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Editorial

Extending transformation

TWC Editor

[0.1] Abstract—Editorial for Transformative Works and Cultures, no. 3 (September 15, 2009).

[0.2] Keywords—Fan studies; Open access; TWC


1. Introduction

[1.1] Although academic research is notorious for discussing issues that only a handful of other scholars might understand, let alone consider important, TWC's mission has always been to bridge academic and fan communities. In addition, the journal is interdisciplinary, so scholars and fans from a wide range of backgrounds and fields can be exposed to each other's ideas. We hope that this makes the potential reader base quite large, and we are continually striving to ensure that the topics TWC works with appeal to more than specialists. We want information should go viral; knowledge should spread, not remain constrained by limited access. Now that TWC is publishing its third issue, we have grown even more convinced that open access, permissive Creative Commons copyright, and online distribution are the keys that will allow us to reach as many people as possible. That access has allowed the academic essays to be read alongside online meta conversations. The commenting feature used by TWC's software, OJS (http://pkp.sfu.ca/?q=ojs), lets readers talk directly to the authors—although we'd like to see more use of this, and so we encourage readers to start a conversation. And finally, the online nature of TWC means that the essays provide easy-to-click hotlinks and embedded media to illustrate and support arguments. We want information to be at people's fingertips, not a library visit away.

[1.2] We extend thanks to everyone who helped spread the word about TWC, from word of mouth, to flyers passed out at scholarly and fan conventions, to academics revising a conference paper for publication, to teachers suggesting that their advisees consider TWC as an outlet for their work, to fans who felt compelled to say something important about a fan-related issue. In our third issue, which begins our second year of existence, the essays again interrogate and extend the concept of transformative works. Our subjects range from wikis and fan films to quilting and filking, and the authors use legal and film theory, literary studies, and cultural studies to focus on large cultural concerns such as race and gender and to analyze how fan spaces reflect and magnify these issues.
Acafans are finding themselves riding a crest of acceptability: fan events such as Comic-Con have drawn huge audiences—an estimated 126,000 attendees attended the 2009 San Diego Comic-Con (http://www.sdnn.com/sandiego/2009-07-09/attractions-hotels-resorts/comic-con-2009). TV shows and films are wooing active fans thanks to viral marketing and online interaction. Accordingly, more academics are doing part- or full-time fan studies from a stunning range of disciplines that in fact intersect and overlap: political remixing, fan film, and fan vidding; hip hop, wizard rock, and filking; copyright concerns in dance, remixing, and crafts; literary pastiche, tie-in novels, and fan fiction. Both in practice and in academic discussion, acafans struggle with preserving distinct heritages while acknowledging the mutual influences and indebtedness between these diverse yet complementary fields.

2. Theory and Praxis

[2.1] This issue's first essay is representative of the breadth we're hoping to continue: Debora J Halbert's "The Labor of Creativity: Women's Work, Quilting, and the Uncommodified Life" looks at the way traditional crafts—in this case, quilting—have been negatively affected by copyright concerns. The gendered aspect and the fannish investment of its creators connects Halbert's subject matter closely to many of the other essays in this issue. Identity, authenticity, and community are central to the quilting community as they are to the communities Melissa L. Tatum describes in "Identity and Authenticity in the Filking Community." In an essay that is both an introduction to the fannish practices of filking and an argument about the complications filkers encounter in terms of copyright concerns, Tatum connects filking with other musical fan engagements, notably wizard rock, and she provides sound clips to demonstrate the range of creativity in fan-based musical expression.

[2.2] If community is important to both these essays, it is at the center of the arguments of Jason Mittell's and Leora Hadas's essays. Both focus on one fandom (Lost and Doctor Who, respectively) and one online network (the fan wiki and a fan fiction archive) to look at the way conversations surrounding these sites give us insight into the interpretive debates within the fandoms. They also explicate how fans define themselves and collectively negotiate their fannish self-understanding. Mittell's participant observation of a Lost wiki, "Sites of Participation: Wiki Fandom and the Case of Lostpedia," foregrounds the way discussions on wiki content articulate show canon and user self-understanding. Competing fandom interpretations and its associated community infighting are the topic of Hadas's "The Web Planet: How the Changing Internet Divided Doctor Who Fan Fiction Writers," where she discusses how seemingly innocuous administrative decisions related to an online fan fiction archive affect and reflect internal fandom discontent.

[2.32] Viewer responses and interpretations are also the focus of Julie Levin Russo's "Sex Detectives: Law & Order: SVU's Fans, Critics, and Characters Investigate Lesbian Desire." The essay, which centers around the contested queerness of one of SVU's main characters, Olivia Benson (played by Mariska Hargitay), connects the show, the fan responses, and the paratextual structures (co)created by both to interrogate concepts of deviant sexualities and
its myriad vicissitudes. Finally, where Russo's fans are purposefully and consciously manipulating media representations, in "On Productivity and Game Fandom," Hanna Wirman's game players do so to the computer games they enjoy. Wirman looks at various forms of player productivity in an effort to stretch our understanding of what exactly constitutes productivity and what exactly constitutes fannish behavior.

3. Symposium, Interview, and Review

[3.1] Symposium and Interview work to bridge academic and fannish spaces. This issue features several essays that meditate on their own spaces and procedures as well as modes of engagements and infrastructures. Avi Santo looks at "The Future of Academic Writing?" and the role of online publishing for academic scholars, and K. Tempest Bradford interviews Verb Noire founder Karnythia and discusses the need for a press that focuses on protagonists of color. A group of fans discusses the role of race within online and off-line fannish spaces in "Pattern Recognition: A Dialogue on Racism in Fan Communities," while Suzanne Scott looks at the role of gifting and commercial models with fan spheres in her "Repackaging Fan Culture: The Regifting Economy of Ancillary Content Models." Jen Gunnels describes the fannish community of cosplayers (costume players) in "'A Jedi like my father before me': Social Identity and the New York Comic Con," Lynne Joyrich discusses the role of magical realism in contemporary TV programming, and zvi LikesTV interviews the founders of blogging and networking site Dreamwidth, Mark Smith and Denise Paolucci.


[3.3] Reviews in this issue include Theresa M. Senft's Camgirls: Celebrity and Community in the Age of Social Networks (Adriano Barone), which analyzes power, gender, and the gaze as articulated through Webcamming and addresses the ethics of rules building in online communities; Colette Balmain's Introduction to Japanese Horror Film (Alessia Alfieroni), which analyzes Japanese films as well as their Western remakes in terms of various subgenres, including rape-revenge, zombies, serial killers, and urban alienation, concluding that the horror genre articulates concerns related to the modernist breakdown of a collective social structure; and Craig Jacobsen's review of derivative novel Pride and Prejudice and Zombies, a rewrite by Seth Grahame-Smith of Jane Austen's classic 1813 novel that includes both zombies and ninjas—and a book that Jacobsen ultimately finds disappointing.

4. Conclusion
The next issue of TWC, No. 4, which will appear on March 15, 2010, will be a guest-edited special issue on the popular show *Supernatural*, which has a huge fan following—as well as more than a few interested academics. Guest editor Catherine Tosenberger published an essay on *Supernatural* in TWC No. 1 that, at more than 16,000 views, is far and away the most accessed TWC essay, demonstrating not only engagement with the topic, but also wide-ranging academic and fan interest. We are looking forward to offering more and more diverse intellectual and fannish engagements with the show in No. 4.

TWC No. 5 will be an open, unthemed issue, and we welcome general submissions. We particularly encourage fans to submit Symposium essays. We encourage all potential authors to read the submission guidelines (http://journal.transformativeworks.org/index.php/twc/about/submissions#onlineSubmissions). The close date for receipt of copy for No. 5 is March 15, 2010.

5. Acknowledgments

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Theory

The labor of creativity: Women's work, quilting, and the uncommodified life

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[0.1] Abstract—Quilting is an area of creative work rich in tradition that demonstrates how ideas and inspiration flow between quilters as they share with each other, move to new parts of the country, and develop their own designs. While commercial patterns have been copyrighted, quilting has generally existed under the radar of copyright law, primarily because quilts are most often exchanged within a gift economy. However, as quilting becomes big business and patterns and pattern books are more centrally located in quilting culture, issues associated with copyright protection emerge. This article investigates the relationship between copyright law, innovation, and sharing as it is understood by quilters who responded to an online questionnaire. Survey participants feel that quilting is a creative activity in which copyright plays a very small role, except when it restricts the actions of quilters. The survey suggests that respondents see quilting as creating a connection between themselves, their families, and their communities. Their creative work, in other words, is a gift they want to share, not a product they want to sell.

[0.2] Keywords—Art; Authorship; Copyright; Quilting


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1. Introduction

[1.1] Kathleen Bissett's 2004 lawsuit against the Central Canada Exhibition quilt show highlights the controversies emerging around copyright and quilting. Bissett sued the Central Canada Exhibition for including a quilt using her pattern in the exhibition. The quilt won first prize, but the quilter had not sought permission to show it, nor did she attribute the winning design to Bissett. "Buying the pattern design does not entitle a quilter to 'copy' it without permission, [Bissett] explained. That includes showing it off in public competition. 'Display is a form of copying' and goes beyond the definition of personal use, she said" (Quilt kerfuffle 2006).
Bissett's interpretation of copyright gives her, as sole author of the design, the ability to control the quilt as a derivative and unauthorized work (Bissett n.d.). Once the quilt is understood as a derivative of the pattern instead of the creation of the quilter, the pattern's designer can exert control over anything produced from it. The Central Canada Exhibition now refuses to display quilts without the permission of the pattern designers, as a result of Bissett's complaint (Quilt kerfuffle 2006).

Bissett's maximalist views on copyright run counter to a long history of sharing, inspiration, and transformation in quilting design and creation. In fact, for generations the display of quilts at state fairs has spurred copying and provided inspiration for other quilters. According to Virginia Gunn,

Nineteenth-century women regularly exhibited their quilts at community fairs where thousands of visitors admired them. Women themselves carefully examined the quilts and needlework on display, noting and commenting on the results of judging, as people normally do. Since fair organizers encouraged people to study the prize-winning items and return home and emulate them, it would have been unusual if quilters were not consciously or unconsciously influenced by what they saw on display at county and state fairs. It is highly likely that these quilt exhibits helped shape regional taste and style preferences in quiltmaking. (Gunn 1989:105–106)

According to Gunn, the entire point of the state fair competition was to display the best work, on the theory that "competition stimulated invention, and prizes helped people recognize superior quality and design which they could later copy" (107). Sharing is preferred over strict enforcement of ownership. Bissett's interpretation suggests a sea change in attitudes toward quilting. Her argument also ignores the fact that a quilt is a collaborative work, of which the pattern design is only one element.

Copying, sharing, learning from others, and quilting collectively are hallmarks of American quiltmaking history. Authorship in quilts and the stories told about them are diffuse and multiple (Elsley 1996:58–59). Copyright law, in contrast, is designed to protect creative works that are fixed in a tangible form. The paradigm it imposes on quilting is different from the one that evolved within quilting circles. The copyright paradigm makes the public display of a quilt, the donation of a quilt to a charity fundraiser, or indeed any nonpersonal use of a quilt a complicated, and perhaps even illegal, endeavor.

However, underneath the concern with property rights imposed by copyright law, there exists a culture of transformation—a culture finding inspiration in color choices, material choices, pattern designs, and nature itself. These inspirations,
generated through interaction with the world, are then used to create new and different quilts. Quilting is heavily reliant upon a shared culture of designs using traditional motifs, often transforming them into new and innovative art. The modern commercial world in which quilt patterns and designs are subjected to copyright rests on top of the rich and textured historical tradition of a quilting culture where innovation and originality are closely linked to sharing and exchange without prioritizing ownership. It is a "hybrid" economy, to use Lawrence Lessig's term (2008), where commercial uses build upon noncommercial culture.

[1.8] Although commercial pattern makers and quilt designers have made inroads into quilting culture, copyright law has not fully penetrated it. Thus the culture that creates the conditions under which quilts are made and shared can serve as an interesting counterpoint to the more commercialized culture of other fields of intellectual property. Quilting culture highlights the transformative nature of creative work and the ways in which ideas flow freely when concerns about property rights are not predominant.

[1.9] This essay examines quilters' attitudes toward copyright as they were revealed in an online survey administered in 2006. The project began with the hypothesis that because quilters operate under a paradigm of creativity informed by a culture of sharing and gifting, they would find the application of copyright to quilting problematic. The intent of the survey was to use the answers of the women who responded to better understand the relationship between creativity and copyright. The stories told by the women in the survey suggest a varied response to the problems associated with copyright, creativity, transformation, and appropriation, and they tell a complex narrative of the relationship between copyright and quilting. To set the context for the survey, I'll first discuss the history of quilting, and then the relationship of quilting to copyright law.

2. A brief history of quilting as women's artistic work

[2.1] Contemporary quilts, like the ones produced by survey participants, must be seen within the larger history of quilting. While quilts are produced around the world, this paper focuses on the American tradition. The quilters who took the survey are not isolated from the tradition of American quilting, but instead are a contemporary extension of it. However, as this section suggests, copyright did not play a significant role in earlier quilting. Instead, the convergence of copyright andquilting is a relatively recent phenomenon that has emerged as proprietary forms of ownership begin to trump cultural norms of sharing. The growing importance of copyright today does not mean claims of authorship and ownership were absent in the past. However, copyright has not been a useful way to understand innovation in quilting, nor has copyright been
historically helpful in understanding how quilting was integrated into the lives of the women who did it. This section seeks to provide a history that highlights the creative and transformative nature of quilting and gleans, from existing historical narratives, insight into how women understood their creative work.

[2.2] The concept of the author, as it is connected to written work, has a history of its own (Rose 1993). For the legal doctrine of copyright to become relevant to quilting, the quilt had to be seen as more than a utilitarian device. It had to be understood as an original work created by a single author. The requirement of originality helps to separate the utilitarian function of the quilt from the creative aspects and helps to transform a blanket into a work of art.

[2.3] Quilts only gradually became accepted as artistic works. Although quilt scholars called them art as early as 1935 (Hall and Kretsinger 1935:28), the mainstream art world was slow to recognize their artistic value. Scholars widely agree that it was only in 1971, when the Whitney Museum of American Art produced an exhibition of quilts entitled "Abstract Design in American Quilts," that quilts became "officially" recognized as art in the United States (Pritchard 2006:4; Berlo and Crews 2003:5).

[2.4] Quilting had remained on the margins of artistic work for a variety of reasons. First, the functional nature of many quilts meant they were understood as utilitarian in purpose (Hall and Kretsinger 1935:13). Second, quilts are made almost exclusively by women and were thus often relegated to the category of domestic crafts rather than artworks (Hedges, Silber, and Ferrero 1987:47; Parker and Pollock 1981:75; Parker 1984:5). As Parker notes in her feminist analysis of the distinction between arts and crafts, artworks were created for purchase, and thus were things of value, while crafts were created in the domestic sphere for love, making the distinction gendered as well as economic (Parker 1984:5–6). Such a dichotomy is important from a copyright perspective, since only when art becomes a commodity does it generate the value copyright is designed to protect.

[2.5] The Whitney exhibit was a breakthrough because it positioned quilts as embodiments of artistic design traditionally made by women. This show, combined with the feminist movement of the 1970s and the already existing culture of quilting, catapulted quilts into prominence as much more than utilitarian devices (Berlo and Crews 2003:14). Despite its importance, however, some quilters criticized the Whitney exhibit because, while it situated the quilt as art, it also "depersonalized the quilts," taking the "heart out of what the quilts mean" (Elsley 1996:25). The shift from craft to art and the commodification of the quilt will be returned to later. However, the quilts must first be understood within their own historical context, which is deeply linked to women's history.
Since women's stories are often excluded from historical narratives, contemporary scholars have turned to material culture to understand the lives of women, including the rich history of quilting and clothing more generally (Barber 1994:286–300; Hornback 1993:68; Berlo and Crews 2003). Quilts can be read as women's history because their designs tell stories of the women who made them and they are symbolic of the larger American picture of which they are a part (Berlo and Crews 2003:12). Each quilt bears the story of its making, and its subsequent history often links together generations of a family.

There is a fine line between accurately depicting women's work and romanticizing it. For example, Berlo and Crews note that much of what has been written about quilting was intended to "ennoble and reclaim the artistic work of women" (Berlo and Crews 2003:12). However, it is clear that femininity and needlework have been closely linked, and remain so to this day. Women quilting today do so because of a history that makes it a legitimate form of artistic expression for women. However, overcoming the historical disregard for women's creative expressions demonstrates that these histories are political. It also problematizes the way we understand the distinctions between art and craft, and thus the distinctions between what can be protected by copyright and what is considered unworthy of protection. Quilting, then, is a story that can be told as women's history: a history that links quilts made in the past to the work done by the women who responded to the survey.

It is likely that quilts arrived in America with the earliest colonists, but the first documented quilt is found in the 1685 inventory of the property of Captain George Corwin (Orlofsky and Orlofsky 1974:10). Even quilt scholars like Orlofsky and Orlofsky call these earliest American quilts "considerably more utilitarian than decorative" (10). They were most likely made to help the colonists survive the harsh North American winters. The fact that quilts become increasingly referenced as household goods during the 18th century suggests that they gradually become more valuable over time (19).

It is important to avoid situating the quilt as an "emblem of classlessness" that would mythologize an American past, picturing it as without class conflict (Miller 2006:94). That being said, quilting and needlework crossed socioeconomic boundaries and were done in both rural and urban locations, with elite women and poor women, black and white, making quilts (Benberry 1992; Hall and Kretsinger 1935:27). Needlework was an essential skill learned at an early age by both girls and boys (Hedges, Silber, and Ferrero 1987:16–29; Orlofsky and Orlofsky 1974:27), and early American quilts were often produced using the labor of the entire family (Orlofsky and Orlofsky 1974:45). But despite the collective nature of these efforts, quilting is most closely linked to women's work. Especially important for women's spaces is the history
of the quilting bee as a way of solidifying community (Elsley 1996:54; Hall and Kretsinger 1935:21–26).

[2.10] The feminization of needlework and quilting is a crucial part of the history of material culture. According to Bilger, needlework became fully feminized in the 18th century (1994:18). During the 18th century, it was essential for women to engage in needlework as a way of "labor[ing] for male attention" (22), a goal that was further solidified by 19th-century Victorian attitudes that linked needlework with feminine "purity and submissiveness" (Parker 1984:37, 82–109). Writing in 1929 about the history of the American quilt, Finley argued that male domination meant women had no control over purchases, and that "in needlework only did women hold full sway" (1929:20). Needlework was "a covert means of negotiating the constraints of femininity," providing women with the opportunity to "make meanings of their own while overtly living up to the oppressive stereotype of the passive, silent, vain, and frivolous, even seductive needlewoman" (Beaudry 2006:5). As Finley notes, "trained from babyhood that she might make good in the marriage partnership, a girl was first taught sewing; and the first thing she sewed was patchwork" (1929:33).

[2.11] Integral to the place of women in the home was the understanding that sewing was the essence of the feminine. Women who sewed were developing appropriate feminine skills and learning their place (Hedges, Silber, and Ferrero 1987:26). Thus, women were strongly discouraged from participating in "masculine" creative processes, such as writing. Feminine pursuits, like needlework, were considered excellent alternatives (Bilger 1994:23).

[2.12] The 19th century changed the position of quilting within the American household. In the later part of the 19th century, the industrializing economy meant most productive work moved outside the household and the ensuing "cult of domesticity" for elite women prescribed sewing as an essential element of women's work (Hedges, Silber, and Ferrero 1987:24). Industrialization introduced cheap cotton and new technologies, both of which changed the nature of quilting. First, as quilters gained access to more fabrics and colors, they were able to express more complex artistic visions (Orlofsky and Orlofsky 1974:33). Second, by 1850, textiles were easily available and quilting became more popular, even as other domestic crafts were supplanted by factory production (Orlofsky and Orlofsky 1974:58; Hornback 1993:68). Third, the introduction of the sewing machine radically transformed quilting by eliminating tedious hand stitching, allowing women to focus on the most expressive parts of quilting, though it would be almost a century before machine-sewn quilts were considered as "authentic" as hand-stitched ones by many traditional quilters (Brackman 1997:24). As Berlo and Crews note, the contribution of women to 19th-
century visual culture "was one of constant innovation and experimentation, constant openness to new materials and ideas" (2003:14).

[2.13] The 19th-century commercialization of quilting aligned it more closely with the commercial culture associated with copyright. While histories of quilting generally do not consider the influence of copyright, a focus on quilt patterns and the methods through which they were developed, exchanged, and transformed can provide insight into how quilting culture continued to evolve in the commercial world of the 19th and 20th centuries. The remainder of this section will focus more specifically on the role of the pattern and commercial quilt culture.

[2.14] As social changes left elite women with more leisure time, they turned to quilting to demonstrate their domestic skills. National magazines helped situate the quilt as a creative work associated with civilized life instead of a mere utilitarian piece. According to Hedges, Silber, and Ferraro,

[2.15] Many of these women, no longer involved in essential work in the home, were much affected by popular magazines such as Peterson's Magazine and Godey's Lady's Book, which urged them to make highly embellished, non-utilitarian display pieces...These quilts were decorative, reflecting Victorian taste and the status of the quilt-makers' husbands. Women had become symbols of leisure; to have a wife who was leisured reflected very favorably on a man. During this time, quilts were no longer found exclusively in the bedroom; typically we see them in the parlor, where art and music and women's "civilizing" influences could be practiced and displayed. (1987:25)

[2.16] Thus, while early quilters considered their labor simply a form of women's work, and gave little thought to the artistic value of their quilts, industrialization, the cult of domesticity, and the increase in leisure time created an opportunity for quilts to be understood as more than utilitarian devices. Quilt pattern designers, who were often associated with fabric manufacturers, saw patterns as a way of selling more fabric and the result was a greater variety of artistic quilts.

[2.17] Quilt innovation and design spread across the United States as specific techniques became popularized, shared, and commercialized (Hornback 1993; Waldvogel 1990; Hall and Kretsinger 1935). Historically, ideas were generated from family traditions and by looking at traditional designs, because patterns were not to be found (Waldvogel 1995:52). As women traveled, they shared designs with those they met (Hornback 1993:87). Quilt researchers note that design elements were passed from quilter to quilter across the country, even before popular patterns were nationally available (Nordstrom 2002:44–45; Hall and Kretsinger 1935:14). Patterns were
influenced by contact with African, Asian, and Native American traditions. The beauty and unusual style of Hawai`ian quilts, for example, demonstrate the manner in which cultural flows and transformation forge new patterns and art forms as cultures interact and exposure to new ideas inspires art (Murray 2003; Jones 1930; Orlofsky and Orlofsky 1974:246; Hanson and Smucker 2003). Patterns were exchanged among friends, and often women would make sample blocks for future reference and build upon those innovations (Orlofsky and Orlofsky 1974:248). Even though women were now more likely to get patterns from magazines or purchase them from quilting companies, they were normally shared with other quilters.

[2.18] Multiple permutations of a single pattern, with different names but the same design, began to appear as patterns migrated across the country (Finley 1929:97–103). Many patterns exist in multiple versions, and collections of patterns may include thousands of designs (Orlofsky and Orlofsky 1974:245; Brackman 1993b; Walker 1983). These traditional patterns are part of a history that can be drawn upon; as Ruby McKim writes in the introduction to her pattern book, "We have found bits of interesting history about these [quilts] and drafted patterns from which you can copy them" (McKim 1967:3). However, the taxonomy of quilting patterns is in disarray and researchers Forrest and Blincoe find that many active quilters do not remember, or perhaps never even knew, the names of their patterns (1995:1–4). Quilt patterns had traditionally been passed down locally by families and friends, and their origins were often forgotten (Orlofsky and Orlofsky 1974:245). Copyright was not a relevant concept for ownership because patterns were freely exchanged and transformed, and they quickly lost their link with their author. One study of 19th-century Ohio quilting notes that it is doubtful the most talented quilters were anonymous at the time they were quilting (Gunn 1989:122); however, while some famous quilters are still remembered, many more are lost to history.

[2.19] Industrialization changed how many women found and used quilt patterns. By the end of the 19th century, patterns began appearing in newspapers and magazines (Breneman 2007a). Mail-order patterns became available nationwide and strongly influenced quilting trends in the 19th and 20th centuries. For example, in the mid-20th century the Double Wedding Ring pattern became so popular that middle-class women across the entire country were sewing it (Horton 1989:140; Brackman 1993a:107). While ready-made kits were available, women often personalized and adapted a pattern by using their own colors and fabrics, as well as altering the design (Brackman 1993a:107).

[2.20] Quilting became increasingly commercialized in the early 20th century. For example, in 1914 Iona and Rosalie Wilkinson opened the Wilkinson Quilt Company and began producing quilts (under copyright) for American households; they advertised
their products as "art quilts" (Goldman 2002). Commercialization allowed designs to be exchanged more easily. Waldvogel notes that

[2.21] well before the Depression, the wide dissemination of quilt patterns in print—through magazines like *Farm and Fireside*, syndicated newspaper columns, and pattern books—was altering the dynamics of traditional quilting, just as records and radio were dramatically accelerating the circulation of folk music styles and repertoires. Folk quilters, once limited to traditionally inherited patterns, were increasingly exposed to unfamiliar designs from impersonal outside sources, some traditional patterns from elsewhere, and others entirely new. (Waldvogel 1990:xiii)

[2.22] Mass marketing was considered a mixed blessing. In part, the revival of the '20s and '30s, spurred by cotton manufacturers and quilt kits, continued an American tradition (Hall and Kretsinger 1935:17; Cord 1995). However, for some traditionalists, purchasing precut pieces took some of the "joy" out of quilting (Hall and Kretsinger 1935:17).

[2.23] Patterns were used to encourage women to buy specific brand-related materials (Waldvogel 1990:14). Mountain Mist, for example, printed patterns on the inside of the paper wrappers of Mountain Mist batts so women would buy textiles from the company, as well as purchase additional patterns for a small extra charge (Waldvogel 1995:105–6). During the Depression, most women living in rural areas copied their patterns out of newspapers and shared them with friends (Waldvogel 1990:14). There is no way to determine if the pattern designers were fully compensated by the newspapers (21–23), but several of the patterns distributed in this way became symbolic of the era: the Grandmother's Flower Garden, Dresden Plate, Double Wedding Ring, and Sunbonnet Sue (23). Although the designs may have been protected by copyright, in most cases we cannot know if copyright was established or not. Whatever the official copyright status of these patterns, it was their uncontrolled copying that allowed them to become classics.

[2.24] Two parallel cultural approaches emerged in the mid-20th century. The "traditional" approach allowed quilters to create "variations into inherited designs, the better ones contributing something of themselves to the common stream of tradition" (Waldvogel 1990: xiv). However, commercialization fashioned a "synthetic equivalent in its place" (xiv). Thus, ownership claims emerge out of nationalization and commodification, which take individual quilters out of community-based folk traditions. Furthermore, as quilting became associated with "art" instead of traditional "craft," serious artists became interested in protecting the boundaries of their work from appropriation by others, a concern that is clearly evident in contemporary quilting. Copyright becomes more important as quilting becomes "artistic" and quilters begin to
see themselves as individual artists instead of members of a community of women sharing a craft.

[2.25] The renewal of interest in quilting in the 1970s led to a proliferation of new organizations, publications, and groups (Davis 1993:177). Quilting shops multiplied and pattern books appeared that included both new and traditional patterns (Pritchard 2006:43). Their publishers sought to copyright both types of designs.

[2.26] Modern quilting exists in a world where copyright matters to the creators and publishers of quilting books, patterns, designs, and fabrics. These are all items a quilter needs and thus may have to purchase, placing quilting more firmly within a commercial paradigm. When ownership and authorship of patterns matters, the traditional culture in which they were shared is replaced with a legal mandate that each quilter must purchase her own copy of a pattern. Copyright helps condition women to understand the pattern as something that must be bought from an original author, not as something that can be shared. Pattern designers see photocopying as a problem, because it allows quilters to buy only a single copy of a given pattern and share it, as they have been doing for hundreds of years. The relationship between authorial control, the use of patterns, and the creation of quilts has shifted.

[2.27] Copyright protects a creative work "fixed in a tangible form" for the life of the author plus seventy years. It also gives the copyright owner control over all direct copies, public displays, and derivatives of the work, as well as control over its general "look and feel." In other words, the copyright owner has been granted broad control over a creative work and the uses it is put to. The brief examination of the history of quilting outlined above suggests that copyright has not played a substantive role. Sharing, finding inspiration in the creativity of others, and transforming one design into another have been valued by the tradition of quilting, though not by copyright law. As copyright expands, these values are targeted as violating the rights of the copyright owner, and the culture of transformation is undermined. In the next section I'd like to examine the uneasy fit between copyright and quilting.

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3. Copyright and quilting

[3.1] The pattern is an important and underlying framework that helps the quilter create a quilt. For example, Brackman found that most of the 13,000 quilts she surveyed were made from existing patterns instead of original designs (Brackman 1993b:109). There is evidence to suggest that while quilting was often a cooperative effort, when quilting involved competition, some women carefully guarded their quilting designs to keep others from copying them to enter in future competitions.
(Brackman 1993b:124). However, while more research is needed here, they do not seem to have used copyright to do so.

[3.2] Copyright can disrupt the traditional flow of ideas and expression associated with quilting and other needlework. Compare, for example, the story of Kathleen Bissett's assertion of ownership over her design to Mountain Mist's marketing strategy of using patterns to encourage women to buy their products. At the 1933 Sears Quilt Contest held at the Chicago World's Fair, three of the top quilts used Mountain Mist patterns. Mountain Mist owner Frederick J. Hooker wrote to the finalists to find out if they had used his batting and then proceeded to put their testimonials in his advertising (Waldvogel 1995:128). By not rigorously policing the boundaries of their work, early pattern designers were able to facilitate innovation and transformation instead of halting it, while making money on associated products. It is unlikely that the transformations in quilting could have happened if strict copyright protection had inhibited the transfer of designs then, as it does today.

[3.3] A second example of how copyright disrupts more traditional cultural flows comes from the blog of a woman who had sewn several wallets to donate to a charity auction. In an effort to do the right thing and attribute the wallets' pattern to its designer, she added a link to the pattern owner's website from her own. The pattern owner then notified her that the donation of the wallets to the charity auction was a violation of her copyright (Lilian 2007). Controlling a final product donated to a charity auction based upon a pattern design is a long way from the culture of Civil War quilters' societies, in which quilts were made to raise funds for the war effort on both sides (Breneman 2007b).

