplayers have the potential to disrupt the traditional formations of innocence central to the Disney characters. Disney cosplay destabilizes innocence through subversive tensions which reframe fictional characters onto the bodies of ordinary people.

3. Blurred lines between self and character

[3.1] Disney cosplayers' fascination with the dogma of Disney blurs the boundary between self and fictional character through the practice's playful relationship with constructions of identity. Richard Schechner and Victor W. Turner's (2008) concept of subjunctive mood or liminal performance is useful in a consideration of this aspect of the practice. Their work on performance interrogates the junction of performer and character to find the boundary between self, or me, and character, or not me. Performers embodying a character take on the not me of the character yet simultaneously retain me-ness even though the not me has become me, instilling in the performer a new not-not-me identity. "Elements that are 'not me' become 'me' without losing their 'not me-ness.' This is the peculiar but necessary double negativity that characterizes symbolic actions. While performing a performer experiences his own self not directly but through the medium of experiencing the others. While performing, he no longer has a 'me' but has a 'not not me,' and this double negative relationship also shows how restored behavior is simultaneously private and social" (Schechner and Turner 2008, 111–12). The not-not-me aspect of performance allows the performer to combine aspects of the character with aspects of the performer (Gunnels 2009, ¶1.3). However, cosplaying differs from acting because of the deep personal connection between self and characters.

[3.2] Cosplaying offers participants the opportunity to construct their own identity through playful engagement with dogmatic text. In Understanding Comics, Scott McCloud (1994) presents the concept of the Masking Effect, or the surrogation of the self in the body of an iconic character. Through focusing on the aesthetic form of the cartoon, McCloud explains that "the cartoon is a vacuum into which our identity and awareness are pulled, an empty shell that we inhabit which enables us to travel in
another realm. We don't just observe the cartoon, we become it" (36). Mickey Mouse is not just a figure outside of myself, but is myself. Mickey's face is a mask I exchange for my own face, an identification I take as my own.

[3.3] Scott McCloud's (1994) theory of the masking effect goes beyond Schechner and Turner's (1985) formation of subjunctive performance to account for a lack of distinction between self and character. Cosplayers perform a live surrogation, taking the identity of their characters for their own identity in their cosplaying. Like the cartoon viewer who inserts themselves into the place of the character while watching, the cosplayer inserts their body into the space of the character through costume and performance. Cosplaying is the embodied performance of active identity construction and thus serves as a prime example of the masking effect.

[3.4] In my participant observations of cosplaying, I found that simplified physical similarities served as a grounding for identification with a character and the surrogation of the self. My first Disney cosplay was Esmeralda from The Hunchback of Notre Dame because I identified with Esmeralda as a child, based primarily on the character's mass of dark curly hair, which matched my own. This sense of childhood superficiality is common to the Disney brand. Within Disney ontology, physical traits function as cultural memes and are direct metaphors for personality or character traits: a hunchback is evidence of personal weakness, or wild hair is evidence for liberated independence. I am not a highly independent or adventurous person, but through cosplaying I experienced an expansion of that trait in my own identity; because Esmeralda would stride through the hall with confidence, I found myself striding with confidence, and because people identified my body as Esmeralda's, it did become her body, and surrogation for the character was achieved.

4. Deviance: Corporeal bodies and translation

[4.1] The innocent imagery and thematics deployed in Disney animation is subverted through cosplay and fan practice. Disney cosplaying is a performance of nostalgia that becomes deviant through the translation of animation onto corporeal bodies.

[4.2] The nostalgia for characters encountered in childhood is a large motivation for Disney cosplayers. A survey respondent explained that "I truly feel loved when I wear Snow White. The children are so adorable and it feels a bit like magic when they come up to you to talk and tell you how much the character means to them. I feel nostalgic because this is how I felt when I was a kid. One time I had a girl approach me and whispered 'Snow, you are beautiful!'" (note 1). The cosplayer justified her character selection by referring to her nostalgia for the character while simultaneously obscuring her own identity in the character's identity through attributing the identification of the
character's beauty as her own. The nostalgia that motivates the practice is forced to reconcile with the reality of a Disney cosplayer's modifying her own voice to match the innocent high and airy voice of Snow White. The translation of an animated image onto a corporeal body is a deviation that transfers an object from one medium of expression and reinterprets the image onto a drastically different format; the tensions of deviance are found in the corresponding limitations that arise from the translation of media.

[4.3] For example, Disney cosplayers demonstrate an intense desire to look as aesthetically close to the reference image as possible. A survey respondent commented: "When I cosplay I 'am' the character, not only on stage or for the poses in the photos but for all the duration on the event. Even with my friends, or while I'm eating—I usually don't eat or drink while cosplaying anyway, but I would eat like my character." In another example, the attempt to style one's hair in rolls identical to a Disney princess ignores not only the practical distinction that human hair does not behave like animated hair but also the more fundamental distinction between animated image and corporeal body.

[4.4] Corporeal bodies are raced and gendered, and these elements are factors when translating an animated image onto a body. Overt or conscious gender politics are rare in cosplaying communities (Gn 2011, 585), but when pressed, Disney cosplayers do recognize the presence and importance of gender in cosplaying. However, the strict gender codes demonstrated in Disney films are challenged by the practice of cosplaying in which crossplay—cross-dressing cosplay—is a conventional practice. These stylistic variations remain largely consistent with the Disney canon but diverge from traditional interpretations of the character's innocence. This thematic difference does not affect essential canon character traits, merely the presentation of those traits. Sexy Disney princesses are a popular group cosplay at Comic-Con; images of the original group of sexy princesses can be found across the Internet. These princesses differ drastically from the original character designs—for example, Sleeping Beauty may forgo a skirt entirely in favor of ruffled underwear—but the cosplayers do not perform their characters any differently.

[4.5] The sexy princesses illustrate the ultimate extension of innocence into the sexualization of the fetishized image of innocence. As the fundamental valorization of inexperience, innocence is antithetical to the experience and knowledge of sexuality. Although innocence is always a creation of the empowered viewer, an identification written onto the inexperienced child, in the sexy princesses the retained visual vocabulary of innocence serves to demonstrate the limitations and constructedness of innocence as a category of social identity performance. The intentional deviance of the sexy princesses appropriates the innocence of the standard princess in a hypersexual
costume. It is the innocence itself that is being used to heighten the sense of sexiness in the hyperinflation of fetishization. Even in the face of this purposeful inversion of innocence, the cosplayers remain faithful to the limits of Disney canon. Each of the poses that the cosplayers adopt for photos is strikingly similar to traditional princess cosplay poses. It is as if the character's innocence is so deeply ingrained within the character that when the design is overtly sexualized, her claims on innocence are not mitigated but only transmuted.

5. Conclusion

[5.1] Cosplaying is a transmutation of normative innocence through performative fan practice. This uncanny visual representation of children's characters on the corporeal bodies of adults destabilizes innocence and resituates it as a process of deviance. Traditional cosplay is a fluid activity without defined formal boundaries and organization, but Disney cosplaying relies on a highly institutional, ordered, defined, and pedagogical canon with specific traditionalist interpretations of innocence. This resituates the innocence that infuses Disney films in both themes and imagery as something that is constantly fluctuating.

[5.2] In Disney cosplaying, innocence is imbued with the sense of strangeness. Disney cosplayers possess the potential to expand character narratives and rewrite character identity but their reticence to do so, instead cosplaying with fanatic devotion to authenticity, forecloses the potential. As adults performing children's characters without a sense of irony, Disney cosplayers bear a strong potential for subversion; however, this potential dissipates and transforms into an air of strangeness surrounding and imbuing cosplaying practice and the innocence which it actively seeks to perform.

6. Note

1. My analysis of cosplaying is generated from a 3-year study I conducted of self-identifying Disney cosplayers through participant observations and qualitative interviews conducted with respondents from multiple cosplaying venues, including internet sites, popular culture conventions, photo shoots, and cosplay gatherings. The study was completed in 2013.

7. Works cited


1. Introduction

[1.1] Fans are what keep media afloat but also what kills it. Without fans, the entertainment industry would be only a shadow of what it is today. Fans, especially those who identify themselves as part of a fandom, are not passive viewers: "Fans speak of 'artists' where others can see only commercial hacks, of transcendent meanings where others find only banalities, of 'quality and innovation' where others see only formula and convention" (Jenkins [1992] 2013, 17). Here I examine the integral role fans play in contemporary media culture and the complicated relationship media (that is, that of the television and film industries) has with its fans.

2.  
Teen Wolf and social media

[2.1] The MTV supernatural teen drama Teen Wolf began airing in summer 2011. MTV hired Matt McDonough to take the role of community manager for the show. McDonough managed all the social media accounts for Teen Wolf, including the official Teen Wolf Twitter and Facebook accounts, as well as a blog on Tumblr. McDonough's goal was to connect with the fandom of Teen Wolf using Tumblr, where fandoms were communicating most (DeSouza 2013). The blog turned out to be successful, and McDonough uses it to this day. Teen Wolf fandom latched onto it because McDonough speaks their language, reblogs fan art, and jokes about the show with them. Fans
have responded positively to the direct communication. *Teen Wolf* fan Kaitlyn Vella (2013) comments, "When I saw *Teen Wolf* posting fan created content and responding to fans, I was shocked. I thought it was awesome." McDonough reached out to Vella back in the early days of *Teen Wolf*, when she and a friend were posting videos on YouTube about the cast. McDonough invited them to come to the set and meet some of the cast members. The next year, Vella was accepted into Viacom's internship program, where she worked for MTV's social media team. She even took over the *Teen Wolf* Twitter account for a few weeks. Now Vella has a desk of her own at MTV, where she helps run their main Twitter account (Vella 2013).

[2.2] Vella is one fan among many whom McDonough has provided with the opportunity to use the skills they developed as fans for official *Teen Wolf* efforts. Fan-made GIF sets and YouTube videos have been used for promotional spots on MTV (Wentz 2014). Since season 3A began, big-name fan (note 1) Qhuinn has been making animated GIFs of each episode that McDonough then posts on *Teen Wolf*'s Tumblr while the episode airs. For Qhuinn, who has been engaged in fandom for more than 15 years, *Teen Wolf* social media (TWSM) has been a positive change.

[2.3] *Teen Wolf* provides an example of everything I'm not used to in my own fandom. I don't usually invest in the actors or in the show's social media. Nor have I ever been this active in a fandom—not only by working with fandom projects such as the Sterek Campaign (note 2) but by reading and writing fan fic, creating graphics, and so on. *Teen Wolf* treats its fandom well, and the show engages people, causing them to be more active because they feel welcome and comfortable (Qhuinn 2013).

[2.4] Fandoms can be intense; the fans are simultaneously the biggest fans of the show and its harshest critics. McDonough's decision to focus on fans who identify as part of the fandom, rather than putting out content that works with the general audience, was not a decision made lightly. He understood that with fans' passion and talent came a recognition of problematic elements of the show, as well as critical social media responses reflecting these elements. These fans are not watching the show just for entertainment. They are analyzing it and writing about it, fully aware of the both the positive and negative aspects involved.

3. Negative interactions in social media

[3.1] Because of the stigma associated with early (late 1960s era) fandom, fans stayed quiet for many years. A fourth wall was put up between fandom and The Powers That Be (TPTB) (note 3). An unspoken rule existed within fandom that no one was to speak about issues with the source material to TPTB. This fourth wall was
established to prevent fandom wank (that is, drama) from appearing. However, the emergence of social media has allowed fans to have unprecedented access to people who work in entertainment—and vice versa. As Gavia Baker-Whitelaw (2013) puts it, "Forget the so-called fourth wall of fandom. It no longer exists."

[3.2] Trekkers are considered the first fandom for a television show (note 4). They are the originals; they have the most history, and their fandom has most content to pull from. It also means that they expect a lot more from any source (TV show or film) considered part of that franchise. In a recent fan/TPTB interaction, the cultural shift toward fan empowerment clashed when a script writer read a review of a movie he had recently worked on. On the Daily Dot, Baker-Whitelaw (2013) writes about Star Trek Into Darkness (2013) and describes screenwriter Bob Orci’s issue with the Star Trek fandom. The film was a mild hit in theaters, making just over $70 million in its first weekend in theaters; however, its predecessor, Star Trek (2009), made $140 million in the same time span. Some fans of the classic series complained about the film's emphasis on big-budget effects over plot (Baker-Whitelaw 2013). Trekmovie.com (http://trekmovie.com/) critiqued the movie, explaining why it was not a smash hit in theaters. Bob Orci read this article, commenting, "As I love to say, there is a reason why I get to write the movies, and you don't" (Baker-Whitelaw 2013). He even told one commenter to "fuck off" (Baker-Whitelaw 2013). The fourth wall was established primarily by fans for fans. Now, however, when fan critiques—even a fan's passing thought—are published online, TPTB have access to it. They can retaliate if they feel like it. The concern is that when there is a lack of civility between fans and TPTB, it creates tension—a tension that indicates why the fourth wall existed in the first place.

[3.3] Fans are now more fearless. They believe they have the right to not only state their opinion but to aim those opinions at people with positions of power in the entertainment world. The thoughts expressed by fans do have some validation. They are speaking about issues that affect their fandom as well as a general audience.

4. Positive outcomes from negative situations

[4.1] Although fans grant TPTB leeway because they have control of the content, TPTB must be prepared to receive criticism. The era of social media means that they must actively listen to that criticism, some of which is invaluable. Many fans catch inconsistencies with story lines. They know the characters well, and they will fight for a character's consistency and honor. Fans will also break down every moment in a show—not only to do a meta-analysis (note 5) but also to explain issues within the show such as sexism, racism, and homophobia. Blogs on Tumblr are dedicated to, for example, feminism in relation to TV and film, such as the Tumblr blog Fandoms and
Feminism (http://fandomsandfeminism.tumblr.com/). These fans encourage writers to hold themselves to a higher standard by asking for better representation of minorities, better continuity, and overall more thought into character development. This is beneficial for both fans and television networks. "No matter if they like it or not, maintaining the fourth wall is only going to get harder as the years go by. People feel closer to their favorite shows, and that makes them engage further, which helps the shows to have better ratings and more publicity" (Qhuinn 2013).

[4.2] There is always room for a writer or director to engage in a debate with fandom. Seeing things from different perspectives provides room for valuable debates. Yet an issue may surface when that defense grows out of ignorance and displays a lack of understanding of the way fans think and process things. This is where leaders like McDonough can have an impact on shaping a positive future for fan interactions. Community managers work directly with a show as well as directly with fans. They bridge that gap. Community managers can communicate with the fandom and explain, from the creator's point of view, why a particular scene was written as it was or why character acted a certain way. A community manager can also explain to a director or writer why fans are upset, permitting an attempt to address fan concerns.

[4.3] After season 3A of Teen Wolf aired, an article was published in The Geekiary (http://thegeekiary.com/), a blog run by fans of pop culture. The article discussed several issues that had been accumulating in the Teen Wolf fandom since the finale of season 3A in August 2013. It mentions a memorial video that TWSM had released that showcases all the deaths in Teen Wolf. It was used as promotional material for a contest they had put out for a fan to "Die on Teen Wolf":

[4.4] This video should have worked. Everyone loves a good spoof, it was relevant to the contest themes and it had just enough sarcasm and cynicism to appeal to the Tumblr audience. But it failed to take into account two of the biggest complaints from Season 3A: the death of several beloved POC and female characters and the confusing timeline. This video essentially plastered a neon sign above these issues saying "hey fandom, remember all that stuff you were yelling about? Well we totally ignored your complaints and then made a joke out of it." (Popplewell 2013)

[4.5] This article probably would have received minimal attention, had it not been picked up by the blog Oh No They Didn't! (ONTD; http://ohnotheydidnt.livejournal.com/), a popular source of entertainment news among fans. Immediately after the article appeared on ONTD, Teen Wolf fans on Twitter and Tumblr began discussing it and related issues—yet there was no acknowledgment of the article on any of TWSM's accounts. Fans were less than pleased because the article mainly targeted the social media team itself, not the show.
A few days later, an article was published by *The Daily Dot* that featured subject matter similar to the *The Geekiary* article. One of the primary issues brought up was the use of the hashtag #killdanny, which was being promoted by the TWSM team. Danny is one of the few gay characters on the show, and many fans root for him because he represents a minority viewpoint. This time, McDonough responded on *Teen Wolf*’s Tumblr blog:

"hey. i'm matt. i'm the bag of flesh and guts and bones on the other side of this blog. i want to address the fact that a video we posted recently threatened to #killdanny unless we got votes for something or other.

that was a joke. i am maybe better at gifs than comedy (though some of you might argue). it was an improvised line in the video, meant to play on the #moredanny tag, and i thought it seemed comically absurd that the show might kill off a character for this reason.

it lacked perspective. it lacked insight into this fandoms amazing sensitivity to a sense of progressive representation of characters on tv, something i usually take pride in. i'm sorry, and you won't see that again.

so, now and forever (and also coming up in 5 minutes): #moredanny"

This was a big step for McDonough and TWSM's presence. Deciding to own up to his mistakes and apologize to the fandom was a risky move, especially because he did it himself, not under the umbrella of *Teen Wolf* or MTV. Sounding sincere over the Internet isn't an easy feat, but he took time to acknowledge the fans' sensitivity to these issues. He seemed to genuinely care that the #killdanny tag was seen as a negative representation of a queer character. His apology gathered much positive attention. *Shut Up Teen Wolf Fans*, a Tumblr blog that points fingers at *Teen Wolf* and its fans, including the #killdanny hashtag, reblogged the post from *Teen Wolf*’s Tumblr blog, commenting, "Thanks for the apology, Matt. More Danny indeed!"

Although fandom is a small portion of the show's entire audience, McDonough chose to speak directly to them because he believed that people who identified themselves as part of fandom were the most dedicated to the show (McDonough 2013). They appreciated the give-and-take of the fan/community manager relationship. McDonough's appreciation for fandom has garnered a lot of respect—something all social media teams for television should strive for.

5. Conclusion
Fandoms have been pushed into mainstream media. If fans, TPTB, and community managers keep moving forward in a positive direction, then fans can receive a better portrayal in mainstream media than they did 50 years ago. There are obvious positives and negatives to removing the fourth wall, but the more fandom and TPTB collaborate and listen to each other, the more positive outcomes there will be.

6. Acknowledgments

I thank Matt McDonough for his support and for granting permission for me to use our informational interview. I also thank everyone who participated in my online survey about fan culture. Their insights were crucial to my work.

7. Notes

1. Big-name fans, or BNFs, are fans that are well known within their fandom.

2. The Sterek Campaign aimed to show Jeff Davis (creator of Teen Wolf) that if he made the Sterek (Stiles and Derek) pairing canon on the show, then he had enough support from fans to do so. Fans sent hundreds of cookies to the show's office in support of Sterek. The campaign now raises money for charity, including thousands of dollars to help rehabilitate wolves (http://sterekcampaign.com/).

3. TPTB are the creators of the source text. That usually includes writers and directors, but some fans also consider TPTB to include the shows' actors and anyone else directly involved with the source material.

4. Trekkers is the term most preferred by people in the Star Trek fandom; the term Trekkies has a mass media–created negative stigma.

5. "In fandom, particularly LiveJournal-based fandom, meta is used to describe a discussion of fanworks of all kinds, fan work in relation to the source text, fanfiction characters and their motivation and psychology, fan behavior, or fandom itself" (http://fanlore.org/wiki/Main_Page).

8. Works cited


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Interview

Exploring fandom, social media, and producer/fan interactions: An interview with Sleepy Hollow's Orlando Jones

Lucy Bennett and Bertha Chin

[0.1] Abstract—Orlando Jones, an American film and television writer, producer, and actor who currently plays Captain Frank Irving in Fox's Sleepy Hollow, provides an intriguing example of how producers and fans can engage in a receptive and dynamic relationship through social media, most specifically through Twitter and Tumblr. We interviewed Jones to ascertain how a regular in a popular television show perceives and maintains this form of communication with fans; how his enthusiasm for fan studies has unfolded; and how he has negotiated and managed fan controversy.

[0.2] Keywords—Fan fiction; Tumblr; Twitter


1. Introduction

[1.1] The arrival and use of social media has offered new avenues for connections between producers and fans, allowing for seemingly direct communications that bypass previous filters such as management and news media.

[1.2] Orlando Jones, an American film and television writer, producer, and actor who currently plays Captain Frank Irving in Fox's Sleepy Hollow (2013–), provides an intriguing example of how producers and fans can engage in a receptive and dynamic relationship through social media, most specifically through Twitter and Tumblr. Jones, by encouraging his fans to create and compose fan fiction, live tweet episodes alongside him, and engage in acts of shipping characters within Sleepy Hollow as well as other shows like Supernatural (2005–), displays an acute awareness of and passion for the intricacies of fan cultures. In this sense, we are witnessing a media producer and object of fandom who uses social media platforms to interact with fans using terms and values from the previously more demarcated and often undervalued world of fandom. However, although the majority of fans and viewers have expressed delight and heightened enthusiasm at the object of fandom taking an interest in their activities, within these interactions and the blurring of worlds have arisen...
controversies surrounding the reactions of others. Some fans view Jones's mentions of a particular pairing (such as Destiel, the Dean/Castiel pairing from *Supernatural*, and Ichabbie, the Ichabod/Abbie pairing from *Sleepy Hollow*) as endorsement, which leads to shipping wars in fandom. Others appear unhappy that Jones would publicize this aspect of fandom by engaging in discussions with those who disagree with him.

[1.3] However, what also makes Jones particularly intriguing for fan studies scholars is that Jones expresses a strong interest in the field of fan studies, declaring an appreciation for works by scholars such as Henry Jenkins (with whom he shared a panel during the 2014 Transmedia Hollywood conference) and professing an enthusiasm to study this area further. Jones participated in a live chat as part of a series on the future of fan works involving academics, industry professionals, and fans organized by the Organization for Transformative works (http://transformativeworks.org/news/discussing-future-fanworks-march), and he is also scheduled to be a virtual guest speaker in September 2014 at the Fan Studies Network conference.

[1.4] In light of these interesting developments, as well as Jones's receptiveness in engaging with fan studies scholars, we interviewed Jones about his use of social media. We were interested to ascertain how a media producer such as Jones, as a regular in a popular television show, perceives and maintains this form of communication with fans; how his enthusiasm for fan studies has unfolded; and how he has negotiated and managed fan controversy. The interview was conducted via e-mail in December 2013, and the responses have been edited.

[1.5] Orlando Jones can be found on Twitter at @TheOrlandoJones (https://twitter.com/TheOrlandoJones) and on Tumblr (http://theorlandojones.tumblr.com/). *Sleepy Hollow* has been renewed for a second season on Fox, set to premiere in the autumn of 2014, and Jones is also currently involved in the creation of *Tainted Love*, a digital graphic novel series (http://www.taintedlovemovie.com/).

2. Fandom/fan studies

[2.1] **Q:** Are you a fan of anything?

[2.2] **A:** I'm a fan of many things, too numerous to mention. Since I've tried my hands at many creative pursuits outside of the traditional entertainment business, I am especially a fan of things I myself have tried. Film and television. Comics and graphic novels. Music. Fashion.
I love creative expression in its many forms and celebrate living in a world where anything from Vine videos to Tumblr blogs have a clear and present distribution platform that is (at least for the time being) unencumbered by gatekeepers or stakeholders.

Q: What place in your life has fandom held?

A: Fandom is finding a community of like-minded enthusiasts that vibrates at your same frequency. It's great to love something, but when you find other people who share that love in its purest expression and you can talk for hours about plot theories, or ships, or the general excitement about being moved to feel based on a creative work—that's intoxicating.

Q: What is it about fandom and fan studies that fascinates you?

A: My interest in fandom is born partially out of my own work as a creator and the desire to better understand how fans relate to story worlds on a granular level. It's a perfect little ecosystem, and in some ways it's a looking glass version of society at large, both positive and negative. This is the place where the disenfranchised and the marginalized have a voice, where they can express their dissatisfaction with the status quo and demand a more concerted effort by the media establishment to improve diversity, to expand beyond tropes, idioms, and stereotypes.

It's also somewhere where they become co-creators in a self-directed narrative that might fall out of the bounds of the "intended meaning" of the original creators. Participatory culture and the creation of transformative works is an absolutely fascinating component of this conversation. So far, it's either been mocked, ignored, or intentionally disparaged, but not many people outside of academia have taken the time to understand the value it provides in terms of how stories are told in the sharing economy.

Q: Have you encountered any academic work on fandom prior to this?

A: I was aware that academic work was being done in this area but had no direct knowledge of the specific voices of authority in the space.

Q: In your interaction with fans, what has surprised you the most about them, and about fandom in general?