[3.4] The Internet has made it difficult to enforce copyright protection of pattern designs while making patterns more easily available. One Web site offers instructions to quilters regarding what can be copyrighted (Elkins 2007). It and similar sites take strict copyright control by pattern designers as a given. Consider, for example, the information a Bluffton, Ohio, quilt shop has put on its Web site regarding the use of quilt patterns under copyright.

- [3.5] When you buy a pattern from a shop, then you have the right to use the copyright.
- When you buy a pattern from a shop, then you have NOT purchased THE copyright.
- You alone have the right to make quilts from it.
- Your friends do not have the right to make quilts from it.
- Your club or guild does not have the right to make quilts from it.
- Your class does not have the right to make quilts from it.
- You may have the right to sell the pattern, but those who buy that pattern from you do not have the right to make quilts from it, even if you give it to them.
- You do not have the right to swap your patterns or trade them in any way.
You can not photograph a quilt and make a copy of that quilt.

You can not download illustrations, patterns, or pictures of a quilt and make copies of those quilts, unless specifically authorized in writing [which can be on the web] by the copyright owner.

When you receive a quilt pattern free of charge, it does not give you the right to distribute it to others. It is the copyright owner's choice as to how it is distributed, not yours. Free patterns have their economic payment in that you have been rewarded for visited their web-site, store, meeting, class, or any number of things.

You must read the copyright wording. Some copyrights:

- Limit how many quilts can be made from it.
- Require labels to be put on the quilt.
- Require that the quilt is only for your use and can not be sold. ("Copyrights, licenses & quilting" 2007)

[3.6] I am not primarily concerned with the legal inaccuracies of these claims, but it should be pointed out that these rules prohibit almost all uses of the pattern and thus eliminate the reasons for buying one in the first place. In this analysis, the pattern designer is the original author and the quilt itself is a derivative work, which can be controlled by the copyright owner. Virtually all methods of gaining ideas and inspiration from already existing images and patterns, as well as all forms of sharing, have been prohibited.

[3.7] Although this Web site and others offer some information, there is little reliable legal guidance regarding how copyright should be applied to quilting, and many gray areas exist regarding authorship, originality, and sharing. These lines are especially blurry when the pattern designer asserts broad control over the uses of the quilt. In the remainder of this section I'd like to investigate the problems associated with the use of copyright as it applies to quilts.

[3.8] Quilting, as practiced by the vast majority of women, is an art that flies under the radar of the copyright regime because it is not a "good fit" (Bartow 2006:573). First, as the examples demonstrate, authorship of a quilt is not the sort of unitary authorship envisioned by copyright law. Quilting can involve multiple "authors," including the pattern designer, the quilter, quilting friends, and professionals who are paid to add the finishing touches. Historically, quilting bees have been sites of collective practice, where women work together on a single quilt, or work on their individual quilts within a more social environment (Finley 1929:36). As Phillips notes, often the top of the quilt is worked by one woman, but the quilting itself would be done collectively (Phillips 2007:361–62). The collaborative nature of quilting defies the presumption of an isolated and original author; the final product can be the result of the work of many. The multiple techniques for creating a quilt make it difficult to ascertain sole or joint authorship. Who is the author, or who are the authors? How many authors are there? Is the pattern designer the author, as designers like to
assert? Or is the author the person who chooses the fabrics and creates the top? Or are the quilters who help fashion the stitchwork authors?

[3.9] Second, from the perspective of copyright, the relationship of the pattern to the quilt is unclear. Are all quilts simply derivative works based on a pattern design? Some quilters work with basic blocks; others rely upon patterns that may be copyrighted and are often shared; others design their own patterns, or alter an existing pattern for their own uses. Some exchange fabrics with each other, widening their options for colors and textures. This complexity makes it difficult to determine how copyright can (and whether it should) play a role in the general creative process of quilting as practiced by most women. Furthermore, many traditional patterns carry multiple names and are not copyrighted, and no information regarding their original authors is known (Finley 1929).

[3.10] Some quilt scholars suggest the pattern is only one element of the creative work that goes into a quilt. As Forrest and Blincoe note in their extensive study of the quilt, "specific choice of materials for the various parts of the quilt is profoundly important" (1995:75). They claim that the underlying pattern is the "generic foundation," but the methods for bringing the quilt into being offer "endless variation" and a single cell "can be transformed myriad ways in the construction process" (126–27).

[3.11] For many quilters, a pattern is only a starting point, and new design elements are often added. These designs, while perhaps "derivative" according to the standards of copyright, reflect the creativity of the quilter. For example, quilting requires the sophisticated use of color. One quilting scholar describes the relationship of adaptation and invention in the work of two respected Kansas quilters this way:

[3.12] The most distinctive of the Kretsinger and Whitehill quilts are the original designs—Whitehill's Kansas Pattern and Rose Kretsinger's Orchid Wreath—that cannot be traced to pattern companies of the day. Such original designs are a minority; most are creative interpretations of traditional designs, nineteenth-century appliqué patterns redrawn for a more formal, sophisticated balance. But even the patterns obtained from commercial sources show creativity in the way design elements are rearranged and borders redrafted to provide strong, symmetrical frames for quilts that looked as good on a wall as a bed. (Brackman 1993a:107)

[3.13] Such analysis suggests that quilting is a blend of adaptation, sharing, and the commercial pattern, all to create a new original. Ultimately, patterns and the resulting quilts are a combination of inspiration, copying, and the use of already-existing
designs, which until recently were simply part of the flow of quilting (Forrest and Blincoe 1995:98). However, the role copyright should play is less clear.

[3.14] Relatively few cases of copyright infringement associated with quilting have reached United States courts, so there is little case law to help sort out the confusion. Most such cases have dealt with the unauthorized commercial exploitation of a quilt design by an already commercially oriented designer. For example, artist and pattern designer Paula Nadelstern sued the Hilton for taking one of her quilt designs and using it as inspiration for a carpet placed in their Huston hotel. The case was settled out of court in 2006 in favor of Nadelstern (Sophie 2007). Another commercial designer, Judi Boisson, successfully sued six U.S. retail stores for using unauthorized copies of designs that she had produced under a contract with a Chinese manufacturer (Woodward 2000).

[3.15] One of the more prominent cases actually focused on a poster of a quilt displayed for less than 30 seconds during a television program. In Ringgold v. Black Entertainment Television, the court found that the public display of the quilt poster on the set of a television show was a violation of the copyright holder's rights (Marques 2007:337). The decision didn't provide much in the way of insight into how the quilt itself should be treated; instead it focused upon the commercial use of the poster as part of the set design.

[3.16] The decision in the Ringgold case is consistent with Canadian quilt designer Kathleen Bissett's interpretation of copyright as it applies to her quilt patterns. She claims that "anything in any artistic print or media that uses the artist's design is a copy. This includes: quilts based on the original design (even with significant changes they are derivatives), copies of the pattern, photographs, slides, drawings, etc." (Bissett n.d., emphasis in original). She strives to track down unauthorized uses of her designs, including online pictures of quilts made with them, and keep them from being made public.

[3.17] Bissett claims that the only "fair use" is the use licensed by the copyright owner. Any transformative use is a derivative work and violates her copyright. Bissett's attitude is reflected in the copyright warnings of other online resources as well. As one quilt blog notes, quilting patterns are "unusual" because they are printed designs that guide the creation of a stitched work, but, it maintains, that does not change the fact that even in the new medium, the work may be legally used only in specific ways (Copyrights 2000).

[3.18] Issues related to appropriation, fair use, and the look and feel of a quilt are central to the legal questions raised in Boisson v. Banian (2001). This ruling by the second circuit court found in favor of Judi Boisson, who sued Vijay Rao for illegally
copying two of her quilt designs and producing them for sale in the United States. Boisson began her quilting business selling antique Amish quilts, but as those became more difficult to find, she started designing her own. Two of these quilts used variations on an alphabet quilt pattern: Boisson used hand lettering and arranged the alphabet into horizontal and vertical rows. Boisson accused Vijay Rao of copying her quilt design for his own ABC quilt (Boisson v. Banian 2001:4).

[3.19] One central question in the case was to what extent Boisson's quilt design could be owned, given that the elements of the design—the alphabet and a standard quilt layout—are fairly common within quilting traditions. The trial court found that neither the alphabet nor the layout were protected under copyright, in part because that particular design can be found in patterns at least 100 years old. However, the second circuit court rejected this argument, noting that the standard for copyrightability (besides applying for copyright protection) is simply a "minimum degree of creativity," even when that creativity relies upon something existing in the public domain. It extended protection to the layout of the letters, while recognizing that the letters themselves were not protectable (Boisson v. Banian 2001:13).

[3.20] Although it was acknowledged that Boisson had seen quilts using an alphabet design prior to designing her own, the court required the defendant to demonstrate that Boisson had actually owned an alphabet quilt in order to claim that she had copied the design from an already existing pattern (Boisson v. Banian 2001:15). While acknowledging that quilts with the letters of the alphabet on them are fairly common, the court claimed there was no evidence Boisson had copied her alphabet quilt from the public domain, and thus she could copyright her design "despite its identical nature to a prior work, because it is independent creation, and not novelty that is required" (17). The court also found that the color selection could be copyrighted, even though colors themselves cannot (19).

[3.21] The court thus upheld Boisson's claim of copyright ownership. In its opinion, it was acceptable for her to appropriate and copyright an expression from the public domain, but the defendant's copying of what was now her "original" idea was a different matter. Boisson had sufficient ownership of the design that a work "substantially similar" to it would violate her copyright (20–21).

[3.22] The court used a "more discerning" test instead of the "ordinary observer" test to compare Rao's quilts to Boisson's, focusing on the "total concept and feel" of the work (23). The "ordinary observer," according to the court, might not understand fully the distinction between the copyrightable and uncopyrightable elements of a particular design. Thus, the court sought to employ a "more discerning test" that is required when the work incorporates elements in the public domain (21–23). Using the more discerning test, the court found that despite the fact Rao's quilts used different
pictures and colors from Boisson's, and had differences in pattern design, his quilt titled "ABC Green" was similar enough to constitute an illegal copy (27–28). The other, "ABC Navy," did not infringe on Boisson's copyright because the icons were scattered throughout the quilt in a different pattern and the colors were sufficiently different. The court remanded the case for appropriate remedies.

[3.23] Like the two other cases discussed here, Boisson involved two commercial entities, each trying to sell a commercial product. The court acknowledged that there was little original about Boisson's design, given its heavy reliance upon traditional quilting patterns. Its focus on overall look and feel, however, led it to grant Boisson a level of control over her designs that limits future transformations. The defendant's quilts used different colors and different, "cute" icons, and the court did not grant a copyright to the lettering itself. However, the offending quilt's substantial similarity to the plaintiff's quilts was sufficient for the use of these alternate designs to be barred. The legal analysis leaves no room for inspiration and transformation. Instead, despite the limited creativity of Boisson's design, she was given extensive protection against a broad swath of possible permutations.

[3.24] Boisson has sued numerous major retailers for copying her designs. Schoenberger writes that "she argues that as long as you alter a color or add a distinctive border,...public domain designs can be copyrighted" (2000). Boisson freely appropriates from the public domain and thus privatizes what would otherwise be a public good, but, notwithstanding her own appropriation, is quite willing to limit the appropriations and transformations of others. While Boisson has only sued commercial manufacturers to date and has not pursued litigation against individual, noncommercial quilters, she has set the stage for other copyright infringement cases based upon the standard of "substantial similarity."

[3.25] One last example further demonstrates the ways in which the legal system can interfere with the transformation and innovation historically part of quilting culture. Attorney Paul C. Rapp wrote about a copyright dispute between two quilters, both of whom had created new designs based upon the same traditional quilt pattern. Because they had used the same pattern as their inspiration, their final quilts were similar, and the case was made more complex by the fact that the quilter Rapp represented, whom he refers to as "Jane," noted that she had been "inspired" by a picture of the other quilter's work, which she had seen online. While she could document that her own quilt had been created independently, and she had only meant that seeing a completed version of a similar quilt had given her confidence that she could finish her own, the other quilter hired an attorney who proceeded to accuse her of copyright infringement (Rapp 2003).
While this dispute ended without litigation, Rapp's analysis of quilting as an act of transformation is significant. He notes,

If he [the opposing counsel] had sued, we would have had an interesting little case on our hands. Say the facts turned out that Jane had liberally borrowed from the Iowan's quilt, and that the quilt block was indeed "original." Jane may well have been found liable of copyright infringement. She saw an original creative work and copied it. That is infringement. End of story. And if every quilter (or even a lot of them) had a similar Machiavellian streak and a bull-headed lawyer, quilting as we know it would come to a grinding halt. Because the essence of quilting is copying, but there's no folk art exception in the copyright law. (Rapp 2003)

Thus, while there is little case law, there is some reason to be concerned that the strict enforcement of copyright will have a damaging effect on quilting as it has traditionally been practiced.

These conflicts are substantively at odds with the practice of sharing and transformation that has generated the richness of the quilting world for hundreds of years. If copyright is to become the prevailing mechanism governing creativity, it will become extremely difficult to produce quilts outside the commercial sphere. If such prohibitions on sharing had existed historically, it is likely that few patterns would exist instead of the thousands that survive today.

The controversies and complexities of imposing a copyright system on the practice ofquilting spurred me to conduct a survey of quilters. I wanted to assess attitudes toward copyrights, creativity, and quilting. The next section describes the results of that survey. In the remainder of this paper I will highlight the key issues emerging from the stories told by women in the online survey, in an attempt to capture quilters' attitudes toward their work and the subject of copyright.

4. The labor of creativity

The initial call for participants was sent to several different online quilting groups, including the American Quilt Study Group, the American Quilters Society, the Quilters Bee List, the Quilters Online Resource Connection, and Northwest Quilters. Additionally, the survey was sent to quilters known to me personally. Those contacted were encouraged to forward the survey to their friends, thus creating a snowball sample from which the results are drawn. Sixty-five people responded to the survey and all the respondents were women. Given that there are an estimated 20 million quilters in the U.S. alone (Pritchard 2006:88), this survey cannot claim to be representative. However, it does provide insights into the attitudes of women who see
themselves as quilters. Future surveys could be designed to more systematically assess these attitudes.

[4.2] The survey was designed with several hypotheses in mind. First, I posited that women who quilt would primarily see their creative work as a labor of love, and that the quilts themselves would be intrinsically linked to the social structure within which these women live. Second, I expected that the concept of copyright would be foreign to most women, and their perspectives on copyright would help clarify how everyday creators interact with the law. Third, I hypothesized that the culture of quilting would undermine the assumption (by advocates of copyright law) that creative work exists only within an economic incentive structure and offer evidence that there is a divide between the regime of copyright and the motives for creativity associated with quilting. Fourth, I was interested in stories related to the process of creativity: how people learned and engaged with their craft. In this section, I will report on those questions whose answers specifically provide insight into how these women saw their work as creative and transformative.

[4.3] Several broad categories of questions were asked. The initial questions established the women's experience with quilting and the number of quilts they had produced. The second set of questions delved into the relationship they had to quilting and the meanings associated with their quilts. The third set focused specifically on copyright and the ways quilters saw copyright helping or hindering their creative work. Many of the questions were open-ended because I was most interested in capturing the stories told by quilters to enrich the picture of why they quilt.

[4.4] The respondents generally had substantial quilting experience; the majority had made more than 25 quilts, or had been quilting for more than five years. All survey participants quilted most of their quilts alone, but most had also quilted with help or suggestions from friends. Fifty-five percent had worked collaboratively on at least one quilt. The type of collaboration differed, with most explaining that the quilting (as opposed to the blocking of the pattern) was done collectively or sent out to be machine-done. This response supports other empirical research on how quilts are made, but disrupts the larger narrative of quilting as a traditionally communal activity (Forrest and Blincoe 1995:150).

[4.5] Only a few of the women in this survey were interested in quilting as a commercial activity. A future survey should seek to identify quilters who understand their work as commercial, in contrast to the sample here. Respondents could select more than one answer to the question of why they quilted, and many did. Most quilted because it was relaxing and artistic, and allowed them to be creative. Quilts were most often made as gifts, typically for a special occasion or person, or for personal use, and 77 percent of respondents signed their quilts in some fashion.
Participants were asked to tell the story of their first quilt, and the responses suggest several things about those first quilts and the women's reasons for quilting. First, many quilts were made for relatives, often to celebrate a birth or wedding. Often, learning to quilt and having a child were intertwined. As one respondent put it, her first quilt "was a baby quilt for our first son. I made it with little pieces of fabric I had on hand, with all sorts of textures. I still have it and it will be his Christmas present this year." Second, many of these first quilts were loved and, despite their age, were still valued. Many commented on how their first quilts had become worn over time. While several respondents had discarded their quilts because of their age (and still regret the loss), most of these first quilts are still owned either by their makers or by the people to whom they were given.

Third, these quilts symbolize connections between people. One respondent noted,

"My daughter told me she wanted a rainbow quilt. I thought for years, about how I wanted to do it. I bought several fabrics, cut them out and she helped me place the pieces the way she wanted it. It's still her pride and joy even though I've made other quilts for her since. Everyone who sees it wants one just like it. It will always be one of a kind. My daughter is now a teacher and an artist. It is the only thing we have done together in quilting."

One story evokes the numerous ways a quilt connects generations, embodies an act of creation, and also gains value through being used:

The first quilt I ever made actually partly was made by my mother when she was young. We were visiting with my grandmother and she was cleaning out her cedar chest. She had these old quilt squares that my mom had made when she was young. She asked me if I wanted them. I really didn't want to mess with them, but my mom suggested I take them so as not to hurt my grandmother's feelings. She even helped me plan on how to finish it. So, we went to the fabric store for the backing and batting. I worked on it and finished it when we got home. It ended up being used a lot! It became sort of sad because of the use it had and it started to fall apart. When my sister's dog died we ended up burying the dog in it. I still have pictures of it and someday would like to make it again. Especially now that both my grandmother and mother have passed away.

Even taking a quilting class to learn how to quilt is rich with the connections made through learning and sharing skills. One person told the story of her first quilt:
[4.12] My first quilt was a sampler. It was dark green, light green, and muslin. It was my first class at the Community Center. The teacher told the class, I can tell you which ones of you will continue to quilt after this class and which ones will give it up. Then she turned to me—you are hooked on this. I saw her later almost ten years and told her how much her class had changed my life. She had just lost her husband and she was working at the hospital and I made her cry. She said she needed to hear that—that she changed someone's life. She did change my life.

[4.13] Almost all the stories were dominated by the ways in which the quilt became a part of the lives of those who received it. These memories were both good and bad. One woman explained, "My first quilt was a lap quilt for my elderly mother. I had just bought my embroidery machine and I used my Angel memory card to apply one angel for each of her 7 children, followed with all of our names. I also used fabric from clothing pieces that we knew she would recognize. It was just a simple 9 patch but she loved it."

[4.14] One final story highlights that, while a quilt might be created to share memories and develop connections, sometimes it outlived the relationship it was meant to celebrate:

[4.15] My first quilt was a turning twenty quilt for my son and his new bride. They are vegans and all natural in their approach to living. I made the quilt with beiges, 100% cotton, all natural. It was a mess!!! But they loved it. Since they have parted ways I now have the quilt tucked away. Too many memories for my son to keep it. Too many sad memories for me to show it. And giving it away would deny the past.

[4.16] The creative urge behind these quilts is far removed from profit motives, the desire to protect original designs, or concern for property rights. Instead, for virtually all the women responding to the survey, quilting was a satisfying act of creation, and its product was often intended to serve as a gift. Indeed, throughout their history, quilts have almost always been made as gifts for families and to commemorate special occasions (Cooper and Allen 1999). The "value" of the quilt as a gift allows for the possibility of unalienated labor that can cement relationships between individuals and help form bonds of family and community (Roberts 1994:132).

[4.17] Central to the creative process is the question of where patterns and ideas come from. Two questions, "Where do you get the patterns for your quilts?" and "When you find a new pattern you like, do you share it with friends?" were included to assess the ways in which quilting patterns are used and shared, an area of concern for commercial quilt book publishers and pattern makers.
The women in this survey did not all get their patterns in the same way. Consulting quilting books was the most common method of getting a pattern (89 percent; participants could choose more than one answer). The next most popular method was to make their own patterns. However, when they find a pattern they like, 69 percent share it with friends, suggesting that whatever the origin of the pattern, the community itself sees the sharing of ideas as part of the process. More information is needed about this sharing. Specifically, if quilters are sharing photocopies of patterns, they may be violating copyright law. On the other hand, if a quilter makes a quilt from a pattern and then gives the pattern to a friend without copying it, then such an action should be allowed under the first sale doctrine. If quilters are making and sharing their own designs, then the copyright violation is less clear. Either way, when the sharing culture of quilters meets the property culture of copyright, there will inevitably be clashes.

To further ascertain how the quilters perceived their practices of innovation and sharing in relation to copyright law, participants were asked if they had ever come across the term "copyright" in relation to quilting, to which 87 percent responded affirmatively. Most of them (45 percent) had heard about copyright in quilting books. Those who were either teachers or had taken some sort of course had been educated in more detail about copyright issues.

Thirty-seven women answered the question asking them to describe their encounter with copyright. I had thought participants might provide specific stories of their experiences with copyright. However, they used the open-ended question to demonstrate that they had some knowledge of the law and tried to obey it, but were confused about what was and was not legal. They understood the distinction between personal and commercial use to be a key factor in copyright issues. These quilters tried to follow the law by not sharing photocopies of patterns, buying their own books whenever possible, and opting out of the commercially driven world of copyright by creating their own patterns or using ones in the public domain. One respondent said she used quilt books as a source of inspiration for creating her own patterns. Several women mentioned attending lectures on copyright either in school or at their quilting guilds, and many others said the topic was discussed on the quilting lists. Thus the quilters were aware of the issue in general, but largely unfamiliar with its intricacies.

Most felt that copyright law did not apply to them because they were not engaged in commercial quilting; if they were, they tended to use public-domain patterns to avoid the charge of copyright infringement. None spoke of their noncommercial quilts as having or needing copyright protection. One respondent noted that the only time she shares a pattern, thus infringing a copyright, is when her quilt group is unable to find it for sale, or when someone is having financial trouble. Most
(75 percent) felt that copyright had no impact on them. Only two respondents of the sixty-five saw copyright as a barrier to their creativity, one thought it had made it more difficult to quilt, and four understood copyright to have protected their own creativity. Generally, while quilters know copyright laws exist, they see the law applying to commercial quilting, not to their creative work as quilters. They seek to obey the law as much as possible, but continue to operate primarily in a world where copyright is not an issue. Despite their overwhelming sense that copyright has no impact on them, their general confusion regarding the topic and their willingness to share patterns and thus possibly violate copyright suggest that the law does have some relevance to quilting practices, although the survey participants might not recognize it.

[4.22] When asked to explain why copyright had no impact on them, most reiterated that while they seek to follow the law, their work is not commercially driven, and because they do not sell their quilts, copyright is irrelevant. Many spoke of being inspired by quilt patterns: "I know I can't sell a copyright item as my own so I use the ideas, combine techniques and make my own design. That way it is not violating copyright but still get the inspiration I need for new ideas." Of course, according to Kathleen Bissett's interpretation of the law discussed above, such use would still violate copyright if the resulting quilt was substantially similar to the pattern that inspired it.

[4.23] Several respondents said that they completely avoid work that is copyrighted, or engage in the quilting equivalent of an "open source" or "creative commons" approach to innovation and design.

[4.24] It [copyright] has kept me from purchasing licensed products from the likes of Disney or Mary Engelbreit. I choose to support those who in turn will support my endeavors. I remember decades past when one would go into a yarn shop, pick a pattern out of the shops collection of books, magazines, pamphlets, buy the yarn and the shop owner gave you a copy of the pattern. I did not know about copyright as a youth.

[4.25] Another noted that she respected copyrights and "others creativity and right to make a living from the copyright."

[4.26] The overwhelming response was that copyright did not apply to the work done by quilters, because they engage in their craft for personal reasons. Additionally, 75 percent of the respondents would share a quilt pattern they designed themselves with friends or give it away freely to everyone via the Internet, indicating that the culture of sharing remains strong among this sample of quilters.
Respondents were asked, in a final question, for any last comments on quilting, copyright, and what the survey had made them think about. While some respondents said they had not thought about copyright before and now would think about it, most summarized their feelings toward quilting and tried to place quilting within the commercial world of copyright. One respondent said,

I actually had never thought of the "legal" side of quilting. Why should something that is such a personal creative gift have to fall into the category of "who owns it."...We have become so selfish about things...Beauty is to be shared, and if there is a profit in it, so much the better, but I have never made it the end product of an act of enjoyment.

One respondent told a story she had recently heard about a woman who had donated one of her quilts to a nonprofit group for a fundraiser, but the group had been told that raffling off the quilt would violate copyright law. As she noted, "I thought this was very sad."

One woman highlighted her own connection to quilting, "Quilting makes me an artist. It helps to lift my spirits and lets me make things that I think are beautiful. I use quilting as my creative outlet to relax and to teach others how to create beauty." Another said, "I have found quilters are more than happy to share their knowledge and patterns with anyone. It is a way to keep the art of quilting alive and pass it on." One respondent noted that if copyright concerns changed the way her quilting guild shares information, it would be a detriment to the community. She explained, "[I] feel the quilting community in our local guilds have been very open and sharing with information about techniques, etc. I would miss this exchange if copyright issues would change people's attitudes." Another simply noted that she saw patterns as a "tool" and not as the most important element of quilting. Finally, one woman noted the complexity of copyright as applied to design. She said, "I think copyright pertaining to the written word is understandable enough for most but design is still a black hole in space."

It is certainly the case that it is difficult to know exactly what aspect of quilting is protected by copyright. While the survey participants understood how it applied to books, they were uncertain where designs might fall within the protective sphere. There was significant confusion over what could be protected if one took a pattern, modified it, used different fabrics and colors, and thus created something new. The fact that copyright can also be applicable to fabrics, while not mentioned specifically by the respondents, may also increase the general confusion about what is available for use.
5. Analysis

[5.1] Because of the small sample size, the results of this study cannot be generalized. However, these women's stories and responses to questions provide some insight into the ways in which copyright and creativity function. First, collaboration takes many forms. Ideas and patterns are commonly shared with friends and family, but collaborative quilts are far less common than individual quilts, though individual quilts are often created within a supportive network of friends and family. Second, while respondents were generally aware of copyright, these quilters, unless they were interested in commercial applications, had no interest in applying copyright to the quilts they made or to the patterns they designed. Only upon commercialization does copyright emerge as an issue, and, in this sample, only for those writing quilt design notebooks for their quilting classes or creating patterns for commercial sale.

[5.2] These respondents see copyright as relevant to others, who engage in commercial activity, but not to themselves and their creative work. These quilters create original designs or modify existing ones when the things they see inspire them. They generally operate and create outside the protective sphere of copyright. They do not seek to protect their work using a narrative of property and copyright. In part, this lack of concern with copyright can be attributed to the fact that most women responding to the survey quilt for pleasure and to create gifts. However, it is clear that these quilters can work within a quilting community, without much recourse to the commercialized world. As quilting becomes an industry and some people further professionalize it, issues of copyright become more salient. Quilters do not want to break the law, but at the same time seem saddened by the way property rights erode a community of sharing.

[5.3] It is worth mentioning that all of the survey respondents were women, and men were only rarely mentioned. From these responses, it seems clear that quilting remains overwhelmingly a women's sphere of creativity. Further attesting to the female-dominated nature of the topic, all but 11 of the 340 books listed in the OhioLINK database on quilting were written by women. Women are therefore the primary actors in the commodification of quilting as well as the ones participating in the creation of quilts. The divide between those who own and those who share is not along gender lines, with men understanding and using copyright to protect property in creative work and women sharing their creative work; rather, it separates commodified and uncommodified labor.

[5.4] For example, one respondent mentioned that she avoids Mary Engelbreit and Disney patterns because Engelbreit and Disney approach the sale of patterns too commercially and are not part of the sharing community this women associates with
quilting. Engelbreit is a businesswoman who makes a variety of creative products, including greeting cards and fabric. On her Web site she describes herself as an "artist and entrepreneur," a woman who has loved drawing since she was a child and who began her creative work drawing greeting cards. While the biography on her Web site seeks to ground her in her love for drawing, it also mentions her licensed products six times and clearly situates her creative work within what has been called her "vast empire of cuteness" (About Mary n.d.). There is no denying Engelbreit's creative energy, but she has sought to market her work and create a global brand, not share her work within the noncommodified culture associated with the gift economy of quilting described by the survey participants.

[5.5] What is interesting is that survey participants understand that work like Engelbreit's is protected, and instead of violating copyright and using these products in ways that are not permitted, they simply avoid using them at all. Thus, as a commercial aid, copyright can work against itself by scaring people away from the use of restrictively licensed work. Instead, quilters look for free patterns and fabrics. Since numerous Web sites offer free patterns, it is quite possible to quilt without ever violating a copyright. However, it is also true that quilt books, quilt classes, and other forms of commodification make it more difficult to ignore the commercial aspect of the quilting "business."

6. Conclusion

[6.1] The creation of quilts as collaborative projects and as gifts suggests a model for authorship and ownership different from the concept of the original author that underlies copyright law. Quilts often include stories sewn into their squares, they require knowledge of textiles and appliqué techniques, and they have served important political and cultural functions (Berlo and Crews 2003:16–19; Elsley 1996:21–22). Furthermore, the quilt itself has a life history. It cannot be viewed as a static art, but has a story linked with the narrative of its owner (Forrest and Blincoe 1995:97).

[6.2] The act of authoring a quilt continues to exist at many levels outside the realm of copyright law. For the women surveyed, quilting is part of a gift economy and is practiced as a labor of love, not in return for money. Almost all the women surveyed responded that they would be hurt if they found out a quilt they had given as a gift had been sold for profit. They consider quilting a creative pastime and sometimes an art, something that allows them to make beautiful gifts. Thus, not only do they create absent the protective incentives of copyright law, but they also help us see the kind of world made possible through a different type of labor, the unalienated labor of quilting that creates social ties as well as gifts that cannot be assigned a monetary value.
Quilting is a culture of transforming the ideas of others into one's own creations and building new quilts upon the traditional models of past quilts. Quilting is also an art form replete with transformative moments. Women share and exchange their ideas and patterns; they use fabrics from old items and make them into something new; they take a traditional design and add their own flourish. It is clear that quilting is a culture premised upon seeing something interesting or beautiful and then working with the design to make something new. Old and new patterns are combined, colors and materials sorted, pieces of older garments sewn into new quilts, and the modern melded with the traditional. Quilting thus demonstrates the creativity that emerges in transformations connecting the past to the present and individuals into a community.