A: What has surprised me most [has been] the level of talent the fans possess as artists, writers, storytellers, and creative practitioners in their own right. It still amazes me that I'm involved in a creative enterprise that inspires others to create new works of such incredible scope.
What I'm not as surprised about, but what occasionally makes me sad, is the level of distrust my presence in fandom seems to engender at times. I am sensitive to the concern that people who like things don't want an outsider to come in and pretend to like those things only to turn around and disparage them. Trust is obviously something that needs to be earned, but at a certain point, it starts to become uninteresting to constantly have to prove myself and demonstrate my authenticity. At the end of the day, though, I'm doing this more for me than anyone else, so it accomplishes nothing to worry about what other people think about me or my actions.

Q: The success of *Sleepy Hollow* has partly been credited to an astute social media strategy. How much of the show's success do you think comes from an innovative take on fan engagement?

A: I honestly have no idea what the exact formula is that explains the show's success. I'm reluctant to refer to what I do through my social channels as a strategy per se, but the amazing digital team at Fox and K/O have certainly done many innovative things to create awareness, drive conversation, and encourage engagement. Those efforts, coupled with the amazing performances and chemistry of Tom Mison and Nicole Beharie, as well as a uniquely diverse and multicultural cast, are all important factors in the show's success.

3. Social media

Q: How much—if any at all—of your interaction with fans on social media is directed by 20th Century Fox? Do they have much say and control over these interactions?

A: 20th Century Fox has no say or control whatsoever in how I interact with fans on social media.

Q: Social media has greatly affected the ways in which fans can interact with producers. Can you tell us how you communicate with your own fans through these channels? How strongly do you value these interactions?

A: Interacting with fans through social channels is an essential tool for me as a creator, as a fan, and as a person who aspires to master some level of media literacy. This past year I learned a lot about the subtle differences in engagement between the platforms (Facebook, Twitter, Tumblr) in ways I didn't fully comprehend before. In the past I had a tendency to cut and paste my social messaging so that it could be streamlined/turnkey, but I came to appreciate the need for customized interaction that is appropriate to each audience cohort. Specifically, things that might have worked on Facebook had an entirely different (and often polarizing) response on Tumblr. And
Twitter is also a fascinating tool that can be a force for a lot of good, as well as a destructive and divisive medium that does not allow for nuance and context in the same way that other mediums might.

[3.5] It's still a learning process but I'm enjoying the discovery and am continuing in my efforts to develop an authentic, relevant, and fun(ny) voice across each platform.

[3.6] **Q:** As an actor on other successful film and TV shows prior to the proliferation of social media such as Twitter, Facebook, and Tumblr, how have you felt the change that these platforms offer, if any, in terms of interactions with your fans and audiences?

[3.7] **A:** Historically, film and television production has lacked the immediacy of real-time engagement and feedback. You have no idea how what you're doing in the moment will be received by an audience (unless you're working on a show that is shot in front of a live studio audience). I'm a great lover of theater and have had the good fortune to star in a number of award-winning theatrical productions throughout my career. Social media offers a unique level of interaction with an audience that has some complementary paths to the experience of performing in a play. That said, there are aspect of it that can be (and often are) a double-edged sword. It's as much art as science, and it remains an arena where the rules are continuing to evolve in interesting and unexpected ways.

[3.8] **Q:** You not only regularly live tweet episodes of *Sleepy Hollow,* but you also live tweet episodes of *Supernatural* while it's airing and make references to pairings/ships from other fandoms like *Arrow*'s (2012–) Olicity. Any particular reasons why you've chosen to interact with the *Supernatural* and *Arrow* fandoms? What prompted the decision to do so?

[3.9] **A:** The decision was motivated both by *Sleepy Hollow* fans who also watch those other programs suggesting/recommending that I live tweet those shows as well as the fact that I am a fan of *Supernatural* and wanted to get caught up since I haven't had time to watch the show in the last couple of years. I considered there might be some audience overlap so that it wouldn't seem so unexpected. I'm a fan of a lot of the stuff that's on the CW right now. As I've publicly stated before, I'd be a fan of *Sleepy Hollow* and engage with the fandom (although perhaps with greater anonymity) even if I wasn't on the show. The same is true with these other programs. I enjoy watching them, so I see nothing wrong with sharing my enjoyment in a more public forum.

[3.10] **Q:** How do you decide which fans to follow on Twitter—and have there been any unusual/persistent attempts by fans to get noticed by you, or for you to follow
[3.11] **A:** There are no hard-and-fast rules, but I generally follow people I know IRL (either because we've worked together, we're friends, or we've hung out), people whose opinion/perspective I am interested in (academics, journalists, satirists/comedians, content creators), or fans who have participated in the random contests I occasionally throw up wherein the prize for winning is a follow from me. I've certainly had fans who are persistent in their attempts to get me to follow, but I try to encourage them to provide a legitimate reason why I should follow them instead of just because.

[3.12] **Q:** In terms of fan and producer interactions, do you feel there is a genuine direct connection facilitated by social media, or is it illusory?

[3.13] **A:** I guess that depends on how we want to define those terms. My interactions are not motivated by agenda or expectation, so in that sense I believe them to be genuine. I'm just a country boy from Mobile, Alabama, so the idea of having fans is still strange to me. I'd like to believe I was doing social media before it was ever a thing because I work in media and I like to be social. I sometimes read tweets from people who say something to the effect of, "I saw Orlando Jones at the Whole Foods and I was too shy to come up and say anything." What I always try to tell folks is that if you see me, come and say hello. Don't be shy.

[3.14] I enjoy people immensely, I'm intellectually curious, and I'm a lifelong learner, so if I'm engaging, it's because I have a genuine interest in doing so. In fact, this type of interaction has introduced me to some up-and-coming artists and storytellers whom I could actually see myself working with in the future.

[3.15] Anyone who knows me personally understands that I enjoy making people laugh, and that invariably translates to my efforts in the social media realm, which I try to balance alongside the things I want to share that are not meant to be humorous. I acknowledge that without context, some of what I put out might be misunderstood or perceived in a way different than I intended, and I am mindful of the impact of that, both positive and negative. I take neither offense nor insult when people say "I'm trying too hard" or make other disparaging comments about what I'm doing.

[3.16] **Q:** The title of your Tumblr is "The Tumblr Experiment." Is there a particular reason why that title was chosen, and did it start out as one?

[3.17] **A:** The Wikipedia entry for the word *experiment* (and I apologize in advance for the laziness of my research protocol) refers to the notion that "an experiment is an orderly procedure carried out with the goal of verifying, refuting, or establishing the
validity of a hypothesis." Although my engagement strategy on Tumblr is sort of an antistrategy, I suppose I am trying to establish the validity of a hypothesis regarding the creator as fan and the ways in which transformative works can be elevated alongside canon while still existing as its own unique art form. I don't anticipate that the experiment will end any time soon.

4. Managing fan controversy

[4.1] Q: You've encountered some controversy, not just over your tweet regarding Olivia Pope from *Scandal* (2012–) but also having tweeted (in support of) about Destiel (*Supernatural*) and Olicity (*Arrow*). Has that changed your views of fans and fandom in any way?

[4.2] A: Prior to starting on *Sleepy Hollow* I spent 18 months on the road doing stand-up comedy. The creator/audience dynamic in a comedy club offers a unique paradigm because the end product is unformed, improvisational, and experimental. You're constantly figuring out what jokes work best and how to present them. I would perform at some clubs where my set felt like it was on fire, and other times it would be as cold as ice. I absolutely love that environment as an artist and a storyteller. My comedy was not designed to be politically correct or civilized. My success or failure depended on whether or not it was funny, and sometimes humor comes from exploring a side of ourselves that we might filter in polite company. I brought some of that perspective to social media, and as I mentioned earlier, I learned the importance of addressing your audience within the context of the medium you've chosen to engage them.

[4.3] I'm genuinely fascinated by the self-policing mechanisms that exist in social media, which run the gamut from demanding accountability for statements that are offensive to taking on a mob mentality (complete with pitchforks and torches) that's out for blood. I have learned the importance (and value) of being more precise in my language, but I fully expect to make additional missteps in the future, which I will attempt to navigate with sincerity and candor. I am also sure that a certain segment of Tumblr in particular will find further reasons to dislike me or pass judgment, and that's a part of the process too.

[4.4] I got into some trouble recently when I expressed the sentiment that "I don't give offense, you take offense," but it's a point of view that I believe has merit. It sometimes feels that a segment of the audience in fandom or across social media (or really, anywhere) is looking for things to be offended over. So while I (hopefully) have neither the ego nor arrogance to dictate whether someone has a right to be offended over something I say, I still maintain that they make the choice to be offended by it.
In saying this, I understand that it doesn't even matter what I actually meant, as they might be offended by my words regardless of the meaning I intended. That doesn't mean I'm blaming them for saying something offensive, and it doesn't mean I wasn't wrong (or that they were right). Although intention may not mitigate offense, neither is offense a zero-sum game.

[4.5] So long as folks see my sincere effort and know that I'm approaching these sorts of things authentically, with humility and without the presumption that I'm entitled to anything, I think it'll all work out. And if not, that's OK too.

[4.6] Q: You've been asked on Twitter to refrain from talking publicly about the "ugly side of fandom." Do you think there are limits, as a public figure, to the types of issues you want to engage with, or in terms of how you run your Twitter account, types of things you want to tweet about?

[4.7] A: I respectfully reject the premise that there are (or should be) any limitations to what I can tweet about. If people don't like it or disagree they have the ability to opt out. If they choose to follow, then the implied contract is that they take the good with the bad. And if there is some exception to the position I just espoused, I suppose we'll cross that tweet when we come to it.

[4.8] Q: Do you think fan expectations of who you are and who you can be (especially in lending a voice to their ship) are overwhelming?

[4.9] A: I don't know that I'd call them overwhelming, but I definitely know that I won't live up to certain expectations that have been assigned to me. I'm not a writer on *Sleepy Hollow* or *Supernatural*. Nothing I say in any forum will have a bearing on how the writers/creators of those shows (or any show whose audience I may choose to interact with) will do their job and tell their stories—nor should it. I'm genuinely pleased that my overall appreciation for shipping and implied endorsement of certain ships is viewed positively by many, and I make no apologies to those who don't like that facet of my interaction. As I said before, I think it's a revelation that transformative works have evolved to the extent they have and that fans have an outlet to bring their inner voices and deepest fantasies to life in the stories they create and share. Any creator who mocks or maligns it does so at their peril.

[4.10] Q: Some fans are sensitive about actors and producers breaking the fourth wall in fandom, and you've consistently broken through. Thinking about your experiences in the past year, have there been any memorable fan encounters—positive or negative—that were specific to your constant breaking of the fourth wall?

[4.11] A: Again, the experiences that resonate most deeply are the creative works that have come from fandom that I've directly or indirectly encouraged and supported
(such as slash involving my character, or Ichabbie). I respect those who are sensitive to the manner in which I have broken the fourth wall. It is not my intention to offend them or make them feel uncomfortable. That said, I have zero intention of backing off or changing course. I'm having fun. The majority of feedback I've received from fans suggests that they enjoy the manner in which I engage. The people who feel differently have every right to feel that way, just as much as I have every right not to let their point of view derail me.

[4.12] Q: You've written about accountability, and about using that as a standard to guide you in your interactions with fandom. Do you think that approach has helped and has made your fan engagement different from others, and more meaningful?

[4.13] A: Actually, yes. This is a fluid process. I try to make sure my feet and my tongue go in the same direction. I'm not interested in adulation or sycophants. I've heard people say that they've never encountered a celebrity who interacts in the way I have chosen to do so. They seem to appreciate that, for the most part, I endeavor to be consistent, sincere, and fair. And I gladly take the positive along with the negative because I sort of set myself up for that.

[4.14] I quickly realized the contradiction in my wanting to be treated like anyone else in fandom because I obviously bring some unique baggage that does make my contribution different than others. But I was a fan first. You may call me the Twitter and Tumblr personality Orlando Jones who occasionally appears in film, on television, and onstage.

5. Fan fiction

[5.1] Q: You have particularly encouraged the composition of fan fiction by Sleepy Hollow fans. This move is quite unusual for those involved in the production of the canonical text. To what extent do you feel that this form of literature is important?

[5.2] A: There was a recent definitive ruling in the courts that Sherlock Holmes is now in the public domain and no longer under the exclusive control of the estate of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. I suppose that means that besides the BBC show, and Elementary (2012–) and the Robert Downey Jr. film series (2009, 2011), others can now exploit that intellectual property to tell new stories. But fan fiction has been a part of the Holmes story world from the beginning, and in some respects has been seamlessly integrated into canon to such an extent that new audiences may not even be aware of the difference.

[5.3] Transformative works (and fan fiction specifically) matter because they establish that an original work has become part of the fabric of a broader narrative
story world that says something important about the world and how we see ourselves in it. Tens of thousands of books are published every year. Hundreds of television pilots are produced. But what makes certain ones stand out and rise above the white noise? Clearly there are business models and economic considerations that factor in, but sometimes a certain story becomes a part of the zeitgeist in ways the original creators could never have imagined. When fanboy Phillip Iscove decided to mash up the two best-known Washington Irving short stories in order to bring Ichabod Crane into the 21st century and took it to superfans like Alex Kurtzman and Bob Orci, there's no way they could have known what the show *Sleepy Hollow* would become. The contribution of the fans as co-creators of this real-time story world is undoubtedly a part of the show's success.

[5.4] **Q:** How do you feel about fan fiction (including real person fiction) written about your character, Frank Irving?

[5.5] **A:** I feel great about it. I'm excited to see it regardless of any particular kink, ship, or scenario that may emerge. As I said from the very first tweet that set things in motion: "Bring. It. On." And like I also said, I am clearly in *way* over my head.

[5.6] **Q:** You've indicated a desire to perform fan fiction readings previously. Given the recent controversy surrounding Caitlin Moran and the *Sherlock* (2010–) fandom and your own comments regarding it, how do you think you would approach this now? Do you think there should be more protocols in place to protect fans' interest and their creative works being made use of in public without their permission?

[5.7] **A:** I would never read fan fiction in any public forum without the explicit permission of the fan who wrote it.

[5.8] **Q:** *Sleepy Hollow* has resulted in two distinct main pairs of ships, Ichabbie and Ichatrina. How have you approached the dynamics and sometimes competitive elements that shipping can foster within a fan culture?

[5.9] **A:** I haven't consciously approached it in any particular way. The relationship that Ichabod Crane and Abbie Mills have works as well as it does because of the amazing performances of my friends and colleagues, Tom Mison and Nicole Beharie. I think certain fans have unfairly maligned the really outstanding work of Katia Winter, but some of that is to be expected because of the way in which Katrina Crane's characterization has necessarily unfolded. As I've said before, "Ship who you want to ship because it's a big harbor." The implied subtext from those who may or may not subscribe to a certain ship and what others perceive it to mean in terms of its cultural and social implication (and the ism schism) is way above my pay grade.
Q: The production of fan fiction and other fan transformative works falls into the gray area of copyright and intellectual property laws. Do you think fans should have more rights and power to transform and shape the text?

A: Again, the premise of your question depends on how we define the terms you've set forth. What types of rights are we referring to? What are the potential circumstances and outcomes of this type of permission? Although we exist in a mash-up/remix culture that should allow for certain fair use provisions to exploit existing works, I do believe that copyright laws serve a vital purpose. I also subscribe to the idea that enforcing intellectual property rights is a necessary remedy in those instances where a third party seeks to exploit someone's creative work for financial benefit without compensating the original author. There's also the concern that has come up a few times as to whether the new work might create unnecessary confusion in the marketplace. But fan works are not going anywhere, and I'm much more interested in figuring out how their efforts can coexist alongside original works instead of going back underground. To the best of my knowledge, no case law exists to establish any sort of precedent, so I'm sure this isn't the last we'll be hearing on the subject. Until then, write on!

6. Acknowledgments

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Roundtable

Spreadable media: Creating value and meaning in a networked culture

Moderated by Louisa Stein

Middlebury College, Middlebury, Vermont, United States

[0.1] Abstract—Online Roundtable on Spreadable Media, by Henry Jenkins, Sam Ford, and Joshua Green, with participants Paul Booth, Kristina Busse, Melissa Click, Sam Ford, Henry Jenkins, Xiaochang Li, and Sharon Ross. Section 1 first published as the article "Spreadable Media: Creating Value and Meaning in a Networked Culture", by Louisa Stein, from Cinema Journal Volume 53 Issue 3, pp152-177. Copyright 2014 by The University of Texas Press. All rights reserved.

[0.2] Keywords—Digital culture; Fan studies; Popular culture; Scholarship; Transmedia


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1. Introduction

[1.1] The following roundtable discussion was organized and moderated by Cinema Journal between June and July 2013 as a form of book review of Henry Jenkins, Sam Ford, and Josh Green’s Spreadable Media: Creating Value and Meaning in a Networked Culture. The first section of this roundtable has already appeared in Cinema Journal. We are happy to be able to include the full, extended conversation here in Transformative Works and Cultures. The contributors responded to a series of prompts that asked them to consider Spreadable Media's engagement with questions of
transmedia, digital culture, fandom, and online social activism more broadly. Participants explore *Spreadable Media*'s relationship to fan studies scholarship (note 1) and ask whether *Spreadable Media* represents a shift in the way we think of fans in relationship to popular culture.

2. *Cinema Journal* roundtable

[2.1] **Kristina Busse:** Although *Spreadable Media* is ultimately not a fan studies book, nor does it try to be, it purposefully engages the concept of the fan and thus gets read in conjunction with fan scholarship, including Jenkins's previous works, *Textual Poachers* and *Convergence Culture*. Given that trajectory and the way the book repeatedly deploys specific examples of fan activities within its larger project, it raises the question as to how *Spreadable Media* uses the fan and how it engages with fan scholarship. Looking at the way *Spreadable Media* stretches the concept of being a fan to a point of seeming unrecognizability, I would suggest that the book is ultimately not interested in fans, except what they tell us about larger audiences.

[2.2] There are obviously strategic reasons to expand the term *fan* from the narrow confines that Henry Jenkins's earlier *Textual Poachers* set out. In the intervening years, many aspects of fandom have mainstreamed, a move that Henry has both described extensively and partly helped bring about. There are many benefits to conceptualizing active audiences as fans, but I'd like to look at some of the drawbacks. In particular, I'd like to look at what happens when the definition of *fan* changes from one based on identity to one based on action. I'd like to look at what gets left out when the definition of fan is as broadly conceived as it is in *Spreadable Media*, when any "like" click on Facebook, any forwarding of a YouTube link, constitutes a fan activity. I am concerned that such a broadening of the concept facilitates a shift from the fans studied in *Textual Poachers* to general audiences. Such a shift moves the focus away from the marginal media fan, who was mostly commercially nonviable, often resistant, and uncooperative, and whose dedication to a gift economy was often in spite of capitalist alternatives and not because they didn't exist. In its stead, the fans who take center stage in *Spreadable Media* are the commercializable audiences, who happily seem to collaborate in their own exploitation, free laborers creating value of which they cannot even assume ownership. What gets excluded and marginalized in *Spreadable Media*, then, are the very founders of the concept of fan, the unruly and aggressively anticommercial, the queered and sexually explicit, the anticapitalist and anticopyright. What gets excluded are the audiences whose practices may have been adapted and adopted and celebrated but whose presence is ultimately not desired in this brand-new, commercially viable fan universe.
[2.3] *Spreadable Media* acknowledges this danger: "We all should be vigilant over what gets sacrificed, compromised, or co-opted by media audiences as part of this process of mainstreaming the activities and interests of cult audiences" (note 2). But when reading through the chapters, I am distressed by observing that very compromise the authors warn against. I fear the actual driving force of the book is how things do get monetized and commodified, how fans can be interpellated and how user-generated content can spread—and all with the assumption that such monetization and commodification is a good thing.

[2.4] This exclusion, of course, seems fundamental to the argument when I think of the primary audience as industry professionals. Given the style, citation practices, and authorial affiliation of two of the three authors (with other media scholars, especially of various minorities, relegated to the online extension of the book), I can't help but read *Spreadable Media* as a book primarily geared toward media industry. And as such, it lays out beautifully the many and myriad ways in which media spreads, often against all odds and all too often in unpredictable and exciting ways. What concerns me, then, going back to the question of what constitutes a fan, is the way *Spreadable Media* elides the entire question I just laid out.

[2.5] By presenting itself as universal, the book can take particular examples that proved successful, particular audiences with certain privilege, particular practices that benefit neo-capitalist ideology if not business and frame them as universal and general. In so doing, the book ignores the very audiences that not only established these practices but also whose study brought about fan scholarship in the first place, most notably in *Textual Poachers*. In so doing, *Spreadable Media* seems to frame a procapitalist approach as neutral, ignoring and sidestepping not only the risks and costs of the actions described but also many of the alternatives that may not fit as neatly into a commercial framework. I wish the book had not presented itself as an academic engagement with the issues but instead had been more open and self-reflexive about the compromises it had to take for the industry audience it ultimately seems to be written for.

[2.6] **Paul Booth:** Kristina's points here are really interesting, and from a fan studies perspective I think her assessment of the book's absence of specific fan voices is spot on. This is especially true in the "Web Exclusive Essays": the essay writers are either from the industry or from academia; none is (at least in their bios) identified as "fan" (although of course I'm sure some of them would self-identify as fans of one type or another) (note 3). Hearing from some fan creators would open up the text to even more audiences and creators as well—and would certainly complicate the industrial emphases of the text.
To augment what Kristina was saying, I agree that the book has a less critical eye when it comes to interrogating the commercial media environment, perhaps as one of the consequences of the multiple audiences we've been discussing. The concept of spreadability seems linked, for the most part, to commercial enterprises rather than to the emotional resonances of fan identity (with some notable exceptions, of course; steampunk being an obvious one, but, even then, steampunk is always being commercialized anyway…) (note 4). With fans crowd-funding Veronica Mars: The Movie (Rob Thomas, 2014) and Amazon's Kindle Worlds semilegitimizing a form of fan creativity (whether or not it actually is fan work has been discussed by Karen Hellekson, among others) in the months after the release of the book, Spreadable Media at least got its finger on the pulse of the industry (note 5).

But I wonder if it also pegs a particular type of fan audience that tends to go underrepresented in fan literature—the mainstream fan, or the fan who doesn't want to subvert the status quo. Kristina's points speak to how the particular representations of "fandom" in Spreadable Media go against previous fan literature's emphasis on the ignored or derided, and yet rarely are "nontransformative" fans cited in fan literature either. This "mainstream" fan is the target audience of Amazon's Kindle Worlds, Creation Entertainment convention-goers, and the proud owners of a (nonironic) Star Wars retro T-shirt. They don't read fan fic, don't watch vids, don't really want to "create" as much as they want to "receive." This "mainstreaming" of fandom is something I've been thinking about a lot, especially given the way fans are being represented today. When I teach classes on fandom, many more of my students today are self-identifying as fans than in the past, I think partly in response to the rise of geek culture and the "sexy nerd" stereotype. They proudly wear comic book T-shirts and sport Doctor Who stickers on their laptops. Geek culture is hot right now, and I can't help but see that as important.

Kristina Busse: I agree that the mainstreaming is important and that the question of whether it is an actual expansion of fans, a coming out of previously unacknowledged fans, or a simple renaming is an important one. I keep having the image of punk in my mind, which was a movement; a way to be; a subcultural identity that became popularized, commercialized, watered down. Maybe it's normal. I'm not sure that should keep us from retaining a sense of the ethos, however, of what it means to be a fan. And at the risk of sounding way too hipster, you can't just buy a Sex Pistols shirt and listen to the Ramones a few times and be punk! Making geek culture popular doesn't keep the kids-formerly-known-as-geeks from getting harassed, nor does it keep those pesky transformational fans from being endangered by the media industries, now doubly so, because why can't we play nice like those other kids called and self-defined as fans?
Paul Booth: Spreadable Media is certainly an alternate exploration of fan audiences, but it's one that depends on changing paradigms in fan culture itself. Fans are more visible than ever and have been told by the industry (and academics!) that they are more powerful than ever. Sure, sometimes it's condescending (as Matt Hills has pointed out), but it also creates fans who are more aware of their own place in the media environment (note 6). I also don't think we can discount the impact of Fifty Shades of Grey's move from fan fiction to commercial success—the possibility of making money from fandom is certainly still alien to some, but not to all anymore (note 7).

So I think this brings up a great question, which is, is spreadability (as it's being defined in this book) an inherently neoliberal approach to media? Maybe part of what defines spreadability is its monetization, and just as fans have always reacted to mainstream media with alternate voices, perhaps the monetization of spreadability creates the opportunity for those fans who do want to create negotiated readings to react against its monetization as well. Fans may or may not participate in a "spreadable" environment; maybe there's a fannish form of spreadability that is generative in different ways. Although Henry, Sam, and Josh caution against the exploitation of fans ("we are not suggesting here that every fan activity lends itself well to 'monetization'") (note 8), they never truly break out of the commercial paradigm: "we are suggesting that companies need to get much better at truly listening to their audience and at understanding their various audience's motivations for spreading their content" (note 9). If capital is necessary for spreadability, then perhaps spreadability is not the right term for discussing subcultural (affective) fan audiences.

Henry Jenkins: I want to thank Kristina and Paul for their frank and provocative assessments of the strengths and limits of how we describe fans in the book. The issues you raise here are ones that have troubled me throughout the writing process and subsequently. Please understand that I am never fully satisfied with the answers we offer on any of these issues, given the contradictory and dynamic nature of the topics we are discussing.

The term fan has from the start been a challenging category, as any number of us have written about. Textual Poachers was torn between a publisher mandate to write a general theory of fandom (that might have included soap fans, sports fans, comics collectors, fans of specific stars and performers, et cetera) and a more specific study of a particular community of fans with their own distinctive subcultural practices. Even writing specifically on the primarily female fan fiction community, I end the book by describing a range of different layers we would need to address to adequately describe the identity and practices of that community—as a "particular mode of
reception," "a set of critical and interpretive practices," "a base for consumer activism," "particular forms of cultural production," and "an alternative social community" (note 10). (And this was never intended as an exhaustive list.) What *Poachers* did not address was what would happen if these layers were split apart—if some aspects of fandom gained broader visibility while others remained more marginalized. And that seems to be where we are at right now in terms of the ways fans are understood by industry, within popular discourse, and to some degree, within some more broadly defined fan communities (such as, say, San Diego's Comic-Con). We may give industry too much credit if we believe it has somehow resolved these contradictions, successfully separating out compliant consumers from resistant fans, whereas I think these contradictions are actively being fought, day by day, by communities who are raising expectations about meaningful participation and who are growing sets of social connections through which to lobby for their interests. Often, these battles get staged around terms of service within platforms, but increasingly, they are also fought in terms of efforts to create alternative mechanisms for producing and circulating content, such as, say, the "fan-created, fan-run, non-profit, non-commercial archive" [known as] An Archive of Our Own (note 11).

[2.14] From the start, *Spreadable Media* raises questions about the blurring of these boundaries, and I think it is vital that fan studies as a field continues to explore these issues from the most diverse possible range of perspectives. We use the word *fan* throughout the book to refer to people who would self-identify as fans, who are actively and critically engaging with the media (through a range of mechanisms), who are socially connected to one another through their shared tastes and interests, and so on. And we've made a conscious effort throughout to diversify the range of fan communities we discuss in terms of gender, but also race, ethnicity, and nationality.

[2.15] My own interest in participatory culture starts in fan studies, but my own goal here was to acknowledge the broad range of different groups that have historically engaged in struggles to expand access to the means of cultural production and circulation, and so we explicitly address other grassroots communities that clearly would not fall under my definition of fandom but that are actively pursuing their own interests in this new environment.

[2.16] Perhaps not surprisingly, some of you see this book as more pro corporate than I do. Ultimately, I care much more about broadening the communication capacity of grassroots communities and diversifying the range of media we have access to than I care about any corporate agenda, but corporate policies are what have to change if we are going to bring about a more participatory culture. My goal is to expand the resources the public can deploy to pursue its own interests—some of which involves shaping corporately produced media or supporting the development of transnational
and independent media, some of which involves operating within counterpublics with carefully policed borders and keeping all corporations at bay, and much of which fall in between. The debates within fandom over Fan Lib, in particular, had forced me to adopt a much more complicated perspective on Web 2.0, and these debates, around fan labor in particular, were included in the book (note 12). Yes, we point to some examples where fans and producers have worked together, where fan practices generate economic value for the industry, but we also describe a range of other goals that grassroots communities pursue in their attempts to spread media content—for example, the use of circulation by church groups or activist groups. We discuss relationships between independent media producers of all kinds and their followings, which are also not reducible to a monolithic conception of the media industry. We raise questions about how the mainstreaming of fan practices often involves the industry embracing some kinds of fans and excluding others, concerns that were very much informed by the work of Suzanne Scott, Julie Russo, Gail De Kosnik, and others (note 13). So, I clearly would not agree that the term spreadability describes "an inherently neoliberal approach to media" or only speaks to those forms of fan practice that can be capitalized and commodified.

[2.17] Melissa Click: While I respect the concerns that Kristina and Paul raise, I have to say I rather liked Spreadable Media's focus on "audiences" instead of "fans." At its core, I think Spreadable Media expresses a deep respect for participatory culture and also an acknowledgment that the digital media environment has made participatory behaviors more visible, popular, and accessible. I like the assertion (useful for media professionals and scholars alike) that we shouldn't discount audiences' online activities, whether "minor" or "over the top." I certainly wouldn't agree that liking something on Facebook is an equivalent practice to "vidding" (fan video remix); however, as someone who often studies people who self-identify as fans but who wouldn't meet the definition of "fan" used by many of my colleagues, I appreciate the sentiment that all media "spreaders" are engaged in active processes of appraisal.

[2.18] I don't agree with Kristina's assertion that "the fans who take center stage in Spreadable Media are the commercializable audiences, who happily seem to collaborate in their own exploitation, free laborers creating value of which they cannot even assume ownership." I think Spreadable Media usefully explores the complexities of audiences' engagements with content producers—and endeavors to acknowledge that it's difficult to parse out what is exploitation and what is true collaboration. To see the audiences Spreadable Media discusses as oblivious to their own exploitation overlooks the arguments the book makes to adjust our approach to these folks. The opposite of "fan" shouldn't be "dupe"—there's a lot of important work to be done here
to understand how audiences are engaging with and through digital media, drawing on tools and motivations with direct lineage to participatory cultures.

[2.19] So while the mainstreaming of participatory behaviors might rob fan cultures of their cult or niche status, I don't think it's inevitable that such a mainstreaming will dilute the value or importance of fan practices (or fan studies). The study of fan cultures developed, in part, to explore the identification, collaboration, and democratic deliberation in such cultures. *Spreadable Media* is driven by the desire to see audiences shape the media environments they inhabit, and it suggests that this will be accomplished through digital tools that have evolved from participatory cultures. Fan culture is not the limited domain of those who have found their way out of the capitalist system—fans are not outside of power, although they may have a different relationship with it than other media audiences. I think *Spreadable Media* asks us to consider that media audiences, in varying degrees, have begun sharing media in ways that reshape our media environment and to imagine what it might look like if mainstream audiences became even more engaged. I (and I may be alone here) find this to be a very promising and hopeful vision that encourages us to see all audiences as critical thinkers and agents in their own right.

[2.20] **Paul Booth:** Thanks to Henry and Melissa for the responses! Just to clarify, I agree completely with Melissa's sentiment that while mainstreaming participatory cultures might rob fan of their niche status, it's not necessarily diluting the value of fan practices (or fan studies). I think that there are multiple types of fans and fan audiences—some more mainstream than others. My larger point was that *Spreadable Media* focuses nicely on audiences that are fans but are not studied under traditional fan studies literature. Fans are always imbricated in the commercial and/or industrial system, and, in part, it's their relationship with that system that helps define how fan studies scholars have analyzed and described them in the past. *Spreadable Media* offers a different type of analysis—one that looks at fans from a more industrial point of view but offers a not-unrealistic image of styles of contemporary fandom.

[2.21] **Kristina Busse:** Unlike Paul, I actually do disagree with Melissa's statement that mainstreaming won't negatively affect minority fan practices. I think the point of contention may be that I indeed think of "fan" as a critical subcultural practice whose actions may be imitated by media industries "creating" or, as Louisa describes it, interpellating fans, but whose value as a critical concept gets all but erased when we expand it to the point of universality (note 14).

[2.22] Michael Kackman gave a great talk a couple of years ago at Flow 2010 in a panel on quality TV and pedagogy, where he sketched out the history of media studies as having grown out of the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies and voiced the concern that the heavily Marxist and feminist thrust of the initial project
was getting lost in the aesthetic turn. The field that keeps hovering for me at the horizon of fan studies is, of course, queer studies, for so many reasons. We have always drawn heavily from its methodology, and I think it is useful to think of fan studies in terms of queer studies, as Mel Stanfill does in her work. Like her, I want to retain "fan" as an "analytic," as a way to critically engage, which in turn requires a constant commitment to critical analysis that cannot ever celebrate the status quo or not be suspicious of its collaboration with "the powers that be," be they creatively or economically in charge.

[2.23] And like "queer," "fan" also has much to gain from becoming more inclusive, but even more to lose from becoming all-inclusive. At the point where everything is queer, the model can all too easily end up including the picket-fence, straight, married couple with kids where the wife has a lesbian fantasy once in a while at the expense of the ace trans youth or the kinky leather bear. Likewise, I fear that Spreadable Media is a symptom of this same phenomenon: class and gender, sexual orientation (and let me throw in race and ethnicity, of course, as well!!), can easily separate the "good fan" from the "bad fan," the compliant consumer from the one who isn't. That's my concern with Amazon's Kindle Worlds, for example, and I feel Spreadable Media is complicit in this mainstreaming of the acceptable and the exclusion of the unacceptable—all in the name of fan inclusion.

[2.24] **Paul Booth:** The key point, for me, is what Henry says: "We use the word fan throughout the book to refer to people who would self-identify as fans, who are actively and critically engaging with the media (through a range of mechanisms), who are socially connected to one another through their shared tastes and interests, and so on." In what I've observed in online fandom, these categories—self-identifying as fan, active engagement, social connection—have themselves become more fluidly applied to fan audiences by fan audiences themselves. It's not that just the "industry" is changing its perception of fans (although I do think that's the case; people's ideas of what it means to be a fan are being adjusted as fans become represented more often in different ways, in large part because there has been a generation of influential creators who read Textual Poachers and other fan studies literature), but in turn more people are thinking of themselves as fans, perhaps lowering the bar of what it takes to be a fan (fandom's version of "slacktivism," as Jeremy Sarachan writes about) and therefore opening up the category to new audiences and new "methods" of being fannish (note 15).

[2.25] So I don't think Spreadable Media misrepresents what's going on in the fannish world; I do think that the book offers a take on fandom that depends on the industry being affected by fans and fans being affected by the industry.
Melissa Click: Paul, I think we agree on this. I do wonder, though, if more mainstream audiences are thinking of themselves as fans or whether mainstream folks' identifications as fans have become more visible.

And I've been ruminating on Spreadable Media's suggestion that "those who are most prepared to embrace spreadability have often been the people with the least to lose from changing the current system" (note 16). I believe this sentence references industry professionals and media corporations, but in light of Kristina's comments, I wonder if fan communities (in the Textual Poachers sense) have something to lose here, too, now that participatory culture has become a source of power, or at least distinction? Perhaps this is an area worthy of further exploration?

Sam Ford: I appreciate Kristina's concern here about not losing the distinctiveness of what it means to be a fan. In the book, our criticism of the many ludicrous statements that come out and around the description of "brand fandom" was an attempt to do just that—to look at how, in the process of mainstreaming the idea of the fan, marketers all too often try to distort what fandom means.

On the other hand, though, I'm sensitive to what I feel has been an inclination within fan studies since the origin of the "field" to often prioritize certain types of fans—and fan activities—over others. Without intending to, Henry—through exploring a case study of a particular community of fans in Textual Poachers—laid out what some have taken as a definitional criteria of what "being a fan" means, which doesn't apply in whole or even sometimes all that much to the fans who originally brought me into the realm. The practices of the fandoms I've studied—in relation to pro wrestling and soap opera texts, for instance—are ones that don't neatly fit the mold of how the mainstream of fan studies has framed the idea of the fan, and many of the practices of these fan communities challenge the notions our field has had of what fans predominantly do.

This prioritization among fandoms in fan studies includes a prevalent bias toward producerlike activities—and certain forms of production activities—that leave us making a distinction of who is ultimately worthy of the mantle of "fandom." For instance, to again go back to Textual Poachers, the book is organized in a way that moves from more deliberatory fan practices toward more production-based activities. While the book at no point claims so, it may be deduced that this is a pyramid or scale of participation, with fan vidding or fan fic positioned as more active and some ultimate expression of fandom. Yet the core expressions of soap opera fandom in particular have been the discussion board, the conversation, and so on. For texts like wrestling and soaps—with five hours or more of new programming each week and without an off season—there isn't the time or the room for some of the longer-range fan production practices we may see from the sorts of fan communities that have more
often been the focus of fan studies research. But these fans are far from model "consumers" in a corporate-driven world, either.

[2.31] In looking at the practices of post-Wrestlemania *Monday Night RAW* (USA Network, 1993–2000; TNN, 2000–2003; Spike TV, 2003–2005; USA Network, 2005–present), fans and how they behave at the live show in ways that run counter to the script the producers have lined out, for instance, or of soap opera fan debates about TIIC ("the idiots in charge"), it's clear that these fans aren't necessarily playing the role assigned to them by prevailing corporate interests (note 17).

[2.32] I'd like to think that no one type of audience is the focus of *Spreadable Media*. I see this book in part as a corrective to the type of research we were working on in the Comparative Media Studies program at MIT in the lead-up to and the wake of the release of *Convergence Culture*, which perhaps overly prioritized fan production practices. One of our hopes with *Spreadable Media* is to look at how the activity of circulation involves significant creative labor and to move away from or challenge some of our collective prior work that put inordinate focus on "content creation." This work of circulation includes everything from intensive production practices all the way down to clicking "Share." That in no way means to imply that clicking "Share" means you are necessarily a "fan"; but to imply that everything other than the production of a video or audio text, or a long-form piece of writing, is "passive" or an insignificant activity dismisses a lot of creative labor as just "consumption." (Of course, even the process of so-called consumption involves quite a lot of labor, hence our connecting to Dallas Smythe's writing about the work involved in media spectatorship) (note 18). I fear that in celebrating fandom (whether so-called transformational or affirmational), we are dismissing a range of active audience practices beyond fandom and stripping agency from those audiences. So we hope to challenge the very idea of the passive audience in this work.

[2.33] Per both Kristina's and Melissa's points above, I'd also be concerned if only a certain type of spreadability, or even spreadability itself, becomes a criterion for what we consider worthy of attention as scholars, or a criterion within the media and marketing industries for defining what they consider "a success" from a business perspective. Henry, Joshua, and I have criticized ourselves for occasionally falling victim to one of the myths we were trying to dispel with this work: that success in spreading content can only be reached by "going viral," defining success in terms of reaching a certain quantity of audience members. At times in the book, we cite examples to illustrate how far, and on how broad a scale, spreadability can reach. In retrospect, I fear this risks undercutting the much more transformative potential of smaller-scale spreadability, which we illustrate throughout the book as well. Even if spreadability can occasionally lead to something reaching a mass audience, one of the
messages we hoped to convey is how important audience circulation activities are surrounding media content that doesn't "go viral" but that deeply resonates within a particular community, as well as some of the complications that happen when content spreads outside those communities' borders...when content moves outside the original social context under which it was circulated and thus brings certain risks back to the community from which it came.

[2.34] **Henry Jenkins:** Kristina, I share your concerns about what happens to the subcultural dimensions of fandom as some forms of fan participation go mainstream, and I still very much value forms of fan studies that maintain a critical edge, that ask hard questions about industry and academic practice. But, keep in mind, we are back to dealing with the terminological confusion that has always surrounded the term *fan*. There was never a moment when the word would have referred exclusively to a particular subculture and its practices. We could go back a hundred years and the word in popular usage would have referred to sports fans and movie fans, both of which were closer to the groups we discuss in *Spreadable Media* than to anything I discussed in *Textual Poachers*. Recent works, such as *After Subculture*, identify several problems with our classic formulations: subcultures were historically defined against a dominant culture, but increased fragmentation makes it hard to define the "center" against which opposition is directed (note 19). Subcultures were historically marginalized because they lacked the means to communicate with larger publics, whereas a key point of *Spreadable Media* is that all subcultures now have much greater communicative capacity.

[2.35] Fandom is one of those spaces that has had the most intense and generative debates about what constitutes meaningful participation, about the borders between subcultures and the mainstream, about how public or private they want their cultural production to be, and about the values of remaining a counterpublic that builds consensus within itself, or being engaged in the larger public conversations that influence cultural production. There is clearly much space between being totally marginalized and being totally mainstreamed; fans have rightfully protested both, seeking above all the right to self-determination. For sure, some fans have historically found safety in flying below the radar, in escaping any attention (or regulation) of their activities, but others have long sought ways to actively influence cultural production (a distinction I documented in my discussion of the Gaylaxians' struggle to insert a queer character onto *Star Trek: The Next Generation* [NBC, 1987–1998] rather than writing slash as a form of subcultural appropriation) (note 20). If, as *Textual Poachers* argues, fandom is born from a mix of frustration and fascination, we need to avoid reducing fans to purely "resistant readers," emphasizing the first at the expense of the latter.
[2.36] I still have deeply ambivalent feelings about Amazon's Kindle Worlds. This example certainly illustrates the limits of the "free labor" frame for talking about the intersection of fan and commercial creativity. Often, describing fan production as "free labor" implies that if we just paid people, the problems would go away, yet we insist in *Spreadable Media* that this is not the case, given how many fans do not want to see their "gifts" commodified in any fashion. One key difference between Amazon and FanLib is that fans are getting paid for their creative labor; we might agree that the terms of their contracts are still exploitative, though not notably more so than the terms of our contract with New York University Press. As Gail De Kosnik notes in the extended book, male science-fiction fandom historically had a close relationship with the commercial institutions that support speculative fiction; most major science-fiction writers, editors, and artists were recruited from fandom, and fans saw their amateur production as a means of gaining skills and exposure which might pave the way for professional status (note 21). De Kosnik also notes that female fans have historically not enjoyed any such easy scaffolding and support. As a much smaller number of them sought to publish professionally on the basis of the skills they had developed within fandom, many had to erase their roots in fandom rather than maintain them, which meant that they often could not be supporters of the next generation of fans who sought to go pro with their work.

[2.37] So, you can argue that the new Amazon model specifically addresses these concerns: it recognizes that *50 Shades* has made it possible for female fans to go pro while not erasing their past within fandom, and it may pave the way for a more fluid range of possible relations between amateur and professional writers. There will be many women who have the chance to become authors as a result of these mechanisms, and many more may discover fan culture through these publications. That said, a more commercialized form of fan fiction loses the quality Catherine Tosenberger claims is central to its alternative status—it's "unpublishability," or the fact that it is largely free of constraints on what can be said or done with the characters because it exists outside the commercial marketplace (note 22). We should be sharply critical of the constraints that these guidelines place on what fans can write and what their larger implications may be in terms of who gets to be an author under this arrangement.

[2.38] **Kristina Busse:** I am not trying to suggest that *fan* ever referred to only subcultural poachy fans, but I do firmly believe that fan research needs to remain conscious of that aspect and its political and social implications. After all, *Textual Poachers* all but established the subdiscipline of fan studies, even when acknowledging that Henry didn’t set out to do so. But it is a fact that the book was very much indebted to the politics of recognizing and analyzing socioeconomic imbalances. Consequently, the field has a critical orientation—whichever lens any given author
chooses—through which there remains a focus on systemic inequality. Sports fan studies, for example, does not have that center of gravity; that's what makes us unique.

[2.39] We can call this an analytic, as Mel Stanfill does, or I think of it as an ethos, but it was clearly present both in the types of fans *Textual Poachers* studied and (as a result) in the field that has grown around them academically. And my focus on which fans are studied primarily really is a way to address what critical ethos this study has taken. Clearly, given the diverse audiences, this book has to look different as to focus, tone, and analytic than a "purely" academic one, but I am concerned that this did not take the form of inclusivity but swung too far the other way to focus only on the most palatable.

[2.40] **Sam Ford:** I think you are certainly right, Kristina, that a focus on imbalances of power—and social, economic, and cultural "capital"—has always been, and must remain, a key aspect of a fan studies approach, or ethos.

[2.41] Our hope with *Spreadable Media* was to look at positives, negatives, and potentials of how new and expanded cultural processes of communicating and circulating content—ways in which active audiences (including, but far from only including, various fandoms) are communicating with and around media content—are addressing those imbalances. And, as well, we wanted to question how those working in the media and marketing industries might likewise seek to create methods that allow them to have greater respect for, and better serve, their audiences. (I'd offer that, in many cases, that "service" might be to leave them alone and not interfere with subcultural processes in which those audiences have every right to engage.)

[2.42] We begin and end the book by saying that there are both new potentials for creating a more participatory media environment that respects all participants' interests to a greater degree and also long-standing imbalances that remain. And our hope was to illustrate those issues of systemic inequality, power imbalances, and marginalized cultural practices throughout. Obviously, this was the purpose of sections like "But Which Fans?", "The Problem of Unequal Participation," and "The World Is Not Flat," as well as a range of examples sprinkled throughout the book. But we look at those examples alongside other cases where the interests of audiences and content creators align, or where there are people within the media and marketing industries who advocate for companies that are more responsive to the needs and interests of the audiences they seek to reach with their texts.

[2.43] I am certain that, for some readers, we will be seen as having leaned too far toward looking at ground gained and positive potentials—and toward ways in which ground can be gained within the economic realities of the logics of the world in which
we live. But I'm invigorated by projects that look at ground gained and at potentials right alongside looking at tensions and imbalances that remain or even are at the risk of expanding, for instance, as logics like that of Web 2.0 seek to create a narrative of perfect alignment between audience autonomy and business practices. As we explore studying active audiences (including fandom), I think there is room in the field for optimism about the potential for greater equality in participation and for interventionist sorts of work that seek to engage with media companies and with marketers to listen to and empathize with (or leave alone) various audiences, depending on desires and dynamics. But I agree that it has to be situated within a critical perspective—to not be blindly optimistic.

[2.44] One area I feel we broached but didn't give enough space in the book itself—and which I hope subsequent work will focus on more—are some larger questions about the negative potentials of spreadability: concerns around the implications of data mining and other violations of privacy, the spread of rumors and untruths, and a whole host of troubling behaviors that come alongside an expanded capacity to circulate media texts broadly. Certainly, our consideration of data-mining practices in *Spreadable Media* and our incorporation of work like Whitney Phillips's examination of troll culture did a bit of that, but it's a rising concern for me in terms of how spreadability functions alongside our roles as neighbors, as community members, as family members, and as citizens *(note 23).*

[2.45] I want to return in particular to an observation that Paul brings up: that the book includes media scholars and media and marketing professionals but not voices from fandom. While we list active audiences (including participants in fan communities) as one of the desired readerships for this book, they are not represented as official contributors to the project, even if texts from activists, fans, and "customer protesters" (for lack of a better term) are cited throughout. This is perhaps a distinct failure on our part as primary authors on this project. Maybe it represents an unstated assumption that the academic readership (including both scholars and classroom use) and the media and marketing industries readership would be larger than a nonprofessional readership for the book—but it also represents a concern as to how we could accurately represent those readerships, given that the "active audiences" we seek to address represent such a diverse range of interests that it might be hard to "address them" in any direct way. Now, of course, it would be quite false to say that "the academy" and "the industry" are monolithic entities with singular viewpoints either, but it is especially difficult to think about how to represent the perspectives of "the active audiences" involved in circulating spreadable media texts in any direct way.

[2.46] I was coeditor of *The Survival of Soap Opera*, with Abigail De Kosnik and C. Lee Harrington *(note 24).* That book took a similar approach in its aim to be read by
soap opera fans and audiences, the US soap opera industry, and a television studies, media studies, fan studies readership. Similar to Spreadable Media's online portion, that book included contributions from both soap opera scholars and industry professionals, including soap writers and one soap actor. However, crucially, the book also included a range of pieces from soap opera fans of various sorts: multiple soap opera bloggers, a fan site moderator, a fan historian, and a soap opera fan who writes about how her relationship with her soaps connected with her relationship with her mother. Further, in The Survival of Soap Opera, we framed the short bio of each contributor by indicating his or her own personal relationship with US soap operas, trying to explicitly demonstrate how the boundaries between fan, industry professional, and scholar were often blurred, from the soap opera writer who left academia to take a job in the industry to soap opera bloggers who have moved from fan to industry professional to industry critic or observer.

[2.47] The difficulties of taking a similar approach with Spreadable Media were multiple (as evidenced by our failure to do so, I suppose). First, in the case of The Survival of Soap Opera, we were talking about a particular genre of text. So—while there is significant diversity of perspectives and community types within "soap opera fandom" and also among fandoms of various shows within the genre—it was still easy to see how to bring fans of varying types into the conversation about the past, current state, and future of the genre. Because Spreadable Media lacks that degree of specificity, it left it less clear how to bring active audience voices into the conversation. And, further, because this isn't a book primarily about fandom but rather about various sorts and degrees of active audiences, the question of who to bring into the conversation is a complicated one as well.