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Sex detectives: Law & Order: SVU's fans, critics, and characters investigate lesbian desire

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Abstract—I address the contested question of whether sex crimes detective Olivia Benson (a character on TV's Law & Order: Special Victims Unit played by Mariska Hargitay) is a lesbian, and the ways in which both fans and TV scholars approach this mystery. That is, I investigate not what we "know" about lesbians on/and television, but how we frame the very processes of this knowing. In both critical and fan discourse, debates about where to locate the queerness of television oscillate irresolvably between three sites: the text itself, audience interpretations, and the surrounding metatexts and contexts. With a primary theoretical framework drawn from Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's Epistemology of the Closet, I analyze the cultural and televisual traditions that shape SVU's portrayal of deviant sexuality, and I assess how these resonate with fan interpretations in today's context of media convergence.

Keywords—Convergence; Femslash; Queer theory; Television studies


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1. Private eyes

Let me introduce you to Olivia Benson, a dedicated yet personally tormented detective who investigates sex crimes in New York City and sports a deadly weapon, a leather jacket, and a short haircut. She's hopelessly in love with assistant district attorney Alexandra Cabot, who prosecutes her cases—they're each other's domestic partners, occasional lovers, or secret crushes, depending on who is telling the story. That is, these individuals are fictional characters on Law & Order: Special Victims Unit (SVU; 1990–present), and the question of whether Olivia could be Alex's (or anyone's) girlfriend is a particularly contested one across online SVU fandom: some fans are determined to claim her as gay, while others insist that she's straight. Although there is clearly intense investment on both sides in definitively verifying the answer, there is at the same time much confusion about the proper source of the necessary evidence: text, subtext, or metatext. In this essay, I chronicle the inquests of three detectives with parallel mandates to uncover the truths of desire: the TV character, who is hot on the trail of New York City's sex offenders; the SVU fan, who watches the show vigilantly for clues to who is in Olivia's heart and in her bed; and the television scholar, who is fascinated by these epistemological conundrums, driven to investigate how we might know things about television, about audiences, and about sexuality. I maintain that the projects of these three detectives are intertwined in multivalent networks that link knowledge, desire, and spectatorship across diverse registers. Within this intertextual architecture, the question of whether Olivia is "really" a lesbian is inextricable from broader ambiguities that infect the conflicted relations between texts and audiences, academics and fans, gender and consumption, hermeneutics and erotics.

My own romance with Olivia Benson (figure 1), played by Mariska Hargitay, began with a chance conversation at my local coffee shop that catalyzed an addiction to USA Network's nightly SVU reruns (the show's first run appears on NBC). Because of my preexisting fluency in subtextual viewing protocols, the availability of the Olivia/Alex dyad transformed SVU, for me, into a compelling nexus of speculation, imagination, and desire. Olivia and Alex are indeed a power couple of female slash fandom, one among a scattered pantheon of classic one true pairings—OTPs that certain media seem to invite us to recognize by portraying a profound, if not explicitly romantic, relationship between two characters (an archetype that, in the world of femslash, does not much predate Xena: Warrior Princess, 1995–2001). My personal engagement with their saga depends on the contingencies that shape television viewership—daily routines, a fortuitous meeting, and the topographies of social networks and lesbian subcultures (both online and off)—demonstrating how interpretations of, and libidinal
encounters with, SVU the program are entangled with Internet fandom and with everyday life. Television criticism often leans toward one or the other side of the border separating diegetic content from audience reception, examining one territory in relative isolation. Here, I attempt to plot the intersections between screen text and fan text, taking them as mutually constitutive. This process incorporates the disintegration of a number of linked binaries because the indeterminacy of inside/outside or gay/straight impinges on the stability of private/public, fiction/reality, fan/critic, leisure/work, and other oppositions. Crucial among them is the rapidly dissolving frontier between television and the Internet, which brings the interdependence of TV producers and consumers ever more out into the open.

Figure 1. Olivia Benson (NBC promotional image).

[1.3] The subtext of my argument is the notion that television is itself in the closet about its digital tendencies, largely as a defense mechanism for preserving broadcast's profit models and margins. Like the question so often posed about Olivia—"Is she or isn't she?"—the question "Is it or isn't it TV?" has high stakes in hierarchical economies of power, and is addressed with a parallel coyness. Moreover, these taxonomic teases are interlaced and analogous: as slash fandom becomes increasingly visible and pervasive under conditions of increasingly competitive and diffuse distribution and attention, its cultivation (or at least negotiation) takes on increasing importance. Convergence, in other words, is queer, in both content and form. In this milieu, my analysis consists not of cracking the case of Olivia Benson where the aforementioned detectives remain stymied, but rather of mapping the specifically televisual limits that circumscribe their inquiries, especially at the hazardous junctions of epistemological endeavors, erotic investments, and capitalist economics. I can offer no incontrovertible proof that Olivia is a lesbian, no stable hierarchy of meaning among text, subtext, and metatext. Any evidence that might be offered is always already ensnared in the vortex of the closet, wherein the secret truths of (homo)sexuality are simultaneously exposed and effaced in relentless fluctuations between binary poles.

[1.4] What I present here is the more nuanced claim that Olivia is the fulcrum of an apparatus of lesbian desire that operates at the volatile interchanges permeating these geographies, including those that constitute television as a mass medium. Given television's interpenetration with its social context, with online paratexts, with the competencies and orientations of its viewers, the desires and procedures of my three detectives (the character, the fan, and the critic) mirror and structure each other in their pursuit of a verdict. My intervention here, while not minimizing the value of these stabilizing projects, is to delve into the unstable circuits of mutual interdependence between the strata of this textual network. I take seriously the question of how what appears on television can channel fans' deductive and creative activities, as well as the question of how fans' meaning-making can influence the import of television programs. I maintain that it is ultimately in such complex relations that the most fruitful prospects for knowledge, passion, and profit lie.
2. Closet case

2.1 If Olivia is gay, then she's a closet case.


2.2 Fans' inquests into Olivia's sexuality are animated by a politics of representation that calls for "gay characters" to come out of the closet. While I wouldn't want to belittle calls for increased visibility, it's important to remember that lesbians never transparently and unambiguously appear, and this is even more true of their portrayal on television. This rich indeterminacy is at the heart of Eve Sedgwick's intervention in Epistemology of the Closet, which investigates how, around the turn of the 20th century, the homosexual/heterosexual binary was transformed into the privileged, obligatory taxonomy for classifying all persons and all permutations of sexuality. The closet is Sedgwick's figure for this profoundly contradictory organizing principle, not only of sexual identity but also of all oscillations of secrecy and disclosure that are primordially filtered through the "one particular sexuality that was distinctly constituted as secrecy" (1990:73). This aporetic logic is all the more insistent when operating within the already highly compromised and overdetermined domain of TV representation. Epistemology and consumption are fundamentally intertwined with sexuality in the televisual economy, as Lynne Joyrich argues: "U.S. television both impedes and constructs, exposes and buries, a particular knowledge of sexuality" (2001:440) to the point that "the closet becomes an implicit TV form" (450). Joyrich observes that the media have managed homosexual desire through deliberate ambiguity, with contradictory consequences. This subtextual strategy, wherein coded desire is readable only to viewers properly qualified to decrypt it, is typically condemned (by all but slash fans) as coy, mercenary, and apolitical at best. The appearance of explicit gay characters on TV programs can serve to localize and thus contain what are otherwise more pervasive and destabilizing homoerotic undercurrents, implying that, enmeshed as we are in the inexorable seesaw of binaries, subtext or connotation is in some ways the more progressive mode.

2.3 According to Joyrich, this strategy is a key permutation of "the [TV] industry's attempts to define sexuality as product while retaining its simultaneous anxiety around sexuality as practice" (2001:451), an economic bargain often facilitated by "encourag[ing] an epistemology (and erotics) of 'knowing viewers'" (453) (or, in my terms, trained detectives). She links "the logic of the commodity" to "the logic of the closet" (462), just as Amelie Hastie similarly calls attention to the "inherent overlap between consumerist and epistemological economies present both in television itself and in television criticism" (2007:91). One form these hybrid economies take is show tie-ins, be they commercial merchandise or fan productions. They capitalize on the viewership's coupling of desire and pleasure with the project of investigation to promote a realm of supplementary texts that drive and are driven by TV as a consumerist medium. The practices of screen, fan, and academic detectives are congruent and interdependent, shaped by interlocking modes of engagement: epistemology and consumption. Each is enabled and constrained by closet formations wherein binary terms continually reassert their authority in spite of their manifest instability and contradictions. Both academics and fans have sought out the "queer character" as an object of knowledge through the same self-perpetuating ciphers that seem to propel her ever further from reach.

2.4 My study is necessarily engaged with a broader ongoing debate in the discipline of television studies about how to theorize the interfaces between text, audience, and sociopolitical context. These have lately been transformed from more or less stable and opposable categories to a more postmodern assemblage. We must grapple with the precarious question of whether meaning is located inside or outside the text, in representation or interpretation. Even as the programmatic binary is extensively rejected in favor of more complex, interactive models, as I show here, it seems impossible to dispense with these terms completely (note 1). We can take from this assemblage an appreciation of the interdependence of queer interpretive work and specific codes and conventions of screen representation. The quandaries of textuality and sexuality continue to merge in the present-day turn to media convergence, wherein subtext and slash as a platform for fan engagement become increasingly foregrounded in overlapping academic and industrial discussions (Jenkins 2006). By all accounts, when, then, we arrive at an epistemological diagram of sexuality where inside and outside interpenetrate, the television text compromised by intertextual relations and infiltrated by audience readings. This is not to suggest that no distinctions or hierarchies can be recognized across these registers. Episodes of SVU are obviously distinguishable from fan fiction stories, for example, as SVU's producers are from fans as producers, and each is differently
interfaced with apparatuses of power. The point is that discourses of sexual knowledge—on the part of fans, who refer alternately to episodes, fan works, actors, and industry in attempts to find evidentiary purchase, as much as on the part of academics—make it apparent that crucial televisial boundaries stubbornly elude efforts to render them fixed and impermeable.

3. Special victims

[3.1] After the first time [Alex] wondered whether people could tell. She had gay friends who would play "lesbian/straight?" over coffee as if there were secret signs, visible only to women in the know. And maybe there was something in that. She wondered if she exhibited such signs...

[3.2] When Olivia is near she feels the whole world watching..."We should be more careful," she says, watching the squad room for signs of interest. "We shouldn't...not where everyone can see us"...sometimes she wonders if they know already. There's not much that escapes a detective in sex crimes.

—CGB, "Objects in the Mirror" (fanfic, 2004)

[3.3] Just as closet formations often intersect with work via the economic underpinnings of public and private spheres, gendered ideologies of work often collide with our perception of sexuality. Working women on screen have been an object of interest for queer and female fans, perhaps since the early days of Mary Tyler Moore's workplace family and Cagney and Lacey's police partnership. In her analysis of feminist sitcoms across several decades (here, Murphy Brown in the 1990s), Lauren Rabinovitz includes a discussion of how Murphy Brown's "assertiveness, independence, brassiness, and 'smart mouth,' as well as her tailored and even sometimes androgynous wardrobe, may suggest her capacity as a lesbian or figure for lesbian identification while references to her active, ongoing heterosexual life and desire undercut such signifiers" (1999:160). The ambivalence of connotation is in full force here, and I'd like to point out that 10 years later, lesbian-oriented fans describe Olivia, and the oscillation between the eruption and erasure of queer desire surrounding her on SVU, in strikingly similar terms. As Angie B (2004) observes, Olivia has had brushes with past or potential boyfriends on screen, but these fleeting references to heterosexuality seem far outweighed by the pervasive fact that she is

[3.4] one of the few characters on TV to exhibit what are often considered to be dyke characteristics—with short hair, a leather jacket, and a gun at her hip, Olivia sits with legs apart, commanding the space around her. She is the protector of the victims who come through her department, a strong woman in a profession filled with men, and often physically or verbally dominates "perps." Her uniform includes t-shirts, sweaters, slacks and sensible shoes—no heels, no frills, and little jewelry except for what appears to be a man's watch.

[3.5] Notably, these qualities, like Murphy Brown's, have, in and of themselves, nothing to do with sex between women. What they do imply is these characters' contravention of the bounds of properly feminine aesthetics and activities, the challenge to stable taxonomies of gender that inheres in their role as successful professionals. Though they may appear superficial and stereotypical, such historically contoured markers for encoding transgression in style and accessories are a crucial dimension of lesbian viewing strategies.

[3.6] Alongside Olivia's place in a genealogy of television's working women, it is significant that her character is located within a distinct textual milieu: the crime procedural—a form that John Fiske describes as "the primary masculine television genre," and one of TV's favored workplaces. Because, as Fiske puts it, "'most masculine texts' eliminate 'the most significant cultural producers of the masculine identity—women, work, and marriage'" (Fiske in Cuklanz 1999:18–19), it follows that the portrayal of women and private, "feminine" concerns like romance is especially conflicted here. Lisa M. Cuklanz identifies an economically motivated shift in the textual orientation of detective shows: "In the 1980s the genre became more and more similar to the soap opera, with the aim of attracting a broad-based, mixed-gender audience...the form and content of crime dramas became increasingly feminized" (24)—but such hybridization may exacerbate rather than alleviate the tensions plaguing this televisial version of separate spheres. As Louisa Stein (2008) theorizes, genre mixing is a ubiquitous media strategy, and it offers frustrations as well as opportunities to both producers and fans. In the case of SVU, the uneasy amalgamation of Olivia as police heroine and Olivia as romantic heroine, of public justice and intimate sex
detective series dictate that "the show deliberately does not focus on the personal lives of its characters." This attribute incites and justifies disproportionately intensive deductive formulas: in the rubric of one group (Baby Lurches, now off-line), for example, one drink between characters in the diegetic realm equates to a sexual liaison, once you control for the program's acute representational restraint. Moreover, I’d contend that many fans are also consciously engaged with the ways the more enfolding contortions of the closet manipulate the visibility of lesbian eroticism, both on screen and off.

[3.10] As I (along with commentators like Sally Forth and Angie B) have theorized SVU, the elements that conspire to render Olivia unrepresentable as a lesbian on screen are ultimately extratextual: our culture's pervasive homophobia; the economic imperative to appeal to a mass audience; the gendered hazards bequeathed to television by historical hierarchies and transformations; the insidious ubiquity of the closet. Fan fiction stories, however, often transpose the impediments to Olivia and Alex's romance from outside the text to inside the characters' psyches, reconstituting these oppressions as their individual fears and inhibitions. Even when fics thematize, as they often do, Olivia's or Alex's struggle with prejudice or internalized homophobia, these conditions are still located as hang-ups that, although perhaps seething with acknowledged violence, can be processed and (usually) overcome privately. Simultaneously, stories may transpose the fans' procedures of watching (obsessive scrutiny of the characters' attire, vigilance for suspect looks and touches), as well as their tendency to fantasize about what they see, into the heads of the characters, converting the viewers' competencies as sex detectives into Olivia and Alex's erotic waltz. What appears is a kind of machine for collapsing TV's divergent registers into each other, a libidinous interface with the perpetual flows of meaning wherein SVU episodes, industry gossip, and fan production penetrate and transform each other. It is in this interactive destabilization of the ostensibly obvious perimeters distinguishing text, audience, and metatext that lesbian desire in the televisual sense operates.

4. Is she or isn't she?

[4.1]  **Mariska:** A week ago, I'm walking down Seventh Ave. [...] and all of a sudden this guy yells, [...] "Damn! I thought you were a lesbian!"

[4.2]  **Conan:** Really? Because of your character [Olivia Benson] on the show?

[4.3]  **Mariska:** Yes, everyone thinks that, and I don't know why.

—Mariska Hargitay on *Late Night with Conan O'Brien* (April 2003)

[4.4]  All SVU slash to some degree engages the circulation of sexuality across variable strata. Crucial to such circulation is plausibility: how much responsibility do fan writers have to textual fidelity? How much leeway do they have to transform the primary text from without? This dispute is rendered in fan jargon as canon versus fanon. Henry Jenkins notes that rejection of slash fan fiction has "less to do with the stated reason that it violates established characterization than with unstated beliefs about the nature of human sexuality that determine what types of character conduct can be viewed as plausible" (1994:468), although Sara Gwenllian Jones critiques this tendency, pointing out that "in such formulations, slash is interpreted as 'resistant' or 'subversive' because it seems deliberately to ignore or overrule clear textual messages indicating characters' heterosexuality" (2002:81). A verdict in Olivia's case could only be provisionally negotiated among three epistemologically incommensurate but inseparable layers: screen texts, fan texts, and the social context that mediates among them. These layers are negotiated differently by different viewers: "heteroglossic cultural references which are easily read one way by queer viewers" are read "quite differently by heterosexuals unfamiliar with the queer lexicon" (Jones 2000:19), yet the "deficit between what is presented on screen and what is implied or omitted that cult television formats exploit in order to enthrall viewers" (13). In other words, the diverse pleasures fans glean from imaginatively filling in what their favorite shows formally and strategically leave out is a crucial element of marketability. In this sense, Olivia's chronically boyfriend- and girlfriend-less condition is an impetus of SVU's popularity because it stimulates much of the speculation and argument that swirl around her.

[4.5]  Discourses arguing the case of Olivia Benson promiscuously intersect the structuring oppositions of sexuality and television alike. At issue is what register of evidence for Olivia and her ilk's orientation is ultimately
definitive: the television text, or the extratextual milieu. The former offers proof in the form of mysteriously cathected scenes with Alexandra Cabot, short hair, and butch accessories; the legitimacy of audience interpretations, viewing practices, and communities that resoundingly proclaim Olivia's lesbian desirability. The latter assesses the conscious intentions of the show’s producers for the character and the economic necessity of keeping her palatable to a broad audience, the (perhaps excessively) open heterosexuality of Mariska Hargitay, homophobia, and the dearth of "real" lesbians in the mass media. Such boundary confusions are figured in fiction, but they are more than just a metaphor. The unreliability of its own perimeter was a founding condition of television: because "experts of the period [the 1950s] agreed that the modern home should blur distinctions between inside and outside spaces," as Lynne Spigel notes, "television was the ideal companion for these suburban homes" (1997:212–13). At the same time, this ambiguity was the source of acute "anxieties" as "popular media expressed uncertainty about the distinction between real and electrical space" (219). Television's tendency to perforate and compromise the frontiers between discrete spaces, generating contradictory overlaps and simultaneities, only intensifies with media convergence. Resolution to the enigma of where diegetic authority stops and audience interpretation begins is frustrated by design as paratexts—including online promotions, interactive network Web sites, and fan sites—further erode the circumference of the medium. Such transmedia branding leads to what Sharon Marie Ross calls teleparticipation, or "invitations to interact with TV shows beyond the moment of viewing and 'outside' of the TV show itself" (2008:4).

[4.6] Thus, the mystery, "is she or isn't she?", is inextricable from the mystery of what television itself is: if we can't determine the boundaries of television, then evidence for our mystery will never be stable, rendering convergence a closet brimming with speculation and creativity. Just as television technology—the signal's perpetual transmission through the walls of the home, the scanning beam or pixels that only simulate a fixed image—is central to the difficulty of confirming its limits, the Internet platforms of television fandom are integral its border wars. In her "Brief History of Media Fandom," Francesca Coppa observes that from the 1990s, "the movement of fandom online, as well as an increasingly customizable experience, moved slash fandom out into the mainstream" (2006:54), making it more influential in both the production and consumption of mass media. In an initial shift from fan activity on Usenet, "mailing lists customized fandom by allowing fans to select from among their fannish interests, [then] blogs such as LiveJournal.com...began to be widely adopted across fandom around 2003, where it caused a wide-scale reorganization of fandom infrastructure" (57). SVU spanned this transition, which is a factor in the varied geography of its slash following: a compendium of links to author pages, Yahoo! mailing lists, LiveJournal communities (figures 2 and 3), multimedia archives, and official Web sites (http://xenawp.org/svu) offers some sense of the broad scope of slash activity around Olivia, who is paired with Alex as well as other female SVU characters.

Figure 2. Community header image by p_inkjeans for the LiveJournal community ob_fangrirl. [View larger image.]

Figure 3. Community header image by aleatory_6 for the LiveJournal community alex_liv_lovers. [View larger image.]
Online fandom's technological substrate makes particular registers possible in the open case file on Olivia Benson's sexuality. Although SVU fans of various orientations display an intense investment in definitively determining the truth, there is significant confusion about where to locate legitimate evidence. The hermeneutic uncertainties of fan discourse parallel those that vex scholarly discourse (to the extent that these domains are distinct), revolving around the axes of television's inside and outside, knowledges private and public, and media producers and consumers. Given the indeterminacy of the borders of both heterosexuality and textuality, there is little hope of closing the case once and for all, but the inquests and debates can illuminate the prolific operations of the closet. While social networking interfaces tend to gather like-minded fans to discuss a loose cloud of topics, more linear message boards may invite fans from diverse subcommunities to discuss a clearly defined topic, and as such, they are a platform where such debates almost inevitably erupt.

One notable thread, on the officially sponsored yet largely unmoderated SVU board at USA Network's website (the program airs on the USA Network in syndication), can serve as an example of the vehemence and complexity of the testimonies mobilized in attempts to prove that Olivia is gay or straight (note 2). It begins with a cautious, open-ended query by mariskafans: "So, would anyone be too terribly offended if Olivia started dating a girl?" Tellingly, the question is immediately transmuted into a dispute over Olivia's probable sexual orientation. Some fans consider only the most explicit textual citations admissible as evidence, and say so quite emphatically:

- **dtobe2008**: She is DEFINITELY straight. There have been many episodes where she's had a date with a man and you've seen a few.

- **teresa985**: The fact that she's dated men before on the show, and no women, leads me to believe that she's straight. Unless she flat out says: "I'm dating a woman" or something of that nature, I'm not going to believe she's a lesbian.

Others respond to this literalism by pointing out the inherently partial picture of Olivia's desires that the screen text offers, alongside the possibility of a less rigidly binary sexuality:

- **Bekster**: We don't know that she's straight—she's mentioned a significant other, what, once? She could definitely be bisexual, which would be great, she's gorgeous!

- **Kloie**: And...just because a girl's slept with men doesn't necessarily mean she's straight. lol

This tactic is then countered with references to extratextual gossip (the avowed heterosexuality of Hargitay) and TV industry logics (the imperative to appeal to a mass audience and remain within the program’s formal constraints):

- **svu junkie**: They will never make Olivia gay 'cause her heterosexuality has already been established. If she decided to "jump the fence" then they would have to focus on her personal life and we all know they would NEVER do this!! Heck...the show's been on 5 years and we've seen the interior of Olivia's apt...what...maybe once??

- **SVUFreak107**: OMG YOU GUYS ARE CRAZY!!! Mariska/Olivia is not gay no matter what it will just screw up her image in real life and no one will like her. It will take people away from teh show not to it!!!

A later poster objects on political grounds, lamenting the casualties of the closet's gendered double binds:

- **SVUAddict**: I find it very frustrating when females who are strong and assertive immediately get labeled lesbians. Yes, Olivia is tough and independent, but she's also straight and I've grown tired—in my own life and in Hollywood—of seeing powerful women labeled as gay. To me, at least, it undermines the potential of straight women to possess these characteristics.

Meanwhile, what is perhaps the most fascinating response overtly describes the influence of fan production on Olivia’s hypothesized sexual orientation:
Munchz Hunch: as far as Olivia and being gay goes, the only reason I ever thought she WAS gay was because of all the fan fics about her BEING gay! That was what made me question her sexuality...people write fan fics from what they got off the show, and I haven't seen every episode, not even CLOSE, so I was wondering after reading those fics if they [Olivia and Alex, etc.] truly WERE gay couples on the show. But that was put to rest after seeing her with Cassidy [1.10 "Closure"] and with that reporter dude [1.16 "The Third Guy"]...so I have had my suspicions, but they were all eventually cleared up.

In this viewer's hierarchy, fan fiction has substantial authority in the investigation of Olivia's sexuality because it is written by those with particular expertise in reading television's signals. However, diegetic verification trumps these fan interpretations, providing a stable resolution to the mystery (at least if one conveniently overlooks the option of bisexuality, as noted above). When priority is given to clues located inside the television text, the implication is that if some are arriving at the wrong verdict, their viewing strategies must be perverse or deluded. Spank puts this dismissal most succinctly: "This is ridiculous...You lot look for things that aren't there." I would argue, however, that the significance of these processes of looking should not be underestimated: what popular debates such as this one illustrate is that commercial authority over textual conclusions is dynamically negotiated and always provisional.

Far from the message board debate in both degree and kind, one fan under the pseudonym Sally Forth composed an elaborate riposte to these sorts of scornful reactions to the proposition that Olivia isn't quite straight. Her exhaustive, expansive, and often excessive "rave," rendered as a static Web page dated 2006 (http://web.archive.org/web/20060423012451/http://www.sallyforth.info/), is an idiosyncratic and remarkable document of vernacular theory, detailing her observations and arguments concerning Olivia's intimacies with lesbian desire through both textual analysis and broader political critique. Covering everything from obscure inside jokes to the moral, legal, and conceptual battles over social issues such as gay visibility and same-sex marriage, Sally's content and links manifest her engagement with fan and media networks even in the absence of technical interactivity. Confirming that "on every SVU-related message board I've seen, the issue of Olivia's sexual preference comes up at some point," she gripes, "Any time I posted that Olivia might be gay or bi, well, let me say, I got my ass kicked. 'You're crazy. That scene/look/action/appearance could mean anything. Olivia Benson is not gay. Get over it!'" Sally, like some of the posters quoted above, is not optimistic about the prospect of Olivia coming out within the constraints of commercial television, writing, "IMHO, TPTB [The Powers That Be] will keep Olivia as she is. No boyfriend. No girlfriend. That is the only way to avoid alienating any fans." But she nonetheless champions the integrity of spectatorial practices, asserting, "The whole point behind subtext is that people can enjoy the show however they wish, without having someone tell them that they're wrong or reading things into the show that aren't there." Her claims are not based solely on a revaluation of fan readings, however: she supports this call for interpretive pluralism with a humorous but meticulously impartial account of the textual evidence on both sides of the question "is she or isn't she?", making the case that those who consider the inquest over at the first glimpse of an on-screen boyfriend just aren't looking hard enough. That is, although she self-identifies as a lesbian fan, for Sally too, the figure of Olivia's lesbianism is a shifting jumble of diegetic references and absences, audience competencies and investments, industrial conditions, and political context that is not easily stabilized, and at the same time not easily dismissed. Both ephemeral online discussions and Sally's more concerted manifesto are artifacts of fans' struggles with the complexity and contradictions of the project of representing or locating lesbian desire in the televisual landscape—its frustrations and its inexhaustibly generative potential.

5. Textual orientation

The fluctuating topology of television's text and metatext, denotation and connotation, canon and fanon is a conceptual challenge to sexuality as an epistemological project, but it also concretely intrudes at the points of contact between the territories of production and consumption on either side of the screen. I have already noted television's formal and historical inclination as a medium that endeavors to be coextensive with everyday life, to unfocus comfortable demarcations of all sorts. Jane Feuer notes, "Television as an ideological apparatus strives to break down any barriers between the fictional diegesis, the advertising diegesis, and the diegesis of the viewing family, finding it advantageous to assume all three are one and the same" (1986:105). The commercial
Figure 4. Graphic by aqua_blurr, posted on October 18, 2004, to the LiveJournal community ob_fangrrl. This image adds a humorous internal monologue to a screencap by aleatory_6 in which Olivia is dressed up in high-femme "drag" for an undercover sting (6.02 "Debt"). [View larger image.]

Figure 5. Graphic by newbie_2u, posted on November 2, 2005, to the LiveJournal community ob_fangrrl. Fans saw the changes in Olivia as so dramatic that they declared the original character a "missing person." [View larger image.]

[5.4] If, in its early days, slash was sometimes condemned as character rape, for fans of "butch" Olivia, her feminization was the true violence, and their vehement expressions of rage and betrayal were commensurate with such an atrocity. In an impassioned post on the subject dated September 22, 2005, LiveJournal blogger trancer21 captures the intractable, intolerable position that results:

[5.5] I really feel that the consumption of fandom has changed my opinions. Because, while reading these MH [Mariska Hargitay] articles, seeing the pictures, I get the picture of a woman who's trying to reclaim ownership of her character from the fans who see the character as gay. There is no separation between actor and character...And it pisses me off because Olivia Benson is NOT the property of Mariska Hargitay. Once those little images leave the cathode ray clutter, it becomes the property of the audience.

[5.6] In other words, the entanglement of actor and character is itself inextricable from the entanglement of the cathode ray and the audience that generates interpretive concords about Olivia and Hargitay's text and paratext, and these epistemological snarls are in turn ensnared in the economics of the industry. For Olivia is certainly not "the property of the audience" proportionally to her status as property within the apparatus of corporate ownership, buttressed by the legal mechanism of copyright and the system of mass distribution and financing. However, the devices of ownership are still unable to contain her in these bounds, and in keeping with the futility of binary enclosure, the siege of Olivia on screen stimulated an efflorescence of snark (that is, sarcastic criticism) online. Following the conjecture that elements of Mariska Hargitay's persona were forcibly grafted onto Olivia Benson, much of it lampooned the resulting monstrous mutant: Oliska Hargenson. As far as I can tell, this portmanteau was coined as the punch line of the parodic fanfic "It Ain't Her" by newbie_2u, posted on October 4, 2005, to the LiveJournal community ob_fangrrl, which features Detectives Munch and Tutuola investigating Olivia's apparent disappearance. It is an example of a smattering of meta stories treating this theme, and others often refigure the extratextual battle fans framed in terms of Olivia versus Mariska as an angst-ridden erotic drama of Olivia/Mariska. One rendition by giantessmess posted on September 10, 2005, to ob_fangirl reverses
the familiar hierarchy, portraying Olivia as the stronger and more real double, and Mariska as the television viewer who falls prey to her charms:

[5.7] She grew Olivia out, strand by re-touched strand. She tried to stop herself from disappearing, as she felt the camera draw her inside it...But she still felt herself fading. Watching Olivia, failing to see herself, falling helplessly in love with her possessor...Mariska was afraid to sleep. She was afraid that she wanted Olivia to find her. Afraid of her dreams that bled into reality.

[5.8] Here, it is Olivia who possesses Mariska, in both spectral and proprieted senses, infiltrating "reality" with uncanny spectacle. It is not incidental that the memetic conspiracy in which these artifacts participate was largely located in a LiveJournal community: this and comparable distributed, interactive Web networks haunt television like fanon Olivia haunts Mariska, perturbing the economies of corporate possession. In this context, paranoia on both sides about Mariska and Olivia commingling seems well founded. Today, TV's existence depends on its interpenetration with fan fictions.

6. My girlfriend Olivia

[6.1] After previewing selections from the original version of this essay while it was a work in progress, Sally Forth jokingly told me that she "can't wait to get to the 'Olivia is really gay' part" (personal correspondence, June 26, 2004). Needless to say, there is no such part. My analysis has not solved any of the enigmas of the closet, whether on the axes of straight/gay or TV/Internet, or any of its other intertwined polarities. The price to be paid for such complexity is a refusal of the sort of politics of representation that Sally Forth rously renders in her 2006 rave:

[6.2] In order to be free, we must be seen...For this reason, the struggle to become visible has been part of every civil rights movement in this country. Conservatives are constantly fighting against the realistic portrayal of gays and lesbians in the media. By making us invisible, they can define us, control us, and stop us from fully participating in this culture...It is why the closet is so destructive.

[6.3] While this call can be deployed strategically, the threshold of the hidden/visible is itself caught up in the closet's structural logic. As the case of Olivia Benson demonstrates, seeing a lesbian on television is far from a simple procedure, and what looks like a realistic portrayal is contingent on localized viewing strategies. The closet is their terrain, and despite its oppressive fickleness, I'd venture that it generates as well as conceals truths, opens as well as closes doors.

[6.4] This returns me to the provisional distinction between what I would qualify as lesbian versus queer readings. As a TV fan, I occupy both positions, and I can appreciate the desire for a sexuality—lesbian—that appears conclusive and legible as a political identity. Given that a queer perspective thwarts closure and boundaries, it is understandable that it might be considered pessimistically as its own sort of "closet of connotation" (Doty 1993:xii), refusing any authoritative findings and relegating all meanings to perpetual subtext. Arguably, however, fandom's drive is itself a queer one because it is openness that inspires the creative engagements and interventions that aim to but never fully succeed at filling in a program's gaps. This tension between lesbian and queer modes, without any final resolution, defines SVU femslash fandom during its most dynamic era. In the context of media studies, I am committed to a queer methodology at the cost of any decisive outcome because I believe that it accentuates the dimensions of fan production that resist, even if they do not topple, the epistemological regime that is most convenient for capitalism. This is perhaps little consolation, though, to the bitter fans who called for Olivia to come out, struggling with TPTB over ownership of her image.

[6.5] As my own rejoinder to those who insist on enforcing Olivia's heterosexuality, my work here is conceived as engaging with rather than merely commenting on this expansive and interactive battleground. This essay, which has been posted online in various earlier versions since mid-2004 and which itself may be recognized as a node in the diffuse matrix of Olivia fandom, also has permeable boundaries and is open to wanton intersections and continual reconfiguration. If in one sense I've created a colossal tease for those who may wish to prove conclusively that Olivia is a lesbian, in another, this ardent critique has been the supreme erotic encounter between Olivia (my fellow detective) and me, in defiance of the frontier dividing the real world from the one on
the TV or computer screen—and what could be more substantial evidence that Olivia swings my way than that? Nonetheless, it remains unclear how Olivia can be my girlfriend within an academic project, or how such a project can satisfy fandom's desires.

[6.6] Part of the puzzle is differentiating serious work from salacious leisure, a margin that late capitalism renders ever more coy. The explicit incorporation of fan labor into the media industry undermines the distinction between professional and amateur production, which debunks the fantasy that consumers inhabit an entirely separate sphere from producers. And on the flip side of this blurred boundary, it can be in the promotional interest of creators to present themselves as familiar with (and to) fandom. Meanwhile, as consumer engagement is increasingly valued, the importance of desire as an interface between media commodities and their reception, as a form of productivity in itself, comes to the fore. The industrial escalation of television's identity crisis makes it imperative to consider the confluences between outside and inside, public and private, reality and fiction that lend the libidinal economies of slash and closets their powerful vitality. What I offer here is my own fannish reworking of some of the scholarly traditions of television studies that intensifies their linkages with these emerging systems.

7. Notes

1. For an analysis of media audiences as occupying various subject positions, see Ang (1995). See also Fiske's desire to "dissolve" the classification of the audience into "a multitude of differences" that "makes nonsense of any categorical boundaries" (1991:56).

2. Law & Order: SVU USA Network Message Board, available via the Wayback Machine at http://web.archive.org/web/20040720081022/http://63.240.52.141/ubb/usa/html/ubb/Forum24/HTML/000155.html The USANetwork.com forums have undergone a redesign, and content before 2005 is no longer available. Unfortunately, the second page of this discussion is not archived.

8. Works cited


Abstract—As a result of its unique characteristics as a technology and a medium, a computer game engages its players with several novel forms of coproductivity, such as modding, the making of machinima videos, and the writing of game play walkthroughs. Depending on the game, genre, and playing style, the player is either expected or encouraged to create game content and game-related texts of her own. This essay discusses the productive practices surrounding computer games, proposing five dimensions of player productivity: (1) game play as productivity; (2) productivity for play: instrumental productivity; (3) productivity beyond play: expressive productivity; (4) games as tools; and (5) productivity as a part of game play. Such mapping reveals limitations in views that consider fandom predominantly as productivity or approach player coproductivity straightforwardly as fandom. The essay aims to illustrate that we should look for alternative manifestations of fandom among players, those not solely based on productivity. By exploring various ways in which players of computer games take part in the production of the games they play, the essay discusses games as an excellent example of a participatory culture because of the blurring of professional and hobbyist productivity in games. Since new motivations for productivity are proposed, this view informs research about fandom and productivity in current media culture in general.

Keywords—Cocreativity; Coproductivity; Computer games; Fans; Participation; Productivity; The Sims; World of Warcraft

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1. Introduction

It is a precondition for every study of fandom that fans are somehow different from other, usual media users and audience members. Otherwise the entire concept of fandom would become obsolete. Drawing on his research on 19th-century music lovers, Daniel Cavicchi (2007) writes about fans as those who refuse to accept anonymity and limited involvement of audiences and who want to extend their roles as members of audience toward more active participation and engagement. Generally, theories about fandom recognize and underline the impact fans make on their preferred medium: fans are, as has been extensively explored in the work of fandom
researchers, active as users and members of audiences. Very often this activity is presented as a contribution of textual productivity.

[1.2] Emphasis on resistance and textual productivity among a group of audience members or users is, indeed, what is unique to fan studies in comparison to audience research in general. The tendency to concentrate on fan productivity is familiar, especially from first- and second-wave fan studies, where fan texts offered a tangible and perhaps easy basis for explorations into resistance and power relations in general (see Sandvoss 2005). These days, fandom is often discussed based on texts that are considered as an outcome of fannish activities (Hellekson and Busse 2006).

[1.3] Fans rework, cocreate, and recirculate texts that are possibly derivative and appropriative, or as Abigail Derecho (2006) suggests, archontic, in regard to the original content, as the texts seem to be ever expanding and never completely closed (for example, when fan fiction is written based on existing characters from a television series). For fan studies, Matt Hills argues, it is fans' creativity as producers that "has formed the basis for theorisations of fandom which celebrate this 'activity', whether it be video editing, costuming/impersonation..., folk songwriting and performing or fanzine production" (2002:39). While the mental production of meanings, interpretations, and identities has long been one of the interests of fan studies, the new and altered material forms of culture created by fans are arguably one of the biggest themes on which scholarly work, both on fandom in general and on games fandom in particular, has concentrated.

[1.4] Such critics find fan texts to be important markers of the creativity, rather than passivity, of fans. John Fiske (1992), for example, argues that all audiences produce their own meanings and pleasures around the products of the culture industries, but fans divert this semiotic productivity into some form of textual productivity. In the same spirit, Henry Jenkins (1992) has suggested five further levels of fan activity, one of which is the particular forms of cultural production and artwork (for example, fan writing).

[1.5] Also, in her brief history of media fandom, Francesca Coppa describes the development of "bigger, louder, less defined, and more exciting" fandom in the early years of the 21st century and states that "media fans are making more kinds of art than ever before" (2006:57). However, and this is what I will look at in this essay, the emergence of participatory cultures makes complex fans' active engagement where it takes a form of textual productivity. When participatory cultures are understood as cultures that have "relatively low barriers to artistic expression and civic engagement, strong support for creating and sharing one's creations, and some type of informal mentorship whereby what is known by the most experienced is passed along to
novices" (Jenkins et al. 2006:7), their characteristics seemingly overlap with the productive qualities of typical fan participation.

[1.6] Therefore, it becomes interesting to discuss if and how fan productivity is distinct from everyday media use that is inherently productive in current participatory cultures. For in computer games, "the authorial shift that occurs between gamers and designers differentiates it from other traditional media" (Jones 2006:266). Thus, games can be used as excellent examples of participatory cultures. In his recent study on game fandom, Robert Jones goes on to say that this shift "thus positions the video game as an important site of investigation into fan cultures" (2006:266), implying that looking at games could help us to deepen our notions of the relationship between fandom and productivity in general. Games, both as a medium and as a technology, engage their users in unique ways that result in multiple forms of coproductivity.

[1.7] Consequently, a crucial question for this essay is: when player productivity such as new graphical textures for game characters (known as skins) or other game modifications, which could be considered typical manifestations of participatory cultures, are understood as fan engagement, is that misreading them or charging them with importance and affect greater than what actually exists? Drawing a clear line between fandom and the productivity that is part of all game play is difficult and unnecessary. Instead, looking at different forms of productivity in games, which ultimately is the aim of this essay, helps identify the possible motivations for this productivity and can be used to categorize or examine the different groups of user-producers and their specific affiliations with specific games or characteristics of the same game. Until this work has been done, we can't concentrate on the personal affective relationships and identity construction of players and fans and recognize different modes of participation in game cultures.

[1.8] The "conventional logic [which has occurred in many theories of fandom], seeking to construct a sustainable opposition between the 'fan' and the 'consumer,' falsifies the fan's experience by positioning fan and consumer as separable cultural identities," states Matt Hills (2002:29). For him, fans are "always already" consumers. What I would like to add to this discussion with my essay, is the proposition that computer game players are, in addition to being consumers, always already producers. For this reason, computer games offer a good starting point for explorations on fandom and productivity.

[1.9] However, strikingly in game studies, games and play have broadly been conceptualized as non- or unproductive as opposed to everyday lives. Celia Pearce argues that unproductivity is a quality of games inherited from early play studies such as Huizinga's (1998) and Caillois's (2001) work that continues to inform some areas of game studies. Furthermore, such waste-of-time understanding of the use of media
products is often characteristic of research on mass media as well (Pearce 2006). Pearce herself suggests that "in fact neither play nor games is inherently unproductive and furthermore, that the boundaries between play and production, between work and leisure, and between media consumption and media production are increasingly blurring" (2006:18). Works by Kücklich (2005), Sotamaa (2007), and Yee (2006) all discuss the intermingling of (productive) work and (unproductive) play qualities in game play engagement. In the same breath, Thomas Malaby proposes that three characteristics often associated with games, separable from everyday life, pleasurable, and finally safe—what he defines as nonproductivity—are not inherent features of games but "always cultural accomplishments specific to a given context" (2007:96). Without attaching the notion of unproductivity or, alternatively, productivity onto either play or games exclusively, this essay concentrates on the ways in which games do facilitate productive activities and discusses what forms of productivity already exist among players.

[1.10] This essay proposes a study of video game players that reveals the nuances of productivity within a specific culture, thus broadening our notions of player engagement and the ways it may overlap with fan engagement. Simultaneously, the essay aims to demonstrate that considering all game-related productive practices as fan practices is generally oversimplifying. Whereas current game studies seem to consider fandom predominantly linked to player-generated content—in other words, user coproductivity—my aim is to suggest that such accounts do not fully consider the motivations behind player engagement.

[1.11] I then want to propose that there are at least five kinds of productivity related to games, and that every one of them, in a particular way, stretches the dichotomy between fans and nonfans. The five dimensions I am going to introduce are: (1) game play as productivity; (2) productivity for play: instrumental productivity; (3) productivity beyond play: expressive productivity; (4) games as tools; and (5) productivity as a part of game play. These dimensions are not inseparable from each other but are used here in discrete ways to help unpack the complexity of the practices involved. When a game is played, these different forms and orientations behind productivity usually overlap and meet. Rather than offering a set of rigid categories, the dimensions suggested can be used as analytical tools.

[1.12] In regard to the format of this essay, I will start section 2 by proposing that all game play is a form of player productivity. The second dimension of productivity relates directly to playing and succeeding in a game (section 3), while the third grows from the expressive and artistic intentions of the player (section 4). In addition to these three I will discuss cases in which games serve as technical tools for forms of self-expression or other media fandoms that have very little to do with the game being
played (section 5). Productivity as a part of play is introduced in section 6. It covers recent, so-called Game 3.0 games, which integrate the creation of new game content as a consumer product. Through suggesting these dimensions of game productivity, I intend to show that productivity in games serves different coproductive purposes than in other media fandoms and that these different productive practices all need to be discussed separately with regard to how they could be studied in terms of game play engagement as fandom.

2. Play as productivity

[2.1] It seems that the connection between media fans and original media producers is something that encapsulates computer game play already as a nonfan activity. Thus, it is important for the forthcoming discussion to understand the shared authority between designers and players of games as cultural products. Cocreativity, a term introduced to game studies by John Banks (2002) and further elaborated by Sue Morris (2003) and Jon Dovey and Helen Kennedy (2006), is a way to understand the ways in which authorship of a game is shared between paid game developers and the players of a game. In her study, Morris (2003) suggests first-person shooter games as products of collaborative creative processes between game developers used by game companies and individual players, because game modifications—player-made alterations to game content and mechanics—feed new ideas and content into professional game production. This results in a particular cocreative relationship between player and developers.

[2.2] Dovey and Kennedy (2006) broaden the concept of cocreativity to gather various forms of player productivity, such as fan art, mod arts, and tactical arts, and show its usability regarding explorations of games as cocreative media. Building on this work, I would like to suggest further categorization of such practices. First is to consider game play itself as player productivity.

[2.3] So I will start from the beginning—from the activity of playing a game—and I will follow other game scholars in proposing game play as productivity. Espen Aarseth's Cybertext (1997) paved the way to one of the foundational principles of game studies: games are texts with unique characteristics, cybertexts. Compared to linear and thus many older and earlier forms of media, such as television or film, computer games allow users not only to interpret, but also to explore, configure, and add content to them (Aarseth 1997). Games cannot be approached like linear media because they do not come into being until a player puts life into them, plays them, creates particular stories out of multiple possibilities, remixes her own set of actions and outcomes, and thus creates the media text while playing. This configurative practice means that games may develop in emergent ways and have unpredictable
outcomes (for example, Aarseth 1997; Eskelinen 2001; Dovey and Kennedy 2006). Sal Humphreys has articulated this particularity of the medium, proposing that the game play "is an engagement which serves to create the text each time it is engaged" (2005:38). This feature has also had an impact on the study of games: "the computer game only exists as an 'object for contemplation' and analysis as and when it is played" (Dovey and Kennedy 2006:104). Productivity can, therefore, be understood as a precondition for the game as a cultural text.

[2.4] From this perspective, then, when playing computer games all players are producers of the original media text, meaning, again, that every gamer is a coauthor of the game, not only a producer of meanings of the game. And this idea seems to be agreed upon in game studies. Simply put, a user's involvement in the game text is significantly different from the contexts of earlier media. Aarseth's (1997) distinction between interpretative user function, where the user is only able to make decisions regarding the meaning of the text, and configurative user function, where the user can choose and create new strings of signs that exist in the text (note 1), sheds light on this change. The game player (co)produces the game throughout the play process itself, unlike the reader of a book or viewer of a film, for whom the material object already exists in the world as a product open for various interpretations by different users. The configurative user function required from the player can be illustrated with a simple but fundamental example. If a player does not make the effort of moving a character in a game—in The Sims 2 (2005), for example—no progress takes place and the game, depending on its dynamics, either stays static or faces its end quickly. Actions taken by the player have impact upon the functions available later in the game world and how game play can proceed. While Jones points out that "as an interactive medium, the video game requires the participation of the gamer," he reminds us that this interactivity should not be conflated with fan participation, such as the writing of slash fiction, and thus attempts to establish borders between fan and nonfan activities (2006:643). I agree with Jones that game play as productivity differs in degree from writing of fan fiction as productivity and try to go further in understanding where these differences originate.

[2.5] The partial authority every game offers to its player means not only that games are better understood as platforms for experiences than as products, but also that games as cybertexts are only partly predetermined or precoded before the activity of play takes place. In games, it is not only at the level of interpretation that the meaning of a game can be determined, but also as the material game artifact itself. However, each game as played can also be interpreted in various different ways once it has been created via game play, whereas in a narrative film the development of events and the order of them are prewritten in the text. The same boxed game may lead to many entirely different played games as developed by different players and
when replayed by a player. Furthermore, every player can create a new and substantially different material game text every time she decides to play it.

[2.6] In multiplayer games, this means that the player also affects other players' experiences of the game. T. L. Taylor's (2006) and Humphrey's (2005) studies of MMORPGs (massive multiplayer online role-playing games) extensively describe the players' ongoing impact on each other's actions in such games. Their studies have opened up the social dynamics of multiplayer game play as well as the combination of unpaid and paid labor that produces such play. In *World of Warcraft* (WoW, 2004), which is one of the most popular contemporary games and an online multiplayer game with a player base of more than 11.5 million, players must at the very least create characters with specific qualities, wander around the game world with these characters, and then participate in temporarily creating a game environment for other players. They may kill opponents, pick up or buy items, and go into various locations and thus transform the game environment. Additionally, most players will take part in social or collective play, such as forming and attending parties (a group of players gathered together in order to accomplish a certain quest or other challenge in the game) and guilds, in order to participate in the social and in-game cultural system of WoW. All these activities change and create the game world for other players. As Humphreys writes, "the trajectory of game play is thus contingent upon the particular dynamics and action generated by shifting combinations of players" (2005:40).

[2.7] Therefore, configuration, the first step of player productivity, seems to be for a game what interpretation is for a film or a television series. To be explicit, a casual player is always productive, whereas a casual viewer is not. In games, interpretation is another level of user participation that comes after or parallel to configuration.

[2.8] Furthermore, in some games, configuration may encompass the systemic structures of a game. A player may, for example, be required to create her own goals for the game play, rather than simply responding to goals coded into the game system by its manufacturer. Especially in the case of so-called sandbox games—simulation games such as *The Sims 2* that offer a form of free play without preferred goals or a winning state—the player must invent the aims of the game play. Configuration of the structure of the game is almost a precondition for this form of game. In *The Sims 2*, the player can decide to aim for a big house and large family, or to be a single person with a good career, or even aim to create a family with a graveyard for a backyard and ghosts coming in every night. These goals vary from player to player, though the game supports some goals better than others.

[2.9] The situation gets complicated, given that some games facilitate and afford more alternative playing styles. This means that players of such games can, through their game play and specific choices, create several different material versions of the
game that have little to do with each other. For example, in WoW there are separate
game servers for those players interested in role-play and for those concentrating on
strategic skills and goals. The playing styles, ways of communicating with other
players, and emphasis on different graphical, narrative, and mechanical features of the
game are different depending on whether the player is interested in role-play or in
strategy. Players who prefer role-play are likely to produce games with strong
narratives and deep characters, whereas strategy-oriented players will focus on the
structure and mechanics of the game as a rule system.

[2.10] Consequently, players with such differing orientations may also produce off-
game texts that have different foci. The two orientations to be discussed in the next
two sections seem to differ from each other drastically. One group of productivity (for
example, machinima videos made of WoW game play) has stronger connections to
earlier media fandom, while another, because of its instrumentality, is more strongly
linked to game play and offers insights into entirely new forms of user productivity,
and perhaps fandom. While this section described all game play as player productivity,
the next two sections will look at these two forms of off-game productive activities.

3. Productivity for play: Instrumental productivity

[3.1] Another way productive participation in game cultures surpasses already well-
studied forms of fandom is that some player-produced texts are simultaneously clearly
part of the game play and materially separate; they are mainly written and organized
outside the playing moment. Because computer game play often requires a lot of
knowledge of the game, including techniques, strategies, and item locations, online
sources offering this information may be used during the game play to assist the play,
overcome difficult game situations, and generally play more effectively. As game play
is temporally flexible and depends on the player, games enable the simultaneous
consultation of this kind of instrumental information while playing—information on
characters, objects, quests, and monsters in the game, for example. By
instrumentality, I refer to tool-like use of information and means-to-ends rationality in
order to gain efficiency in a game and especially with regard to the structures of the
game and game mechanics. Such information is provided on Web sites designed for
this purpose. Seth Giddings's characterization of walkthroughs describes both their
value for players and their instrumentality:

[3.2] It is in part an instruction manual, assisting a stuck video game
player through a particular puzzle, tortuous labyrinth or fiendish demand on
hand-eye co-ordination, but it is also a verbal map of the peculiar space–
time of the video game's virtual world. It is a document of the writer/player's
skill and effort in exploring and solving every last aspect of the game world.
It is knowledge shared via the Web to both assist other players and to display the writer's expertise in, and devotion to, the game in question. A walkthrough is a determinedly non-literary work, dispassionate, stripped of non-instrumental description and of most subjective reflection on its writer's part. (Giddings 2006:31)

[3.3] Sources such as walkthroughs and databases are often continuously updated or rewritten by people while they play the games. This characteristic of computer game-related productivity derives from the combination of the technology used for getting involved with the original text, a game, and the transition of fandoms to the Internet. Consequently, often involvement with both the original source text and the productive practices related to it take place on a personal computer and often also online. This has noteworthy implications for game play, as the player is able to participate in fan productivity and community interaction in parallel with the play itself (note 2).

Information on the game is easily available online and moving between the game and sources available online is smooth. Players who would rather find optimal solutions and models of acting for game-specific challenges than learn them slowly by trial and error can easily consult online sources during the game play.

[3.4] The terms power gamer and hard-core gamer are usually used when there is an emphasis on a player's efficiency, clear personal goals, and desire to win. Such players invest plenty of time and money in play and often have a playing style that does not meet the usual expectations of fun or leisure, even though they themselves may "consider their own play style quite reasonable, rational, and pleasurable" (Taylor 2006:72). In connection with these player types, Taylor (2006) discusses instrumental play, in which such power gamers are situated more closely to work than play in their approach. "The simple idea of 'fun' is turned on its head by examples of engagement that rest on efficiency, (often painful) learning, rote and boring tasks, heavy doses of responsibility, and intensity of focus" (Taylor 2006:88). This contrasts with the average person's idea of game play as something purely enjoyable. Correspondingly, with instrumental productivity I refer to the way introduced player productivity yields new and altered game texts that offer tools for more effective play. Because of their functional status, these texts do not usually serve any other purposes outside game play, meaning that they are not interesting for nonplayers as independent texts. (But some can be. For example, there are walkthroughs that are closer to interesting stories than to instructions on how to proceed in a game.)

[3.5] According to Andrew Burn (2006), authors of walkthroughs know the procedural demands of the game system and are not interested in a holistic view of the game, which includes the narrative, for example. The aim of a player is to proceed through the game as efficiently as possible. The texts that I group under this notion of
instrumental productivity are based on the player's interest in games as systems and structures. Use of such sources does not necessarily lead to certain interpretations of the game but will impact upon players' choices and actions. These choices and actions, once made, form a game open to interpretation. As an example, a WoW player may search an online database for the average selling price for an herb she has picked up from a distant land. She may sell it at a small discount in the in-game auction house because she needs the money urgently. When another player buys the herb in order to create a potion needed in fighting, the seller gets her money via the in-game mail system. When these transactions and events have taken place, interpretations about the economic ideologies, workings of the auction house, and fairness of players in setting up prices can be made.

[3.6] Another example of instrumental productivity is online databases such as Thottbot. Thottbot is an unofficial WoW database that features tools for players to use to obtain game-related information about game items, locations, quests, and monsters. The database is equipped with a search function, which makes it very convenient to use alongside the actual WoW game. Figure 1 shows some of the information available for a player interested in the statistics, looks, sources, and uses for a specific item. Using Thottbot to find locations for quests or certain monsters frees the player from spending time on what, from some perspectives, may seem unimportant or routine tasks. For many players, databases such as Thottbot, as well as add-ons providing the same information, are extremely important for game play. The game is played with one or more different databases open in the browser windows, and a play session involves continuous switching between the game and these databases. Players who use such databases increase their chances of success in the game as they have more information about the system and simulation available. Such functional practices are used by players because they make playing easier, efficient, and, in the end, more fun.
Figure 1. Information on WoW character's equipment, magister's robes, on Thottbot.

[View larger image.]

[3.7] Interface modifications and add-ons could also be understood in terms of instrumental productivity. While it is the players' responsibility to search, transfer, and transform the information from walkthroughs and databases into the game and finally toward actions and decisions in the game, interface modifications and add-ons are player-made pieces of software that change the looks and functions of the game interface and are thus materially parts of the game. They are available online for other players to use and serve the same function of facilitating more effective game play (note 3). These modifications, which are popular among hard-core players, offer information and tools, new buttons and other interface elements, for executing certain actions that would normally involve performing additional crucial clicks that take seconds to carry out or for browsing sources outside the game. For example, the QuestHelper add-on for WoW tells the player how to finish a quest in the easiest and fastest manner. Meanwhile, the Auctioneer Suite offers statistical information on sellable game items so that selling and buying them via in-game auction house in WoW is faster and more profitable.
Moving to the economical and political aspects of such additions to games, the making of player-originated elements of games is often supported by game companies, as they offer tools and distribution platforms for making and sharing them. The communities that are formed through these practices are then enlisted into commercially successful networks and companies such as Maxis, the development company behind *The Sims*, which take full advantage of this free content made by players (Banks 2002). Instrumental productivity does indeed sometimes take the shape of commercially profitable engagement. The economic point of view with regard to player-produced texts is nowadays made even more complex by third-party companies that make a profit based on player productivity but are not directly associated with game publishers. Mia Consalvo (2007) describes how one of the databases, Allakhazam.com, originally "a one-page guide for EverQuest" and now an information source for all major MMORPG games, is offering content that has been added and updated by player communities. This is provided for its premium users for a yearly fee of $29.99. Another form of such paratextual industry is, Consalvo suggests, game-guide publishing. Strategy guides such as *World of Warcraft Strategy Collection 2008* (BradyGames 2007) and game-world map books such as *World of Warcraft Atlas, Second Edition* (BradyGames 2008) are available in mainstream book stores and offer firsthand information and glossy pictures on WoW. Unexplored areas of the game can be studied in advance from the atlas books, for example.

4. Productivity beyond play: Expressive productivity

We can distinguish game modifications from play as productivity because the way a game is altered through modification results in changes to games that are visible to other players and affect their game play. Borrowing Katie Salen and Eric Zimmerman's term, Jones (2006) calls this kind of play *transformative play*. To illustrate the same difference between play as productivity and interface modifications, for example, we can look at Aarseth's (1997) useful distinction between scriptonic and textonic changes to a cybertext, although we risk stretching the concepts to excess. *Scriptonic* change refers to modification in the information as it appears to players, while *textonic* means changes in the cybertext itself. Joost Raessens (2005) talks about the same phenomenon, but uses the word *construction* in referring to additions to a game as software. It is a more extreme form of productive participation and is characteristic only of a minority of players because it requires advanced technical tools and skills from the player. Interface modifications are examples of instrumental productivity that produces textonic changes.

But there exists another group of game modifications, also resulting in such changes, that does not indicate instrumentality by definition. These game modifications are probably more widely known and add new content into the game
worlds in terms of game levels or objects or changing the looks of the characters—
their skins. *Skinning* is the practice in which players use graphics editors or special
software designed for this purpose to alter the looks of game characters. This can vary
from changing the color of a character’s skirt to creating an entirely new character
with a new skin color and clothes. Accordingly, a skin is a player-made outlook for a
computer game character or avatar. Making a skin involves using a graphics editor to
create a new picture and saving the image file in a specific place in the folder where
the actual game has been installed.

[4.3] Making such alterations to the game serves no purpose in more effective game
play but is rather a practice of self-expression and creative exploration. Players of *The
Sims 2* are well known for their active skin production. Players have created skins that,
for example, bring cultural symbols into the game (figures 2 and 3). These examples
further demonstrate that self-expression can also make a game to better suit local
values and tastes. Helen Kennedy (2005) has studied women players who use skinning
in order to enrich the range of female characters in games that contain only limited
representations of females, such as the *Quake* games (1996–2007). Her examples
show that there sometimes seems to be a political importance to skinning, even if the
agenda behind it is not explicitly political.

*Figure 2. Burqa skin by bettye from ModTheSims2. [View larger image.]*
While there seems to be no instrumental aspect to the modifications that affect the visual characteristics of the game world, such as skins (note 4), such modifications are often understood as a form of hacking and are thus seen as resistant toward the original game. But, just as Jenkins (2006) observes that it is overreaching to label all DIY media as a form of destructive cultural jamming, it is not sufficient to understand game modifying as simply countercultural. Makers of game modifications do indeed rework and partly destroy the games they modify but often do it in order to lengthen their engagement with the game and to offer their insights of the game to other gamers. This said, however, projects such as Velvet Strike, an antiwar game modification inserting politically charged graffiti into the game world for Counter Strike (1999) can be seen as a kind of tactical art, because, as Dovey and Kennedy (2006) argue, there is an intended political or activist impulse behind such modifying. Game-world modifications are, of course, generally regarded as copyright infringements. They are also made with player-created tools or even with no tools at all and therefore require good technical skills and more effort than that for production integrated into the game itself.

Because game modifications can appear both to embrace the original text and to be seemingly countercultural, I wish to discuss them generally as an expressive form of game productivity together with machinima videos (videos created from 3D game play footage recorded during the game), stories about games, drawings, screen captures, and poems based on games. These practices do not support play or exist as essential parts of a game, but some of them, such as machinimas, are created during play. They can also exist as independent texts with no need for the user/viewer/reader to understand the original game. For example, several humorous machinima videos are equally understandable and thus entertaining for both players and nonplayers. At
first sight, it also seems that this model of player productivity covers what is traditionally considered fan production: that is, fan fiction and drawings, as well as movies and videos based on the original text. Machinimas, for example, are often pure game play movies or involve inventing stories about the lives of game characters.