[2.48] However, the fact that it's complicated isn't justification for not doing it. Our idea for the site is that it could be an ongoing project that perhaps includes additional voices over time. We know not only that there are a range of angles the book only touches upon but also that there are many angles not yet covered at all. Perhaps most important among them is this question of how to provide more of a platform for active audience members themselves to be part of the dialogue. On the site itself, we've tried to link to just about any and every reaction we've seen to the book thus far, but perhaps there's a way to bring voices more officially into the conversation the book intended to start. To that end, while it's rewarding to participate in discussions related to the project for a venue like Cinema Journal, I'd really be eager to find ways to bring fans, activists, independent cultural critics, and other "active audiences" into the conversation.

[2.49] So, let me just baldly ask—does the panel have any suggestions as to ways we as book authors but, as importantly, coeditors of this larger project might open
whatever platform the site has created to expand the range of contributors? What would be the best way to bring on a mix of contributions from the perspective of multiple fandoms or positions in fan communities, as well a range of other active voices?

[2.50] Kristina Busse: I want to be clear: I am concerned here with systemic issues surrounding race and gender as well as academic and fan labor issues. Though I may name people directly as I comment on identity issues, I really mean to primarily address structural issues in academia, publishing, and public discourses and how we tend to replicate "kyriarchical" privilege. I think the fact that the primary authors of this book ended up being three white guys, two of whom are working in industry, has pretty much foreclosed the wide-openness the book claims and desires. The extended version offers a multifaceted and expansive dialogue on convergence and transmedia culture, especially in its intersection of audiences and industry. But when I hold the book in my hands, it is you three on the cover, your bios on the dust jacket, your names, I'd assume, on the royalty checks. The web expansion importantly expands your book, but that ultimately can't erase that the book is by Jenkins, Ford, and Green. So, yes, you may bring into the online expansion more different voices, such as fans writing about themselves, but that will not even have informed the book in the way the other essays that you reference within the print version have, nor will it give any of them actual author status.

[2.51] Sam Ford: I will let Henry speak to the question of how we envisioned this project as a balance between monograph and anthology. But I want to address the professional affiliations of the primary authors, since you've raised it a couple of times. We explicitly make the varied affiliations of the authors a key part of the book and its ability to address various academic and industry readerships, so I think it's especially valid and helpful that you ask critical questions about what that means. However, I'm not quite as clear on how my job affiliation—or my coauthors'—"forecloses the wide-openness the book claims and desires."

[2.52] First, where we were affiliated when working on this project is not a straightforward designation. All three of us were employees of MIT when this research project started. I had been a graduate student in the Convergence Culture Consortium research group and stayed on the project as the project manager after graduating. Joshua had joined the project as research manager as part of his postdoctoral research position. And Henry was the project's principal investigator. After all three of us left MIT, Joshua helped run a research project at the University of California–Santa Barbara for the majority of the duration of our writing the book. In the latter stages of the project, he accepted a position at Undercurrent. Meanwhile, though I’ve spent the past six years (roughly five-sixths of the time we worked on this project) working at
Peppercomm, a communications strategy firm, I have also held a research affiliation with the Comparative Media Studies Program at MIT during that full-time period and, since spring 2009, have acted as an adjunct instructor in the Popular Culture Studies Program at Western Kentucky University (including serving on the curriculum committee for that program). The press took only the first line of my bio for the dust jacket, but my complete list of affiliations is in the author bio. Further, in my position at Peppercomm, I am given a third of my time to pursue academic writing, teaching, and so on, with no oversight from the agency and with me retaining intellectual property. Part of my time is also set aside for speaking and writing about how the marketing industries might better respect their audiences, outside of my work consulting with various companies. And particular to this discussion of fan studies, it's worth noting that 70 percent of Peppercomm's clients are "business-to-business" companies, and that I have only worked with media and entertainment clients at the firm a handful of times.

Now, certainly, my larger work in marketing makes me complicit in the neoliberal logics of a capitalist society, and so forth. I entered this field with the hope of taking issues I care about from my media studies—and fan studies—work and translating or applying them to how companies of various sorts could more respectfully understand and communicate with their various audiences. After spending the past few years in this role, I'm quite sensitive to what I feel is a tendency within the media studies academy to flatten the wide degree of tensions, competing priorities, and conflicting philosophies within companies' orientations to their various audiences. I feel that often gets amalgamated into "corporate interests," when, of course, the corporation is far from a single-minded entity but comprises tens, hundreds, or often thousands of individuals who negotiate meaning and orientation on a daily basis. I particularly appreciate the work of Mark Deuze, Vicki Mayer, and others, who have—through a production studies lens—helped explore those tensions to a greater degree (note 25).

Henry Jenkins: I feel awkward saying this, but the reality is that my name on a book at this point in my career guarantees a certain amount of attention, and yet I believe deeply that the best scholarship right now is apt to emerge through collaborations across disciplines and with people from diverse backgrounds. My ethical commitment is to try to redirect as much attention as I can onto other scholars whose work I admire and whose careers I want to support. Many senior scholars make similar choices when they agree to coauthor with a younger scholar or contribute to an anthology because their "name value" may increase its likelihood of being published. We began the project at a time when publishers were actively discouraging anthologies because they lacked a strong through-line and thus were unlikely to be reviewed, because they were so easy to cherry-pick for course packs. We experimented with a
hybrid approach that combines elements of the anthology and the monograph, and we worked hard to achieve an ideal balance between the two, using the shorter pieces by our collaborators as something like the sidebars in *Convergence Culture*. With this goal, we brought together researchers at all stages of their careers—from graduate students finishing their dissertations, to senior scholars who are as well known as the primary authors, to activists and industry insiders who operate in a totally different reputational economy. Part of how we got this array of contributors was by promising them that their commitments would be low, writing only 2,000 words each, often drawing on existing work, whereas the three of us would do the heavy lifting of constructing the core arguments and getting the project across the finish line.

[2.55] Part of experimenting with new approaches is that they do not always work the way you expect. Many who read the draft felt that the central arguments we were posing were hard to follow through the various shorter pieces, and embedding them in the manuscript seemed to dictate that the reader stop and read them at the point we reference them and only as related to our arguments. We were running up against entrenched expectations about what counts as a coherent and cohesive manuscript and against the linearity of the printed book. We were at the same time trying to do too much—write to multiple audiences, engage with critical perspectives, diversify the range of examples—and so the length expanded well beyond what the press was prepared to deal with. So, faced with a choice, we decided to split the functions between the two platforms, giving the book fully over to the monograph and using the web to create a larger space of conversations. Because of the ways the sidebars were integrated into specific chapters, moving some of those chapters to the web would still have created inequalities among the contributors. I don't see web publication as inherently second class, even if some may still ascribe greater prestige to the book.

[2.56] Having made this choice, we have done everything in our power to ensure that the other contributors received the recognition they deserved. We refer persistently throughout the book to these other essays, introducing their authors, addressing their arguments, and acknowledging their influence on our own thinking; we have organized sessions at major conferences, such as the Society for Cinema and Media Studies and Media in Transition, which introduce some of the contributors to the project; and we consistently pay respect in our individual presentations to the other contributors.

[2.57] Kristina, you know how much I admire the work you and Karen do on *Transformative Works and Cultures*, which is an online publication, so I am a bit surprised that you seem to feel that digital publication denies people the status of authors. As far as I am concerned, what's online is an active part of the book, one that
will continue to evolve while the hard-copy book remains static, and one that is open to further contributions.

[2.58] **Xiaochang Li:** Most everything has been said about the particular challenges, tensions, and political and analytical stakes of how we define and classify "fan" identities, activities, and interventions. Therefore, I want to just note that alignment between certain fan practices and political tendencies might not be categorical constants elsewhere in the world. The kinds of values and investments we associate with fan participation in the West are not necessarily the same as those present in practices that operate transnationally or occur under different historical conditions. This is not to make some broad cultural relativist sweep that undercuts the value of maintaining a level of analytical specificity around the definition of *fan*, but to suggest that we have a tendency to assume that certain kinds of activities and inactivities are indicators of particular kinds of investments or types of identity, which does not necessarily hold true once you start to traverse borders of various kinds. To use a generic example, "the unruly and aggressively anticommmercial, the queered and sexually explicit, the anticapitalist and anticopyright" audience practices might, in some media environments, signal a particular kind of political position. However, these same "anticommercial" practices take on a different tenor in places where "piracy" necessarily constitutes a logic of everyday media engagement, and they can apply to the appropriation of material goods and infrastructure as well as media content, such as the examples of Ravi Sundaram's work on "private modernity" in India or Brian Larkin's discussion of Nollywood referenced in *Spreadable Media* (note 26). Similarly, fan subtitling, which is undeniably transformative and certainly unruly, while technically anticopyright, nevertheless remains deeply entangled with a history of transnational commercial markets, both authorized and unauthorized. I tend to agree with the point that Melissa and others have made, that *Spreadable Media* focuses on audiences that are perhaps less classically "fannish" in an effort to acknowledge the agency and productivity of other, often less explicitly productive practices in order to "usefully explore the complexities of audiences' engagements with content producers."

That is, I don't see it as necessarily diluting existing definitions of *fan* so much as suggesting that practices and identities outside that definition can also be complex, nuanced sites of intervention. And I think it's important to engage "fan" and other forms of audience practice as mutually informing categories, or we otherwise run the risk of *fan* being defined not only in terms of a set of important critical and ethical commitments but also in terms of an unspoken configuration of geographies.

[2.59] I will say also that while I agree *Spreadable Media* isn't as critical or as attentive to structures of capital as I might like, if we are to mount these kinds of critiques, it becomes even more important to look closely at those practices that seem at times complicit in a neoliberal orientation while also being sources of individual and
collective affect and pleasure that can't be dismissed as "mass distraction." As Sharon points out, capital is always already a part of the conditions from which fan and other audience practices emerge; we must understand the intricacies of how value is being produced and extracted, by whom and for whom, and how these processes and power relations become formalized in institutions, policies, and technical arrangements. For instance, if we are able to see acts of sharing content not as a part of generalized media "consumption" but as a productive activity, we might more readily come to understand corporate data measurement and analytics practices as forms of labor extraction. As such, far from foreclosing a critique of capital, the appreciation of the productive capacities of commercially viable audience practices may lead us toward a better, more granular understanding and consequent critique of its applications.

[2.60]  **Kristina Busse:** Great point, Xiaochang! Yes, you are totally correct that we need to look at the specifics not just historically but also geographically, if we are to maintain a socioeconomically astute and critical point of view. I hope that my elaborations below make a bit clearer that while my personal stakes are very much in the "old skool media fandom" of *Textual Poachers*, my critique is attempting to be broader. But yes, thank you for the much-needed corrective!

[2.61]  **Sharon Ross:** Throwing in here, as I understand Kristina's passions and points: What follows are my two cents based on my own "fan" research. One of the things I was fascinated with in *Beyond the Box* that I could only give slight space to was how the Internet was changing notions of fans and fandom—in all sorts of competing realms (note 27). I'll echo Xiaochang here and note that even back in the early 2000s, fans who responded to my surveys (and they did call themselves fans) were telling me that there was some kind of spectrum with fandom in this age of the new millennium. Nuances emerged further with the issue of crossing geographical distribution boundaries (fans getting a season of a show one year later, for example, which led to great social community, but ultimately they'd rather have the show at the same time). So in general, for me, as I battle the academic need to classify and define with the equally academic need to refute that first imperative, I have adopted (based on self-identifying fans telling me what they think *cult* and *fan* actually mean) the following framework: The meaning of fan, cult, and so on, varies with context. This context includes history. A fan from the 1800s isn't the same as the fan from the 1940s from the 1980s, ad nauseam. And on the basis of what I've researched and seen anecdotally, the definitions will continue to shift all the more. Let's not get bogged down in notions of the "true fan" without considering historical shifts (while admittedly not falling into a trap of "it's all copacetic now").

[2.62]  Today, like it or not, some form of capital(ism) is necessary for fandom. Most pointedly, there must be a product of labor for fandom to coalesce around. There is
also the same in fandom itself—social capital, cultural capital, relational capital—and more importantly, for me at least, the dynamics surrounding different forms of capital are often the same. In many fan communities, there are rules of exclusion and limitations. If you talk about a text for five hours a week (exaggerating here for effect!), you might not "count" if you don't do that talking online and with an original creation attached to it. Or, God forbid, you post your comments at the top versus the bottom of the thread! From a political perspective, such rules (from fans themselves) are disenfranchising and have often been especially so for female fans and fans of non-sci-fi or fantasy texts. My point is that as much as industries rooted in an economic imperative exclude fans who can't be controlled and monetized, so do fans themselves. It might not be about strict monetization for fans, but that dynamic of control over the product and over the results is the same.

[2.63] So for me, to some degree, an attention to mainstream cult, mainstream fandom, and so forth, is a necessary part of the conversation. I do not think it should displace "classic fandom," but it is necessary. Too many people I've talked with have felt disenfranchised more by "core" fan bases than by the industry to discount the value of conceptualizing fandom along a spectrum.

[2.64] Let me bring into our conversation the question of the "burden of representation" in academia and publishing. As a parallel, The Cosby Show (NBC, 1984–1992) can't equal "the black family of the 1980s," but so many saw it as representing that concept. So we have in academia a similar tension: Textual Poachers can't equal what fandom is (or even what it was at that time), yet the fact remains that many see it as such (note 28). Is this fair to Henry Jenkins? No. But one of the big things I have discovered in trying to tackle a common phenomenon with multiple audiences is that "reality" often doesn't matter so much as the "perceived reality."

[2.65] In short, I don't think we can expect Spreadable Media as a book to do more than it can. But that doesn't mean that we can't take it to task for gaps. I simply believe (as an academic who only has so much time and energy) that the value of a forum such as this is that we voice the concerns, gaps, and questions. As I stated earlier, I see this book as a primer for further work.

[2.66] Sam's point regarding bringing in fans' voices is a tricky one, to be sure, given the parameters of publishing and given all the power plays within fan communities noted above. But one of the most fun things I enjoy in my reception research is finding those moments when you can break through and give space to other voices. You have to realize you'll never provide space for all—but that doesn't mean you can't damn well try. So, let's use the power of the authors and the resources of the online contributors. I had the most fun when I asked various self-identified "fans" to tell me what a fan was. With a book as broad and expansive as Spreadable Media, it's not quite so easy.
But perhaps (especially via the online pieces) we can just flat out solicit. I wrote in my online piece about a number of shows recently on the air and could hit the fan boards with "read this excerpt and give me your two cents" (note 29). One of the most significant end results of *Spreadable Media*, designed as it was within the strictures of publishing, is that we can leverage the name value of the authors to invoke the input of additional voices. If we don't truly try to spread *Spreadable Media*, what's the point?

[2.67] **Melissa Click:** I totally agree with Sharon on the value of this forum. Clearly, the definition of *fan* is contentious, and it's perhaps even more so because of the evolution of fan identities and practices online. While we may never agree on a definition of the term, I think the debates we're having around it are really important.

[2.68] I tend to side with *Spreadable Media*'s more optimistic evaluation of mainstream fans' online engagements with media producers: "Indeed, companies are often profiting from this audience labor, but it's crucial not to paint this wholly as exploitation, denying the many ways audience members benefit from their willing participation in such arrangements" (note 30). I'm not comfortable assuming that any engagement with industry gives the industry all of the power—I don't think that's fair to audiences (even the mainstream ones!), and even more, it doesn't recognize the benefits (if only internal or relational) that audiences take from such engagements with industry material or on industry terms. I also think the suggestion that the authors of the online content on *Spreadable Media*'s website are being exploited denies the history many of these authors have had with Henry, Sam, and Josh through MIT's Convergence Culture Consortium. Certainly, even those without these connections will benefit from their association with the book, which is likely to have a robust audience. And we are here, in this forum, working for free also. But we are doing it because we want to—and we will all benefit, in varying degrees, from our collaboration.

[2.69] And in line with my belief that mainstream audiences have some agency in their engagements with the media industry, I'm not so sure we need to keep those pesky transformational fans from being endangered by the media industries. Transformational fans are nothing if not resourceful and will continue to do what they do, even though their tactics will likely evolve along with the media environment. I think Kristina's ire around these topics demonstrates that! I absolutely agree that the threats are real, and I think it's important that we remain vigilant as each new case plays out. I don't think *Spreadable Media* is blind to this debate, but its optimism is likely frustrating to some.

[2.70] I really like Kristina's (and Mel Stanfill's) use of *fan* as an "analytic." I worry, though, that a commitment to this kind of constant vigilance might keep us (scholars, fans, and acafans) from seeing how we might take the opportunity to gain a bit more control over our media environments if we were to engage more with media producers
—to give them a sense of what they have to gain by being more open with us (note 31). I think this is what *Spreadable Media* is about, and I don't think it needs to be a slippery slope; it can certainly evolve through tiny steps and big retreats, if need be. I think we have more to lose if we don't try!

[2.71] **Kristina Busse:** When I mentioned the "three white guys" I felt that I was calling out the elephant in the room, but seeing everyone's responses I feel like I need to expand a bit more on my comment. Clearly, I feel that online publications are academically equitable and eminently worthwhile, or I wouldn't be coediting *Transformative Works and Cultures*, as Henry points out. However, at the same time the existence of a hardcover book published by New York University Press, called *Spreadable Media*, with the three named authors, available at Amazon for $22.09 right now, produces a difference between virtual and hardcover publication. So, regardless of how crucial the book's online extension is—regardless of how important Henry, Sam, and Josh as people regard the online additions—as far as reception is concerned, I fear, those three remain "the authors." So, to distinguish them from the people we know and love, we could abbreviate the metonymic "Henry, Sam, and Josh" as HSJ, a function of the final published book and the surrounding discourses of authorship at play here. The significant differences in economic status, form, and circulation of the print book versus the online paratexts all contribute to a sense of two classes of authors—and it just happens to be that the three who are more equal than others are white and male. Again, this is not a critique of Henry, Sam, or Josh as much as it is a systemic critique that the end result looks as it does. Given what Henry says about attempts to be more egalitarian and more inclusive about authorship, it is all the more telling that this is what was ultimately published, as opposed to putting the other scholars in the book and more HSJ online. The fact that the contributions from the non-HSJ authors weren't given the same platform (either print or online) produces inequality between them, and the book version is authored by three white guys. I agree with Melissa that there clearly is value for authors in the extended online version, and my somewhat blunt reproach did not mean to suggest that they are not also benefiting, but we should not ignore the inequality between print book (center) and online extension (periphery) authors.

[2.72] **Henry Jenkins:** I remain uncomfortable with how you describe our goals and motives throughout this discussion, but you are right, Kristina, that whatever our intentions, we cannot fully determine how the press promotes our book or how critics and readers respond to it. A culture of academic celebrity and traditions about single authorship can damage the collaborative spirit with which we have conducted this project. As Jonathan Gray and Amanda Lotz stress in their contributions, the name of the author still carries enormous value and often gets ascribed unjustly at the cost of other contributors to the process (note 32). Certainly, there are institutional forces
around the promotion of a book that turn authors' names into commodities that may attract a presold audience. (And yes, there are all kinds of systemic privilege that ensure that some of us are more apt to be granted "celebrity status" than others.) For *Spreadable Media*, for instance, several reviewers have not only ignored the web-based essays but also unfairly focused on my contributions as the author whose name appears first at the expense of Sam and Josh (who are at different points in their careers and less well known to some readers). Putting the names of all of the contributors on the book's cover would not have rectified the problem you identify here. I struggle every time I want to collaborate with a younger scholar or graduate student, wondering whether he or she gains more from any attention my name will attract or loses more from having his or her contributions devalued by people who assume—no matter how we position it—that I am the primary author. I am pleased when people value my work but not when it comes at the expense of other collaborators. I suspect these are problems we as a field need to work through: the academic celebrity phenomenon may have a toxic impact on decisions at every level, from publishing and promotion to reception and recognition, and it may run counter to the goal many of us have of producing more diverse, multidisciplinary, engaged, and collaborative modes of scholarship.

[2.73] **Kristina Busse:** The field of fan studies has been around long enough for us to do some soul-searching. We have been soul-searching throughout this discussion, but there are two questions: Who are the fans, and whom should we study? Why are we studying this? We've been asking that first question for a long time, but we haven't addressed the second one. A lot of the pushback I have gotten for my argument about marginalized fans has been around the first question, asking who or what "counts" as a fan; but in fact, I think, the real mode of interrogation should focus on the second. Are we just describing a phenomenon in the world, or do we have an ethical position? What is our job as researchers? That's what I was trying to get at when talking about the ethos of fandom, which, by extension, means the ethos of fan studies. I'm not sure we need a third discussion on Henry's blog, but maybe if there were one, that might be a worthy topic—not so much just describing fan activities or even debating fan identity politics but instead seriously interrogating the purpose of the field itself. Why continue to define a field called fan studies if all audience members are now fans? What does fan studies let us see? In other words, what critical lens does it afford us that broader audience studies may not? And this is where I believe the attention to inequality that founded the field needs to stay central.

[2.74] **Paul Booth:** I think there's still a place for defining affect and understanding audience interpretation within the larger field of audience studies. And I do still think there's a difference between the casual viewer and the fan, and a difference between the way the media industries market to casual viewers and the way they market to
fans. And I think the lines that demarcate between these (always) artificial
categorizations are porous. I'm a fan of some things and a viewer of others. That
distinction is meaningful to me, but probably not to other people, who would self-
define differently. So in that sense, fan studies as a field will always have a purpose,
even if the way that people who define themselves as fans changes, because there will
always be people who see themselves as "fans," that is, as distinctive from other
viewers in particular and specific ways.

[2.75] It might be useful here to tie our discussion back into the concept of
transmedia. Fan studies has always thrived because of its flexible boundaries; it is the
very definition of transmedia scholarship, as it represents fluidity between outlets and
entities. It necessarily draws from so many interdisciplinary connections that it's fairly
difficult to find a "home" discipline (media studies may be the closest that I've seen,
but even that's a contested discipline as well; plus it leaves out other types of
fandoms, like sports fandom). The transmedia scholarship we've discussed is linked
through spreadable knowledge, just as disparate elements of narrative are spread in a
transmedia story, just as multiple genres and media are spread in a transmediated
franchise. (Maybe they're spread in different ways, but they are spreadable
nevertheless.)

[2.76] So maybe it's not that we need to redefine fan studies to encompass all
audience members but rather that we need to rework the spreadable connections that
we're making between the disciplinary lines of fan studies itself, seeing the field
articulate finer distinctions that are applicable to more lines of inquiry. When I explain
fan studies to my review board, I have to frame it in much larger terms, and
spreadable media gives researchers the platform to reach those multiple audiences.
Spreadability therefore becomes a communicative tool rather than a descriptive
category.

[2.77] Henry Jenkins: Kristina, thanks for clarifying your perspective. I would have
said that my contributions to Spreadable Media are very much governed by my ethical
and political commitments as a fan—by what you are calling the ethos of fan studies.
First and foremost, my work is governed by my belief that the movement toward a
more participatory culture (having agreed that we need ever more precise definitions
of what this means) is the best mechanism we have for promoting democracy and
diversity within our contemporary culture. My goal is ultimately to expand the power,
voice, and influence available to a broad range of communities who are differentially
situated in relation to the dominant institutions and practices of the broadcast era.
Some of this commitment leads to a focus on media literacy, where we seek to ensure
the broadest possible access to the skills and opportunities necessary for meaningful
participation. (And there are large numbers of active and visible fans who are teachers
and librarians who see promoting media literacy as an important part of their professional identities.) Some of this involves struggles over policy, for example, around intellectual property law or net neutrality, but also around terms of service from companies that can strongly influence our ability to meaningfully tap into what constitutes expanded communicative capacities. Some of this involves struggles over representation as we push media companies to be more responsive to the public and to embrace a broader range of different forms of content that reflects the diversity of our culture.

[2.78] For me, this genuinely is work in the service of Textual Poachers kinds of fans, who, to be clear, want a range of different things and should have the freedom to pursue those interests through every medium that is accessible to them. For some fans, this may involve seeking to influence mainstream media content. For some, it may mean finding ways to gain professional opportunities that build on the skills they developed within fandom. For some, that may mean being free of cease-and-desist letters that would block them from creating and sharing their own productions. For some, it just means for everyone—industry, academics, general public—to leave them the fuck alone. I am calling for a larger public conversation about what kind of culture we want to live in and that does involve making a case to industry for why it is in their best interest to allow people to have a range of different relationships with their content. At the same time, the Textual Poachers kinds of fans offer powerful examples, because they have such a long and rich history in their deployment of alternative media practices, which can prove helpful to other groups that are seeking to exert greater influence in this new media environment. As we open up that conversation, it is important to bring diverse stakeholders to the table and create a context where their perspectives can be heard. As we do so, we need to help people recognize ways they can speak from a more powerful position within the context of a changing media environment, as well as recognizing the constraints that still work to marginalize or exclude some people from equal participation in those conversations.