[4.6] But creating fiction with game characters is somewhat distinct from making fan fiction representing existing movie or TV characters, which is a practice widely maintained by TV fans. The difference emerges because game characters' life histories and characteristics are only partly encoded in the game and, depending on the game in question, can be defined to some extent by player actions. The same character can thus represent entirely opposite roles, values, and identities in different players' games as well as in the fan fiction based on these games. Such a character is not as fixed by its qualities as a character attached to linear media. For example, The Sims 2 does not suggest personal histories or specific characteristics for game characters outside a player's choice. A The Sims-based machinima video titled "Leet Str33t" makes fun of geeky language and topical Internet phenomena, presenting characters that live their ordinary lives on Leet Str33t communicating in leet (or, correctly,1337) speak (note 5). Meanwhile, many other games offer characters with detailed characteristics and colorful backgrounds with which to create further stories and machinima. For example, the players of Super Mario games have created tens of machinima videos representing the love lives, dinner plans, and other everyday occasions of the game characters Mario, Luigi, and Princess Peach. Finally, in MMORPGs such as WoW, it is the player who creates the character and its life history little by little during the play by choosing how to proceed in the game, how to communicate with other characters, what to wear, and what kind of tasks to fulfill. Similarly to The Sims games, the characters are thus freely adjustable to narratives of any kind.

[4.7] While I am defining instrumental productivity as the contribution of players who have a strong interest in game mechanics and structures, it is visual representations, characters, and narrative that seem to be the starting points for what I call expressive productivity. These texts are created to serve the artistic self-expression of a player (or a nonplayer, as I will later suggest), and the motivation behind creating them may well be anything from fondness for a particular game lore or character to distributing political statements. The distinction leads toward separating productivity that concentrates on form/structure from productivity around content in games.

[4.8] If we then compare players who create poems or stories based on games to the players writing walkthroughs and strategy guides, one helpful point of comparative duality could be to look at MMORPGs. In these, role-players are often distinguished from power gamers, and this position is supported by Taylor's (2006) research on
EverQuest (1999), which shows that role-players, players who play the game in-character and attempt to identify with it, are normally seen as interested in the backstory and narrative, while power gamers, players who aim to play as effectively as possible, concentrate on goals, such as completing game quests. In other words, role-players seem expressively productive and power gamers instrumentally productive. Figure 4 classifies different game-related texts according to their origins in either expressive or instrumental productivity.

Figure 4. Different orientations of game-related productivity. [View larger image.]

Finally, while game modifications and other player productivity that encompasses reworking of game content cannot be understood as purely countercultural or resistant, the motivation for making game modifications may derive from a wish to continue one's experiences with a particular game even longer and in new ways. Such productivity actually extends the life cycle of a product and creates deeper engagement with the game. Jenkins (2006) and Julian Kücklich (2005), among others, have suggested that such participation creates passionate affiliation and brand loyalty. Player production results in what Charles Leadbeater (2008) has noted about participatory cultures in general: players can get products that are exactly as they wish them to be and customized for their very own purposes. While some game scholars (for example, Kücklich) wish to suggest that game developers gain a one-sided advantage at the expense of players, Humphreys reminds us that industry and players are not mutually exclusive spheres: "The interests of commerce and the interests of culture are not necessarily opposed" (2005:47). However, when concentrating on active player-engagement, there is often a risk of idealizing and imposing too much empowerment onto these actions.

5. Games as tools

My presumption of dividing productivity that is not part of game play into the suggested two categories is not without problems. Quite often machinima videos, game-fact forums, and walkthroughs all present an expressive account of the
narrative, simultaneously suggesting more effective ways to play the game or presenting important details of the game. The duality could also be contested by the fact that games are also used as tools for other purposes than playing or even for purposes related to other fandoms. Henry Lowood suggests that "when a computer game is released today, it is as much a set of design tools as a finished product" (2006:29). Machinima videos are an excellent example here. Lowood offers an introduction to games' tool use in machinima making: "Machinima makers have learned how to re-deploy this sophisticated software for making movies, relying on their mastery of the games and game software. Beginning as players, they found that they could transform themselves into actors, directors and even 'cameras' to make these animated movies inexpensively on the same personal computers used to frag monsters and friends in DOOM or Quake" (2006:26).

[5.2] Player-made music videos form one of the genres of machinima. Often, as soon as a new music video for a pop song, for example, is released, a machinima version of it can be found on the Web. This means that a player has used a game in order to reconstruct the video with the video game technology. The player has chosen characters and character outfits that correspond to those in the original video. Then, like a puppet master, she has organized the characters' movements so that they resemble what happens in the original video. Finally, the player has used software in order to record what happens in the game.

**Video 1.** A machinima imitation of Lily Allen's music video for "Alfie" by Badboy2008.
Louisa Ellen Stein's study (2006) of players of *The Sims* games serves as another kind of example of games' tool use. The players she has studied created Sims characters from the Harry Potter books and then devised new fannish stories within the game with these Sims characters. Stein suggests that the unpredictability of *The Sims* games creates a feeling of the characters' full existence in the game. Fans feel able to act outside the limitations offered by the canon of Harry Potter because the characters seem to exist "beyond the original source text, and beyond even the specific captured narrative being told through Sims images" (Stein 2006:257). Character qualities introduced in the books do not apply to the game, and Sims Harry Potter characters act independently of them.

Several questions arise from such hybrid productivity and games' tool use. Do these examples suggest that a music video made with *The Sims 2* playing "Alfie" by Lily Allen that loosely copies the original music video is a Lily Allen fan text? Or is it a *The Sims 2* fan text? Or is it both? How to approach an episode of *Lost* made with *The Sims 2*? Or an episode of *Friends* made with the same game, or a Brad Pitt skin for a Sims character? Are the Harry Potter fans discussed in Stein's study also fans of *The Sims*? Whatever the answer is, it is clear that games can be mobilized to express fondness for a song or particular star, to create new stories, express opinions, or even advertise a product, as the Coca-Cola machinima advertisement made with *Grand Theft Auto* and CBS's *Second Life* machinima advertisement for *Two and a Half Men* demonstrate. Furthermore, hundreds of autonomous machinima series and short movies exist, such as the five seasons of a well-known machinima series, *Red vs. Blue* (2003–2009) by Rooster Teeth Productions. *Red vs. Blue* is a parody of first-person
shooter games, a comic science fiction machinima made using visuals from the *Halo* games (2001–2009), and it features two opposing teams in futuristic desert settings.

6. Productivity as a part of play

[6.1] James Newman ends his book *Playing with Videogames* (2008) with a short discussion of the third generation of video games, generally described by the umbrella term *Game 3.0* (note 6). These integrate player cocreativity into the game play itself (finessed by the industry as "putting the spotlight back onto the consumer") and are clearly connected to the social software made available by Web 2.0, such as YouTube and Flickr. Newman uses *Little Big Planet* (LBP, 2008) as an example of Game 3.0, but *Spore* (2008) and *Hello Kitty Online* (HKO, forthcoming) fall into this category as well (note 7). The first two games were published in the UK in late 2008, *Spore* (PC and Mac) on September 5 and LBP (PS3) on November 5. While introducing these games, I will show how productivity is increasingly being integrated into game play as one of the central mechanics of the game, although it is still not always necessary for game play. Such productivity also seems important for the continued success of games to a changing industry. In the marketing of the games discussed hereafter, the making of players' own content has been forcefully introduced and such content has been then used in order to attract greater numbers of players.

[6.2] *Spore* is characterized as a multigenre massive single-player online metaverse video game. Whereas the notion of massive(ly) multiplayer game refers to games with a large number of simultaneous players, it is not clear what is meant by massive single-player games. I suggest it is precisely this that is interesting and novel about this particular game: a new way of mobilizing a large number of players and generating collaboration without actually bringing them into the same game play situation to play with and against each other. In *Spore*, this is implemented by the technically nondemanding production and sharing of player-generated content, such as *Spore* creatures. A number of editors are made available for the players to create their own content for the game, the most significant of which, *Spore* Creature Creator, had already been published by Electronic Arts before the actual *Spore* game appeared. Several features are included to facilitate including other players' creations into one's own game, such as an RSS feed for favorite creator content. Significantly, the favorite creator is "just" another player of the game. Furthermore, Web sites such as The Best *Spore* Creature ([http://www.bestsporecreature.com](http://www.bestsporecreature.com)) already include millions of creatures created by players (note 8).

[6.3] While the marketing material for *Spore* utilizes the catch phrase "Create, Play and Share," another game, the action platform game LBP, proposes three surprisingly similar themes and modes for the game: play, create, and share. Similarly to *Spore,*
the LBP player is able to add material made by her or other players into the game and editors for such work are integrated in the game product. These include characters and levels, for example. In numbers, players had shared 84,000 levels for the game by November 13 (Three Speech 2008). The HKO game, which will be a franchise-led MMORPG for the PC, differs very little from many other popular MMORPGs but presumably has a very different target audience. Unlike earlier games in the genre, HKO offers an in-game blogging tool as well as a tool for taking real-time footage from the game play, a new form for player productivity. The game's Web site also includes a number of ways for players to produce videos, and even the beta testers for the game were initially selected by videos created by potential players. Productivity in HKO does not cover the making of new parts for the game and for other players to play, as do Spore and LBP, but it still brings traditional play more toward player productivity.

[6.4] As these three examples show, out-game player productivity is an inseparable part of such games, not an add-on or extra. But this is a new level of player productivity, one that works in addition to play itself as a form of textual productivity. In Game 3.0 games such as Spore, LBP, and maybe also HKO, the production and dissemination of the player-made game texts is anticipated by the producers and developers and is an important aspect of marketing the games in a way that leads to the creation of a community within which distribution and share of new game content takes place. Productivity in these games serves as a strong starting point for creating player communities, since player creations are not limited within one's own game. A special relationship with the game is not a requirement of player productivity in these cases; instead, player productivity is built into the game itself.

7. Conclusions and future reflections

[7.1] Alongside game play, the WoW player may chat online to her friends, endlessly develop character(s), and play the game, thus making the game look and feel different to other players. She may contribute to Thottbot by describing where to look for a specific rare mob, take part in raids in order to kill new bosses, express her opinions regarding the price of items in the Allakhazam.com database, or write a game ticket to a game master in order to report a bug in the game. If scholars define fandom on the grounds of the degree of contribution to the knowledge about a game, then most of the MMORPG players would be categorized as fans. This would unnecessarily stretch the concept of fandom. Instead, it seems that what has earlier been considered as fan productivity is increasingly being structured into the media text itself in games.

[7.2] In this essay I have suggested that productivity in games is manifold and encompasses all players. Although fan communities and community interaction have not been the primary foci of this essay, the importance of other players and online
communities for player productivity is probably clear from the dimensions of player productivity I have suggested. Places for sharing and distributing player-produced content facilitate player communities, and player-produced texts such as character skins or walkthroughs become evaluated and discussed within these communities. Peer recognition is an evident motivation for players to produce new content. Thus, not only does cocreativity encompass a player and an official producer, but players are also coproducers in regard to each other. This coproductivity is collaboratively orchestrated mainly on online forums. Furthermore, it is a unique aspect of multiplayer games that communities among the users/audiences are already created during game play. These communities form strong bases for fan communities. A player of a multiplayer game such as WoW may be involved in community interaction both in-game and outside of it on an online forum, yet parallel to game play. Player communities are acting simultaneously in multiple places, and they are interconnected and overlapping. As competition between game publishers is hard, these communities also form and maintain strong opinions on competing products and therefore have impact upon the sales of the games.

[7.3] As player productivity or cocreativity grows from a group of varying motivations and is tightly linked to the production of games as media texts, I therefore suggest that we need better definitions for game fandom as well as for its different forms (note 9). Not all the productivity related to games can easily be understood as fandom. In game cultures in particular, as suggested in this essay, there are forms of productive activity—such as the creation of walkthroughs, game modifications, and add-ons, as well as the possibility to easily share content created in-game among the player community—that do not have counterparts in the fan activities of traditional media. However, it is already easy to recognize that various forms of recent media use, including what has been called Web 2.0, require more specific and elaborate accounts in media fandom. Understanding the underlying motivations and connections to original media in such productivity can be entered through the levels of productivity presented in this paper.

[7.4] This essay may seem to suggest, too, that computer game players' productive practices are especially emancipatory. However, even the games I have used as examples show that instead of independent DIY culture, game cultures remain very dependent on a mass market, and the most visible fan texts are altered from or based on those popular games. It is also worth noting that in the end, only a small percentage of all the players contribute to the production of new texts. While the highly productive power gamers may appear to occupy the most extreme position of a cocreator, even they work within the varying economic and legal boundaries and regulations set by global corporations.
Examples used in this essay are all from PC games and primarily from the games WoW and The Sims 2. Therefore, in addition to exploring more closely the social, political, and economic aspects of the different dimensions of player productivity, applications of the proposed model to different forms of games, game genres, and playing styles are what I would suggest as starting points for future research. Such work would result in enriching and broadening the proposed categorization and in multifaceted comprehension of player productivity.

8. Acknowledgments

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9. Notes

1. Aarseth writes that "a text, then, is any object with the primary function to relay verbal information" where the information is understood as "a string of signs, which may (but does not have to) make sense to a given observer" (1997:62).

2. Similar activity takes place when fans of a TV series watch episodes of a show in real time, maybe via the Internet, and use online forums for commenting and reflecting on the events of the show. However, in multiplayer games the player is also responsible for the outcomes of the game, and the productivity and discussions online may and often do affect the game play of many players. There are also meaningful differences in the temporality of a show that is defined by the broadcaster, whereas the timing of events of the game play is determined by the players and the order and length of events may vary from player to player. This happens, for example, when players kill respawn (regularly and continuously reappearing) monsters in a multiplayer game.

3. In order to illustrate differences, I have simplified interface modifications to be understood as modifications that simply enable more effective game play. However, there may be interface modifications that are more decorative and not meant to improve the effectiveness of playing.

4. Skins may, however, be partially instrumental as well. Creating a character skin that one identifies with better can potentially fuse a player–avatar identification that, again, makes playing more fluid and possibly even more efficient. For example, if a
female player is constantly distracted by the male avatar she plays, or by a hypersexualized female avatar she is forced to play, then creating a skin more in tune with her personal preferences would facilitate identification, reduce distraction, and thus be a means to an end for more efficient game play.

5. For "Leet Str33t" machinima videos by AnonymousKind, see http://www.machinima.com/film/view&id=26722.

6. The term Game 3.0 was originally suggested by Sony Worldwide Studios' president Phil Harrison during his keynote speech at the Game Developers Conference in 2007.

7. The Sims 3 (2009) game would fall into the same category but was published only some days prior to making the final corrections to this essay. Therefore the game is not discussed here, but it will be part of my future studies.

8. On June 25 in 2008, one week after Creature Creator was released, Electronic Arts announced that 1 million player-made creatures were available for other players. On May 4 in 2009, the number was 100 million (Electronic Arts 2009).

9. In doing so, it may be valuable to bear in mind an important remark made by Hills (2002): definitive definitions for larger phenomena such as fandom should not make us assume that just by fixing the terms in place, we can isolate an object of study. After all, identifications as fans or power gamers are multidimensional cultural constructions.

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Praxis

Sites of participation: Wiki fandom and the case of Lostpedia

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[0.1] Abstract—This essay explores the award-winning fan site Lostpedia to examine how the wiki platform enables fan engagement, structures participation, and distinguishes between various forms of content, including canon, fanon, and parody. I write as a participant-observer, with extensive experience as a Lostpedia reader and editor. The article uses the "digital breadcrumbs" of wikis to trace the history of fan creativity, participation, game play, and debates within a shared site of community fan engagement. Using the Lostpedia site as a case study of fan praxis, the article highlights how issues like competing fandoms, copyright, and modes of discourse become manifest via the user-generated content of a fan wiki.

[0.2] Keywords—Fan community; Television; TV; Wiki


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1. Introduction

[1.1] In its December 28, 2007, issue, Entertainment Weekly (EW) indulged its typical list-making fetish by adding to its normal assortment of year-end "best of" rankings a list of 25 "essential" fan Web sites. Not surprisingly, a wide array of cult media and personalities had featured sites, from The Amazing Race to Joss Whedon, including popular films, television shows, musical artists, and books. I read the entry for Lostpedia (http://lostpedia.wikia.com/), which was ranked number 3, with a particular sense of pride—not only did it help justify my own research on this fan site, which I can now claim is an "award-winning site," but I am an owner and author of that award-winning site. Created by me, and thousands of other contributors, Lostpedia represents a collective effort to build what EW calls "the ultimate resource for researching new conjectures and keeping tabs on what's been debunked and what hasn't" concerning the television series Lost. My personal involvement with Lostpedia runs a bit deeper than that of most users, however—during the summer of 2006, I was an active player of the alternate reality game known as The Lost Experience and was one of the most frequent updaters of Lostpedia's coverage of the game. I was promoted to the level of sysop (systems operator) as a result of my work on the site's Lost Experience pages, and served as one of a dozen or so site administrators for around six months, until my professional and familial commitments forced me to shift back to the status of a rank-and-file user—after all, "sysop of Lostpedia" has no clear place on a CV, even that of a television scholar. Yet I continue to engage with Lostpedia as an academic fan, or acafan, interested in how it augments my fan practices around Lost and inflects my understanding of television fandom and new media systems.

[1.2] I'm highlighting my own participant-observer status not only to provide a bit of methodological reflexivity, but also to frame my reading of EW's celebration of Lostpedia. While it praises the site's comprehensive coverage of all things Lost, from spoilers to theories to a multitude of cultural references, EW does not mention me—nor the dozens of other past and current sysops, nor the thousands of contributors who ensure the site's comprehensiveness and quality. Notably, the blurb does not even mention that the site is a wiki, and thus generates content collectively in a constant frenzy of editing, updating, and linking. Only one other of EW's top 25 fan sites was a wiki, Memory Alpha (ranked 11), a Star Trek site; the magazine identifies it as a wiki but does not bother explaining what that means. Perhaps wikis had become sufficiently mainstream and acceptable by 2007 that previous hand-wringing surrounding Wikipedia's lack of authority and attribution had been supplanted by a casual understanding that collective contributions can yield authoritative results. Or more likely, EW was simply more impressed by the product of Lostpedia than the process that yields it, not considering it worthwhile to highlight how such sites are made in what was admittedly a short write-up.

[1.3] In this essay, I do focus on the processes that yield the results of Lostpedia, examining how fan wikis constitute a system of participation. The basic definition of a wiki—a Web site that can be edited by its users via a
simple Web interface—suggests a structure that privileges particular possibilities of use and creation. While wikis can be used on a small scale to allow a closed community of writers to collaborate, such as in a class, an office, or an organization, a wiki becomes exponentially more robust as its base of editors expands, as with Wikipedia, the world's most famous wiki. Thus, while there have been other Lost wikis (including one featured as "official" on ABC's Web site), Lostpedia has become the predominant Lost wiki (and perhaps the most prominent Lost fan site overall) as a result of the efforts and size of its user base, not because of the efforts of its initial creator.

2. Lostpedia: The Lost wiki

[2.1] The site was launched in 2005, at the dawn of the show's second season, by Kevin Croy, a computer programmer. Croy created the site as a technical test of how to administer the MediaWiki software, figuring Lost was a good topic to experiment with. The site's growth surprised him, as dedicated editors began adding and supervising content while Croy and others successfully maintained the invisible but vital back end. Lostpedia has since grown into a full-fledged Lost portal, with an associated forum, blog, and IRC chat room as well as more than ten foreign-language mirrors, although my analysis will focus on the original English-language wiki. In 2008, Lostpedia migrated from its own independent server to the wikia.com domain, which is run by the Wikimedia Foundation; despite the migration, the same community of Lostpedians continues to make the site one of the most popular wikis in the world, with more than 25,000 registered users who have generated more than 5,000 unique pages, more than 600,000 edits, and more than 150 million page views.

[2.2] My analysis of Lostpedia seeks to understand how the site functions as a place for the aggregation of fan creativity, what limits and boundaries are placed on that fan-generated content, and what rationales underlie those policies and preferences. I'm building on issues raised by Sarah Toton in her analysis of the Battlestar Wiki (2008), in which she highlights how despite the open-ended, user-generated framework of fan wikis, the Battlestar Wiki limits its content to canonical material from the show, factual definitions and explanations, and hypotheses about narrative enigmas. For Toton, the absence of queer readings, fan fiction, fan vids, and other typical hallmarks of television fandom constitutes the wiki as a masculine space separated from, and even hostile to, the oft-studied female-centered community of science fiction fandom and its associated creative practices like vidding and fan fiction. Toton's analysis suggests that wikis as a platform seem to be better suited to such typically masculinist pursuits of cataloguing and analysis than to feminine creativity and community. However, my experiences with Lostpedia complicate this neat linkage between technological platform, gender identity, and mode of fandom.

[2.3] Lostpedia is both larger and more inclusive than the Battlestar Wiki. Its breadth is in part due to Lost's significantly larger global viewership, and the broader array of Lost transmedia content, including multiple games, novels, toys, and extensive Web tie-ins that extend the show's narrative universe. Perhaps even more central to the growth of Lostpedia, the show's central narrative framework presents Lost as a puzzle to be solved, a set of interlocking enigmas that require viewers to engage with research materials and a searchable archive to understand them. The show's core narrative focuses on a group of plane crash survivors attempting to explore and make sense of a mysterious island, uncovering centuries of complex backstory and unexplained phenomena, including time travel, reincarnation, ghosts, and electromagnetic implosions. Steven Jones (2008:19–46) goes so far as to suggest that the experience of watching Lost is closer to playing a video game than watching a television series. Such ludic narrative logic and transmedia storytelling promote a model of "forensic fandom," a mode of television engagement encouraging research, collaboration, analysis, and interpretation (see Mittell 2009). As Henry Jenkins discusses in his early study of online forensic fandom of Twin Peaks, fans saw the technologies of the VCR and Usenet boards as essential tools with which to crack the narrative codes of the series (Jenkins 2006b). Just as Lost's narrative architecture has pushed the boundaries of television storytelling far beyond the innovations of Twin Peaks, the decoder rings of today have similarly evolved to facilitate a more inclusive, faster-paced, participatory, and multimedia forensic fandom.

[2.4] Thus Lostpedia's core function is as a shared archive of data, culling information from the show, its brand extensions, and its cultural references to make sense of the show's mysteries and narrative web. But in this essay, I'm more interested in how Lostpedia goes beyond the realm of data collection, as it includes elaborate policies on how to treat borderline material such as speculation, hypotheses, fanon, parody, and fan-generated paratexts. How do the users who generate the site's content make these distinctions and decide on these policies? And how does the wiki system enact such policies and put them into practice?
A brief methodological aside: I had planned on surveying and interviewing Lostpedians about these topics, getting a sense of their own conceptions of the site and its boundaries. I tried to duplicate the successful online survey that Jonathan Gray and I conducted of Lost spoiler fans, which yielded over 200 responses and a wealth of research material (Gray and Mittell 2007). I created a similar survey for Lostpedia and posted a link to it from the site’s popular discussion forum. Alas, the results were underwhelming—only 20 users even began to answer the survey, and virtually none of the responses included any useful comments. While there may be many reasons why the survey failed, including poor design and unsuccessful promotion on the forum, the contrast between this result and the success of our similarly designed and promoted spoiler survey led me to believe an online survey was not going to be an adequate way to get Lostpedians to reflect on their own processes.

Fortunately for researchers, the wiki architecture leaves historical breadcrumbs. The MediaWiki software that runs both Lostpedia and Wikipedia saves a record of every change to a page, allowing researchers to view the evolution of pages and track the development of policies. Even more usefully, each wiki page has associated with it a discussion tab where users discuss the page’s content, debate ideas before posting them to the main page, and even vote on proposed policies or major edits. In this way, decisions as to how to define the site’s parameters and scope are explored and rationalized in public spaces of the site itself. For this reason, fan wikis provide a tremendous resource for scholars to observe a fan community reflecting on its own practices, making the metadiscussions of fandom transparent and accessible to all who know where to look. Additionally, such research avoids the hurdle of the institutional review board: by analyzing the public, published practices of wiki users, researchers can chronicle fan practices without needing to justify research methods under guidelines designed for much more invasive and controversial techniques.

Toton highlights the lack of queer readings as one important limit of the Battlestar Wiki, arguing that their absence means that an important aspect of fan culture and creativity is not represented. When I began my research on Lostpedia in Spring 2008, Lostpedia had a space for queer readings and shipping fandom on the page called Pairings (http://lostpedia.wikia.com/wiki/Pairings). The page’s topic was then defined as follows: "Pairings are relationships, either real or suggested, that fans enjoy and would love to see consummated. The desire for love to blossom on the Island between several pairs of characters, to varying degrees of commitment and affection is explored further in fan fiction" (note 1). Beneath this brief disclaimer, the page listed a wide array of romantic relationships depicted in the show and the fannish nicknames for them, such as Sawyer and Kate ("Skate") and Charlie and Claire, whose multiple monikers include PB&J for "pregnant babe and junkie." This page also included relationships more imagined than enacted, like Sayid and Kate ("Kayid") and Claire and Ethan ("Eclaire"). Same-sex pairings were unproblematically included in this list, such as Kate and Juliet ("Juliate") and Locke and Sawyer ("Lawyer"), with links to related fan-created projects that explore these relationships, such as the satirical fan vid Brokeback Island (http://lostpedia.wikia.com/wiki/Brokeback_Island). On this page, all romantic relationships, from canonical to slash to extratextual (like the mashup of producers Damon Lindelof and Carlton Cuse into "Darlton"), were given equal billing, seeming to exist on the same level within the Lostpedia universe.

One of the hazards of researching wikis is that the object of analysis is always in flux. On January 2, 2009, the Pairings page was transformed without discussion. On that day, a Lostpedia sysop removed all noncanonical relationships from the page, offering only the explanation "removing fan wished relationships. non-encyclopedic cruft." A link to a page on fan-made names (http://lostpedia.wikia.com/wiki/Fan-made_names) remained, but the shipping content there is far less prominent and extensive. This edit exemplifies how wiki content can appear and disappear according to a single user’s preferences, rather than by consensus or as a result of debate, even when a clear policy on such changes has been established—and often such changes are left in place, simply because nobody within the community notices the edit. While any wiki does reflect a version of consensus among the editing community at a given time, it is important to note that it is often a passively accepted status quo rather than an actively negotiated agreement. Active and vocal editors will be able to trump less forceful and less active users, even if their preferences or opinions are not widely shared.

While the instability of wikis can be frustrating, this fluidity also allows researchers to engage directly with them when appropriate. Although as a researcher I would not want to impose a single vision of proper fan practice, the wiki platform allows interventions to be transparent and impermanent. Because I disagreed with the decision to eliminate imagined relationships from the site, I created a page entitled Pairings (fanon) (http://lostpedia.wikia.com/wiki/Pairings_(fanon)) on March 27, 2009, to restore the "cruft" that had been edited out, albeit within its own fanonical space, as dictated by Lostpedia policy. I made this direct intervention into the site as a
The nature of the island garnered their own pages, such as the Garden of Eden theory created knowledge alongside the more encyclopedic acts of collecting, organizing, and distilling canonical information. Encyclopedias and even Wikipedia, Lostpedia has always allowed for original research and analysis, incorporating fan—of different ways of separating the canonical known from theoretical speculation and musings. Unlike other its inception, Lostpedia has served as a site for mulling possible explanations for the island's enigmas, with a variety term. The most integrated of these noncanonical modes are theories (between creator-endorsed truth and fan-created para-truth, or perhaps contrast, most other modes of information contained on the site are labeled noncanonical, creating a clear hierarchy is unmarked, simply existing as one of hundreds of entries in Lostpedia's archive of the show's narrative universe. By site's standard or norm, which fits with Lostpedia's typical encyclopedic form of writing—a page containing canon is self-evident for a transmedia narrative like Lost. The canon page (in Lostpedia has undergone a series of significant revisions—initially, it offered two categories, canon and noncanon, defined by the presence or absence of official endorsement by the show's creators. After The Lost Experience and the tie-in novel Bad Twin complicated the boundaries of the storyworld, Lostpedians began to debate various levels of canonicity. One dedicated editor, Scottkj, proposed a complex and highly Catholic set of canonical levels—Canon, Deuterocanon, Ex cathédra, and Apocrypha. While the community ultimately rejected these gradients, both because their complexity was daunting to casual users and their religious connotations put off some editors, the ensuing discussion forced Lostpedians to engage with fairly complex notions of narrative medium, transmedia authority, and intentionality—for instance, if a deleted scene appears on a DVD, does it count as a canonical event in the storyworld? As an active editor named GodEmperorOfHell philosophically posited, "If Claire had coffee with the pilot and someone deleted that scene, did they have coffee?" The canon policy that stands today is more straightforward, with three levels: canon, semicanon, and noncanon. Ultimate authority rests with the authors, both creative and industrial—if it comes out via ABC or from the mouths of producers, it is canonical. Usually.

One of the central ways this canon policy impacts Lostpedia's users is that canonical content is presented as the site's standard or norm, which fits with Lostpedia's typical encyclopedic form of writing—a page containing canon is unmarked, simply existing as one of hundreds of entries in Lostpedia's archive of the show's narrative universe. By contrast, most other modes of information contained on the site are labeled noncanonical, creating a clear hierarchy between creator-endorsed truth and fan-created para-truth, or perhaps truthiness, in Stephen Colbert's wiki-friendly term. The most integrated of these noncanonical modes are theories (since its inception, Lostpedia has served as a site for nulling possible explanations for the island's enigmas, with a variety of different ways of separating the canonical known from theoretical speculation and musings. Unlike other encyclopedias and even Wikipedia, Lostpedia has always allowed for original research and analysis, incorporating fan-created knowledge alongside the more encyclopedic acts of collecting, organizing, and distilling canonical information.

Lostpedians do try to mark differences between various forms of theory. Some broad-based theories about the nature of the island garner their own pages, such as the Garden of Eden theory
Reason why wikis should be suited more for recording than for editorializing, and many wikis have been used as sites of collective engagement that many scholars highlight as one of the most participatory and exciting aspects of fan culture (see Jenkins 2006a).

For some Lostpedians, theories and speculations belong on the site’s discussion forums, not within the wiki itself, which they see as an authoritative documentation of the canonical storyworld. To enforce this distinction between fact and conjecture, a wiki architecture was developed for including theories in Lostpedia’s archive: the theory tab, a separate subpage on each article that allows for noncanonical possibilities. Lostpedians work to ensure that such theory tabs are not simply discussion forums and speculative musings, but more elaborated attempts to hypothesize and support an interpretation. The theory tab emerged in late 2006 out of a frustration that individual articles were being overwhelmed with speculation and theories, which detracted from canonical information. The discussion about the theory tab recognized that theorizing was unusual for most other wikis modeled after Wikipedia, but also that such analysis is crucial for the nature of Lost’s narrative mode.

In many ways, the creation of the theory tab served to further enshrine the site’s authorial-endorsed factual content. As one anonymous editor wrote in endorsing the theory tab, “Not only do I feel it will keep things organized, and give more room for elaborated canon-based justifications of each theory, but also think the explicit separation of Theories from the facts articles, will be of a great effect on debunking any claims of Lostpedia being a fiction-based project.” The ironic contortions of attempting to deny the fictional roots of a Lost encyclopedia aside, such comments highlight how the site’s architecture is designed to allow spaces for noncanonical fan production as a means of prioritizing canonical authorized content. These spaces are a marked-out, separate sphere of unofficial knowledge that helps make canon seem more official by comparison. The site’s policy also stipulates that canon trumps theory—when a theory is disproved, by either producer denials or conclusive storyworld evidence, it is deleted from the theory tab. While the policy allows discredited theories to be archived on a page’s discussion tab, it is clear that the goal of theories is to arrive at fact, not to serve as an ongoing realm of fan creativity, speculation, and noncanonical imagination of different narrative possibilities.

The discussion over the place of theories cuts to the very heart of the definition of Lostpedia and wikis in general. PandoraX, an active female editor and former sysop who initially proposed theory tabs, highlighted the concern that theories might muddy the waters of the site’s goals: “Wiki editors, IMHO, should seek to be recorders, rather than editorialists, otherwise we risk biasing others with our opinions. I’ve noticed many newer editors don’t edit anything *but* theories nowadays” (emphasis in original). Other users take a more pluralist approach to including theorizing within the purview of Lostpedia, highlighting how much post-episode traffic is devoted to editing theories rather than adding canonical information, and that not all users consult the site as they might an encyclopedia. Even show runner Damon Lindelof highlights this coexistence of theory and canon in a 2009 interview conducted on Lostpedia; after explaining the official show bible, maintained by story editor Gregg Nations, Lindelof suggests that what differentiates Gregg from what Lostpedia does, is that Lostpedia is speculative. That is to say, it has to assume something, because it’s not run by us. So, you know, I think there is sometimes a perception out there that Lostpedia is kind of branded by the show, as opposed to a separate fan community, and we find ourselves having to differentiate those two things. That being said, when we’ve visited the site we are incredibly impressed with sort of the level of detail. There are occasions where we basically say “What was Juliet’s husband’s first name?” and if Gregg is not sitting in his office we will log into Lostpedia to get that answer.

Thus for Lost’s production staff, as for many of its fans, Lostpedia’s primary function is as a repository of canonical fact, supplemented—and made unquestionably valid—by the associated speculation and theories.

In many ways, the tensions between Lostpedia’s canonical and noncanonical information stem from the slippage between the software platform of wikis and its most well-known iteration in Wikipedia—there is no inherent reason why wikis should be suited more for recording than for editorializing, and many wikis have been used as sites...
of collaborative creativity, collective brainstorming, and other activities that go beyond gathering and organizing facts (Dena, Douglass, and Marino 2005; Mason and Thomas 2008). But for most people, the word "wiki" evokes Wikipedia and its assumed objective model of writing—for instance, in a comment on Toton's Flow article (http://flowtv.org/?p=1060), a Battlestar Wiki user named Spencerian offers the following dubious claim as fact: "A wiki, by definition, is an encyclopedia." This pervasive connection between wikis and encyclopedias is further emphasized by Lostpedia's name evoking the objective -pedia rather than the collaborative wiki- aspect of Wikipedia's portmanteau name; although its name and platform do imply an encyclopedic factualism, Lostpedia's practices include a broader array of creative production than most Wikipedia-style wikis.

[2.21] As we well know, fan production goes far beyond collecting and recording narrative information, and Lostpedia does have ample space for fanonical modes of contribution. Initially, the site allowed for parody, allowing editors to create pages that tweaked many of the conventions of both Lost and Lostpedia. One of my favorite such pages was Box, a parodic theory positing that a cardboard box made by the company owned by Hurley and employing Locke was the essential powerful force that caused all of the island's enigmas—the page documented every instance of a box appearing in the show, and included enigmatic clues like "Damon Lindelof and Carlton Cuse have described a new lead character in Season 3 as 'cubical, hollow, brown, and corrugated.'" This canonical page faced a bit of a crisis of faith in season 3, when Ben Linus referred to a "magic box" (http://lostpedia.wikia.com/wiki/Magic_box) that allowed him to transport Locke's father to the island—editors had to clarify the links to Box to separate the canonical (although probably metaphorical) magic box from the parodic Lostpedia box, while some editors felt that Ben's reference to the box was a shout-out to Lostpedia from the producers, a theory that remains unsubstantiated.

[2.22] In the summer of 2007, Lostpedia had a collective change of heart about parodies (http://lostpedia.wikia.com/wiki/Lostpedia:Parody). As numerous parodic pages emerged to less-than-enthusiastic reactions, the community debated (http://lostpedia.wikia.com/wiki/Lostpedia_talk:Parody) how to deal with bad parodies, and whether embracing parodies creates a slippery slope. As XSG wrote:

[2.23] If we accept parodic articles, how do we feel about slash? I could argue, and possibly successfully, that the only difference between slash and parody is the intended audience. Opening the door to one would therefore open the door to the other, and... I don't think slash belongs in Lostpedia. I'm questioning whether fanon does, either, and now I wonder about parody. Thoughts?

[2.24] The consensus was that neither parody nor slash belonged in Lostpedia, or at least that neither should originate there. Parody and fanon became markers used to point to fan-produced content that resided outside of Lostpedia, such as fan vids, fanfic, parodies, and fan Web sites, but Lostpedia removed all pages consisting of original fan content, including Box (which lives on only via the Internet Archive [http://web.archive.org/web/20070225014550/www.lostpedia.com/wiki/Box]).

[2.25] But we shouldn't take this decision to ban original content creation as a disavowal of the wiki architecture's potential to enable collaborative creativity. One fanonical page that remains is Jackface (http://lostpedia.wikia.com/wiki/Jackface), a gallery of images of Matthew Fox, the actor who portrays Jack Shepard, making exaggerated facial expressions. Jackface works as a site of wikified creativity because the community shares the basic parameters of what constitutes a Jackface and an appreciation for the form—the collective intelligence of Jackfacers makes the page a definitive resource for sharing a parodic wink about one of the show's lead actors, while feeling like we are contributing to a project that is a bit more creative than merely documenting canon.

[2.26] Jackface also points to a facet of fan productivity that can lead to differences among contributors: fair use. As a U.S.-based Web site, Lostpedia strives to adhere to American copyright law, avoiding reproducing copyrighted material except to illustrate an example or concept via brief quotations or screen-captured images under the banner of fair use (see Tushnet 2007). However, Lostpedians have not articulated a collective interpretation of fair use as it applies on the site, relying instead on a single user's outline of policies (http://lostpedia.wikia.com/wiki/Lostpedia:Fair_Use) adapted from Wikipedia, which has undergone little discussion or significant editing. ABC and other copyright holders have not requested that material be removed from Lostpedia, at least not in a publicly identifiable way. But despite this, and even though producers explicitly acknowledge referencing the site, some editors act in an overly constrained manner for fear of legal action, mirroring the "chilling effects" of a "permission culture" that presumes infringing guilt over fair use innocence (Lessig, 2004).
Occasionally, individual users will take down material out of concern for legal reprisal—the Jackface gallery was removed from the site in March 2008 for this reason. Another user overturned the removal, reinstating the gallery without discussion, three months later. It has ping-ponged on and off the site in this way several times, as users differently interpret its legal status and edit accordingly. While the wiki architecture would allow deliberation and debate with the goal of articulating a clear fair use policy, it also allows "first come, first served" policy, with decisions enacted unilaterally but without binding force. Sysops can also exert their power to assert an opinion by locking down an article—after a series of Jackface edits, a sysop locked the page in a state without the controversial gallery, despite other users (including myself) objecting to what may be a misreading of fair use policy. As of this writing, the discussion has stalled because a lack of interest in the debate, not because of any clear consensus position. Deliberative policy making requires users to focus their efforts on articulating shared goals, which has happened around questions of canon much more than copyright.

Lostpedia also allows a mode of writing that we might think of as creative nonfiction, with the caveat that this "nonfictional" gaze is aimed at the fictional storyworld of Lost. Pages on topics categorized as literary devices (http://lostpedia.wikia.com/wiki/Literary_techniques), such as Archetype, Plot Twist, and Symbolism, all offer original analysis and research, synthesizing elements of the show to demonstrate its use of particular storytelling devices and representational strategies. Such original research is strictly forbidden on Wikipedia, marking a key difference between the two and showing how Lostpedia can work in ways belied by its encyclopedia-like label.

One interesting example of this mode of collaborative research is the Economics page (http://lostpedia.wikia.com/wiki/Economics). Originally drafted in June 2006 by user Scunning, a doctoral student in economics, the page initially read like a term paper, exploring how the allocation of resources on the island mirrored various economic models. Dozens of editors dived in, expanding, deepening, and rethinking the original article, until it was named "featured article of the week" in late 2006, the first time such an analytical page was highlighted on the site's front page. While academics are prone to thinking of analysis as a solitary extension of a single mind, Scunning embraced the collaborative output of the community (http://lostpedia.wikia.com/wiki/Talk:Economics):

Wow. When I started working on this entry around 8 months ago, I never dreamed the community of viewers would transform it into this. This entry is really spectacular as a result of what everyone has contributed. The weakest parts of it, I now see, are the original sections I wrote! Seriously, this is phenomenal.

The Economics page, like other analytical pages on Lostpedia (http://lostpedia.wikia.com/wiki/Category:Analysis), are not tagged as Fanon or otherwise marked as noncanonical. This distinction was noted in July 2007 by Silence, a male user who was an active Wikipedia administrator but had just joined Lostpedia:

In what sense is analysis, in the sense you're using it, not fanon? "Analysis" like Economics is noncanonical (I don't think the word "socialism" has ever even been used in the show), fan-created, and is based on, but not a part of, actual canon. Something doesn't need to be far-fetched or outlandish to be fanon, after all.

Two years have passed with no reply, suggesting that distinguishing analysis from canon is a far less pressing concern among Lostpedians than demarcating or eliminating more explicitly creative modes like parody and fic. While the wiki architecture allows for multiple modes of collaborative creativity, the Lostpedia community seems to have embraced a different hierarchy of perceived value than has Wikipedia. It allows original research, analysis, and theories, but still embraces core distinctions in fan culture that privilege canonical content and extensions of canon over more explicitly noncanonical modes of creativity, distinctions that certainly align with the gendered differences noted by Toton and many fan scholars.

Lostpedia's dual function as a catalog of canon and a site of original creativity found an interesting point of synergy surrounding The Lost Experience in the summer of 2006. This alternate reality game (ARG) extended the show's narrative universe beyond the confines of the television screen and into the real lives of viewers. Fans could attend events and receive complimentary Apollo Bars (a candy featured in season 2), watch a representative of the mysterious (and fictional) Hanso Foundation appear on Jimmy Kimmel Live! to denounce the misinformation spread by Lost, and witness a live event at Comic Con in which the ARG's main character, Rachel Blake, accused Lost
producers of having "blood on [their] hands." Clearly the blurring of the boundary between real life and the fictional universe was part of the game's appeal, a slippage that extended into Lostpedia.

[2.35] A key part of The Lost Experience was a hunt for 70 pieces of a larger code that could be entered into a Web site to reveal a hidden video offering key information about both the ARG and the in-show DHARMA Initiative. These codes were primarily linked to graphic glyphs that were embedded in a variety of Web sites or posted in real-life locations. In August, the "puppet masters" of the ARG contacted a number of fan sites to ask them to embed glyphs, including Lostpedia. Kevin Croy, Lostpedia's head administrator, received such a request and contacted me, in my role as the designated Lost Experience sysop. The two of us devised a puzzle using wiki protocols that was designed to reward dedicated Lostpedians through their knowledge of the site by giving them their own glyph. While it took a few days for users to discover the trail of links, some Lostpedians found a new user account in the name of Rachel Blake posting on Lostpedia, beginning the search for the hidden glyph within the wiki. Once the glyph was found, one Lostpedian commented on Blake's page, "Awww. This is so exciting! I feel like Lostpedia is getting a little reward! :)."

However, the way the material was placed on Lostpedia probably violated the community's policies on posting original content and properly labeling noncanonical contributions, policies that both players and the administrators happily overlooked. The puzzle placed me in an interesting loop, since I participated as researcher, game player, community member, and momentary puppet master, and it also highlights how the encyclopedic thrust of Lostpedia can be punctured to create spaces of ludic engagement and fictional role-play, even as it still functions as an authoritative and reliable source of Lost information.

[2.36] I want to conclude by highlighting the potential of the wiki architecture to overcome and blur boundaries and hierarchies between fiction and truth, canon and fanon. Even though Lostpedia's structure privileges canon and the authority of Lost's creators, it also offers many spaces for unauthorized content, creative experimentation, and the blurring of boundaries between categories. Except for an occasional rant by an aggressive user, the site hosts impressively collegial discourse across different realms of fandom: shippers and cataloguers, theorists and vidders. The open platform of the wiki allows constant remaking of the site's parameters and policies, and Lostpedians use other platforms to include content not appropriate to the main wiki—in the hiatus after season 3, the site sponsored a fan fiction contest, hosted on the Lostpedia discussion forum, to map out the arc of the following season. While the site's hierarchies and attitudes matter, they are fluid and ever-changing, reshaping themselves as the community develops. Although hierarchies of modes of practice, engagement, and identity persist within various spheres of fandom, I hope that the structural possibilities of wikis like Lostpedia will allow fans to find spaces where differences within a fandom can be ironed out, one edit at a time.

3. Note

1. Because of the fluid nature of wikis, the text of Lostpedia is likely to change over time. Whenever appropriate, quotations will cite a date that the page did include the material; if not noted, the quotations were part of Lostpedia on March 20, 2009.

4. Works Cited


Praxis

Identity and authenticity in the filk community

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Abstract—As a result of several studies examining the relationship between identity and music subcultures, sociologists have developed a framework for analyzing those relationships. I apply this framework to the filk community, using the question "Is wizard rock filk?" as a vehicle for exploring slippery questions: What is filk? What is the filk community? What does it mean to be a filker? Part of the difficulty with defining these terms rests with the fact that people approach filk in different ways; it can be one of many activities at a convention, a genre of music, a subculture, or some or all of these. Although both wizard rock and filk are musical movements within fandom, I conclude that the answer to the question "Is wizard rock filk?" depends on the context of who is answering the question and what perspective that person holds with respect to the filk community. This dependence on perspectives is particularly important in the filk community and has repercussions for the larger fan community because one of the hallmarks of these fan communities is a tolerance of differing perspectives.

Keywords—Filk; Wizard rock


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1. Introduction

[1.1] Recently, while I was at a conference to present a paper on filk, a member of the audience asked whether I thought wizard rock was filk, or more specifically, whether filkers considered wizard rock to be filk. My immediate reaction was "No, wizard rock is not filk," but when I tried to articulate why, my arguments either ran into roadblocks or circled back on themselves. As an academic, both of those outcomes were completely unacceptable, so I began writing this essay as part of an effort to unravel my thinking on the subject.

[1.2] As I worked through the various arguments, this essay mutated from a simple extended answer into a more complex look at identity and authenticity in the filk community. The transformation began with the realization that answering the
deceptively easy question of what filkers think of wizard rock required that I define the filk community, define how the filk community views wizard rock, and construct a framework for analyzing the connections between identity and music subcultures.

[1.3] Fortunately, sociologists have spent decades studying the relationships between music, subcultures, and identity, and in the process, they have built a framework for exploring the symbiotic relationship between music and identity. That framework provides the ideal mechanism for answering the question "Is wizard rock filk?"—or rather, for answering the question of whether I think wizard rock is filk.

[1.4] To explore this question, I first provide a brief orientation to filk and wizard rock. I then set out a sociological framework for examining issues of identity in music subcultures, apply that framework to the filk community, and use it to analyze wizard rock from a filker's perspective.

2. What is this thing called filk?

[2.1] Filk is not easily defined, although parts of it are easy to explain. For decades, the science fiction and fantasy community has regularly brought its authors and fans together for weekend conventions. Many of these conventiongoers would gather in the evening hours for song circles, playing music and swapping songs. In the early years, these gatherings were small, informal gatherings in hotel rooms or hallways, but over the last 25 or 30 years, filk has become more mainstream. Filk is an accepted part of fan conventions; dedicated filk conventions have sprung up, such as GAFilk (http://www.gafilk.org) and OVFF (Ohio Valley Filk Fest, http://www.ovff.org), a filking hall of fame (http://www.filkontario.ca/hof/hofmain.html), and an annual awards ceremony (the Pegasus Awards, http://www.ovff.org/pegasus). The term filk is generally attributed to Lee Jacobs; it is the result of a typographical error that changed "folk music" to "filk music" (Filking 101) (note 1).

[2.2] Filk appears in three basic spaces at conventions: filk rooms, filk concerts, and filk panels. Filk rooms are the classic space and are traditionally arranged so that filkers sit in a circle, taking turns performing. The method of taking turns can vary, with the two basic forms being bardic and chaos. In a bardic circle, the rotation proceeds around the circle in order, with each person either performing a single song, requesting another member of the circle perform a particular song, or passing the turn. In a chaos circle, turns proceed in random order, often with the idea that each song should be in some way connected (for example, by tune, theme, composer) to the song that was just performed. Both styles have advantages and disadvantages, and several variations have developed as part of efforts to maximize the advantages and minimize the disadvantages. As filk has become more popular, conventions have
sorts of music in widely ranging genres: folk, electronica, metal, and hip-hop (Vineyard 2007).

[3.3] What unites these bands into a genre or subculture is not their musical style, but rather the content of their music (Vineyard 2007). As with filk, wizard rock encompasses a wide variety of musical styles. Unlike filk, however, the subject of wizard rock is more limited. As the sound clips above demonstrate, filk songs cover a wide variety of topics; in contrast, wrock bands exclusively play music rooted in the Harry Potter universe. One other significant difference between wrock and filk is the performance format; filk music is rooted in the song circle, while wizard rock bands perform in more conventional formats, with the bands on stage playing for an audience of fans. Thus, although filk and wizard rock both share a common base in the science fiction and fantasy world, the two genres do not appear, at least initially, to overlap. Before reaching a definitive conclusion on the subject, it important to understand what we mean when we talk about a music subculture and how we define the identity of that subculture.

4. Music and identity

[4.1] Debates within music communities over how to define themselves are not unique, and indeed, sociologists regularly study the relationship between music and identity (Davis 2006; Williams 2006; Kruse 1993). This relationship is of interest because "music is seen as consequential in the creation of subcultures as well as a consequence of them" (Williams 2006:174). As part of this exploration of identity and community, sociologists study "how members of music scenes construct identities that separate themselves from the mainstream" (Williams 2006:184).

[4.2] It is important, then, to understand what is meant by social identity. J. Patrick Williams (2006:177) defines this term broadly as "plac[ing] the individual as a member of a social category that differs from other categories. Membership in [a] category accompanies the person" even when the person is not interacting with other subculturalists. Williams continues,

[4.3] Successful identification rests upon expressing a similarity of self to one's peers as well as distinction from members of mainstream society. Subcultural participants may, for example, construct narratives that emphasize their allegiance to a group ethos or to subcultural values and norms. Such narratives build in-group cohesion and highlight how subculture differs from mainstream culture. The resulting subcultural boundaries situate some people on the "inside" and others on the "outside." Such identifications
are an affective as well as a cognitive experience, invoking positive feelings and emotions as people identify as members of a group. (2006:177–78)

[4.4] Williams (2006) conducted an interesting study of so-called straightedgers, a part of the punk movement that defines itself in part by not doing drugs, not smoking, and so on. Williams explored a dispute between "two different types of straightedge participants [that have] emerged as more people outside of traditional straightedge music scenes learn about straightedge on the internet and begin interacting within online subcultural spaces" (2006:175). His article focuses on claims made by each category regarding what constitutes "authentic" straightedge identity. He distilled those claims into two categories: straightedgers who "utilized the internet forum as a supplement to their participation in face-to-face straightedge music scenes," and those who "argued in favor of a broader definition of straightedge that included anyone who lived the straightedge lifestyle" (Williams 2006:183).

[4.5] The debates over authenticity centered on whether participation in the face-to-face straightedge music scene was a necessary element of a straightedge identity (Williams 2006:188). The so-called music-straightedgers were not openly hostile toward the Net-straightedgers, but instead

[4.6] expressed their concerns about the dilution of straightedge through what they saw as people bypassing essential(ized) criteria for authenticity. This perceived "defusion" was occurring because the internet facilitated the spread of subcultural information and knowledge to populations who did have that "essential" something that made straightedgers different. (Williams 2006:188)

[4.7] Williams then explores notions of authenticity more abstractly, noting that it "is not an either/or experience. Like all symbols, authenticity is interpreted by individuals and mediated through interaction with significant others" (2006:189), and that "authentic characteristics do 'not inhere in the object, person or performance said to be authentic. Rather, authenticity is a claim made by or for someone, thing or performance and either accepted or rejected by relevant others'" (Peterson 2005 in Williams 2006:177).

[4.8] The sociological studies of music and subculture, and in particular Williams's study of the straightedge community, provide a wealth of tools for exploring definitions of filk, particularly those offered by the filk community itself. As the next section makes clear, no clear, universally accepted definition of filk exists.

5. Defining filk and the filk community
Much angst and ink have been spent in attempts to define filk and to identify precisely who is a filker. Indeed, one source asserted that "one of the things filkers do besides sing and write songs is argue over exactly what filk is" (M.A.S.S.F.I.L.C.). This struggle fits squarely into Williams's (2006:189) observation that labeling something as "authentic" or "inauthentic" is not an absolute but rather something filtered through individual perspective and interpretation. Thus, it is important to understand both the definitions that have been offered and the perspective of the person evaluating those definitions.

Many definitions have been proffered to explain what constitutes filk. Those definitions range from "the folk music of the science fiction and fantasy community" (Shapero) to "filk is anything that happens in a filk circle" to definitions about lyric content:

Filk includes songs about every science fiction or fantasy subject you could imagine: outer space (both real and fictional), books, movies, TV shows, dragons, magic, unicorns, vampires, and aliens of every sort. It also includes songs about things of interest to the Science Fiction and Fantasy community (usually referred to as "fandom") and strongly resembles contemporary folk music. (M.A.S.S.F.I.L.C.)

One filker, Gary McGath, surveyed the various definitions, sought input from those in the filk community, and attempted to build a more all-encompassing definition. His efforts resulted in the declaration that "filk music is a musical movement among fans of science fiction and fantasy fandom and closely related activities, emphasizing content which is related to the genre or its fans, and promoting broad participation. Filkers are people who participate in this movement" (Filk: A New Definition).

Although other definitions do exist, the ones set out above generally represent the spectrum of descriptions offered. But they also conceal some of the sources of disagreement. Perhaps the biggest single factor influencing how one defines filk centers around performance quality. Filk circles are egalitarian and welcoming to all attendees. The result is an uneven quality of musical skill. Filkers range from professional musicians to enthusiastic amateurs who have difficulty carrying a tune. This variation in quality leads many to disparage filk and filkers. At the same time, however, many in the filk community view this inclusive approach as one of the most positive hallmarks of their community.

At first glance, that inclusiveness would seem to argue in favor of a conclusion that wizard rock is filk. But even if filkers would reach out to include wrockers, do wrockers want to be considered part of the filk community? Before that question can
be answered, it is important to step back and evaluate the various definitions of filk. Which definition is the appropriate one, and does that definition encompass wizard rock?

6. Is wizard rock filk?

[6.1] The definitions of filk discussed above fall into two basic categories, one focusing on the content of the music and the other focusing on who is performing the music. If you adopt any of the definitions focusing on content, wizard rock would appear to be filk. It is about the Harry Potter universe, which in turn is centered around magic, thus putting it clearly within the science fiction and fantasy genre. If you adopt one of the definitions based on community, whether wizard rock is filk will depend on which community—that of fandom in general or the filk community more specifically. Those involved in wizard rock are clearly part of fandom, but they are not part of the filk community.

[6.2] Part of the difficulty with definitions arises because different people approach filk in different ways; it can be one of many activities at a convention, a genre of music, and/or a subculture (as that term is used by sociologists). Definitions of filk will naturally, and obviously, vary depending on who is asked the question and from which perspective they approach filk. As Williams (2006) discussed, there is no rigid test for authenticity in the abstract; claims of authenticity can only be made and evaluated in context.

[6.3] The answer to "Is wizard rock filk?" thus depends on who is answering the question and what perspective that person holds vis-à-vis filk. A group's identity can be defined either by those within the group or by those outside the group. The definitions chosen by insiders and outsiders are likely to differ, as each perspective is defining the group for a particular purpose (Tatum 2000). Insiders form definitions as part of a process of self-identification, both in terms of who they are individually and whom they choose to associate with. Outsiders, however, often choose a definition designed to foster a particular emotional response to the group or to achieve a particular goal (Tatum 2000).

[6.4] In this particular case, we are interested in the insider's definition because we are exploring the question of how filkers view wizard rock. Opting for an insider's perspective does not resolve our difficulties, however, because it is clear that filkers themselves do not agree on a single definition. Although it is folly to insist on unanimity from community members on all issues, the question of a group's identity usually generates at least a core of agreement among the group's members.
In reality, there is a core of agreement among filkers about what constitutes filk. The major disagreement is over how to classify songs performed by those who are not active, self-identifying members of the filk community and how to classify the musicians who compose and perform those songs. The definitions of filk that focus on content would reach out to include all songs (and musicians) with a science fiction and fantasy component to them. The definitions of filk that focus on community likely would not.

This dispute is not likely to be resolved largely because of the nature of the filk community and of fandom in general. One of the hallmarks of the fandom community, and filk even more specifically, is a tolerance of differing perspectives. Filk and fandom are far from homogenous, in any sense of the word. Filkers and fans come in all races, religions, genders, educational backgrounds, and occupations. Indeed, "filking more often speaks directly about fandom as a distinctive social community," more so than other fan activities, because "while only a small percentage of those attending any given con participate in the filksinging, its ranks typically embody a cross section of the larger fan community" (Jenkins 1992:253–54).

Accordingly, I can only answer the question "Is wizard rock filk?" from my own perspective; other people may answer the question very differently. To borrow Williams's language, what I view as authentic in terms of filk is influenced by my perspective and interpreted through the lens of my experiences.

How, then, do I define "filk" and the "filk community"? I am drawn to Gary McGath's definition: "Filk music is a musical movement among fans of science fiction and fantasy fandom and closely related activities, emphasizing content which is related to the genre or its fans, and promoting broad participation. Filkers are people who participate in this movement" (Filk: A New Definition). At first, this definition would also appear to encompass wizard rock because wizard rock is a "musical movement" that takes place "among fans of science fiction and fantasy" and that "emphasizes content related to the genre." There are, however, two critical differences: the format of wizard rock, and the lack of overlap between the two communities.

First, as to format, wizard rock is not filk because it promotes performance to a particular crowd rather than building a community of performers who perform for each other. The difference between performing for an audience and participating in a music community is an important one. As McGath stated, "More important than [filk's] subject matter is its attitude toward music: that people should make their own music, even if they aren't great at it" (Spirit of Filk). McGath's definition appeals to me because it highlights what I find most noteworthy about filk—the sense of community and the shared enjoyment of both the music and the genre. Sally Childs-Helton, an
ethnomusicologist, movingly articulated this in her acceptance speech when she was inducted into the Filk Hall of Fame:

[6.10] Being an ethnomusicologist, I professionally look at the way people use music in their everyday lives. I look at the way that music is expressive of a culture and all the many relationships between music and cultures. All of us were raised in a culture that said, "If you don't have talent, then forget about doing any kind of art." Forget about singing, about dancing, about doing any of those things, and we have to be acculturated out of it...In a way, we've been robbed. We have robbed ourselves of the joy of making music, of dancing, of doing art. [The filk] community has taken that and pitched it out the window and said, "We are making music because we love it, we need to do it, it feeds our souls, it feeds our community, it feed us as individuals." And we do it.

[6.11] One of the great joys for me in this community, is that I see people over the years growing as musicians and growing as human beings. That is not a small accomplishment in this day and age. So, just be aware that we're doing something—I dare use the word revolutionary, but we are—we are taking back our right as human beings to make art. If the rest of the culture was doing this, it would be a very different and much better culture to live in...

[6.12] We have taken our right to be creative and to literally "play" in the best sense of that word. We invite each other out to play. And we do it. We do it with great joy, and we do it with great hearts. We do it with a lot of loving forgiveness for people who are still developing as musicians and may be a little painful at first to listen to. We see the growth, we see the value, we see the community, and I can tell you that as a musical subculture,—if you want to get really academic about it we are a musical subculture—I don't know of one like it anywhere. (Childs-Helton 2003)

[6.13] My first experience as a participant in a filk circle typified this description. I wrote a song as part of a workshop at the 2007 Balticon, a regional science fiction convention held in Maryland, and I nervously took it to the filk room that evening. After a bit of dithering about whether to take a turn—not only because I lack a good singing voice, but also because the circle was full of talented musicians, including the convention's music guests of honor—I chickened out and started putting the music away. I do not play the guitar or any other accompaniment instrument, and the thought of trying to stay at least roughly in the ballpark of the tune without any musical backup was simply overwhelming. I thought I was being discreet, but one of the filkers near me leaned over and asked if I wanted to take a turn, even offering to
accompany me (I had the chords but no guitar). I took a deep breath, thought "what the hell," pulled the lyrics back out, and took my turn. When I finished, one of the members of the circle complimented my lyrics and asked for a copy.

[6.14] I would later be comforted by reading Jordin Kare's (1995) statement that the traditional key for filk is "off," and also by my experiences in filk circles over the last 2 years. In all of those circles, I was made to feel welcome. Other scholars have recognized this inclusiveness as a significant factor in defining filk. In his book *Textual Poachers*, Henry Jenkins observed that

[6.15] filk originated as a form of music that could be sung communally and its pleasure comes less from the quality of its performance than from the sense of community it generates. Filk shares many of the features musicologists have traditionally used to define folk music: oral circulation rather than fixed written texts, continuity within musical tradition, variation in performance, and selection by a community that determines which songs are preserved, which discarded. (1992:268–69)

[6.16] For me, then, perhaps understandably, given my start in filk, the question "What is filk?" can be answered only with reference to the filk community. Wizard rock does not identify itself as filk, nor does it identify itself as part of the filk community. Nowhere in any of the histories of wrock discussed earlier does wizard rock locate its origins in filk. Indeed, it is not clear whether wizard rock bands are even aware of the filk community. In one interview, a member of a wrock band declared, "There is nothing like this anywhere" (Vineyard 2007), even though filk music has existed for decades, and a significant portion of filk music celebrates favorite books and movies.