[2.79] Yes, I am more optimistic than some others are about our collective capacity to change the system, and I make no apologies for that. I see myself as offering a counterbalance to perspectives that often foreclose any possibility of meaningful change before they have really thoughtfully examined and explored new conditions. But my optimism should not be mistaken for a blindness to the challenges we will confront if we are to get anywhere near my goal of a fully participatory culture. We are moving toward a more participatory culture, but we still have a long way to go and many obstacles to confront before those ideals can become a reality. For that to work, we all have to keep issues of inequality central to the field, and we all need to call out blind spots in our research that might make us less effective at speaking to those concerns.
3. Audience, method, and process

[3.1]  **Q**: *Spreadable Media* positions itself to speak to multiple audiences at once—academic, industry, and interested cultural participants. What is the value or importance of this multiple address? What are the challenges involved? What does it mean for work to straddle this line and to speak in part to the industry, and how does this change what we argue and how we frame our arguments? What are the risks, possible pitfalls and rewards of industry address and straddling these multiple audiences? How does this multipronged address impact the book's methods, style, and arguments? How did the peculiar challenges of the academic context impact the project?

[3.2]  **Paul Booth**: The issue of audience seems to be crucial to the book, not just of *Spreadable Media* but in *Spreadable Media* as well. That is, Henry, Sam, and Joshua have positioned the book from the get-go to be about audience. It opens with a chapter called "How to Read This Book," and the very first sentence—"We envision three readerships for this book"—positions the book already at a nexus point of audiences. At the same time, they structure the book in a network of authors as well—this networking metaphor extends to the multiple Web-exclusive ancillary essays, which attempt to network authorship in the same style as the book networks audience. In this way, at least to me, *Spreadable Media* engenders a readership of spreadability—is this a [nonspreadable] book written in spreadable form?

[3.3]  At the same time, much of the content of the book seems to stem from producer-centric issues as seen through audience-centric paradigms. There is a focus on the audience, consumers/fans of media products, as part of the same system in which sits the industry, the creators of media texts: "The media industries understand that culture is becoming more participatory, that the rules are being rewritten and relationships between producers and their audiences are in flux" (note 33). In effect, we see each group filtered through the lens of the other. What do audiences look like to producers in a spreadable media environment? What do producers look like to audiences?

[3.4]  The result of this dialogue is a book that attempts to both broadcast and narrowcast at the same time. As they cite Doctorow, "we might reimagine our current intellectual property regimes as they might operate in a world dominated by dandelions. The dandelion is playing a law of averages" (note 34). But this dandelion metaphor at the end of the book (and on the cover) actually harkens back to the early metaphors at the heart of mass media studies—the broadcasting paradigm (itself a metaphor of the farm) is an attempt to scatter seeds as far and wide as possible, hoping some of them will stick. To my mind, spreadability is more focused on the more
contemporary narrowcasting paradigm, as more niche interests develop in smaller communities through individually spread messages. The question then becomes, in this attempt to broadcast to multiple audiences at once, can a message like *Spreadable Media* even narrowly focus on any one audience in its entirety?

[3.5] Finally, as a work of media scholarship, the book also has to take a step back to define how each group appears to media researchers. But of course these aren't separate categories at all. I am at once an audience member, a producer of text, and a researcher looking at these fluid categories. I may emphasize one over another at different times (depending on the contextual situation), but "I am large, I contain multitudes" (as per Whitman). One of my "selves" may find a discussion of fandom fascinating while another finds it problematic. In speaking to multiple audiences, more points of rupture between analyses can emerge.

[3.6] The multiple audiences of *Spreadable Media* speak to multiple interpretations too. This brings to my mind the conversation 3 years ago (!!!) on Henry's blog about acafandom and the twinned roles of the academic speaking to the fan as well as the fan speaking to the academic (note 35). *Spreadable Media* reminded me of that debate writ large—not actually any specific outcome of that discussion, but rather that the acafandom itself is a problematic category, with multiple meanings to multiple audiences, and with multiple conclusions. The larger concern, to me, wasn't what the definition of an acafan is (or should be), but rather that the notion of categorization itself is problematic. To me, *Spreadable Media* does this same thing—my initial question was, "Is it even possible to speak in an effective manner to multiple audiences today?" I wonder if a better question is, "How do we as media researchers even define multiple audiences when we are also some of those audiences?"

[3.7] *Spreadable Media* attempts to answer this question through example. *Spreadable Media* is a book that speaks to multiple audiences by (a) utilizing multiple authors; (b) redefining the languages we're using to describe media production/consumption; and (c) addressing changes in technological paradigms. But it does not turn the same interrogatory lens onto media research. What would media research look like if the taxonomic categories that have long defined scholarship are themselves undermined? I think it might actually look like *Spreadable Media* itself—a book both broad and narrow, both comprehensive and specific. Saying too much to some groups, not enough to others, and just enough to many. *Spreadable Media* might just be the Goldilocks of media research!

[3.8] But this isn't a criticism of the book, because I think the underlying concern that *Spreadable Media* raises (in the very fact of its being) is that by researching a media system we as researchers are always already imbricated in that very system. *Spreadable Media* is a book about the relationship between audiences/authors/texts.
But it's also a text, written by authors, within a network of audiences. It is what it is about. And in that sense, I think the way that the "risks, possible pitfalls and rewards of industry address and straddling these multiple audiences" within Spreadable Media (the book) tells us something about spreadable media as a new paradigm of academic research.

[3.9] **Sharon Ross:** First, I bemusedly realized that I did spreadable right after I read Paul's response. I jumped onto another server with this one open and began bouncing all over the Internet (what I call radical oscillation, a term I believe I found in Jennifer Hayward's work on seriality) (note 36)...I went to the Spreadable Media site (and all its internal links and those links' internal links...) (note 37), and then after somehow ended up bouncing out to some Mad Men (AMC, 2007–2015) theories and reviews of Frances Ha (RT Features, Pine District, Scott Rudin, 2012), and that somehow made me think of the process of writing my dissertation way back when and how you always feel like "there's just one more important connection to make!" (I'm pretty sure Janet Staiger still rues the day she agreed to be my advisor given the ridiculously lengthy end result)...and then that made me think of an odd little set of resources I used for that project: a book titled House of Leaves by Mark Danielewski (2000), the plot of which defies description (but suffice to say it had extensive footnotes, some "true" and others not, in different fonts, some pages sideways...). I found this "novel" useful as I discussed Internet fandom for Buffy the Vampire Slayer (WB, UPN, 1997–2003) and Xena: Warrior Princess (syndication, 1995–2001)—especially if I wrote while listening to the author's sister's simultaneously released CD (Haunted, 2000, by Poe—highly recommended). This combo wasn't spreadable media, but it was a form of transmedia.

[3.10] I think I got to this bizarre place in my head and on my computer via Paul's prompting of what media research might look like if viewed through a spreadable paradigm. Paul suggests it might look like the book Spreadable Media, "both broad and narrow, both comprehensive and specific." This fascinates me because I have found this tension to be the bane of most media academics I know: how do you address everything important when everything is important? If I can extend the dandelion metaphor, it makes me think of how my first crazy-ass garden this summer is operating. I was attempting to teach my son about growth and rebirth. In my crazed attention to learning about different plants and growing them from seed, I missed the attention to detail in terms of actually labeling the plants in my garden very well, and I have spent more than a few hours trying to figure out if I have peas, beans, marigolds, and—yes—dandelions. I finally gave up trying to really map it out, and talked with my not very rapt preschooler about how much fun it was going to be to see what happens when you mix together all sorts of different kinds of plants and weeds.
[3.11] So for me the book *Spreadable Media* is much like this. And it's very much my idealized version of the ultimate classroom. A lot of chaos, attention to some details and being okay with missing others, and discovering the amazing things you can get when you present (as I recently suggested to my dean about plans for a new major) a NASA scientist, a filmmaker, a novelist, a violinist, and an MBA with the same problem to solve—together. I think it's no small accident that the book's philosophical design, if you will, refracts the media it discusses. After all, one of the book's larger points is that spreadable media exists within a larger cultural shift that may in fact be a major paradigm shift, or may instead by an evolutionary one, or is most likely both. I see the value of the book, therefore, in both its broader discussions and its more specific examples; and we can add on the value of the scholarly model at work as well. What might happen if this *model* was transposed into a media analysis classroom, or a media production classroom, right along with the book's *content*? How do we convince students and faculty and administrators that there is value in breaking down traditional academic walls when studying and making media? And how do we balance the need for focusing on the general and the big patterns while also attending to the nuances and the variations on themes?

[3.12] In my own work, I do find that when I research multiple audiences for the same project (network execs, media practitioners, scholars, critics, fans) I adopt different voices and even personalities, dare I say it. It is a psychological practicality of trying to get to the meat of things by working to converse in the linguistic context of groups with varying dialects. You don't teach Freud the same way to first years as you do to grad students; you ask for soda in one area of the country and pop in another, right?...Then you have to try to deal with the practicalities of the worlds of academia and publishing (among oh so many others). Academics like categories; publishers like completed works that fit into categories. However, I find the most stimulating works to be the "unfinished" ones—which is how I view spreadable media content and *Spreadable Media* the book—they are priming agents that prompt more. This doesn't mean I don't want the more specific and narrowly circumscribed—and I don't see why we as academics can't find room and respect for both...and in fact why we shouldn't push for the same more often.

[3.13] Some of the "more" that *Spreadable Media* the book prompts will be narrow in focus, and some will be broader, but hopefully it will all be networked in such a way that various audiences can find the connections they need at any given point in time. (When you have a heart murmur, you want the heart surgeon—but it's also nice to have a team that looks at the whole body and person from time to time.) This is a book best returned to and added on to. Media is likely as well at its best when you can savor the niche and/or contained and also glory in the broad and/or never-ending. So
I'm all for a little schizophrenia in the garden. (And I promise when I respond to the prompt on transmedia/digital media I'll aim for the more mentally stable approach...)

[3.14] **Melissa Click:** I had questions about the book's audience, too, that (I think) overlap what Paul and Sharon have already discussed. I really like that *Spreadable Media*‘s preface suggests that it is designed to put media scholars, communication professionals, and citizens who actively produce and share media content in conversation with each other. Yet it seems a bit like the book draws from scholarship and participatory culture to school media professionals about why and how to create media content that spreads. This is an observation, not a criticism! I think the book has and will inspire and motivate scholars and participatory culture members (two groups that no doubt overlap), but I'm curious to know what lessons we think are important takeaways for media scholars and media spreaders?

[3.15] Henry, Sam, and Josh argue that those with the most to gain from spreadable media are also the ones who have the least to lose. I am invigorated by *Spreadable Media*, but I also already agree with its major arguments—and I would guess that many other readers from the media scholar and producing citizen camps will too. So I'd argue that *Spreadable Media* is definitely oriented toward putting the three groups into conversation with each other—but it is through a language familiar to only two of the three groups. I think they're talking mostly to producers—and likely should be [because] they are the missing link in the democratic vision for our contemporary media environment that *Spreadable Media* lays out. This is not to say that there aren't important lessons in *Spreadable Media* for scholars and citizens—there are. But I think those takeaways are less obvious than the takeaways for producers. What do you think? What are the main points you've taken from the book?

[3.16] **Henry Jenkins:** To address a core question above, my experience is that many (if not all) texts today speak to multiple audiences whether we want them to or not. I had written *Convergence Culture* with the goal of producing a teacherly book, seeking to use accessible language and concrete examples, but in the process, I had produced a book that spoke to multiple audiences beyond the academy. From the start, the book had a large audience within the creative industries, some drawn to the reconsideration of the audience, some to the concept of transmedia storytelling, but there were also audiences of policy makers and educators who were drawn to the discussion of new media literacies or media politics. We had sought through the Futures of Entertainment conference and the Convergence Culture Consortium to actively enlarge the space of dialogue between academia and industry; through my blog, as well as some experiments as a columnist for mass market magazines, I was experimenting with how we might enlarge the public around debates impacting media policy; and through the Comparative Media Studies program, we had experimented
with approaches to research and teaching that served multiple kinds of students. *Spreadable Media* was produced within this same spirit. Whatever book I put my name on after *Convergence Culture* was likely to have a diverse audience, so the question was to figure out in what ways we could use that platform to consciously speak to those various constituencies. If industry people were going to read the book, what did we want to say to them?

[3.17] From my perspective, the old broadcast paradigm often assumed that there was a lowest common denominator, a shared message, that could speak to all audiences, whereas the spreadable model suggests that multiple constituencies may be drawn to the same work for different reasons, may circulate that text through a range of different conversations, and may thus create their own meaning and value around that content. In some cases, this may wrench the original outside any intended context, yet I would argue the more we recognize and value this process, the more we can engage with it in more meaningful ways as people who have ideas we want to communicate. In that sense, I see enormous value in exploring modes of scholarship that are self-consciously dialogic and acknowledge that we are trying to speak to multiple audiences at once. And yes, each of us are multitudes within ourselves (part of the point of the *Mad Man* and Twitter example in the introduction, where participants were at once fans and industry insiders). It helped in this case because both the primary authors and the many different contributors were each multiply situated in relation to their objects of study.

[3.18] That said, there are places where the multiple voices work better here than others. There are places where I still wince a bit reading the book because chunks of writing aimed consciously at different kinds of readers slam against each other in ways that feel a bit uncomfortable to my ears. Some readers seem hyperconscious of the segments that do not seem to be addressed to them, so we see people either complaining that the book is not sufficiently academic (if they are scholars) or too academic (if they are laypeople). I am not sure we've totally gotten this business of multiple address down just right yet.

[3.19] If it seems that we have a more direct address to the industries, this may be because we were most conscious of the challenges of writing to this particular constituency, because it is the least familiar to academic ears. I think that there is also enormous value for the general public in seeing the issues this book addresses placed in more concrete and accessible terms, and we are already seeing groups like librarians and educators, who were not consciously identified as core readers for this project, sketch out what they saw as core insights for their field within the book.

[3.20] Also, given the history of academics conducting their conversations in ways that are cut off from other audiences, there are going to be certain discomforts that
emerge within the academy around this project. Should we be talking to industry? Does this make us complicit within the mechanisms of neoliberalism? Do we lose our critical distance?

[3.21] These are important conversations we should be having at a time when academics are going to be playing multiple roles and where our students are apt to have multiple careers, sometimes in radically different sectors, over the course of their lives. We need to become more comfortable as code switchers and shape-shifters while seeking to find a core set of values that govern our work. For me, that core has always been in promoting a more participatory culture, grounded in struggles over democracy and diversity.

[3.22] Xiaochang Li: What I found most productive about the concept of spreadable media is that it's intended to offer an account of media circulation that runs counter to models in which casting remains the dominant metaphor. Both broadcasting and narrowcasting proceed from the assumption that the site of production is central in defining the movement and reception of content, and differ mainly in terms of the scale and specificity of the audience being targeted. A metaphor of spread, however, complicates both production and reception as distinct and coherent practices by taking the process of circulation as its departure point. The focus seems to be less how the media is sent out and to whom but [rather] the stuff that happens in between, the mechanisms and motivations by which it moves, leading to Henry's point about the circulation of texts through multiple constituencies and conversations. The spreadable model seem to be one in which circulation becomes a participatory and collective act in which individuals and groups have the potential to divert and orient the material to suit audiences, interpretive frameworks, and cultural agendas that exist outside the intent and imagination of content producers and marketers. Even in instances of broad circulation in terms of numbers, the spreadable model describes not an aggregate mass but a concatenation of diverse groupings, interests, and social goals. My interpretation here is, obviously, a particularly utopian ideal. It optimistically and unrealistically describes audience practices removed from a consideration of how existing conditions circumscribe the set of available actions for media engagement. But, for me, what makes this model useful as a tool for thinking is this foregrounding of circulation as the starting point for mapping the complex entanglements among the various participants within the contemporary media networks.

[3.23] "Spreadable" has become a fairly slippery term." Since the "what" of spreadable media is rather ambiguous, the term has been used to describe content forms, circulation practices, modes of address, methodological approaches, relations between audiences and producers, technical, regulatory, or ethical standards, and various combinations of any or all of the above. And the concept seems something
slightly different in each case. It's actually fascinating that in the first two responses to the prompt, we already have instances in which "spreadable" is used to describe everything from media production and outreach strategies to individual habits of multitasking and concept association (the latter of which, I have to admit, I'd never thought of in terms of spreadability before!). While I would certainly not advocate policing What Spreadability Means, I am curious as to what kinds of interventions it makes when used to describe different aspects of thinking and doing media. Or to put another way, how does where we locate spreadability within a media system affect how we understand what it means and does? I suspect that the diverse audiences, both for the book and in the book, see spreadable tendencies at different stages or levels of the media circulation process, and thus have varying views on its precise operations and outcomes.

[3.24] This also leads me to wonder whether the model of spreadable media changes as we consider changes in scale. As a function of the range of audiences it addresses and describes, the book often employs these slides in scale, from sharing music in a dorm room to the massive transnational movement of content by millions online. These moves in scale imply that there are distinct attributes by which we can identify spreadability as logic or form, beyond any particular contents, conditions, and practices being described. I suspect that if we can begin to identify the attributes that make spreadable media recognizable as such across different stages and varied scales of media practice, it might direct us toward understanding spreadability as a set of ethical commitments or political stakes.

[3.25] I think too that this links up with the question about Spreadable Media (the book/project)'s varied audiences. I'm not convinced that the book is entirely successful in addressing the different audiences it names in the "how to read" section, but it does highlight some of the challenges and tensions in the effort to do so. Putting aside questions of whether or not it is sufficiently academic, too academic, sufficiently practical, etc., I think what a project like this makes explicit is the difficulty in trying to determine and prescribe what your content is supposed to do for your diverse audiences, all of whom have different goals and investments and expectations. From a tactical perspective, I think the use of contributors and references from various positions within academia, industry, and elsewhere doesn't necessarily work together in the sense that Henry described above. But they do seem to work insofar as they act as invitations for those who identify with various positions to take, use, interpret, and intervene upon the material gathered. In that light, I tend to look at the book (and expanded collection) not as a sort of sustained scholarly argument but as a rich repository, a set of concepts and cases, some of which are more thoroughly developed than others, that can be taken up and deployed elsewhere.
With regard to the question of the opening up of media scholarship more generally to incorporate or acknowledge different sectors or types of media engagement (e.g., fans/industries): Having done a little bit of shuttling back and forth between academic and industry worlds, I'm personally a bit conflicted as to what extent I would like to see them open to one another. But what I will say is that I think rather than a question of whether or not these sorts of enclosures should be dissolved, there needs to be a lot more clarity regarding the specific stakes and considerations that shape the work of either side. Just looking generally at academia and industry for the sake of simplicity, I think there is an enormous amount of misapprehension about what each side does, and the forces at work in shaping the assumptions and actions of those involved. There seems to be a general tendency to assume that conflicts arise out of one side not getting something that the other does, when in some cases, getting and agreeing with a concept doesn't change the material and organizational realities—whether budget allocations or peer review—of how things get made. And as a result, it becomes difficult to make considered decisions about how to engage productively across these practices and set expectations about what might come out of these engagements.

Sam Ford: Henry, Joshua, and I spent a lot of time haggling over the question of language and how to make the text simultaneously inviting enough to all audiences involved but also specific enough to engage each of the very broad, imagined categories we had for the book. As Henry has suggested, I wouldn't advocate that we necessarily got it right, but I'd also argue that you can't get it right. And I don't mean that in any way defensively, as I don't feel we sent the final version off to NYU Press feeling like we had struck the balance. Putting different sorts of thinkers from various professional paradigms (or, as Paul and others point out, who wear multiple hats simultaneously)—or at least citations of their work—into dialogue doesn't eliminate the difference in approach and concern among them or create some sort of homogenized sense of a phenomenon. In fact, as with so-called spreadability itself, my sense is that the chaos of the book and the project—the fact that it isn't making some single, sustained through-line argument—is a microcosm of the complexity of the world we live in today.

If we ask why, of course the answer is quite diverse, and what we sought to do with the book project is provide various vignettes that help illustrate some common themes but ones that can't be locked into a metaphor that is all that neat. I have all sorts of consternation about spreadability as a metaphor taken too far, and I think—as many have pointed out here—part of the challenge is just understanding how no sense of categorization particularly works—defying a core tenet of what both academia and media/marketing industries alike have long hoped for/relied on.
[3.29] More than anything else, I saw the book as a means of translation—hopefully, translation through drawing on a wide range of interdisciplinary academic work to complicate prevailing notions in the media and marketing industries, presuming the book would have a strong readership from those sectors. But also for academics, both in terms of drawing on interdisciplinary cultural criticism and of bringing in a range of industry thought leaders (to use that awful term) to show how these issues are being taken up by people in media and marketing roles. We wanted to complicate some of the generalizations that sometimes get made about industry practitioners within media studies scholarship. Throughout the process, it led to our challenging our own assumptions often, and I still feel that all sorts of slippages, contradictions, and glossing over of key issues or imbalances occur throughout the book.

[3.30] In particular, I'd like to pick up on the challenge(s) facing a project of this nature...interdisciplinary, multiple-authored (in both the main text and the range of authored pieces), and focused on contemporary issues and systems constantly in motion around us. As Xiaochang can well attest in all her work on and around this project these past few years, academic publishing cycles certainly don't align with the sorts of issues we were trying to understand. That was part of the fun in this, but it was also what led to so many aspects of this project being published and discussed years before the book came out. It also lends to a certain degree of self-referentiality in the book itself, in that there was significant marketing industry reaction (for instance) to some of the ideas in the book that we were subsequently able to weave into the book before publication. That process itself lent itself to a certain degree of messiness, especially as some of the authors of those reactions, or material surrounding the project, were moving from academic jobs to industry positions, or back and forth across those lines. In fact, the imagined audiences we start the "How to Read This Book" out with are, as Paul alludes to, fictions: market segmentations that the three of us created to imagine addressing, in ways that were sometimes helpful but also perhaps sometimes not, especially if and when they caused us to make the distinctions among those audiences too finite, or that may have caused us not to (at times) account for the diverse array of people that such a broad categorization might encompass within each category (note 38).

4. Transmedia and digital media

[4.1] Q: What does the term transmedia mean (industrially, from a recruitment angle [parents and soon-to-be students], and academically)? How does transmedia as a concept connect to spreadable media? How can we understand the role of technology and the particular affordances of digital and traditional media in the creation and circulation of spreadable media? How does the shape/format of the technology help to determine the type of media produced and spread? How does
Spreadable Media (the book and larger project) itself function along these lines as transmedia spreadable media? How do the different dimensions of Spreadable Media (hard copy, Kindle, online essays, digital extensions such as interviews, even this review) coexist and impact this project and our understanding of it?

[4.2] Sharon Ross: I have been grappling with the term transmedia from an academic administrative place. At Columbia, every possible form/element of media has its own department—in our School of Media Arts, there is film, TV, radio, journalism, interactive arts and media (where the gaming program lives), marketing....There's a long history to this, and it has its benefits (TV typically being the stepsister to film, and in turn radio being swallowed up by TV—in academic settings). But increasingly the benefits are becoming obstacles, in my mind, as we move further into a spreadable media world. Our school is engaging in some small experiments of combination, but in general what concerns me as both an associate chair and as a scholar focused on reception is that more and more students are graduating into a world where one cannot separate out the media strands so neatly. Thus a conversation has begun in our little world about how best to prepare our students for the shifting realities of media production today. (Columbia's media students for the most part aim to emerge as working content creators—writers, directors, editors, etc.) We have been busily trying to figure out how, in an academy that favors silos of specialization, you create pathways for students that engage with our spreadable media world (not using that phrase, of course).

[4.3] The current place we're at involves a debate over the term transmedia in terms of naming programs/majors/etc. Is it an adjective (transmedia storytelling? transmedia producers?)? Or is it a noun (I do/make transmedia)? Do you go with a crazily narrow definition (one story, told across multiple forms of media, that make up "the" story) or a broader one (stories connected in some way, sometimes tightly and sometimes loosely, with some sense of more than one form of media being at work in the audience's experience)?

[4.4] I throw these current debate points out because I figure this is a good opportunity to get varying perspectives on the idea of a student graduating with a degree in something called transmedia. Would that mean anything to prospective employers in the industry? And what would it mean, exactly? What would it mean to students (and their parents) as they seek programs of study? (In my own experience, the term means pretty much nothing to teen girls so far.)