[6.17] Wizard rock could certainly become part of the filk community by deciding to do so, or deciding for itself that there is a connection between the two communities. Unless or until it does this, however, I do not consider wrockers to be filkers. That conclusion rests partly on my belief that to label wizard rock "filk" would be to force a label on wizard rock that it has not chosen, and each community should have the right to define for itself what its identity will be and who counts as a member of the group. To do otherwise—to broaden the label of filk beyond those who self-identify as members of the community—would put me in the position of an outsider defining a group, which carries inherent dangers (Tatum 2000:12).

[6.18] My major concern rests in the fact that the failure of wizard rock to identify and understand its connections to the filk community carries with it consequences for both groups. Although I've been involved in filk for only 2 years, I have been involved in fandom for a decade. In that decade, I've attended conventions, published short stories, been a guest at conventions, helped run conventions, and witnessed the
continued fracturing of fandom into subgroups—anime, graphic novels, gamers, and so on. There is nothing intrinsically wrong with subgroups, and it is perfectly acceptable for people to focus on the aspect of fandom they are drawn to. The problem arises when those groups lose sight of what connects them and when they cease to identify with each other as part of the larger group known as "fandom." Growth and change are critical to the continued health of any culture. Fragmentation and isolation, however, are antithetical to a culture's continued health.

[6.19]  Groups who share common origins and identities may be able to draw on each other's resources and expertise. Wizard rock and filk may have overlapping audiences and might benefit from sharing information about venues and schedules to avoid creating conflicts for fans. Wizard rock and filk might also be able to assist each other in solving common problems. For example, both communities are apparently questioning the balance between enthusiasm and quality.

[6.20]  I mentioned earlier, one major discussion in the filk community is about quality of performance, an issue that has been percolating for decades. Almost 20 years ago, Jenkins observed that within filk, "a star system has started to emerge as individual performers are drawn from the community...and featured...A form of music founded on ideals of musical democracy, an acceptance of various competencies, has become more hierarchical due to the push toward professional standards of technical perfection" (1992:275).

[6.21]  Similar issues also arise in wizard rock. One of the wizard rock Web sites asserts that the "music of wizard rock varies in a number of ways, from recording quality to genre to subject matter...To some, it matters very little if the recording quality or vocal and musical stylings of the performers are not acutely refined...Other individuals would rather only acknowledge wizard rock bands with exceptional musical talent" (Wizrocklopedia). A member of the band Whomping Willows, one of the earliest wrock bands, addressed the controversy by declaring,

[6.22]  Half of these bands are populated by kids who are just learning to play an instrument and record music. The beauty of Wizard Rock is that for many of the bands, it's nothing more than a LEARNING EXPERIENCE. We, as the elder statespeople of Wizard Rock, should not be encouraging young people to worry about categorization and public image. We should be encouraging them to HAVE FUN. (Wizardrock.org)

[6.23]  Filk has wrestled with this issue far longer than wizard rock and might have some insights to contribute. Conversely, the fact that wizard rock is a much younger genre might mean that it has some fresh perspectives and insights into the issue. But if the two groups are not communicating, they will be unable to share those insights.
When groups share common origins and identities but fail to recognize those commonalities, it should lead each group into a round of introspection. That introspection is happening in the filk community, although it is not clear yet what the outcome will be, or even whether anything will change. The filk community on LiveJournal ([http://community.livejournal.com/filk/](http://community.livejournal.com/filk/)) debated the issue of whether wizard rock is filk. The discussion started with an observation dated April 26, 2009, by LiveJournal user ultimatepsi:

I've noticed an increasing amount of geeky music (nerdcore, video game bands, Wizard Rock, etc) made by people who don't consider themselves filkers...It is unclear to me why few of the new geek musicians are involved with the filk community. Do they not know about it? Are they judging it to be for amateurs? Do they not feel included, perhaps based on musical style, or not directly sci-fi content or some other factor? Do they not want to share performance space? Is there some other cultural factor that creates a divide?

The resulting discussion ranged through many of the issues and perspectives that I discuss here, further cementing my belief that no one filker can speak for the entire community as to whether wizard rock is filk. So for this particular filker, the answer to the question "Is wizard rock filk?" is that wizard rock is not filk because the members of the wrock community do not define themselves as filkers. And perhaps the filk community needs to ask itself, as LiveJournal user happyfunpaul does in the same LiveJournal discussion, whether filkers have "become too closed of a circle, and need to open up more? Do we have a reputation that drives people away, or is it just lack of knowledge?" At the same time, filkers need to hold tight to the values that make filk the distinct subculture that I want to be a member of: the values of inclusion and of taking joy in music.

7. Acknowledgments

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8. Notes


9. Works cited


The Web planet: How the changing Internet divided *Doctor Who* fan fiction writers

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[0.1] **Abstract**—This paper analyzes the debate that arose in online *Doctor Who* fandom surrounding the switch to moderated submissions for "A Teaspoon and an Open Mind," the fandom’s main fan fiction archive. As has been the case with many classic texts of science fiction and fantasy, from *The Lord of the Rings* on, the new adaptation of the cult series *Doctor Who* was the cause of much tension and conflict within the fandom. It has opened up the franchise to a vast new audience unschooled in the fandom’s ways or the ways of fandom at large, and the change in archive policy served as an arena where many of these tensions came to a head. An in-depth analysis of this debate leads to the argument that the cultural logics of fandom and of participatory culture might be more separate than they initially appear. Some fans wholly embrace the ideals of Web 2.0 and argue for the archive as a nonhierarchical, communal space where all content is equal regardless of what standards it might not meet. Yet while their rhetoric resembles the ideas of academia about the potential of fandom as an educational space, other, more veteran fans reject academia, instead using the discourse of private enterprise and property rights, more commonly associated with the producers of texts than with their fans and poachers, to argue for the rights of site moderators to regulate content.

[0.2] **Keywords**—Adaptation; Archive; A Teaspoon and an Open Mind; *Doctor Who*; Fan fiction; Web 2.0


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1. Introduction

[1.1] The first days of 2008 saw an upheaval in the large, active, and notoriously conflicted online fan community of the science fiction series *Doctor Who*: the fandom’s largest fan fiction archive, A Teaspoon and an Open Mind (T&OM, http://www.whofic.com), stopped allowing stories to be uploaded automatically and began moderating all submissions. This move was met by a variety of reactions, but one incident that stands out took place following the banning of popular author MelindaKitty: another author was prompted to publicize her claims against T&OM and
call for discussion in the pages of a blog called fighting_spoon. In a fandom that has, since the 2005 relaunch of the series, been dealing with increasing fragmentation and conflict within its ranks, such a rallying cry was all that was needed to set off a loud debate.

[1.2] In this paper, I wish to present and examine the controversy and subsequent conflict surrounding the switch to moderation of T&OM not only in light of the upheavals within Doctor Who fandom, but also within the context of the broader changes and challenges that online fan communities increasingly face with the advent of what is commonly called participation culture. I propose that, while the logic of participation might seem to mirror the logic of fandom (Bassett 2008), they are not one and the same; that even an interpretive fannish community cannot be seen apart from its own norms and ideals; and that the loose and open nature of participatory culture as idealized in the Web 2.0 model might, in fact, clash with these ideals as much as it might clash with the wider cultural model of production it is threatening to replace. In analyzing the discussion taking place between supporters and detractors of archive policy on the fighting_spoon community, I highlight the clash of two different discourses of fandom as they appeared in this case: a fandom-as-organized-community view that relies upon the rhetoric of private enterprise and stresses the importance of norms and standards, and a fandom-as-free-space discourse echoing notions expressed in academic literature of fandom as a safe, equal-opportunity creative and didactic environment. This clash also serves to illustrate the problems of viewing participation culture and fandom as driven by the same logic.

2. Community and conflict: Doctor Who fandom between Old and Nu

[2.1] Running 26 consecutive years from 1963 to 1989, Doctor Who was not just a science fiction classic, but also a cultural icon in Britain. After its cancellation, in spite of or perhaps because of the various fannish enterprises that stepped up to produce more of the text, it became something of a niche interest, as an invested and close-knit fan community grew around the Big Finish audio plays and the various lines of books. The 2005 revival of the series, now commonly known as Nu Who, caught these fans by surprise, and was not necessarily greeted with joy.

[2.2] By January 2008, when the T&OM controversy broke out, the new series of Doctor Who was enjoying a fantastic popularity. This is attested to by the wild surge of series fan fiction on the site Fanfiction.net—from a mere 710 between 1998 and 2005 to over 12,000 by mid-2008. The once-small fandom was now met with the scenario faced by a growing number of cinema and television adaptations and revivals, from the 2001 The Lord of the Rings films to Battlestar Galactica and Watchmen: a science
fiction or fantasy classic, long loved and cherished by a dedicated fannish minority, suddenly opened to a huge new flux of eager, often young, outsiders with little initial awareness and investment in the original text and no experience in the ways of its longtime fandom—or indeed, any fandom at all. Although these newcomers share the same virtual space with more veteran fans, they do not necessarily share the same virtual community, constructed by practices and norms that have sometimes been in place well before said community came online.

[2.3] This now-common scenario is among several factors that have seen fandom change a great deal from the isolated and misunderstood subculture first studied by now-canonical accounts such as those of Jenkins (1992), Tulloch and Jenkins (1995), and Penley (1991), among others. What was once thought of as a unique viewing position of intense, creative involvement has been steadily losing its exclusivity under assault by the combined forces of marketing and technology. Media corporations have long since come to appreciate the value of a fiercely devoted and invested crowd of consumers, despite fans' unruly ways with their texts; the Internet and other digital technologies that allow users to create, manipulate, and share content provide the other piece of the puzzle. What was once reserved for a particular audience—whether they were considered freaks and geeks or the countercultural elite—is rapidly becoming all the rage in media production as well as consumption.

[2.4] All these changes have necessitated a move away from canonical ideas and conceptions of all things fannish, from the definition of a fan to the inherent value (or lack thereof) of fan work. Recent fandom studies have for some time now been attempting to formulate their own discourses around evolving fandom; not everything is textual poaching (Jenkins and Hills 2006; McGowan 2007). Rather, trends in current research often approach fandom within the larger concept of participation culture and the power struggle and cultural shift inherent in the blurring of borders between producers and consumers. The exclusive narrative of fandom as a unique phenomenon, which fans themselves often adopt in their self-construction opposite "mundanes" and "couch potatoes" (Merrick 2004), thus gives way before the inclusive narrative of participation culture as an open and empowering playground in which the entire audience can play, regardless of their level of involvement, experience, or competence (Lee 2004; Pugh 2004). Of particular interest are the studies of neonate online communities of mostly teenaged fan fiction writers, which broach the idea of fan fiction as an experimental arena where young writers can take their first interpretive and creative steps within an interested and supportive community (Jenkins 2006; Thomas 2006).

[2.5] Little attention, however, has so far been paid to the reactions of the long-time fans to all these developments. Such learning- and play-oriented communities, in
which there is no right way to be a fan, might be perceived as empowering to these young people taking their first steps into participation, but the more experienced and involved fannish crowd, who are already past their learning stage, now must share their play space with a multitude of players still mastering the rules. Fandom is more used to contending with negative stereotypes and keeping to itself lest it draw dangerous attention from media producers than it is to coping with becoming "cool." It remains to be seen how established fandom will respond to its new status and whether new participants will adopt their outlook or challenge it (Hills forthcoming).

3. Fans 2.0: Participation versus authority

[3.1] Much as fandom is no static, monolithic body, it would be equally wrong to make this assumption of the Internet. While interactivity has always been the defining dimension of the Web, the things that constitute this interactivity—such what content is under user control and the degree of control afforded—are now considered to have been recently transformed by a new model of online participation. This model is commonly labeled Web 2.0.

[3.2] The principal idea behind Web 2.0 is that of the Internet as a platform, not a provider, of users as producers and participants, not consumers. BitTorrent, MySpace, Facebook, Wikipedia, and other such Web sites all have in common the function of enabling users to fill in their own content, presenting them not with a product, but with a framework. The Web 2.0 rhetoric speaks of Internet by and for the people; the prerequisite of programming knowledge that was necessary to build one's own Web site is no longer relevant. Tim O'Reilly, the man behind the Web 2.0 coinage, refers to the power behind the new model as "harnessing collective intelligence": not only relying on user contribution to make the bulk of the content on Web sites, but also depending on the user community to maintain itself and the popularity and viability of the Web site (O'Reilly 2007). The more a Web 2.0 site or application is used, the better it becomes.

[3.3] Web 2.0 is a decentralized, nonhierarchical model, relying on and appealing to the collective power and interest of countless users, the long tail of the curve, rather than merely to the bulk of powerful companies and advertisers. Data and applications are not rendered from above onto the people, as in the Microsoft model, but are constantly available and in constant improvement via their own users. This is hardly limited to content, but includes the applications themselves, data management, and even things that might not be appropriately considered the purview of the Net-using public, such as the aforementioned case of Wikipedia: as Lankshear and Knobel (2007) put it, information stands as true until someone overwrites it. The model assumes that
all users, by their very nature as content generators, have something of value to contribute.

[3.4] In theory, the participatory logic of the Web 2.0 ethos is the same one that has been driving fandom for as long as the concept has existed. The cultural shift toward participation mentioned above has been driven forward by the technologies and attitudes that characterize this model, and has driven them in turn, as once clear-cut borders between consumers and producers are steadily eroded. Digital technologies not only make the production and sharing of content—such as home movies uploaded to YouTube or amateur music spread through file-sharing applications—easier, but similarly allow easier manipulation of existing content (Jenkins 2006). Sampling, screen-capping, and editing, media consumers transform the face of consumption and force media companies to reconsider their attitudes toward everything consumption used to mean.

[3.5] It may seem at first glance, then, that fans and fandom stand only to gain from participation culture being increasingly adopted and celebrated across the board. There is an old and strong link between the concepts of interpretive community and virtual community: Helen Merrick (2004) proposes that the forms and practices commonly associated with the latter have in fact existed in the former as far back as fandom existed at all. Historically, fandom has indeed been on the Internet almost from the moment of its conception, with fan fiction being posted to Usenet as early as 1982 (Hale 2002), before even the earliest works on convergence. The interactive, digital, and multimodal space of the Internet is in many ways ideal for fandom, enabling fans to connect across geographical distance and borders, discuss content of all sorts, and generate their own, from simple fan fiction to elaborate works of machinima and Flash vids. It may be observed, then, that the Web 2.0 model has had a profound impact on the conduct of fandom as well (Gooch 2008). If participation is the essence of fandom, then the changes brought on by the new model should be fandom's wet dream. However, as the *Doctor Who* fans are learning, such openness does not necessarily fit in with their conception of what fandom means. The model may supposedly thrive on a community of users, but this is a community with different rules, one much more dispersed and inclusive and seldom as committed as most communities traditionally associated with fandom. Fans have been conceived as the elite audience for reasons of their intense involvement both with the text and with each other, but there is no such prerequisite of care and devotion in the everyday, casual involvement made possible by Web 2.0's various means. If everybody is free to become a part of the community, naturally, the community will lose its distinction and its members will have less and less in common—certainly not a defined ethos that unifies them on any level.
4. Case study: A Teaspoon and an Open Mind—Background and methodology

[4.1] Established in September 2003, the A Teaspoon and an Open Mind archive offered *Doctor Who* fans a fandom-specific venue modeled after the vast, popular, and (some would say) infamous archive at fanfiction.net (note 1). Authors were able to upload their stories to the archive by themselves, without intervention or assistance from the site moderators. With the series' 2005 revival, it quickly became the largest archive of online *Doctor Who* fan fiction, hosting over 19,000 stories by over 2,500 authors. More than its size, its chief importance lies in its popularity as the fandom's definitive archive, a central hub hosting stories of all sorts by authors of all levels of skill and investment in the text. In the polarized and contested online fandom of *Doctor Who*, the archive was neutral, inclusive ground.

[4.2] In the last days of December 2007, T&OM's longtime owners and moderators announced their retirement from the position and put out a call for moderating volunteers, passing archive ownership and management over to well-known writer Carmen Sandiego and a team that formed under her, whose identities remained mostly unknown to fandom at large. The transition itself went smoothly until, on January 5, the new team began implementing changes to archive policies, the biggest of which was the introduction of moderation on all submissions: stories now had to be read by the moderator team and approved before being uploaded. Instead of an instantaneous upload, a story could now take several hours to appear on the site, and could be rejected from the archive due to errors in spelling, grammar, or formatting, or for being content other than fan fiction.

[4.3] On January 4, with the changes announced but not yet implemented, MelindaKitty, a long-standing and popular author, posted a nonfiction essay in which she referred to a character as a poof, a derogatory British slang term for a homosexual. Soon after, Carmen Sandiego commented on the essay (using the site's built-in comments feature) requesting the removal of what she perceived as an offensive slur, and noting that essays were no longer allowed on the site. To this, MelindaKitty reacted by moving the essay into the fan fiction category without altering its content, only to receive a second warning. Another user, Leda, claiming to be MelindaKitty's wife, used the site's comments feature to reply to Carmen Sandiego's warnings in increasingly rude and confrontational language. On January 5, both MelindaKitty and Leda were permanently banned from the archive. As MelindaKitty was a widely popular author, this event did not remain an isolated incident, but was used by her and others as a rallying cry for writers who viewed the archive's new policies as restrictive and unacceptable.
[4.4] Soon, the incident began to send waves through Doctor Who's LiveJournal fandom, the main fannish venue of many archive participants. Participants and observers commented on the issue though much of the conversation occurred in friends lock. At the time of these events—and today—I was on the friends lists of several of the T&OM moderators and thus was privy to locked posts and discussions. Yet my ability to view them does not negate the fact that they were not meant for public viewing, and using their content in research would be a highly unethical breach of user privacy. I must also consider the possibility that my view of the case is incomplete: there may have been other friends locked posts to which I cannot gain access. Thus, I chose not to analyze and comment upon those posts; nor did I feel, in the interest of balance, it would be appropriate to include the public posts in the corpus. I do, however, wish to briefly discuss the possible implications of the acts of public and private posting themselves.

[4.5] The locking of posts—using a site feature, in this case the friends feature, to restrict the ability to access and comment on content—may itself be viewed as a form of enforcement of norms. The user who makes a locked post is literally determining the borders of the in- and out-group and who is qualified to have their voice heard; in other words, the very act of friends locking defines the fannish space as a closed and regulated one, a thing apart from the wide-open Internet and the ideal of equal-opportunity opinions. While public posts are not without their issues of power relations—it is difficult to argue equality between poster and commenter when the former's words are at a fixed point at the top of the page—they do invite participation from anyone who happens to find them, making it possible even for complete strangers and newcomers to the site to have as much of a say as any of the longtime users or the poster's close friends. Locked posts, on the other hand, mean that any discussion is held only within the community of informed users who have in some way proven their participatory competence. In this case, I might argue that the purpose was the specific avoidance of any encounter with such uninformed players, both because these posts had chronicled the posters' personal reactions to stressful events and because—as we shall see—fans on the opposite side of the debate were viewed as disruptive and prone to misconduct. Additionally, friends locking the posts allowed the posters to speak freely without risking any breach of norms of proper behavior in the eyes of the greater community, placing their restrained and regulated conduct opposite the public outcry of their detractors.

[4.6] What I wish to analyze, instead, is what was probably the main event of the "Teaspoon kerfuffle," which took place roughly two weeks after the initial incident. On January 19, T&OM writer Nenya established the blog she called fighting_spoon. This blog was not under friends lock; its proclaimed purpose was to offer Nenya's claims against the archive moderators and invite other users to react to them. The discussion
In this forum happened over four days, the last comments coming in on the 23rd. Of the total of 202 comments made to 4 posts, 91 were from anonymous users, 88 were made by 11 logged-in LJ users, and the remaining 23 were made by 4 people who signed by name only. Fighting_spoon became the arena in which both sides left their private blogs and actually came out to respond to each other's claims. In best Internet tradition, the discussion began with resistance and mutual creative insults, but soon posters were shaping agenda and arguing at greater length, presenting their views and backing them up with a variety of arguments.

[4.7] Of course, the great number of anonymous or name-only comments in the community raises its own set of methodological problems, with which all online research grapples. For one, beyond the 15 who identified themselves by name or user name, I have no real ability to tell how many people were involved in the discussion, nor which anonymous comments might have been made by the same user. The various personal blog posts I've mentioned above and the comments made on them help with this somewhat: all signed, they give a clear sense that even if only a few people were active in the debate itself, a great many more were watching from the sidelines and expressing support of one position or another. I also attempted to single out stylistic features and self-positioning declarations that gave me some idea, if not of a commenter's identity, then of their fandom background. Still, these are only partial means. The problem of fannish groups closing up their discussions and engaging each other only under the safety of anonymity may be viewed as proceeding naturally from the character of online fandom, as subcommunities are able to isolate themselves and control the terms of their engagement with those outside the group. As such, the main focus of my analysis was not the users and their actual identities, the study of which was limited, but the text itself, and how those users presented their identity and played it out through discourse.

[4.8] Approaching fighting_spoon, my interest was twofold: in the ideas that each side expressed regarding fandom and how it should look and work, and in the ways in which these ideas were formulated. The rhetoric used, I believe, is as essential to the understanding of the conflict as the worldviews it conveys. The conflict at its core is about standards of writing, about what deserves and does not deserve to be published, and about what is appropriate or inappropriate for publishing in a fannish context. It is thus interesting to observe the different approaches to the use of language in discussion—the adherence to codes both on the microlevel, such as spelling and grammar, and on the macrolevel, of the construction of arguments. Stylistically, I was also interested in levels of formality displayed by the users on both sides, theorizing that the more norm-oriented T&OM supporters would use fewer swear words, fewer attitude markers such as exclamation marks, fewer emoticons and less Net speak, and fewer rhetorical devices such as loaded words and sarcasm. I did not,
however, expect to see a difference in the degree to which fannish slang and terminology were used, reasoning that both sides were aiming to show cultural competence in the struggle to determine whose way is the right way for the culture to go. The arena for stylistic analysis that yielded the most interesting results was the appeals made by both groups for the validity of their claims, on which they justified their understanding of how fandom works and their right to define its nature.

[4.9] My theme-oriented analysis focused on the use and construction of key terms within the theory that has been outlined in previous sections. I considered how participants posed and related to issues of community, content, rights of self-expression, gatekeeping, and fannish norms, as well as any reference to the conflict between the ideals of participation and classic fandom. I read to discover what community meant to both sides, what they described as legitimate and illegitimate content, to whom they granted the right of gatekeeping, and how all these things came together to define what fandom was to them. Where possible, I also attempted to pry out markers of fannish identity, particularly as they relate to veteran versus new fans, and the value placed upon such identities. Of course, I have no way to know if the commenter claiming years of experience indeed has them, but the statements themselves may be used to demonstrate the importance (or lack thereof) placed on such things by both sides in the discussion. In this same vein, I looked at how each of the groups constructed and worked to delegitimize the other's claims to authority and deciding power, and the personal and group characteristics they found undesirable. It may be seen, then, that the categories for analysis were drawn from the key concepts and issues that formulate the theory of conflict in evolving online fandom. I shall now attempt to use the resulting analysis to demonstrate the workings of these concepts and issues within the case studied.

5. The fighting_spoon discourse

[5.1] Reading fighting_spoon from a content- and style-oriented point of view reveals the clash of two particular discourses, each of them based around a model of how a fannish community should ideally look and work in relation to questions of content, gatekeeping, who is a valued community member, and who should hold a position of authority. These discourses operate on the levels of ideology and rhetoric, both of which I will now present.

[5.2] The model offered by the T&OM critics relies on the discourse of democracy and of participation, constructing online fandom as an open opportunity space. In their view, not only is the ability to write fan fiction a basic right, but so is the ability to post it—a right that is not preconditioned by anything and should not be subject to any limitation. While they acknowledge that content can be, to use their term,
objectionable, they propose that such content should not be banned but posted and discussed, and that readers also have a right to ignore what they disapprove of. Even while claiming to understand the need for some standards, they stress that "just fan fiction," as opposed to professional publishing, should be fun and thus unrestricted. As MelindaKitty sums up her fannish position: "I believe that all writers must start somewhere. If you don't like what they write, don't read it. That's your right. Just posting a story is a major accomplishment for some...Comparing Teaspoon to a private publishing house is laughable. It's fanfiction. We don't own any of the characters, rights, or canon. We make no money. We sell no product" (http://fighting-spoon.livejournal.com/999.html?thread=33255#t33255).

[5.3] Another feature of this free, open space is the idea that everyone should have a voice in the running of the archive, with many commenters complaining that the moderators had been uncommunicative, that they should hold polls or consult with the archive's writers before deciding on or implementing policies, and in one case, even that they should be democratically elected. Stylistically, the terminology used also echoes this discourse: users talk about a public arena, of the Internet as the "greatest democracy there is," and of online fandom activity based not on rules but on good faith. There are many mentions of rights, and many references to free speech, once even citing the First Amendment. At the same time, these commenters are also far likelier to ask for or encourage discussion, addressing the need to talk. While this may be viewed as the one tactic open to them as opposed to the site moderators, it may also support the view of a community space based on openness and equality.

[5.4] Fandom is viewed by the anti-T&OM users as not only a democratic space, but a didactic one as well. According to these comments, since fan fiction writers needn't be held up to standards but should be encouraged to self-express in any way, fannish spaces should ideally function as safe places where young and inexperienced writers can learn their craft by doing. It is interesting to see how the argument, in both content and style, is reminiscent of Thomas's and Jenkins's above-mentioned papers about young people's involvement in online fan writing. The turns of phrase the anti-T&OM commenters use are not unlike those of fans interviewed by Thomas or Jenkins. Writes one fan,

[5.5] I want to make sure others have a life INSIDE Teaspoon. It was a fantastic community. Many authors build their spare time around it. For someone less resilient, being banned from or rejected by such a community could put them off writing forever.

[5.6] That would be inexcusable. Fanfiction is about testing boundaries, making believe, and having fun with characters we all know and love. (http://fighting-spoon.livejournal.com/999.html?thread=12007#t12007)
[5.7] Writes another:

[5.8] Why have up [sic] become so much more picker [sic] on content and content representation?

[5.9] If a reader doesn't like it, they have the choice not to read it. Those who do want to read and will give us important input on improving. Isn't the point of reviewing and commenting to improve and gain help from our fellow fans on our writing? So shouldn't they be telling us how to improve, not you by limiting us? ([http://fighting-spoon.livejournal.com/1157.html?thread=1413#t1413](http://fighting-spoon.livejournal.com/1157.html?thread=1413#t1413))

[5.10] Opposite that, the pro-T&OM comments offer a model of fandom relying on a different discourse: not of democracy, which they dismiss as irrelevant, but of free enterprise. They argue that a fan fiction archive exists apart from any community that might form among its users and has no duty to it, and that those who pay for the server space and volunteer their time and effort to maintain and manage the site should be able to run it as they see fit and filter any content they deem inappropriate. Frequent expressions of gratitude to the moderators for their hard work, and assertions that any unhappy T&OM users can and should respond simply by opening their own archives, point to a view of fandom not as a content-based space where a community of users runs itself, but as relying on the organization of members who create private spaces and top-down frameworks: "The site isn't a democracy. Are you paying for it? Did you contribute to set-up costs? Have you been running it in your freetime over the past five years? Nope, don't think so. No-one forces anyone to use it. You don't like how it's run? Tough luck" ([http://fighting-spoon.livejournal.com/999.html?thread=13031#t13031](http://fighting-spoon.livejournal.com/999.html?thread=13031#t13031)).

[5.11] Fan creation, as these users view it, does not automatically command respect by its very nature, and they do not speak of it as having inherent value, whether creative or didactic. Moderators are not only permitted to practice quality control, but also encouraged to do it by commenters who complain of the lack of standards in fan fiction. To these users, rather than being an open space, fandom also has rules that must be followed in order to participate properly—in this case, rules of language as well as rules of personal conduct.

[5.12] I'm delighted that summaries and submissions are being moderated—it's not just a matter of proper spelling and grammar, but it's also a question of what counts as a story. Is a self-insert where the author "appears" in the TARDIS and yells at the Doctor, or shags Jack, a story? Why should a summary be half a screen long? And as for authors who state in their summary that they don't care about spelling and grammar and "just
judge the story," if they can't be bothered then why should I? (http://fighting-spoon.livejournal.com/1157.html?thread=8837#t8837)

[5.13] Another aspect of this is the pro-moderator construction of the situation as one in which a lone malcontent or clique was banned for misconduct rather than difference of opinion. Arguments against the anti-T&OM faction repeatedly cite the documented instances of personal attacks on Carmen Sandiego, and often accuse the author of posing as multiple people to give the appearance of a larger unhappy crowd. These users have a clear idea of what construes norms and misbehavior in an online fannish environment, and they often stress the importance of norms, as opposed to MelindaKitty's attempts to turn the discussion to posting policy.

[5.14] A key term that repeats many times in the discourse of these users is *false entitlement*. T&OM's defenders use this term to reject any claim to an equal say in archive management, stressing, often in a vitriolic and confrontational tone, the point that being producers of content does not make writers automatically entitled to a place to put up any sort of content they wish. The stylistic flavoring of the pro-T&OM arguments and the discourse they rely on are defined by the frequent use of the term, as well as references to the archive as private, payment for Web space, and the unpaid work of Web site moderators. Some of these users even use the term *private enterprise* to define their fannish outlook in the debate itself. "If you want to have the right to boss the mods around, you could pay them. Otherwise, you're really just not entitled to any say in archive policy. That's not fascism, it's the nature of private enterprise" (http://fighting-spoon.livejournal.com/999.html?thread=23527#t23527).

[5.15] Aside from this use of the terminology and style of arguing, I had expected to find linguistic elements that correspond to the two groups' positions regarding norms and standards: this expectation was only partially fulfilled. With a few exceptions—all signed-in posters on the T&OM critics' side, community founder Nenya among them—users on both sides display the use of correct spelling and grammar, as well as properly structured sentences and paragraphs. The main difference of style was in tone of argument: while the archive supporters' tone is occasionally vitriolic, their expressions remain ones of restrained sarcasm and mockery, expressing their outrage without caps lock, exclamation marks, or even swear words. Their tone, for the most part, is factual and straightforward. The T&OM critics, on the other hand, show a more informal, emotional tone, including the use of harsh language, exclamation marks, and capslock and emotes (the use of descriptives surrounded by asterisks to mean actions performed, such as *hugs* or *offers hand*). As anticipated, little difference was found in the use of fannish terms and slang. While different than what I expected, these findings do show a looser attitude toward language use and a greater emphasis on informal communication on the side of the anti-T&OM faction. Perhaps the fact that
this was not linked to a lesser grasp of language indicates that this use is a matter of choice rather than a side effect of reduced competence.