[4.5] I guess part of what I'm trying to suss out here is a conceptual map of sorts (a little like Henry did in his August 2011 blog entry) (note 39). If we were to visualize it in some way, how do we see the relationships between convergence culture, participatory culture, engagement, transmedia, spreadable media, etc.? How does that
map then look when we try to apply it to studying the story/making and the telling and the engagement; finding ways to teach story making in this world; and finding the best ways in higher education institutions to allow students to learn and practice the skills they'll need to make stories in this world? (Because I'm pretty sure my suggestion at our last Columbia meeting of "no departments when it comes to media" won't fly...).

[4.6] (By the way, I'm in the TV department. My most local goal right now is to find a way to make sure our TV majors don't get out the door without learning about and playing around in this shifting landscape. I also want, on a less local level, to find a way to create a learning space for creative students who really want to jump into the intricacies of this media landscape. I can manage eventually the hurdles of institutional silos—there's always a way. I'm not so sure what to do about the practical need to name things in colleges and universities when it comes to departments and majors and such. So I'm hoping some mapping of the terms used so often in Spreadable Media could help with this....)

[4.7] Paul Booth: Thanks, Sharon. These topics you raise are things I've been thinking about incredibly recently, as I've been (a) designing a new course for our Media and Cinema Studies track in transmedia culture; (b) working as grad director in a new Digital Communication and Media Arts MA program, which uses a transmedia approach to studying digital technology and communication practices; and (c) have encountered (and been tempted by) no fewer than three CFPs (calls for papers) in the last week about different issues in transmediation. So I too have been dealing with these issues of how to best formulate pedagogical and scholarly conceptions of spreadability and transmediation in various contexts as well.

[4.8] So, just to piggyback on what Sharon said, I've had to navigate these traditional academic silos in terms of transmediation (which, as I will get to, is about the navigation of silos in and of itself). But I find great value in the term because of its flexibility—and (not coincidentally) I've noticed in my administration and in the industry, that same flexibility is problematic. Regarding Sharon's excellent question—that is, "If we were to visualize it in some way, how do we see the relationships between convergence culture, participatory culture, engagement, transmedia, spreadable media, etc.?"—may be in some ways an attempt to formalize definitions that, to me at least, need to remain flexible and open enough to accommodate multiple viewpoints and versions. Looking at the history of, say, television studies, even the term television hasn't remained stable (and don't even get me started on the term communication). Personally, I'd rather see transmedia and spreadability open up in multiple ways to accommodate those multiple viewpoints—although given its
placement in our administration as well as its formalization in the media industry, I suspect some of that delicious multiplicity will need to get ironed out.

Anyway, at the risk of mixing my metaphors even more, and actually relating this point back to spreadability and *Spreadable Media*, I see spreadability and transmedia as being linked in the same ways to varying degrees—that is, just as spreadability is a concept steeped in connecting content creators with content audiences, so too is transmediation a concept that must imbricate its users as much as it caters to them. I think Henry, Sam, and Joshua have an excellent quotation on this point:

> We have questioned the industry's assumption that it can create "brand communities" and "fan communities" around its products, suggesting instead that most of these exchanges occur within existing communities and ongoing conversations. As marketers and other content creators enter these spaces, they must think about what happens as content travels across cultural boundaries...creating "impure" texts which are not simply distributed from culture to culture but—in the process—often bear the mark of audiences that remake, reinterpret, and transform content.

Both spreadability and transmediation are at work at the same time, but in different ways. In this passage, it seems as though media texts are getting spread (via both producers and audiences), those texts are changing via the act of spreading, and that spreadability is (ultimately) creating transmediation of content. The warning that spreadable media creators need to heed—"as content travels across cultural boundaries [it] often bear[s] the mark of audiences that remake, reinterpret, and transform content"—is precisely what I see as the key issue facing transmediation as well, but it's one of interpretation rather than creation. What counts as transmedia? Do fan works fit into a transmedia paradigm? I think Jason Mittell's (2012) new book on *Complex TV* lays this out really well in his differentiation between "what is" and "what if" transmediation ([http://mcpress.media-commons.org/complextelevision/](http://mcpress.media-commons.org/complextelevision/)). "What is" transmedia is a way of deepening the world in an authorized fashion—the complement to "drillable," if you will. There is one story, and "what is" transmedia gets at it. In contrast, "what if" transmedia takes the narrative in alternative directions, exploring aspects of the story unexplored in the core franchise—the complement to "spreadable," and a corollary of seeing the types of alternate voices mentioned by Kristina in her response later in this discussion about fandom.

So in a way, *spreadable* (as an adjective, modifying *transmedia* as a noun) is one way of seeing how fandom can enter into a transmedia franchise through fan works that expand on the core story. A text can be more or less spreadable within the transmediated story. I like this interpretation, and I like the flexibility that open and
fluid terminology and categorization brings. *Spreadable* is a way of talking about a text from both the reader's and the author's points of view; to me it seems to be a more egalitarian interpretation of a text.

[4.13] But *spreadability* as a noun, indicating "the technical resources that make it easier to circulate some kinds of content than others, the economic structures that support or restrict circulation, the attributes of a media text that might appeal to a community's motivation for sharing material, and the social networks that link people" (note 40), seems to be an effective way of limiting audience involvement in a (trans)media franchise. In an environment based on technical resources, economic structures, media content, and social networks, I'd say that content creators tend to have the upper hand. *Spreadability* seems to be a measurement, which signifies a controlling stake in the material, shaping the way the franchise develops.

[4.14] So spreadable is different than spreadability, and different types of transmedia may react differently in different environments. One of the strengths of *Spreadable Media* is that it doesn't tether itself to one type or another. I see both spreadable media and transmedia storytelling as linked. One is a mechanism by which information circulates; the other is a narrative structure built on those intertextual moments of circulation.

[4.15] To return to the larger question, then, I think we can interpret the academy through the lens of spreadable media and transmedia. I like to think that the liberal arts are like a big transmedia experience—students take a bit of this here, a bit of that there, and somehow construct their own narrative of the world from these fragments. Spreadable pieces of information [moving] from one class to another is marvelous—who doesn't love seeing students make those connections? And while I'm not in favor of further silos in education, I do think that spreading knowledge from one silo to another is an important step in educational development.

[4.16] **Xiaochang Li:** I really like the distinction that Paul makes here between "spreadable" and "spreadability" as distinct forces where it comes to questions of decentralization or control in the movement, expansion, and transformation of media materials. The question I'm always led back to whenever a discussion of transmedia crops up, however, is what manner of crossings, linkages, or combinations the "trans" in transmedia is being used to describe. I think the spreadable/spreadability distinction speaks to this insofar as it makes explicit the ways in which "different types of transmedia may react differently in different environments," and I would perhaps also add that it reacts differently when applied to different forms of enclosure.

[4.17] The starting definition of transmedia deals with the development and dispersal of narratives across delivery channels, but as delivery technologies and media
practices change, it becomes less and less clear whether or not mode of delivery is the most relevant indicator that there are different media forms being traversed in any given instance. For instance, if we consider a narrative that plays out across novels and comic books a form of transmedia, the "trans" refers not to the delivery mechanism of printed matter bound as a codex, but to the linking of text and visual forms as well as between two recognizably distinct, though not exclusive, sets of narrative conventions. Similarly, we might ask what that "trans" might refer to when considering a film or television show and associated webisodes (or even a game), given that all these forms employ a shared visual grammar, particularly if we consider that a viewer might be encountering all the material on the same screen. We come upon considerations of not only cultural forms, but technical formats as distinct media (I'm thinking here of art historian Rosalind Krauss's treatment of video as a medium), and how that plays out in an environment where media content is not only encountered through a variety of interfaces that have different affordances and limitations (e.g., seeing a film in a theater versus being able to jump to different sections of a digital video), but additionally subject to fundamental transformations in how information is conceptualized, organized, and communicated (e.g., data storage and retrieval, compression, etc.). I'm not advocating that we necessarily narrow the definition of what counts as transmedia (and I'm generally not overly interested in policing what counts and what doesn't) since I too think the term's productivity is tied to its flexibility. But I think that it is worth being specific about which mediatic qualities we presume to be crossing and, by extension, are using as the criteria for distinguishing one medium from another. That is, transmedia describes very different things when we are talking about narratives that are dispersed across genres, forms, formats, apparatuses, and platforms, or even ones that develop through the crossing and bridging of institutional enclosures, industrial systems, or geopolitical borders. A study of transmedia objects or systems might open up the study of media to further questions around not only the content of media, but the mechanisms, techniques, and processes of mediation and the social relations, cultural fantasies, and political possibilities they may animate.

[4.18] To look at the question of the academy, it seems that what a transmedia approach might offer in perhaps more traditionally siloed situations is not only a way for more collaborative or interdisciplinary approaches, but also new objects of knowledge. That is to say, I think that we are seeing more and more instances where traditional categories of media scholarship, which tend to have profound influences on the path and objects of inquiry, are no longer sufficient in describing the conditions and practices in the current media landscape. Such that important objects of knowledge may risk getting overlooked because they do not readily avail themselves to projects that align neatly with an approach to media that takes a particular delivery channel as a starting point.
Paul Booth: One of the issues I’ve come across personally when it comes to "transmedia scholarship" is how protective other disciplines are of terminology and methodology. To assign any sort of nomenclature to a degree program or even to a class always risks stepping on toes. So while I'm in complete agreement that this approach may offer "new objects of knowledge," I wonder if the practicalities of the academic system (either in or out of media programs) would preclude that sort of adventuring. (Not that I think that should stop us or anyone from attempting to make those interdisciplinary/transsscholarly connections!).

Henry Jenkins: I have clearly thought deeply about all of this, especially having been part of creating and running the MIT Comparative Media Studies program for a decade. I think we were well ahead of the curve in terms of thinking about how our curriculum needs to change in order to embrace more transmedia approaches, and many of the ideas that inform Spreadable Media took shape in that context. Since then, we've seen many other schools try to work through these issues, each adopting a somewhat different mix of disciplines or media dependent on their local institutional histories and cultures, but each pushing toward multidisciplinary approaches and toward approaches that move beyond a legacy of medium specificity in the ways we structure our curriculum. There are no shortages of roadblocks here, and yes, a very big one is whether faculty trained in traditional disciplines are fully ready to accept other people playing with their concepts and materials, whether faculty are prepared to move outside their own comfort zones in collaborating with people with different backgrounds and experiences, or even whether they are ready to suspend traditional prerequisites (in all senses of the term) in order to allow students to mix and match courses in ways which make sense for them given their own distinctive intellectual and professional goals. The other thing I can say, briefly, is that the goal of fostering a transmedia education may look different depending on whether the goal is to train someone in media production (where our students are apt to move across media platforms many times in the course of their career), to train someone to think critically about the interplay of media (where few if any questions today can be answered sufficiently by retaining a narrow focus on a single medium to the exclusion of all of the others that impact it), or some combination of the above.

Sam Ford: This is a question that I'd love to see far more engagement on, perhaps outside the conversation surrounding Spreadable Media. As an undergraduate at Western Kentucky University some time ago, I had majors across three different departments. Through my work in each department, I was looking at storytelling of various media types (which made my final thesis an interesting exercise in combining disciplines...including dealing with three different citation styles). Now that I'm back at WKU, I am involved in some way with all three departments again and teaching in an interdisciplinary major, called popular culture studies, that didn't exist when I was a
student here. From my limited experience with an interdisciplinary major as student at MIT and as instructor and curriculum committee member at WKU, one of the key challenges faced with any interdisciplinary major whose transmedia focus takes it across departments is that funding structures are decidedly disciplinary within a school, and it is hard to break from that. It seems that such majors have fared better if rooted in one particular program, with small extensions into other departments, or else as a collaboration between two particular departments. For the pop culture studies program, WKU was boldly experimental in having the major lie with the dean's office rather than any particular department, but then the program has suffered without much line of funding, no significant administrative staff, and faculty who struggle to fit (especially upper-level) classes into the course load from their parent department.

[4.22] There is, perhaps, much we can learn from the struggle journalism schools have gone through in addressing some of these questions. They are more explicitly tagged as training people for professional careers in clearly marked disciplines...which means they have faced these questions/issues more acutely and more quickly than many other departments. When I was an undergraduate major in both mass communication and news/editorial journalism within the school of journalism and broadcasting at WKU (note that it changed names while I was a student, as it was print journalism at the time I started, but "transmedia-tion" was already taking its toll), the school was openly engaging its students on how to deal with convergence and what that meant for the students it was turning out. Now, in working peripherally with the school of J&B on the future of their curriculum, I've found them, 10 years later, still grappling with those questions, with faculty and students alike struggling to find the balance between storytelling expertise in a particular medium and a knowledge of how stories build across various audio, visual, audiovisual, and written formats.

[4.23] The tensions of how to balance between the (sexist) notions of renaissance man on the one hand and jack-of-all-trades and master of none on the other has led to all sorts of soul-searching and a lot of tensions along the way from particular tracks that were once more distinct. The problem only gets exacerbated when students are seen as needing skills that lie outside their department. For instance, with the rise of storytelling through visualization techniques, the school of J&B has been encouraging students to take courses in graphic design. They reached out to the graphic design department at WKU for some partnership, but the faculty there was resistant because basic graphic design classes are not general-education electives. Thus, taking on a large number of students from another (much larger) school was untenable when trying to accommodate journalism graphic design students. On the other hand, when WKU explored hiring a faculty member to start teaching graphic design classes within
the school of J&B, the graphic design department gave pushback as well, not wanting
to see another program offering similar classes. These sorts of absurdities can seem
ridiculous from the outside but are perhaps logical from a viewpoint within the system.

[4.24] We say in *Spreadable Media*, "Corporate infrastructure has created rigid
disciplinary divides among these various departments, not only in scope of work but—
perhaps most importantly—in budget. Who 'owns' the customer relationship within a
company is ultimately a question of who remains relevant and who keeps their job.
And, as corporate communicators throughout an organization adjust to a digital age,
the tensions and fault lines between departments shape how brands react to the ethos
and practices of what we're calling spreadable media" (179–180). Substitute academic
for corporate, student for customer, faculty and staff for corporate communicators,
and schools for brands...and I think the sentence unfortunately works all too well
(which perhaps speaks to the ongoing issues of corporatization of private and public
schools alike, but as equally to the problem disciplines create in any large
organization).

5. Moving forward (with scholarship and action)

[5.1] **Q: Spreadable Media** not only strives to offer insight into contemporary culture
but also attempts to change industry, academic, and audience perspectives and
actions. How might we (and should we) move forward with this agenda? How does the
work in spreadable media connect to Henry's (and others') current concerns with new
media and activism as it relates to the politics of circulation?

[5.2] **Xiaochang Li:** Throughout the book and in a number of the pieces in the
expanded book online, we see evidence of a broad effort to think about media
practices and the concepts and strategies employed in describing, managing, and
engaging with them as historically embedded. We might consider an overarching (or
perhaps underlying) premise of spreadability to be a call for greater specificity around
how we think about media practices, now that models that emerged out of broadcast
or conceptual metaphors like "viral" are no longer sufficient (though, I think the book
argues, still relevant).

[5.3] Obviously there's been a tremendous amount of work done since the project
began in earnest back in, wow, 2007 when we started writing that first white paper.
The arguments and cases have been dramatically deepened and expanded, but there's
a central conceit of sticky/spreadable at its core that seems to have remained largely
intact. This contrast of sticky and spreadable, while not meant to be comprehensive
nor exclusive, at least represents the dominant polarity that orients the book/project
in terms of its approach to the production and analysis of media.
Very broadly speaking, sticky seems to refer to a set of approaches that fall under a regime of measure that is premised on the counting and accounting of viewers/impressions. I don't want to conflate things overmuch, since I think the book does distinguish between concepts of sticky media with actual practices of measurement, but it does acknowledge that quantitative measurement techniques are at least guilty of "echoing the limitations of the stickiness model" (176). Spreadable, on the other hand, signals a push toward some kind of more qualitative reckoning that can attend to the fine-grained textures of association embedded within media circulation and viewing practices.

In this light, I wanted to throw data mining and analytics practices into the mix and see if it complicates this sticky/spreadable structure a bit, especially given the amount of attention big data has been receiving the past few years. It's worth parsing out different forms of quantitative practice. Many of those described in the book center around acts of counting, where measurement is the end goal of a process. But we are also seeing a rise in data practices that use measurement as an intermediary step in a process of modeling. Put another way, if we look at data-and-analytics-driven practices, the goal seems to shift from trying to count the audience to trying to model the audience. These quantitative practices begin to look a lot less like the "traditional questions of 'Who is there?' and 'How many of them are there?"' (177) and more like an the effort to understand "how, or why, audiences might want to interact with the company and its contents" (177) that spreadability seems to call for. Yet at the same time, it isn't quite like what spreadable describes: services like Google AdSense or recommendation engines, for instance, seek to automate the qualitative assessment of user interests, intents, practices, and desires through quantitative means, and thus has no interest and account of "why." The model is less concerned with causation regarding current behavior than it is with an approximation of consequent behavior. That is, modeling as a form of knowledge does not subscribe to a determinist view of the world in which cause triggers effect, but a probabilistic one shaped around trackable tendencies and correlation.

This is, of course, nothing new. Targeted advertising has been around for a long time in various forms (and statistical modeling for much longer than that), and the traditional broadcast measurement models, though primarily engaged in practices of counting, were also assumed to operate as a model that could forecast future ratings/ticket sale/impressions/etc. But I think the growing interest in data, particularly data at a scale beyond qualitative examination that promises the discovery of information and categories otherwise unavailable to us (or so the rhetoric of big data goes) intersects with models of sticky and spreadable media in interesting ways.
My sense is that these practices offer a potentially productive intervention in thinking about models of media use and audience engagement. If nothing else, they complicate how we depict the quantitative reduction that is typically associated with broadcast and sticky models of media. If we think of the traditional impression or what I've been referring to as ''count'' paradigm, it is one in which individuals are reduced to eyeballs based on a present/not-present binary (as well as slightly more sophisticated measurements of how long you look, how many clicks, etc). The user, or user action, remains a coherent unit, though reduced to an impression, a butt-in-seat, a ''unique,'' and so on. Data analytics pursue a quantification that is not necessarily tied to volume and duration but rather seeks to map associations and patterns across various practices and contents. In these practices, the user seems to undergo a sort of statistical vivisection, in which some parts are then rebundled with parts of others in order to render sophisticated correlations. Rather than a method that reduces individuals to little more than data points, you get a slightly different flavor of violence that hinges on the slicing and dicing of individuals and practices for reassembly into predictive models. Put another way, instead of producing an aggregate, undifferentiated mass, the quantification of users become highly differentiated, to the extent that many of the key debates about data analytics revolve around privacy and anonymity.

In perhaps more immediate terms, we're seeing different approaches in how audiences are being sold (in the sense of the running joke of Web 2.0 that goes something like, ''If your service is free, your users are probably your product''), not merely in terms of their numbers but as sites of data extraction. Yet at the same time the rhetoric of big data and data analytics in general seems to echo some of the commitments of spreadability in that the premise of data analytics is the discovery and mapping of complex relations between things, and in particular the discovery of relations that do not necessarily fit predefined categories. Both are premised on the existence of a diversity of users and user practices. These increasingly prevalent data practices seem to at least complicate the epistemological and ideological distinctions that were maybe more neatly aligned in the earlier accounts of sticky and spreadable strategies.

I think what I'm trying to say is simply that data analytics, particularly the efforts around big data, don't fit neatly with the accounts of quantification and measurement associated with sticky, nor do they sit comfortably with the motivation-centric account of spreadable. So I wonder if we can start to map where it overlaps and differs from each, and whether that tells us something about either of these models and how they might have shifted in recent years.
Sam Ford: Xiaochang, I'm glad you brought big data into the conversation. One of the issues I've been preoccupied with since the book project itself wrapped is the prevalence with which big data as a concept has been on the minds of the business world, and increasingly the public consciousness. Most of us have probably seen the stats about how more data have been created and recorded during the time it took me to write this sentence than in all of recorded history before us. (Okay, so I exaggerate, but you get the point.) And yet there is such a wide array of measurement and modeling practices; of data purposefully gathered or collected without particular purpose; and of debate within companies as to the purpose these data receive.

At the Futures of Entertainment conference in November 2012, Grant McCracken made a statement that we are at a particularly crucial moment in which the purpose of big data hasn't been completely defined yet. He suggested that is a moment in which scholars might meaningfully intervene: not solely to praise the qualitative over the quantitative, but perhaps to discuss ways in which the two means of understanding culture and audiences might most meaningfully complement one another, in ways that help organizations better serve their audiences rather than those traditional advertising questions you mention (note 41).

If we think of data as only being useful for measurement or marketing purposes, of course, we are missing the sorts of benefits that might most meaningfully impact media audiences and media creators/companies alike. The ways in which data can help companies better understand and serve are crucial, and we're starting to see all sorts of ways in which data analysis can help save lives (literally) in realms far afield from media. The issues it raises, of course, are what we claim the data can tell us, how they're being gathered, how they're being analyzed, etc. Often I feel the danger comes not from the data but from the analysis: after all, measuring whether a TV set was on or not never actually accounted for viewing, and measuring how much time someone spends on a page doesn't really tell us "engagement."

For someone who heavily advocates the importance of qualitative methodologies and practices, it's easy to decry that the big data era finds ways to further drown out actually listening to the audiences companies seek to reach. Yet there are a range of ways companies can and perhaps should use data already being gathered to find ways to better understand what their audiences want from them. In many ways, the principles behind design thinking apply here: the idea of companies doing what they can through qualitative and quantitative research to better understand the audiences they are trying to serve and to better enhance their experience. This is an area in which I feel that much deeper collaborative research and thinking should come from scholars, where an intervention can be helpful. Yet it requires—I think—our complicating our view, as you suggest, of what "data" means
and what it is or could be used for within an organization. Turning people into numbers is a bad concept, but using data to make more informed decisions about how to serve your audience may be beneficial to media companies and audiences alike. We should be critical of how those interests align, but we also shouldn't dismiss the potentials.

[5.14] I also think the stickiness/spreadability dynamic is further complicated by a range of technologies that increasingly seek to measure content as it spreads. Certainly, the "hearing" strategies the book criticizes in chapter 4 often involve trying to generate data from social media conversations. But we also have services like Bit.ly offering people much easier, everyday access to see how links they share get spread more widely, and a focus on finding ways to quantify exactly how things spread.

[5.15] As you suggest, this allows quantitative data to more easily get at the how, and to do so in a way that doesn't force audiences to conform to the ways in which it's easiest for the company to measure their movements but rather to build data-gathering practices more clearly around how audiences want to interact with content. But it still doesn't address the why, and it still runs the risk of stripping content from its contextual meaning in ways that may distort what it means in the first place. Again, here is a place where I believe scholars can make meaningful intervention. At the very least, we can complicate prevailing corporate narratives that blindly celebrate big data. But perhaps we can also challenge companies to truly think through how these practices—and the complementary possibilities of qualitative and quantitative research—should be used to ask more valuable questions about how to put companies in better service of their audiences rather than how to best measure the results of a campaign or to place the best advertising or create more "accurate" marketing segmentation profiles (note 42).

[5.16] **Sharon Ross:** I think an important future area of spreadability (be it entertainment, news, or academic scholarship) is the potential use of cyber infrastructure. In a way we've created a miniversion of this here. Imagine what could be studied if we had access to a digital system that posed just one of these questions to not just media scholars and industry professionals, but to fans and heads of NPOs and the mom invested in what her kid watches and the scientist and the musician...I think spreadability, in its grandest sense, has the potential to make people see things in radically different ways (to bring it back to media, think of how the show *Dallas* [CBS, 1978–1891] was perceived in the United States versus Japan versus Israel...). So who's going to get us a megacomputer system?

6. What's not (in) *Spreadable Media*?
Q: The book's subtitle—"creating value and meaning in a networked culture"—effectively describes the content of the book, but I wonder what we're leaving out; value and meaning are just two of many things created in a networked culture. Are there valuable messages that don't lend themselves to spreadability? Should spreadability be an expectation of all media messages? If so, what happens to those messages in an environment that privileges spreadability? Are there drawbacks to creating expectations for spreadability in media audiences?

Paul Booth: I have really enjoyed this conversation—this sort of interactive dialogue is an experience I've never had before, and I feel as though I've learned so much about how to participate in a thoughtful and engaging discourse in an interactive environment. One particular aspect that I've been intrigued by (and, to be honest, a bit addicted to watching) is the different ways each of us have approached this technological mechanism of Google Drive. For example, I prefer to type my thoughts into my word-processing program, edit and change as I compose, and revise my final answer before I post it to the discussion. Others of you write directly into the Google Drive document, fingers flying and letters appearing as if by some magical Harry Potter spell (*Lingua Apparere!*), only going back later to make changes or edits to typos. I'm sure there's a fascinating study to be had (or maybe there already is one of which I am unaware) on the ways that interacting with the medium in a groupthink situation creates different interpretations of contributions and effectiveness of arguments...

I am going on at length about this because I think it's relevant to *Spreadable Media*, and is one of the topics that we didn't get a chance to discuss much in our first week's interaction. That is, I'm curious about the role of technology in spreadable media (and spreadability), and the ways that different technologies generate, augment, or (even) necessitate spreadability. The possibility of publishing this entire dialogue (all 30K words) online creates, as Louisa noted, spreadable forms of this discussion without us intending it to happen. If it wasn't going to be published online, would we still consider this discussion spreadable? In other words, is the possibility of spreadability enough to make a text spreadable, or does one actually have to spread it in order to make it spreadable? Is it just enough to make something spreadable, or does spreadability emerge from practice?

Most of the examples from the book, quite naturally, stem from digital technologies, but I also wonder if there are more examples of spreadability in the past that, in retrospect, we can see as spreadable. (We touched a bit on this in the dialogue about fan practices). Or is spreadability something best seen in a new media environment, as a generative process only applicable with (and for) digital technology? While I don't have any answers, I want to pose some questions and topics that
occurred to me as I thought about the relationship between technology and spreadability.

[6.5] For example, I'm typing this in my office right now with a photographed zine sitting next to me. This is a hard copy that was passed to me by a colleague, who picked it up at a fan convention. This fanzine has been spread to me through whatever analog means were applicable to passing it along (although I'm sure digital production went into its creation). This zine is spreadable, but it's a much more limited spreadability than what we see with sharing on Facebook or retweeting on Twitter. Is there a spectrum of spreadability? Some things spread better than others, but for the particular fan community of this zine, it spread pretty quickly (and pretty widely, considering how far it traveled to get to me). Can something spread even without digital technology?

[6.6] One of the main takeaways of Spreadable Media is the "if it doesn't spread, it's dead" phrase—a mnemonic that works quite nicely at distinguishing between types of circulation within contemporary media environments. But I'm also interested in exploring the converse: if it's dead, can it spread? I've been interested in the idea of retro technologies and the cultural return to analog (or even older digital) forms. I saw records for sale in Target the other day! And my wife just got back into Commander Keen, King's Quest, and Quest for Glory—all video games from the 1980s that have resurfaced in glorious 16-color graphics. These ostensibly dead technologies (or, at least, majorly outdated) are making a comeback in our nostalgic return to today's young adult's childhoods. How do retro technologies fit into the spreadable paradigm?

[6.7] Additionally, I'm curious about whether the particular affordances of technology seem to generate spreadability. I mentioned the retweets of Twitter, a functional aspect of the technology that seems to engender spreadable media. The ubiquitous buttons on Web pages that allow people to post to their Facebook wall, construct blog posts, or link to on Twitter all seem poised to promote spreadability within contemporary technology. What worries me about this is how much control the manufacturers and designers of that technology have over individuals' own ability to spread media. It's much easier and faster to spread via Facebook...unless one decides to remain off Facebook. If the designers of technology are enabling the grassroots spreadability, is it a concept rooted in manufactured interactivity? Are we swapping the freedom to print whatever the hell we want in a zine and pass it out to 100 people for the ability to repost a clip of American Idol or Breaking Bad to a thousand? The more that design for spreadability rests in the technology, the less that those without the technological skills will be able to take part in that conversation.

[6.8] I guess I don't really have answers to these questions—perhaps why I posed this larger question in the first place. But I guess the larger issue here is the
importance in interrogating how spreadable media works outside of the contemporary, mainstream paradigm. Does it have the same characteristics when looking at spreadability in analog? The spreadable practices of retro technologies? One area for further exploration, then, could be the spreadability of spreadable media—spreading to other arenas of technological usage.

[6.9] **Melissa Click:** One of the aspects of *Spreadable Media* that I enjoyed is its connection of online practices today to the history of participatory culture. I think what comes out of that connection is the idea that yes, things certainly spread before digital media—and certainly can continue to spread offline in a digital environment. I think Paul's recently received zine is a good example of that.

[6.10] I was really struck, though, by *Spreadable Media*'s final chapter, chapter 7, and its discussion of transnational media flows. There is a recognition here that content is spreading in places (and amongst folks) where digital media is not readily available. But the book is obviously about spreadable digital media flows, not off-line flows, so I started wondering about the folks around the world who either don't have access to digital media—or who simply don't wish to actively participate in a spreadable media environment. What should we be thinking about these folks?

[6.11] I don't mean to stir up our argument about fans (though I definitely enjoyed it!), but it seems to me that the celebration of online spreadability and its resulting activities has the potential to reassert the preference for active (fans) over assumedly passive (audiences). So to be tongue in cheek with the phrase, are people who don't spread dead? I absolutely value *Spreadable Media*'s recognition of everyday activities online and its suggestion that often we are active and passive in different places/times online. I think that's right on—but I'm concerned about reproducing a hierarchy between "folks who spread and those who don't."

[6.12] I really appreciate Paul's questions about where spreadability originates. The idea that it is hardwired into technology is a bit too deterministic for me, though I think Paul's concerns are valuable. I have been amused by our attempts to make spreadability a verb (spreading) or a noun (spreaders), etc., instead of an adjective—we've invented some great permutations of the term! In the same way I think of *fan* as a verb and not a noun, meaning that fandom is something you do, not something you are, I think of spreadability as something you do, not something inherent in content or technology (or particular people, for that matter). I think many of *Spreadable Media*'s examples demonstrate this—including examples about retro items getting new life when they're (re)spread. If spreadability is an action, then anyone can do it—with varying degrees of investment and frequency, of course. I think that means anything can be spread, too—on- or off-line. Spreadability just requires someone
interested in taking up the task who has the access to do so. Whether others wish to
take up and encourage that spreading is another topic process, though...

[6.13] **Sharon Ross:** I looooved Melissa's query: "Are people who don't spread
dead? I absolutely value *Spreadable Media's* recognition of everyday activities online
and its suggestion that often we are active and passive in different places/times
online. I think that's right on—but I'm concerned about reproducing a hierarchy
between folks who spread and those who don't." I think this is an incredibly important
question to ask, and it has deep roots in much of Henry's earlier work. In a sense,
dare I say it, if people don't spread, they are in a way dead. Let's consider: if you
watch a show, go to see a film, read a book, even receive a phone call...if you in no
way feel compelled to share some aspect of what you received, ever, are you
participating in human culture? This takes us back, of course, to Paul's notion of a
spectrum of spreadability. I just really believe at my core that storytelling is an
essential human thing. Storytelling, to me, implies an active listener/reader/what have
you who wishes to do something with that story—pass it on, talk about it, react to it in
a way that then impacts those around them. (If a tree falls and no one is there, does it
make a sound?) Now, this is creating a spectrum so broad as to be irrelevant,
certainly. But in a way, saying "if it doesn't spread, it's dead" also creates areas of
irrelevancy, as Melissa points out.

[6.14] Perhaps we might ask: What is the actual value in spreadability from a
humanistic standpoint? Aside from financial success in the marketplace from an
industry standpoint, what do we as a culture/society (noting here there are more than
one) actually gain that betters us from spreadable media? Is the value in the media
itself, or in the act of spreading? Is it in simply being a part of the spreadability (which
could include passive audiences, noting that passive increasingly seems so only by
way of comparison to more easily labeled active audiences). Here I'm thinking of many
captured live events, for which no planning of spreadability exists. By way of example,
the tragedy of the Boston Marathon bombings was hardly planned as a piece of media,
yet it spread (via technology, to be sure—thus Paul's important points above), and yet
many people received passively. Still, I imagine the knowledge that this spread (that
most everyone knew about it, reacted to it, had an opinion about it) made it a very
active media event for people at an emotional level.

[6.15] **Xiaochang Li:** I love Paul's point about our various uses of the Google Drive
platform, since the question of digital technology becomes so critical in light of both
Melissa and Sharon's points regarding the tendency to privilege certain activities over
others. All of these points, in my mind, direct us to think carefully about the
environments and interfaces—the material surrounds—of practices that are often
discussed in terms of the immateriality of digital information. To use our Google Drive
use as an example: I was one of the people who typed directly into Google Drive, due mainly to the fact that I was working from a laptop while traveling and found toggling back and forth between windows to reference the most up-to-date content to be annoying. Had I been at home or in my office, where I have multiple monitors set up, I may have opted for the cut-and-paste method instead. The physical setup I'm using in order to access content has strong bearing on how I encounter and choose to act in response to it. Similarly, as we think transnationally, passive viewing may become an emphatically active practice as a result of material conditions, requiring interventions on an existing market or even physical infrastructure. There needs to be a kind of technical (or more generally, a medium) specificity applied to spreadable practices as we move forward. This is not to suggest a sort of determinism, but to recognize that our media encounters and actions, the "degrees of investment and frequency" (as Melissa said) with which we spread, are conditioned by the technical and material arrangements available to us.

[6.16] Kristina Busse: Like Paul and Xiaochang, I'd like to conclude my thoughts on Spreadable Media by looking at the role of technology and interfaces as well. But I'm less interested in the way it affects individual interactions or even the spreadability of a given idea as much as I'd like to direct our thoughts in the direction of how and where technology can easily impede access and spreadability. As Xiaochang again reminds us of the transnational component, I want to remind us of the ability of nations to limit, censor, and survey any and all communications. If up to this point I have foregrounded the dangers of neoliberal, postcapitalist ideology as it relates to economic interests, I want to expand the control of interfaces and technological access to these threats.

[6.17] I am less concerned here with the question of whether a given low-income home has broadband (though that certainly is important) or how working in a cloud environment affects our individual work flows (though that is an important theoretical consideration)—what I want to remind us here is that the Internet may be chaotic and free, but it is only as free as our ISP (and, in the end, the laws governing it) allow it to be. Likewise, there remains the continuing promise (threat?) of weighing information by its commercial viability, as with the example in Germany...of provider Telekom proposing that their own online services would retain speed while all others would be throttled. In other words, as a founding member and staffer of the Organization for Transformative Works, I am fully behind its empathic battle cry, and indeed "I want us to own the goddamned servers!" But as important as not getting TOSsed by a Web host may be, for the information to make it to my screen, that it still has to pass a multitude of commercial and governmental sites, all of which can apparently survey and potentially block the transmission. It is here that network neutrality must remain
a part of our overall civic project as much as working toward fair copyright laws and transparency of any and all oversight—whether for economic or political means.

[6.18] If we focus on spreadability only in terms of the individuals spreading, we are in danger of overlooking the ways in which such spreadability is all too dependent on sites wanting to allow this dissemination of information. Technological constraints such as Flash can be cracked, of course, but the difference between cracking and having built-in spreadability is vast and vital. Or said differently, as much as Henry believes in the power of fans to be creative and to protect themselves, it remains an ongoing battle, whether collectively testifying for exemption from the DMCA for vidders or individually rejecting a takedown claim from YouTube. Amazon can delete my Kindle account with all the books I "purchased," the new Xbox effectively allows me to play the games I buy without actual ownership, [and] my cloud services can be deleted for any and all infractions, taking with it all my information and data. There have been some wonderful expansions addressing the dark underside of spreadability in the wake of Spreadable Media, and I'd like to add to that a continuing vigilance for a similarly consistent awareness how spreadability continues to spread only at the discretion of entities that could just as easily limit or curb those abilities.

[6.19] **Henry Jenkins:** First, let me thank all of you for your intense, thoughtful engagement with Spreadable Media as a book and as larger project. Each of you asked important questions or posed critiques that pushed our thinking in new directions, and that is as it should be. This closing discussion has raised other important issues about the degree to which shifts in technological infrastructure might endanger the kinds of breakthroughs Spreadable Media has sought to describe. Let me be clear that I do not consider there to be anything inevitable (or irreversible) about the current state of the technology. I have long argued against rhetorics of technological inevitability, whether they take the form of arguments that new media will inevitably lead toward a more democratic culture or the form of arguments that capitalism will inevitably overcome and contain anything emancipatory or participatory that emerges in the online world. Whatever happens next is, as Kristina suggests above, going to take struggle—active, day-in and day-out, struggle, which is why it seems important for us to document the changes that are taking place every step along the way and to identify core issues and debates as early as possible and in a language that is accessible to the broadest range of stakeholders.

[6.20] Hats off to all of the different fan activists who have been on the front lines in defending our collective rights to participate in our culture through any and every means available to us. Hats off to the educators who have helped to expand the public's access to the skills and opportunities needed for meaningful participation, to the librarians who have argued forcefully against mandatory filters which might block
access to information, to the community centers that have sought resources to ensure that underserved communities can deploy these tools in their own interests, to the independent media producers and activists who have sought to model new tactics for getting alternative messages into circulation, to the human rights advocates who monitor and call out various filtering and censoring mechanisms around the world, and to the producers of media beyond the Global North who are seeking ways to get their productions seen and their voices heard in conversations that are vital to the future of their people.

[6.21] If we need to participate as academics in these struggles, we need to offer conceptual frameworks that are robust enough to serve as resources within these various debates. Part of what we need to do is to define more clearly than most critical studies writing does what we are struggling for—and not simply what we are struggling against. Fan studies has made some key contributions here in helping us to better understand what a participatory culture looks like. And so have scholars documenting a range of other communities that have been on the front lines in seeking to expand popular access to the means of cultural production and circulation.

[6.22] I don't think participatory culture is something that is universal—that is to say, it is certainly not universally available to all under the current system (even if we have seen some expansion of who has access to this expanded communication capacity), and it is also not possible to develop a universal model of what the ideal form of participatory culture should look like. I don't see Spreadable Media as offering the model; I think it points to a range of different models that inform contemporary struggles. We also need to acknowledge that not all forms of participation are progressive or inclusive; for example, the use of Reddit in the wake of the Boston bombings was certainly participatory, but in many cases, it amounted to a collective effort at racial profiling, more collective ignorance than collective intelligence, and so, yes, we need to be "vigilant" as critical intellectuals not only to protect opportunities for participation but also to ensure that we take seriously our ethical obligations as participants to ensure that our speech does not silence others, that we take responsibility for the consequences of the "information" we put into circulation.

[6.23] Paul asks whether spreadable media is necessarily digital media; I think the book includes multiple places where we acknowledge that there was a history of spreadable media before there was networked communication. But I do think that networked communication has fundamentally altered how things spread through culture and has created a context where things that spread digitally are apt to gain much greater visibility and urgency than things that do not spread through these channels.
People who do not spread content may not be dead, but the capacity to get messages out into the larger media landscape may increase our collective and individual likelihood to survive the challenges of the future. Several of you in your closing remarks talk about individual spreaders. From my perspective, individuals cannot or do not spread content. For content to spread, it must pass through networks (whether digitally enhanced or the kinds of social networks and communities that we have lived within throughout human history), and as a consequence, spreading is always a collective practice. For that reason, spreading is meaningful in terms of the set of social connections it activates, the processes through which it contributes, even without regard to the content that is being circulated. These sets of social connections are things that cannot be simply captured or commodified by companies, no matter how they might try.

Sam Ford: The question posed at the top of this section is about what wasn't in the book. The answer is plenty, but we didn't intend for it to be the book on the circulation of media texts in digital culture but rather a book that brings together a range of examples and scholarly work, provides framework and analysis for what is happening today, and (I hope) drives new dialogue and future work that crossed disciplinary boundaries. The mix of people Cinema Journal brought together for this discussion has certainly helped do that. And since Henry wrote the whole book in a Google Doc (as it was called at the time), it only seems natural to have this dialogue take place via the same format.

I appreciate Melissa's question about spreadability as a noun, a verb, and an adjective, and Paul's question about the possibility for spreadability versus actually spreading. This was one key reason we rejected the notion of "virality" throughout our work, as virality is a metaphor that defines spreadability by its result, and in a way that leaves any conscious power in the hands of the creator and her or his text. Instead, I think of spreadability as potential energy, as—to quote Sharon's piece from the project—invitations to spread that may or may not be taken up by active audiences of that text (note 43). Just because the text has the ability to spread doesn't mean that it will. However, creators and distributors of texts can do a variety of things to make texts have a higher possibility of spreading, from making sure that sharing the text isn't overly onerous from a technical perspective, to making texts more "producerly" (to draw on John Fiske's notion we used in the original white paper and in the book), to thinking about how and why multiple communities might want to circulate the work (note 44).

Some texts become valuable to us because they act as fodder for social interaction. They transform at that moment from a media text for an individual to some form of social and cultural resource through which we might define ourselves,
sustain relationships, build community, increase our own notoriety, challenge others, etc. Indeed, as Sharon writes, this is the classic notion of storytelling—that we value stories because of how they can bring us closer together with particular communities.

However, this question of whether people, and texts, are dead if they don't spread is one that is a vital corrective toward any overvaluation of spreadability. Despite the pithiness of the "if it doesn't spread, it's dead" mantra...we have to push back against that statement's oversimplification (and hope that we did, through the course of the book). One of my primary goals in cowriting this book was to challenge the notion that producing "texts" should somehow become the definition of participation and push back against the belief that less visible activities of sharing and circulation can somehow be defined as passive audience practice. In response, though, we also can't define value solely in terms of spreadability.

As Melissa points out, we don't want to create new hierarchies that say that audience members who spread texts—or who spread them via certain (online, "surveillable," "monitizable") ways are somehow more important than those who don't, or whose means of circulating are less visible. Also, not all texts that people find valuable as easily lend themselves to spreadability (as Paul's queries point toward). We have to be cognizant that what a person finds valuable to engage with on an individual level and what they choose to circulate to other networks may not always be the same thing. (People may find great value in reading their e-mail, watching pornography, or listening to international news but be more likely to share on Facebook that clip of *American Idol* or *Breaking Bad* that Paul writes about. While the former texts may have strong individual engagement, the latter may be perceived as having a greater degree of cultural/social value. We don't want to risk conflating the two.)

We also shouldn't primarily think of spreadability in terms of scale—to create a model that defines value solely by how far or how widely something spreads. That again takes us right back to the numbers game of going viral. For instance, Kristina writes about fan groups who share texts within a particular social setting. In this case, the spreadability happens within that community, with little interest in—or even a strong interest in preventing—those texts circulating outside that context. And on [the blog] Ethnography Matters, designer/artist An Xiao Mina wrote about content that is spreadable within Uganda—and ways that the content that circulates, and context of that spreading, have a strong cultural specificity that might naturally contain how intelligible they are outside that context. In both cases, the content might be highly spreadable, but primarily within a particular community or cultural setting (note 45). If we only define "spreadable media" by content that is viewed x number of times, we
ignore the vast majority of content that people are circulating (and, I'd argue, most of the content that is the most meaningful to those doing the circulating).

[6.31] Second, this closing discussion has repeatedly emphasized that we can't define the meaning of spreading content by the tools most readily available to share—as these tools are often what's there, not what's ideal. Paul writes about what trade-offs are involved in technologies that make it easy to share. Many have called this "frictionless sharing." It's called that primarily because the goal is to make it as easy as possible for its users to pass content along to their connections via social network sites...but, of course, frictionless has a second meaning as well: to make sure that it's shared in the most palatable way possible for the creator of the content and for the platform on which it is being shared (note 46).

[6.32] We can't take a technological, determinist view of spreadability. Certain technical features and platforms have increased the scale and frequency of how people share, but spreadability is not the creation of a digital age, as we have all pointed out throughout this discussion. As such, we have to be cognizant that the labor and the meaning behind the act of sharing a piece of content with a particular network can't be reduced to the platform. The myth of Web 2.0 is that the goals of the content owner, the platform, and the community of users are all perfectly aligned. We have to continuously challenge that myth, to acknowledge the gaps in technologies and cultures of access that Xiaochang writes about, the participation gap that Paul writes about, and the many less visible forces that shape (and distort) the act of circulation that Kristina writes about.

[6.33] Part of that work is making all of us more aware of technological and cultural inequalities in participating in a culture of spreadability. Part of this work is the crucial need for advocacy surrounding issues like net neutrality, digital privacy, constantly changing terms of service, and—now—research being done on platform users, as was discovered via Facebook's research on its users (note 47). And yes, I believe there's also much work to be done to advocate to commercial forces (from those who produce content to those who own the platforms that distribute it or that facilitate spreadability) that better respecting their audiences' interests and rights—that, to borrow Carol Sanford's phrase, being a "responsible business"—is not incompatible with capitalism, even if commercial and social interests will not (and should not) perfectly align (note 48). I also think it's especially vital to seek new forms of civic education (note 49) surrounding cultural practices of sharing: to increase the abilities people have to participate, to make us all more cognizant of our right not to participate, and—above all—to help us think through the ethics and implications of the everyday sharing in which many of us are immersed.
7. Notes


9. Ibid.; emphasis added.


33. Jenkins et al., *Spreadable Media*, 35.

34. Ibid., 291.


42. For more on Ford's perspective on this, see his writing on big data: Sam Ford, "Technology and Humanity: Creating Cyborg Organizations," *Fast Company*, February


8. Contributors

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**Kristina Busse** is cofounder and editor of *Transformative Works and Culture* and coeditor of *Fan Fiction and Fan Communities in the Age of the Internet* (2006), *Sherlock and Transmedia Fandom* (2012), and the *Fan Fiction Studies Reader* (2014). Her work on media fandom has appeared in numerous anthologies and journals, including *Cinema Journal, Camera Obscura,* and *Popular Communication.*

**Melissa Click** (PhD, University of Massachusetts, Amherst) is Assistant Professor of Communication at the University of Missouri–Columbia. Her research interests include audience and fan studies, as well as ideological analysis of popular culture texts. She is coeditor of *Bitten by Twilight* (Peter Lang, 2010). Her work has been published in *Popular Communication, Popular Music and Society,* and *Women's Studies in Communication,* and in New York University Press's *Fandom.*

**Sam Ford** is Director of Audience Engagement with Peppercomm, a research affiliate with Comparative Media Studies/Writing at MIT, and an adjunct lecturer with the Popular Culture Studies Program at Western Kentucky University. He is coauthor of *Spreadable Media: Creating Value and Meaning in a Networked Culture* and coeditor of *The Survival of Soap Opera.* He has written for *Harvard Business Review, Fast Company, Wall Street Journal, Christian Science Monitor, BusinessWeek,* and a range of other news and academic publications.

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**Xiaochang Li** is a PhD candidate in media, culture, and communication at New York University. She is currently working on a dissertation examining the history of predictive modeling within media and communications technologies, which she sometimes refers to as "that thing about autocorrect."

**Sharon Ross** is Associate Professor and Associate Chair in the Television Department at Columbia College Chicago. Her work includes *Beyond the Box: Television and the Internet* (Wiley-Blackwell, 2008), and she coedited *Teen Television: Essays on Programming and Fandom* (McFarland, 2008).
Book review

Fanged fan fiction: Variations on Twilight, True Blood, and The Vampire Diaries, by Maria Lindgren Leavenworth and Malin Isaksson

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[0.2] Keywords—Genre; Reception studies


If there ultimately proves to be a bottom to the current cultural frenzy for all things vampire, we are certainly not there yet; vampire romances in books, television, and film continue to provide the foundation for a massive volume of fan creations. With these comes continued academic interest in the complexities and consequences of vampire-based fan productivity. In Fanged Fan Fiction, Maria Lindgren Leavenworth and Malin Isaksson add to the growing body of work on vampire fandoms with a book that approaches fan fiction as texts in their own right rather than simply as a means to analyze fans and their communities. The actual artifacts of fan fiction texts, the authors argue, constitute ever-evolving archives of audience response that negotiate relationships to others' work as well as to the canonical material of the Twilight, True Blood, and The Vampire Diaries sagas. Using these archives as a lens, this book attempts to articulate the ways—both resistive and normalized—that the vampire trope is used to speak of some aspect of contemporary culture that resonates with fans.

In the first three (perhaps strongest) chapters of the book, the authors offer a considered and nuanced chronicle of canonical and fan-generated works in the three
series. These chapters provide a foundation for how the books and films of the Twilight franchise and the books and television shows of True Blood and The Vampire Diaries construct characters, relationships, and perspectives, before highlighting the process of fan engagement with these elements and the nature of fan fictions that respond to and expand upon the canons while ultimately perpetuating them. After a brief interlude to mark the shift, the volume then moves to subversive texts within these archives, those stories that challenge canon norms of sexuality (namely chastity and heteronormativity), monstrosity, and the good/evil relationship. Lindgren Leavenworth and Isaksson are clear that this is not research that delves into identities and communities of fan fiction authors; instead, the textual analysis performed here is meant to complement existing ethnographic and cultural studies work on fandom. The organization of the volume, therefore, allows the authors to argue that these texts, and the relationships between them, are themselves instances of cultural reflection that both reify and deconstruct norms.

[3] In the first chapter, "Single White Females and Sympathetic Vampires: The Canons," Lindgren Leavenworth and Isaksson outline the characters and relationships that form the central components of each of the three canons under discussion. The three share notable similarities: Twilight, True Blood, and The Vampire Diaries are all focused on a young, pretty, and somehow exceptional female protagonist (Bella, Sookie, and Elena, respectively) who are bound in an epic romance with a dangerous yet sympathetic vampire (Edward, Bill, and Stefan) and who must deal with their complicated feelings for another man (Jacob, Eric, Damon) while navigating the supernatural in their relationships. Despite these similarities, however, the analysis here offers a more comprehensive look at the nuances that separate the texts from one another and from their different incarnations—differences, for example, between the blonde, bitchy Elena of L. J. Smith's young adult book series and the more sympathetic brunette who appears in the television show. These variations, and in particular those that mark the different ways that the figure of the vampire in each canon navigates the position of the Other and the Hero simultaneously, reveal a depth of understanding for the values and goals at play within each narrative. The authors likewise use this chapter to briefly contextualize the canons as "promiscuous" (borrowing from Ken Gelder's discussion of vampire fiction) members of the paranormal romance genre and as narratives whose engagement with fan creativity has benefited from their nature as serialized, transmedia sagas. These discussions do not revolutionize the ways any of the three canons are understood, but they do articulate a perspective on the characters and relationships in these narratives as a set of preexisting rules that fan fiction, considered in subsequent chapters, can reference or reject.
[4] Next the authors outline how transmedia paratexts and fan-generated archives are each organized in these canons. These archives are framed as quintessential examples of prosumption, as fan fiction results when a fan first consumes texts and then produces material her- or himself. The authors discuss the rules that govern the practices of prosumption, including those imposed by the canons and the implied and articulated conventions of the sites that host fan fiction and discussions, as well as the ethics involved in following and breaking those rules. A close reading of fan fiction that crosses over between canons illustrates how the authors of these stories must make choices and set priorities in order to balance conflicting norms of different canons. This chapter also constitutes the methods section of the book, in which the authors consider the challenges of analyzing artifacts from a massive and expanding fan fiction archive, though they do not actually outline how they came to choose particular fan fiction stories for textual analysis; nor do they indicate the possible implications of these choices. Lindgren Leavenworth and Isaksson also solidify their approach as grounded in literary analysis by remaining lurkers; they note that the texts themselves are paramount in this study, and though they leave traces of their research in the form of hits and site visits, fan fiction authors need not be any more involved in the textual analysis of their work than are, for example, the authors of the canon material. Though this section is necessary to situate this volume within existing approaches to fan studies research, in itself, this chapter does little to advance the discussion of these challenges.

[5] The third chapter focusing on canon returns more directly to fan fiction stories themselves. Lindgren Leavenworth and Isaksson insightfully point out that in the zeal to analyze the transgressive, resistive, and transformative characteristics of fan fiction, common types of fan fiction stories are often left underanalyzed. This chapter, therefore, contains close readings of fan fiction that the authors consider to be canon adherent—stories that retell canonical events from a different perspective, that constitute prequels and sequels, and that explore alternative romantic pairings within the canon. These stories may include original events or romantic relationships that deviate from canonical pairings, but they maintain the (heterosexual, monogamous) rules, norms, and qualities of the canon and its characters. The authors argue that the elements fan fiction writers choose to change, keep the same, reuse from canon and other fan fiction, and introduce as variations to an existing world reveal individual consumption practices and underlying cultural values. Although the chapter could use a clearer articulation of what these particular stories actually offer by way of findings in these categories, their close readings are thorough and comprehensive. The chapter benefits most from its invocation of Abigail Derecho's term "archontic literature," characterizing the archive of fan fiction as neither derivative nor simply appropriative of original, autonomous material. Instead, the canon and the archive are in conversation, such that similarities and differences influence understanding of canon
and fan fic alike and the relationship is more interwoven than hierarchical. By taking a different approach to fan fiction and concentrating specifically on canon-adherent stories that are frequently passed over in fan scholarship, this chapter offers a useful means to illustrate the possibilities and transformative potential of fan fiction even when it is not framed as critical or transgressive.

[6] The final two chapters, "Canon-Transgressive Lemony Goodness: Sexual Norms and Undead Desires" and "Something Wicked This Way Comes: Ethics, Monstrosity and Issues of the Soul," as the titles suggest, explore resistive elements taken up by fan fiction writers within these canons. In their analysis of stories featuring, among other themes, BDSM, slash and femslash, and dubious consent, Lindgren Leavenworth and Isaksson contend that the nontraditional sexual norms celebrated within these types of stories introduce more possibility for alternative power dynamics and self-actualization than are available in the imbalanced male vampire/female human romances of the canon. Because the figure of the vampire is so often homoeroticized in numerous contexts, though, slash fiction here is not presumed to be a challenge to the canon norms; the authors explore transgressive but not necessarily critical texts in which homosexual encounters are fleeting or take place in prequels, thus leaving open the possibility that the canon and its heteronormative values will ultimately prevail. It is through the discussion of femslash stories, which carve out erotic subtexts from canon situations that are merely friendly, and tales of dubious consent, which speak to notions of sexual control, that take the transgressive potential of fan fiction further afield. This is where the chapter is able to consider more broadly the implication of this mode of fan fiction writing for power, agency, and romantic control.

[7] The final chapter addresses monstrosity in both the canons and in fan fiction. The chapter begins with a protracted analysis of the figure of the vampire: the issues he presents with his status as both man and monster, his predatory relationship with humans, and his ensuing conflicts with morality and sense of self. It is quite detailed, if more historical and literary than specifically supporting the fan practices. The analysis is particularly useful, however, when the authors juxtapose this with three canons that, the authors argue, domesticate the figure of the vampire to the extent that the boundary between good and evil becomes ambiguous. The analyzed fan fiction that resists this message of tamed evil actually aims to reinforce the boundaries between human and monster that canon narratives comfortably blur. The vampires here, for instance, revel in killing, are sinful and morally bankrupt, and are dangerous to the humans around them. The underlying inhumanity portrayed in the vampires of the stories analyzed in this chapter reveals fan commentary on issues unaddressed in the canon: misogyny, abuse, and the false promises of romantic relationships. Framing these critiques as representative of a dissatisfaction with canonical representations of vampires as angst-ridden and metaphorically defanged forms an effective symmetry
with the discussion of the sympathetic vampire from the first chapter, and creates parallels that illustrate the limits and desires of resistive fan fiction.

[8] *Fanged Fan Fiction* is a strong complement to existing fan studies when it focuses on the intertextuality of fan fiction and the relationship between canon and fan archive, and it provides close readings of fan-created texts that conform to and resist (at times simultaneously) the canons of Twilight, True Blood, and The Vampire Diaries. There is a great deal of existing work that deals with these fandoms (Twilight in particular), but by steering away from an ethnographic approach and concentrating instead on actual fan fiction and how it reflects audience understanding, the authors pave the way for some new insights. Some of these conclusions are not as drawn out or as deeply considered as they could be, and the detailed description and close analysis sometimes overshadow a sense of context. As previously mentioned, the authors do not detail how they selected particular stories for analysis; it would be folly to attempt to feature fan fiction that somehow represents the fan archive, and Lindgren Leavenworth and Isaksson are clear that they are in no way attempting to do so. However, they go far enough in the other direction that they do not much discuss the implications of these stories beyond contemporary fan archives for these particular canons. Without straying beyond their stated scope, the authors could offer greater context of how these artifacts from a particular archive relate to broader practices of reading, watching, and negotiating contemporary media. As it is, however, this book is particularly valuable for its perspective on the significance of fan fiction that may not be resistive and transgressive. It offers detailed insight into fan fictions as texts, as products of complex readings of paranormal romance canons, and as evidence of negotiations of norms, conventions, and desires.
Book review

*Manga's cultural crossroads*, edited by Jaqueline Berndt and Bettina Kümmerling-Meibauer

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[0.2] Keywords—Anime; Transcultural fandom; Transmediality


[1] The hybrid and global designs of contemporary media pose a daunting challenge for researchers. In recent discourses within fan studies, these elements come to the fore most clearly in the analysis of extensive franchises as well as in the tensions between local and global spaces of reception. In the context of manga, subcultural practices of fandom and industry-driven transmediality can be witnessed most clearly. Manga broadly refers to comics from Japan and their aesthetic qualities. The verb *manga* is also commonly used to connote the transmedia extensions of these stories in games and animation. The reception and distribution of manga outside of Japan is unique in that fans often distribute, translate, and appropriate these manga products themselves. *Manga's Cultural Crossroads* (2013), edited by Jaqueline Berndt and Bettina Kümmerling-Meibauer, is a timely and insightful publication that addresses this global reception of Japanese popular culture.

[2] Kümmerling-Meibauer is a professor at the University of Tübingen, Germany, who is well known for her publications in the fields of children's literature, picture books, and visual media. Berndt is a German Japanologist and a professor in comics theory at Kyoto Seika University, Japan, whose work focuses on manga as a critical and reader-centered culture. With their broad expertise, the editors represent the diversity of
*Manga's Cultural Crossroads,* which focuses not purely on Japan but also on its spillover into other media and cultures. Both the editors and the authors are characterized by their interdisciplinary interests. Although many of them know Japanese, the contributors do not necessarily see themselves as being at the forefront of Japanese studies; rather, they want to acknowledge how manga studies is indebted to, and can help develop and enhance, related fields of cultural studies.

[3] Conceptually, this volume does not approach manga as a cultural export from Japan but as a cultural crossroads or a nexus for intercultural exchange. The guiding concept of the volume is transculturalism, which the authors favor over transnationalism because a primary focus on the nation-state does not resonate with their studies. Instead, the authors stress more complex global patterns, fan activities, and subcultures that are best captured by an understanding of transculturalism as an interplay between cultures. This collection stresses the diversity of manga culture, both in terms of reception and production, as it explores the transcultural history of Japanese manga and contextualizes manga that are produced outside of Japan.

[4] The twofold structure of the collection stands out. The first part, "Cross-Cultural Perspectives on Manga," comprises eight chapters. The second part, "'Naruto' as Cultural Crossroads," comprises six chapters and takes the popular manga series Naruto (1999–) by Masashi Kishimoto as its primary case. This action-packed series about the adventures of an adolescent ninja has been translated into many languages and has been adapted into a long-running animation series, among other TV adaptations, as well as video games. Naruto exemplifies manga and its global fan cultures. Overall, the chapters within *Manga's Cultural Crossroads* are short and readable. Many have their origins as conference papers at the international conference Intercultural Crossovers, Transcultural Flows: Manga/Comics (2010), which was held at the Cultural Institute of Japan in Cologne, Germany. These studies now appear as full-fledged chapters in *Manga's Cultural Crossroads,* which is part of the series Routledge Advances in Art and Visual Studies.

[5] An interest in the history of manga characterizes the first chapters in part 1. The section opens with a piece by Frederik L. Schodt, a pioneer in the field of manga studies, who discusses the localization of manga in North America. He reflects on the transformations since the 1980s, when manga was deemed an alternative medium with little economic feasibility abroad. Today, manga has become more visible at comic stores and online, but the distribution of these comics also raises critical concerns of piracy and imitation as a result of its limited availability. The second chapter, by Ronald Stewart, offers a critical analysis of the popular understanding that manga originates in the 19th-century sketches of the artist Hokusai, termed *Hokusai manga.* By examining the works by Kitazawa Rakuten (1876–1955), who first used the word
manga in its contemporary sense, Stewart shows that the interpretation of manga is highly contestable. For Rakuten, manga was a way of differentiating his work from Japanese predecessors, and it characterized his modern style, influenced by Western images. The third chapter, by Shige (CJ) Suzuki, explores the history of the alternative gekiga manga in the 1960s as well as its dark and sexual undertones. The works of Tatsumi Yoshihiro, who coined the term gekiga, are central to this chapter and are contextualized according to a larger counterculture in Japanese society.

[6] The chapters that follow address transculturalism as a complex phenomenon related to shared cultural capital and audience spaces as well as political ideals. Berndt challenges scholars to think more about the sociopolitical implications of manga and their production context as a result of the Triple Disaster of March 11, 2011. Yamanaka Chie examines the comics produced in Korea, or manhwa, which, in Korean discourse, are proposed to be part of Korea's national heritage. As it turns out, postcolonial discourse and national sentiments construct the image of these manhwa, downplaying the hybrid nature of these comics in favor of their unique and local elements.

[7] The last chapters of the section focus on transmediality, with a methodology that relies on cross-comparisons between different media. Kümmerling-Meibauer explores the relations between manga and modern picture books. She analyzes a new strand of picture books that are highly intermedial and rely on specific repertoires. She adds to this a specific case study of Allen Say, taught by Noro Shinpei, considering how manga aesthetics shine through his work. Elisabeth Klar's chapter compares the visual and narrative style of erotic comics, or hentai, to the alternative comic scene in Europe. She uses the notion of parody to explore how comics may disrupt notions of gender and embodiment. Last, Nele Noppe provides a rich study of the social media sites deviantART and pixiv. Although they are potentially global media, she argues that the interface and language of the sites cause a heterogeneous, divided audience.

[8] The second section takes Naruto as its primary case and addresses this popular franchise from different points of view. Omote Tomoyuki discusses Naruto through its specific publication format: the series is originally published in the magazine Weekly Shōnen Jump. This medium-specific format, Tomoyuki argues, and the demands of its publication culture have to be considered when contextualizing and performing close readings of the manga's narrative. Fujimoto Yukari discusses the production context of Naruto as a shōnen manga and the gendering of its characters and readership. She argues that the proliferation of fan-driven yaoi (queer appropriations and readings) is the result of its superficial and conservative female characters. Jessica Bawuens-Sugimoto and Nora Renka continue this interest in gender by focusing on English-language fan fiction written by men. They examine the harem genre, where the male
character enters relationships with different female characters. Gender bending is quite common in this fandom, but the authors argue that this must not be understood as queer but rather as a demand for more and diverse female characters to serve the harem genre.

[9] The last articles display an interest in Naruto as a highly intertextual manga with various layers of textual meaning as well as a transmedia franchise that exports its characters to different media platforms. Franziska Ehmcke reads Naruto according to the place Naruto, which it is named after. The connotations inherent in this famous place are echoed in traditional art; they also surface in the manga. Gan Sheuo Hui addresses authorship in times of transmediality and charts the production context of the anime. Sheuo Hui shows that individual producers carry particular cultural meanings and styles to the anime that are relevant to its framing. Martin Roth discusses the Naruto video games and argues that these do not add to the transmedia storytelling process. Rather, they provide instances in which fans can perform these characters anew. Games thus allow players to interact with the narratives in a unique way that is not always coherent with its related media text or overall story world. However, this does not diminish the interpretive experience, which hinges on familiarity rather than coherence.

[10] Overall, the essay collection is appealing and contains some outstanding chapters. I applaud the idea of focusing a section on a single case study, but sadly, the Naruto section in the book is weaker than the first section. Moreover, I found that the chapters repeated each other in their explanations of the Naruto franchise, rather than summarizing it and its themes in the introduction. The Naruto section is addressed only briefly in the introduction, though its separate essays are covered in great detail; further, the focus on the Naruto franchise is neglected in the promotion and title of the edited collection. This is an odd choice because the Naruto case study has the potential to draw additional readers.

[11] This collection is an important contribution to the field of manga studies. In the past, such studies took Japan itself as a unit of analysis, rather than the international reception of its popular culture. Many publications in this field have been in Japanese or focused on Japanese audiences rather than on intercultural reception and exchange. A need for dialogue between Japanologists and Western researchers is needed. This gap is beginning to be filled by the advent of English-language journals in the field of manga studies, such as Mechademia (http://mechademia.org/). Similarly, Manga's Cultural Crossroads clearly shows that manga is not only the product of Japan and Japanese culture, but also a global point of connection and recognition shared by different individuals and subcultures. Such cultural exchanges are always to a degree
hierarchical because they are formatted through complex postcolonial regimes, national sentiments, and economic relationships.

[12] *Manga's Cultural Crossroads* offers a far-reaching and rich collection of essays that address many facets of manga culture. The book intervenes in both the fields of fan studies and manga studies. Its thorough explorations of the history and definition of manga will interest many scholars of Japanese popular culture, and its focus on reception and transculturalism speaks to a broader audience. This edited collection often takes a reader-centered and medium-specific approach that will resonate with scholars of media and their audiences, including scholars of fandom. A reader does not require much knowledge of manga culture beforehand but can understand the field via the essays and can contextualize it as exemplary of other global media dynamics. As fan studies becomes a more prominent field, reading participatory behavior as anchored to a place is not fruitful. Transculturalism will undoubtedly become a helpful tool to examine fan practices as rooted in global and local patterns. Within this conceptual turn toward transculturalism in fan and audience studies, *Manga's Cultural Crossroads* takes an important stance.
Book review

*Popular music fandom: Identities, roles, and practices*, edited by Mark Duffett

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[0.2] Keywords—Belonging; Collecting; Domesticity; Grief; Identity; Industry; Popular music


[1] Although scholarship on popular music fandom has bloomed slowly over recent years, the fandom has yet to receive the focused attention in the fan studies field that it deserves. This new anthology, *Popular Music Fandom: Identities, Roles, and Practices* (2014), edited by Mark Duffett, addresses this gap in research, highlighting the complexities, challenges, and rewards surrounding the investigation of music fandom. The collection dynamically explores a range of perspectives on and studies of music fandom, perceptively unraveling it "both as a changing popular construct" and as an "emergent research object" (1). As Duffett outlines in his introduction, contemporary popular music fandom "can center on a number of different practices and a variety of different objects, but the ways that these combine and relate can make it different in each case and therefore such a fascinating object of study" (8). It is the combination and relation of the different practices and objects within music fandom, then, that drives this collection, with intriguing and fruitful results.

[2] The collection features an introduction by Mark Duffett, an afterword by Joli Jensen, and 10 chapters covering quite different elements and practices of music fandom, such as record collecting, electronic dance music fandom, grieving processes, domestic musical activity, and jazz fandom. Three themes emerge overall: how popular music fandom can be approached as a powerful cultural phenomenon, how it
can inform and be intertwined with social and cultural identity, and how technological developments are impacting some of its practices and processes. These themes do not dictate the organization of the chapters; instead, they are allowed to develop naturally throughout the volume.

[3] To begin the collection, Matt Hills, in his chapter "Back in the Mix," explores fans' affective reception of industrially produced music. He considers how popular music fans relate to industrial creation and how they "make sense of the fact that the music they love is produced...engineered and mixed" (17), suggesting that fandom "makes visible" a range of production personnel and collaborators, beyond merely focusing on performers" (18). This is an important argument because scholarship on popular music fandom has tended to downplay fans' relation to and negotiation of music as an industrially produced entity in favor of focusing on personalized relationships between fans and individual artists. Hills calls for music fan scholarship to consider a more fluid form of intermediary fandom, rather than restricting fandom, both empirically and theoretically, to notions of attachment to one artist, performer, or band. Such restrictions have led researchers to downplay intertextuality and sequential forms of affect. Hills's focus on fans' experiences of the music industry is an important addition to music fan studies, which has largely tended to overlook the relations between music fans and industrial creators.

[4] Nedim Hassan, in "Hidden Fans? Fandom and Domestic Musical Activity," also focuses on groups of people who are often overlooked in fan studies, such as those with learning difficulties. He illustrates how inequality of access shapes music fandom and argues that researchers should consider "how to access and explore fan-related experiences that are less obviously interpreted as fan activities" (58), including everyday domestic activities such as listening to CDs and singing. Hassan argues that these domestic listening and performing practices can be significant ways of expressing identity (especially for those who have learning difficulties and may have problems with verbal communication) and thus require more attention within music fan scholarship.

[5] Cornel Sandvoss considers how belonging and place manifest themselves alongside and within music fandom. Sandvoss questions whether it is possible to be a fan of a place as much as of a text, given that they are both "socially constructed through symbols, discourses and representations" (115). Because of this, he argues that places can also be understood as texts. This understanding is especially significant for music fandom because place can often shape and inform the experience of music and affective engagement with it on both individual and collective levels. Focusing on Ibiza because of its strong music and dance culture, and using an online discussion forum devoted to the island, semistructured interviews, and participant observation in
Ibiza as sources for analysis, Sandvoss demonstrates that "music and place are both part of the same textual field out of which subjective fan objects are formed" (138). This sociohistorical study explores how sustained affective ties and engagements can manifest between fans and a place, such as a tourist site, with music being rooted and anchored within these ties.

[6] Moving on from notions of place, two chapters in the collection offer particularly useful and revealing insights into fan identities. First, Rebecca G. Adams, Amy M. Ernstes, and Kelly M. Lucey, in "After Jerry's Death: Achieving Continuity in Deadhead Identity and Community," explore Grateful Dead fans' responses to and ways of coping with lead guitarist Jerry Garcia's death. The authors illustrate how the Deadheads worked together to gently maintain continuity in the community and also maintain their identities as fans, organizing events such as local gatherings and annual celebrations. They conclude that it is "through dependence on and further development of an already existing infrastructure and renewed efforts to achieve continuity by both the band and their fans that the Deadhead community has survived Jerry's death" (203). Thus, this chapter emphasizes how a strongly developed music fan community can collectively and actively respond to loss and grief in a manner that preserves and strengthens its identity, ensuring the community's continuity and thereby survival. This is a significant contribution to our understanding of how fan identity is affected by, and how it can be protected in the wake of, crisis and change.

[7] Second, Roy Shuker's chapter on collecting in music fandom argues that the identities of the music fan and record collector, although sharing common ground, should be approached as distinct because of the differences between their "emotional and physical investments" (183) and their practices of consumption. These differences, he explains, are due to record collecting being a "more focused and intellectually rationalized activity than fandom" (166). Shuker's exploration of collecting delivers an insight into fans' contemporary collecting practices, most particularly into their understandings of stereotypical and pathological depictions of what is sometimes presented in popular culture as the typical record collector, such as the obsessive-compulsive. Shuker observed, through interviews with collectors, that they pursue cultural capital, a pursuit that is sometimes propelled by desire, pleasure, and obsession through consumption (183). These are important observations that highlight the differences within music fandom and how, for some fans, patterns of consumption and identification are strongly intertwined.

[8] Considering the overall picture of fandom, Mark Duffett, in "Fan Words," reconsiders a term central to fan studies, love, suggesting that we must closely explore and reassess the terms fans use to describe their fandom. He asks, "What does it mean to say you 'love' your favourite musician? Can you actually 'love' anyone
that you have never met?" (146), and instead proposes several new terms, such as "imagined memories" and "symbolic economy," that may prove valuable for future studies and conceptualizations of fandom. Duffett's theoretical ponderings on fan use of love and his conclusion that fans use the term "to self-identify, to naturalize their passion, and to feel united as part of a fan base" (161) remind us that we must attend to key terms such as these because they can offer insight into how fans articulate their affective ties.

[9] Ending the collection, Joli Jensen's afterword reflects on acafandom, offering a thought-provoking assessment of the term and its categorization. Writing over a decade after her influential chapter "Fandom as Pathology: The Consequences of Characterization" in Lisa Lewis's The Adoring Audience (1992), Jensen asks, "Are fans and scholars really different versions of the same thing, and if so, what are we scholars up to when we engage in fan research?" (207). Jensen did her doctoral work on Patsy Cline fandom in the early 1980s, and she recalls meeting a fan who provided her with detailed information and insider knowledge, displaying to her how a fan/collector could be a "vernacular scholar" (209) despite having no easy means to publish his work. In this instance, Jensen "legitimated" the fan's knowledge and expertise with her scholarly credentials and helped his work reach a wider audience. Jensen considers how the stakes of music fan studies have changed in light of technological developments, most especially the Internet and social media. Searching for Cline fandom online, Jensen is astonished at the wealth of material she finds: "For years dedicated fans had been posting information I didn't know and images I had never seen. It is blindingly obvious—curators and followers of Internet fan sites are far more Patsy Cline experts than I am" (210). She concludes, "Fans and scholars are doing very similar things, and the Internet helps us see this more fully" (210), although, as she later admits, there certainly remain "unresolved questions" surrounding the identities and negotiations of both parties.

[10] Overall, this is an insightful and compelling volume. There are still relatively few studies of popular music fandom, and we especially lack empirical investigations that question and observe music fans themselves in order to unravel and understand their practices and affective experiences. However, this collection offers some solid contributions to the field. There is a strong sense, articulated across all the chapters, that music fandom is vibrant; that it is curiously formed and practiced; and that it therefore demands further study. I do think that contributors could have devoted more attention and consideration to social media; for example, how are music artists and fans connecting via Twitter, and what are the implications of this connection? Are social media platforms affecting connections among music fans, and if so, how? Nevertheless, this is an important and compelling collection for anyone studying popular music fandom and the identities, roles, and practices within it.