[5.16] Perhaps the most interesting stylistic find, however, and the one that might go furthest in supporting the theory, is the ways in which each side framed its claims as relevant, what each of them claimed as the source of their authority on fannish matters. In the discourse of the T&OM detractors, the appeal was made to community, to what MelindaKitty calls her fellow fans. Her posts and others' make many references to the friends they have acquired in the archive, to its fun communal atmosphere, and claim to be fighting for T&OM, essentially constructing the changes to the Web site as a hostile takeover of a community hub. This attitude further reveals itself in a readiness to speak in the first person plural; comments on this side of the discussion often use "we"—as in the "we writers" in whose name Nenya claims to speak in her opening post—and refer to the experience of other archive users, something the opposing side rarely if ever does. Another feature of this style is the frequent use of appeals, both to unknown readers who might be following the discussion without speaking up and to commenters on the other side of the arguments. Devices such as pleading with the readers to ask themselves if this is "the Teaspoon you joined," rhetorical questions, and Nenya's invitation to users to "talk to me" all seek to include all participants in the discussion, whether commenters or lurkers, as part of the community that is being attacked.

[5.17] In this view, community is blatantly opposed to authority: from reading these users' arguments, one would hardly guess that the moderators are all fans and fan fiction writers themselves, members of the same community whose privilege is restricted entirely to the archive. Thus the opposing side is delegitimized not simply as a minority, but as outsiders who have no such sense of community, and are not authorized to speak for it, much less run it. In contrast, those who argue against this takeover repeatedly affirm their connection and devotion to the site and to the fandom, even while lamenting specific developments. One user writes: "It makes me want to tear my hair out, but I am leery of openly complaining. I have so many lovely reviews and comments, and so much history there, I'd hate to lose it all...but it's getting harder and harder for people to stay on the right side of the mods" (http://fighting-spoon.livejournal.com/999.html?thread=2023#t2023).

[5.18] However, the supporters of T&OM's policy speak from an authoritative position of experience, speaking as senior members who understand how fandom works. Users on this side tend to cite their experience in other fandoms, with other archives, to demonstrate that the T&OM situation is normal, indeed lenient as compared to other archives. Many comments express amazement at 12 to 14 hours being considered a long waiting period, offering tales of archives that have much stricter rules and may
take days and weeks to update sites and occasionally noting that T&OM's users should be grateful that stories are uploaded as quickly as they are. Not only this, but several such comments also bring up their experience with similar fandom kerfuffles, giving the impression that they have seen too many to take them seriously. See for example this anonymous comment: "Maybe you missed the gigantic furore a few years back when ff.net banned NC-17 fic and songfic and a bunch of users got TOSed. People had much the same tantrums as you're having now. Archives change their rules. That's life" (http://fighting-spoon.livejournal.com/999.html?thread=14823#t14823).

[5.19] Not only are rule changes standard things, says this user, but "that's life," the unavoidable reality of fandom that is self-evident to those who have experience within it. While the anonymity of the discussion prevents us from learning whether the commenters presenting such arguments truly are veteran fans, such reliance on fandom familiarity combined with degrading references to the age of the complainers ("because you're three years old and cannot live without instant gratification," or more tellingly, "teenagers who can't write to save their lives") indicate that they consider such experience a source of authority and cultural capital. The condescending tone shared by this and other similar posts, as well as the frequent references to the real lives of the moderators—lives that presumably consist of jobs, studies, and families, things of the adult world—all point to the importance that these commenters place on maturity and adult conduct, if not adult status. "They probably have lives/are in different time zones/have better things to do. I've been in fandoms where archives could go weeks between updates" (http://fighting-spoon.livejournal.com/1157.html?thread=4485#t4485).

[5.20] While the image presented by these various discursive features is highly polarized, it must be remembered that it arises from the analysis of what was, essentially, a fight and not a search for compromise. Attitudes on both sides are no doubt much more nuanced, both in themselves and in the differences between individual participants; for the moment, fighting_spoon paints a broad-stroke image of the issues and end positions involved in the conflict.

6. Conclusions

[6.1] Both the arguments they make and the style in which they make them indicate that the T&OM critics have Web-shaped views of how fandom ought to look: community as shaped by content and the ability to share it freely, regardless of quality, because by definition, all content is good. (The Web 2.0 model of fan fiction, as it were.) Essentially, the anti-T&OM faction in fighting_spoon wishes only for what it has grown used to receiving from the Internet: an open archive, community-run and without enforced standards. The virtual spaces of fandom in this conception are all
common spaces, regardless of who provides and runs them. Rather than owners or moderators, archives and lists have maintainers, who are expected to provide only the framework. In the debate reviewed, these fans display a great deal of confidence in the ability of the community to moderate itself; in their view, all the archive's users are qualified to comment on its policies, and they reject the idea of the archivist's right to control site content even when this is repeatedly pointed out to be a norm in fandom.

[6.2] T&OM's supporters, on the other hand, not only reject this attitude wholesale, but also view the opposite group's behavior and attitude as a breach of an existing fan community ethos that does have and does stress a code of conduct. Unlike the claim for fandom as a free space without hierarchies, they emphasize the (thankless) voluntary nature of the moderator's work and the upholding of some standards even when these constrain self-expression. A community, as such, is built up on norms, not rights. It is easy—perhaps deceptively so—to recognize how such a view would be formed in a marginalized community, working through interpersonal connections and word of mouth, much as fandom had been before it was revolutionized by the Internet. In such a setup, it would make sense for voluntary work, vital for the community's survival, to be awarded respect and status; in the age of print-copied fanzines and conventions organized by unpaid volunteers, moderators or their equivalents were very much necessary, and one risked a great deal more by breaching rules of conduct than a banning from one fan fiction archive among many.

[6.3] As noted, many of the T&OM critics' arguments seem to be lifted from recent studies on young people's new fan communities online, but they may seem familiar even to those who don't read academic papers—a similar rhetoric is often used by fans to justify their position as opposed to the original creators of media text. The right to self-expression—the idea that everyone is entitled to have a creative go at popular texts, by dint of their very popularity—has long been a staple argument of fan fiction authors. As opposed to an establishment often viewed as oppressive, hoarding its textual goods, fandom constructs itself as a subversive free space that poses no limits on textual play, where readers and writers are not simply equal in status, but the lines between them are blurred to invisible. Its communal nature is held up as one of fandom's great strengths and the appropriate answer to a system in which texts are treated as products in the hierarchical logic of capitalism. As the broad acceptance of the textual poaching terminology might tell us, fandom is quite willing to revel in and even uphold as an ideal its own lawlessness.

[6.4] Yet when used not from fans to major companies but from fans to fans, this rhetoric of freedom from rules meets a great deal of resistance, and even scorn, as its proponents are accused of a false sense of entitlement and bluntly told that they have
no innate right to freedom in every fannish space. The T&OM's supporters' use of arguments regarding property rights, associated more with copyright holders' side of the fandom discussion, completely turns things over. As one commenter says: "So you claim the right to free speech despite the fact that you are working with copyright materials that you have not obtained permission or rights to use...but the mods of Teaspoon do not have the right of a publisher to reject work because they have not obtained permission or rights? That's rather hypocritical" (http://fightingspoon.livejournal.com/999.html?thread=36839#t36839).

[6.5] The application and outcome of this logic are, of course, different: the fans' actual right to write is in this discussion an axiom, not put to question. Both sides in the debate are, after all, in the business of fan fiction. Still, the owners of the archive are granted a position of gatekeeping that is denied the owners of the copyright. Some participants, as in an extract quoted above, go so far as to grant them the right to decide what counts as a story, what falls within the purview of good, acceptable fan work and what does not—a right that fans vehemently deny commercial bodies (see, for example, the case of Warner Bros. and Harry Potter fandom, in Jenkins 2006).

[6.6] Perhaps this is a sign of double standards within fandom, and then perhaps this demonstrates how a community based on an ambiguous relationship with laws and rules keeps itself from degenerating into anarchy. The power relations between the BBC and Doctor Who's fans and between the T&OM moderators and the archive's authors and readership are nothing alike, of course: on such a level playing field, the fans have no one to defend their rights but their fellows in the community itself, no laws to fall back on but self-regulated norms, nor can they hope to enjoy a reward for their work beyond communal recognition. As volunteers spending their own time and money, the T&OM moderators are no media conglomerate in a cold, strictly business relationship with media consumers, but work out of goodwill and thus are more entitled to receive goodwill in turn. Possibly a simple in-group bias is at work: it is certainly much easier to identify with the interests of a fellow fan than with those of the media company that might present a danger to fandom as a whole. But possibly, in order to preserve the cohesive and inclusive nature that allows it to function as a subculture constantly justifying its own existence, it becomes necessary for fandom to adopt this extra-careful discourse concerning the ownership rights and private space of individual members. This is similar to the different attitudes toward plagiarism in fandom: lifting paragraphs wholesale from the original text is merely dismissed as lazy writing, while doing the same from another fan author's story usually results in widespread shunning (Hale 2002). Either way, this problematizes the now-popular image of fandom as an open space of learning as opposed to a space of commercial restriction, and even more so, its position opposite the cultural shift toward participation.
[6.7] On a concluding note: although A Teaspoon and an Open Mind did not change any of its policies as a result of the fighting_spoon incident, and despite several attempts to create alternate archives to serve as community hubs, the site continues to thrive and its popularity remains undiminished. Whether this is in spite of or because of its policies is hard to determine; the very fact of the conflict remains to illustrate the complicated shift that online fandom is undergoing, along with the medium within which it works.

7. Acknowledgments

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8. Note

1. As a large multifandom archive that only rarely serves as the main fan fiction repository of a fandom, Fanfiction.net is perhaps not the best comparison to make; however, it is the prevalent one made by participants in the discussion that I study, which I felt was telling.

9. Works cited


The magic of television: Thinking through magical realism in recent TV

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[0.1] Abstract—After decades in which television has been marked as more banal than bewitching, recalling the "magic of television" is more likely to evoke a sense of wonder for the perceived innocence of an earlier televisual audience than for television itself. With TV offered on demand, captured with DVRs, downloaded or watched streaming on the Web, purchased as DVD sets, miniaturized for private screenings, jumbo-sized for public spectacles, monitored in closed circuits, and accessed for open forums, once-mysterious television flows have flowed to new media forms, giving TV an appearing/disappearing, now-you-see-it/now-you-don't magical act of its own. Has TV disappeared, or has it multiplied—redoubled each time it's sawed in half, replicating like rabbits pulled out of a hat? Is it still TV or something else when programs are screened (as if through a magic curtain) via today's delivery systems?

[0.2] Keywords—Fantasy; Magical realism; Reality; Television


[1] "Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen. It is with great pleasure that I introduce you to the magic of television." It was with these words on August 26, 1936, that BBC announcer Leslie Mitchell inaugurated the first public television broadcast (Wheen 1985:1949) (note 1). Nearly three-quarters of a century later, that phrase, "the magic of television," is still with us, even as its connotations have changed, along with transformations in depictions and deployments of the televisual. After decades in which television has been marked as more banal than bewitching, recalling the magic of television is now more likely to evoke a sense of wonder for the perceived innocence of an earlier televisual audience than for television itself. At the time of Mitchell's statement, the magic of television consisted of its proclaimed power to transport viewers even as they remained set in front of a console—the ability to reveal other worlds, constructing TV itself as otherworldly. Its magic lay in its supposed transparent, objective nature (paradoxically, in its factual, not fantasmatic capacities), seemingly allowing viewers to see through it to a real happening elsewhere but still miraculously visible at home. Today, this belief in transparency has long been critiqued
(as much by everyday viewers as by scholars), and the transportation of television is as evident in how TV has magically transported itself into other media realms as in how it transports its viewers. With TV offered on demand, captured with DVRs, downloaded or watched streaming on the Web, purchased as DVD sets, miniaturized for private screenings, jumbo-sized for public spectacles, monitored in closed circuits, and accessed for open forums, once-mysterious television flows have flowed to new media forms, giving TV an appearing/disappearing, now-you-see-it/now-you-don't magical act of its own. Has TV disappeared, or has it multiplied—redoubled each time it's sawed in half, replicating like rabbits pulled out of a hat? Is it still TV or something else when programs are screened (as if through a magic curtain) via today's delivery systems?

[2] Given its alchemical transmutations, there's a different kind of magic involved as television has transformed itself within our media reality. Likewise, this reality is itself transforming, requiring imaginative modes of thinking about television and the real within our mediaverse—creative ways of talking about these appearing/disappearing acts that can account for both their prosaic and perplexing aspects, their ordinary and extraordinary elements. This may seem to require entirely new terms and traditions, ones that can go beyond the binaries by which we typically categorize cultural texts. Yet there is a well-known creative tradition (or, more accurately, traditions) emphasizing exactly these kinds of transformations between levels of reality and mediation, fact and fantasy: the textual formations of magical realism.

[3] While suggestively signifying the mix of the mysterious and the mundane, the term magical realism has itself been mysteriously absent from most discussions of TV (at least of U.S., and other Western and/or global northern, TV formats). Despite the productivity of the phrase in art and literary criticism (where, interestingly, the term means quite different things, as it has been taken to indicate a new objectivity of extreme realism in art historical accounts of visual work, but a marvelous unreality in literary categorizations of written work), the term is not deployed often in regard to television. TV might be the ideal medium for thinking together logics of the real and the unreal, the "objective" and the "out of this world." Why then isn't the term used more—whether to name a particular genre on television, an available strategy of representation on which a variety of TV texts might rely, or, most intriguingly, the status of television as a whole?

[4] One possible aspect of this, as previously noted, has to do with the disappearing/reappearing act of TV in our multimediascape; another is tied to the visibility or invisibility of various traditions in our multinationalscape. Paradoxically (though with the kind of paradox that magical realism itself might relish), the visibility or realization of certain national traditions on the world stage—their real dominance in
terms of global media traffic—may lead to an invisibility, a derealization, of their appeal to the unreal. That is, their very certainty in terms of cultural recognition may lead to a curious lack of recognition of the ways in which they register uncertainty. Thus, while magical realism has been associated with various national, regional, or diasporic traditions (obviously Latin American narrative, and also Yiddish, African, and Indian narrative, among others, that comment on the place of the marginalized), it has not been seen as having a prominent place in dominant Anglo-American culture—precisely *because* of that culture's prominence. In other words, magic realism has been theorized as a form that, in narrating the emergence of the mystical within the matter-of-fact, recognizes that matters of fact—particularly facts of power and dominance and of who has the dominance to mark certain things as fact—must be interrogated. In this way, it registers the presence of the other—not only the otherworldly literalized in the mysticism or magic, but also the worldly other, those who historically have been othered on the world stage. If magical realism has therefore been seen as a form that gives voice to the disempowered (by imbuing with power that which is not acknowledged as part of the rational—and economically rationalized—world), then it may make sense that it has been associated more with globally disadvantaged cultures than with globally hegemonic ones. But, of course, it is precisely the status of sense that magical realism (not to mention television) calls into question—which is exactly why TV may be an interesting place for (or displacement of) this form.

[5] In fact, there are a number of recent U.S. television programs that might usefully be claimed as magical realist, even though these are typically categorized, by both industry and audience, through other genre and marketing divisions. Consider, for example, premium TV's *Six Feet Under* (HBO, 2001), *Carnivale* (HBO, 2003), *Dead Like Me* (Showtime, 2003), and *John From Cincinnati* (HBO, 2007), and, from standard network television, *Tru Calling* (Fox, 2003), *Wonderfalls* (Fox, 2004), *Lost* (ABC, 2004), *Heroes* (NBC, 2006), *Pushing Daisies* (ABC, 2006), *Journeyman* (NBC, 2006), *Eli Stone* (ABC, 2007), and *Life on Mars* (ABC, 2008). There are many others that deploy magical moments: from soap operas that include stories of supernatural enchantment (not only soaps explicitly marketed as paranormal serials, like *Passions* [NBC, 1999], but apparently normal serials too, like *Days of Our Lives* [NBC, 1965] and *One Life to Live* [ABC, 1968]) to prime-time series (like parts of the biblically inspired *Kings* [NBC, 2009], the "satanically" inspired *Reaper* [CW, 2007]), and just the secularly inspired civic quirkiness of the cop show *The Unusuals* [ABC, 2009]). And, of course, there are aspects of magic across science fiction and fantasy programming. Given that latter association, it is tempting to read U.S. TV's turn to magical realism in terms of the attention paid to fantasy programs that have gained cult TV status and thus cult TV's fan base (note 2). Yet, while the connections to fantasy genres are telling in some ways, they don't tell the whole story; for rather
than only focusing on the fantastic, it is equally important to read this in terms of the complex, shifting notions of the real in even the most prosaic everyday television.

[6] It is exactly in its movement between and across the fantastic and the realistic that magical realism (dis)locates itself, registering the determinate indeterminacy of interstitial cultures by its refusal to come down solely on one side or the other—just like television, in its own move between fantasy and reality. Both of these terms (fantasy and reality) designate TV genres—and not just any TV genres, but ones that are especially significant to commercial television's place (even continued survival) in today's multichannel, multimedia, multinational corporate universe. Faced with both increased competition for users from other media arenas and increased correlation in ownership across these arenas (and so with paradoxical pressures toward, on the one hand, unification and, on the other, fragmentation), television has come up with its own dual, if seemingly opposed, modes of response. This is evident in not only technological but also generic developments, as commercial TV has turned in one direction toward reality programming and, simultaneously, in the other direction of fantasy.

[7] Both might be seen as strategic choices for TV today. Reality programming is, of course, relatively cheap to produce, and, given the fill-in-the-blanks structure of many popular reality shows, such formats are easy to trade on the world market, gaining a desirable status in the transnational traffic in media/informational products. Further, the emphasis on reality might be seen (at least by the industry) as strategically desirable for television's status more specifically: reiterating announcements of the medium's privileged relation to liveness, collective immediacy, and eventfulness, reality programming can still try to stake a claim for television over and above other media forms. Conversely, fantasy TV operates not by trying to claim priority over other media but precisely by connecting and converging with them: television's fantastic programs depend on constructing—and, more significantly, spurring viewers to construct—expansive universes that encourage further exploration across a wide range of technological, textual, and performative options (through wikis, blogs, games, fan productions, conventions both live and virtual, and so on).

[8] With, then, the simultaneous development of both of these (at first glance polar) strategies—the real and the fantastic—the saliency of magical realism to TV (even, or maybe especially, to reality TV) becomes more apparent. After all, just as much as fantasy programs, reality TV too promises magic. It has productively been read in terms of its pedagogically realist function for neoliberal society (teaching us, as Laurie Ouellette [2004] and Anna McCarthy [2007] have demonstrated, to discipline and take responsibility for ourselves). But as part of this mystifying ideology, reality programming also encourages us to hope for the magic moment, the enchanted
occurrence that exceeds rational, self-optimizing, disciplinary strategies. The enormous impact made by *Britain's Got Talent*'s Susan Boyle might serve as an example here, described, as it was, as a case of the eruption of magic where enchantment was least expected, the extraordinary emerging from the most ordinary of both programming and persona.

[9] Such an example speaks to the very status of reality itself today—or, more accurately, to the status of realities, as it is precisely the coexistence of different levels of realness that marks our televvisual universes (both the explicitly magical and the more seemingly mundane ones, not to mention both the televvisual universes that appear on our media screens and the universe, partly constituted by media operations themselves, in which we live). But while we exist within and across these realities, we don't yet have a particularly effective language with which to discuss this, as attempts to analyze how the factual and the fantastical inform and intervene in one another tend to reiterate the very (il)logic of inadequate binaries—a reiteration that, as Justin Lewis has noted, defines "the epistemological contradictions already involved in watching television" (2004:289). Lewis makes this observation in his essay "The Meaning of Real Life," in which he considers the ways in which television depends on maintaining epistemological distinctions between real and unreal, authentic and inauthentic (allowing viewers to make sense and pleasure from these differences), even as it also disrupts those distinctions (equally then allowing viewers to play with TV's ironies). This yields a popular epistemology that is evident, for instance, in how viewers might shift between the materiality of TV production and the make-believe of TV diegeses in predicting program outcomes, how those outcomes might relate to interpretations of both the televisual and the real, how that "real televisual" might operate to produce meanings and communities, how those communities might revel in, say, the display of authentic pretense or pretend authenticity (as much as either option on its own), and so on.

[10] We all know cases like this…but what sort of mode of knowing, exactly, is it? In my own work on TV's epistemology, I too have been interested in television's existence on the border between what we typically think of opposite sides—the public and the private, the ordinary and the extraordinary, the normal and the strange—and in attempting to find ways of terming TV's epistemology that do not simply reproduce those binaries and so might allow us to come to terms with it most productively. Previously, I've considered this in relation to sexuality—focusing on the ways in which TV both expands and evacuates knowledge of sexuality, making it, like something slipped into a magician's trunk or closet, variously appear and disappear (Joyrich 2001). But, of course, constructions of sexuality are hardly the only cultural formations that materialize or vanish through televvisual epistemology, and so other tricks for apprehension are likewise critical. This brings me again to the productions of magical
realism and the suggestion that this form might help us better understand and negotiate categories of real/unreal, expected/unexpected, credible/incredible, self/other, us/them: categories central to the very operations of television (as it articulates the domestic with the social, the newsworthy with the humdrum) but ones that have been unsettled and reworked in a mass-mediated world that relies on these terms even as it destabilizes them.

Moreover, considering television in terms of magical realism might unsettle and rework not only how we assess TV but also how we assess this representational modality. For, as noted above, in its expression of a different reality, magical realism has, most often, been linked to so-called different cultures: cultures seen as somehow embodying difference from the rationalized norms of Western capitalist modernity. It has thus not been seen as central to mainstream American society—despite, as I've been suggesting, its growing centrality to the United States' most mainstream medium, television. Even heightening that paradox is the fact that those U.S. TV programs that stand as perhaps the clearest examples of the genre emphasize not "minority traditions" but "Americana" itself: for instance, the 1930s Dust Bowl era that provides the setting for the miraculous occurrences in *Carnivale*; the surf-and-skateboard culture that draws the mysterious John from Cincinnati westward to California; the attachments to Mom and Pop, apple pie, and a boy's best friend (his dog) that define the characters in the enchanting *Pushing Daisies*. How should we evaluate the emergence of the spectacular within these most vernacular symbols and sites, the otherworldly within such ordinary worlds? What is the work of the magical for such overworked tropes?

It is tempting, certainly, to read this as television domesticating the difference associated with magical realism. Yet it is perhaps more useful to see how magical realist TV might open up spaces for the marginal and the other within the normative everyday, allowing us then to rethink the binary of marginal versus mainstream as much as the other polarities previously mentioned. Indeed, within our current mediascape, that conceptual binary seems particularly inadequate, given the complex intermedial webs across texts, technologies, and communities (and thus across multidimensional realities) that make any such division impossible. It is this imbrication of the margin and the center, the normative and the strange, the existent and the emergent, the rational and the irrational (or, more precisely, the nonrationalized) that magical realism registers—and it is also precisely this imbrication that defines the televisual today.

Let me end, then, with one final example: the U.S. TV show *Chuck* (NBC, 2007), about (as promotional materials describe it) an "average computer-whiz-next-door" who receives an encoded e-mail message that, with its burst of digitized video
imagery, turns him into a kind of bio-DVR, a storehouse of information and images (a superflow of jumbled bits that span the archives of dramatic, comedic, and reality surveillance TV spy shows). At first glance, this program might not seem to fit the genre I'm attempting to map, as the wondrous things that befall our regular-guy protagonist aren't due to magic per se but to technology—specifically, to the intersect of multiple media modes within Chuck's brain. These make him not just a whiz but a literalized media wizard, embodying a cybermancy that, in the narrative of the program, both compares and contrasts to the more mundane reality of the big box electronics store in which Chuck works (the Buy More, which his quirky but ordinary cohorts have redubbed with the magical name of Buymoria to describe their adventures in the world of techno/media consumerism). Yet by narrating the ways in which one might be enchanted (literally) by media technologies, the program shares many features with the more obviously magical realist shows previously mentioned. Indeed, by intermixing televisual fantasies (through its parodic references to the improbabilities of TV spy, sci-fi, and superhero programs) with everyday realities (through its parodic references to the "buy more" ethos of consumer capitalism), Chuck illustrates that intersect of the mystical and the mundane, the real and the virtual, that defines not only magical realism, but television itself. It is at this intersection that we now all find ourselves, once again welcomed to the magic of television—even if, or especially because, it's now a fantastically enhanced TV. More so than making magical realism irrelevant to television, this makes that term even more suggestive, directing us not just toward the tricks of TV but to the importance of imaginatively conjuring a response.

Notes

1. And, of course, the phrase "the magic of television" is even more associated with early television marketing discourses than with early television broadcasts themselves—especially in the United States, which repeated the slogan to promote TV as a consumer object.

2. Or this may be less of a turn than a return, as one might make connections between some of today's magical realist programs and what Lynn Spigel has called the fantastic sitcoms of the 1960s (the zany comedies like Bewitched, I Dream of Jeannie, My Mother the Car, Mr. Ed [Spigel 1991]) and/or with the more dramatic, classic anthology series Twilight Zone or The Outer Limits. Such historical precedents are important to consider; yet they should not be taken to indicate that the recent spate of magical TV texts simply manifests an extension of the fantasy genre, since, I argue, there are other precedents (including those from reality forms) that are equally significant to TV's magical realist hybridity.
Works cited


1. Digital publishing and the changing face of scholarship

[1.1] Contemporary academic debates about online publishing raise important questions about the future of scholarly writing practices as more academics begin to explore the multinodal and participatory digital environment, seeking not only to study it but also to engage in the praxis and community building it makes possible. Through exploring why media studies scholars might choose to participate in online endeavors like In Media Res (http://mediacommons.futureofthebook.org/imr/), I want to show how digital interactive technologies might enable a rethinking of the forms and functions of scholarly writing.

[1.2] Many scholars now have their own blogs and actively use these spaces to comment on emerging practices, engage in conversations with colleagues, students, and curious Web surfers, and work through their intellectual processes in public. By emphasizing the critical process over its finished product and by engaging in open discussion while works are still in progress, they create new forms of networked, cross-disciplinary, and collaborative scholarship and teach critical thinking and digital literacy skills in new ways. Other scholars are beginning to experiment with multimediated essays, scholarly gaming initiatives, and fan/activist mash-up efforts,
rewriting the grammar of academic publishing in the process. Still more are trying out their material on new audiences, searching for ways to engage in conversations with nonacademic communities instead of ignoring, critiquing, or lecturing them. This last approach poses a disciplinary challenge, as online communities may resist hierarchical forms of knowledge formation. In other words, scholarly writing online must not only form its arguments differently but also, perhaps, repurpose argumentation as conversation, with the academic recast as a member of a community, stewarding and participating in discussions, rather than as an expert explaining the community to itself.

[1.3] In many ways, the symposium element of Transformative Works and Cultures attempts to offer a space where multiple members of a community, some of whom are academics while others are not, are given equal opportunity to address one another. One of the premises guiding TWC's mission is that fandom and academia are not mutually exclusive communities (though they have often been encouraged to think of themselves as such). In recognizing the intersection of overlapping identities, TWC offers scholars the opportunity not only to address nonacademics, but to engage them as fellow cultural citizens. It allows academics to write as netizens, not just about them.

[1.4] In most cases, though, academic reward and incentive systems do not yet take into account digital forms of scholarly endeavor. As Kathleen Fitzpatrick has astutely noted in her post to The Valve (http://www.thevalve.org), even as avenues of traditional academic publishing continue to decline and digital models become vital as both alternative sites of publication and innovative modes of scholarship, the academy has continued to dismiss online initiatives as not meeting the "rigorous" standards needed for tenure and career advancement. A new paradigm of peer review is needed, one that serves the needs of not only the institution and the discipline, but the wider community as well.

[1.5] Quite simply, we must reevaluate our modes of scholarly engagement and processes for credentialing expertise in a digital world. By continuing to value—and to romantically idealize—a secluded writing practice, media scholars fail to engage with communities that associate credibility with the foregrounding of ongoing and cumulative process rather than finished product. This has not only handicapped innovative scholarship and the development of peer networks but also alienated many nonacademics, who view the work that results as undemocratic and condescending. The end result is a growing disconnect between scholars and the public they serve, precisely because the process of critical analysis is made to seem proprietary and removed from everyday experience.
Academic assessments of credibility continue to emphasize virtuoso performances of individual intellectual achievement (in the classroom, conference panel, or journal article) over communally built knowledge. We need to change this hierarchical display of expertise to meet the criteria for digital credibility. Media scholars should seek to be stewards of conversation rather than purveyors of knowledge. Yet in order for academics to assume leadership roles within larger communities of activists, citizens, consumers, and producers, we must first be willing to be members of such communities, and we must recognize that nonacademic forms of knowledge are often articulated quite differently from academic forms. This model promotes building knowledge networks out into "alternative" communities (from an academic point of view), and such networks would be a revitalizing addition to the ways in which academic knowledge is currently disseminated: that is, primarily through genealogies of scholars and scholarship created by the master-apprentice model that prevails in the humanities academy today.

Presenting work in progress is a critical part of fostering participant cultures and emergent knowledge communities. Allowing work to become "lost" or embedded in the fabric of an ongoing conversation, in which lateral connections between existing ideas and fresh contributions are the norm, is essential if academic scholarship is to once again fulfill its role of provoking critical discourse and encouraging diverse perspectives.

Moreover, if we want to teach our students to be critical thinkers and writers, we must be willing to show them our own missteps and struggles, not just the finished results. We must be willing to prioritize the process and progression of critical thought over its finished product and show students the mechanisms through which finished works are created, so that they can evaluate and learn from them, as well as the works themselves. Doing so would illuminate the critical process, which is often shrouded from them. By foregrounding the process and inviting feedback from myriad communities at an earlier stage than the traditional blind peer review, we might make transparent the development of critical writing, encourage increased sharing and critical discussion within those communities, and expose students to both the pains and rewards of critical analysis.

2. Changing models in practice: In Media Res

In Media Res (IMR) is one of several emerging sites that experiment with new approaches to scholarly writing in the digital era. It is currently the most visible project created by MediaCommons, a networked scholarly environment being developed by Kathleen Fitzpatrick and myself, in collaboration with the Institute for the Future of the Book (IFB). MediaCommons is attempting to reimagine what academic publishing and
scholarly review processes might look like in the digital age. Kathleen and I, with the support, encouragement, and enthusiasm of Bob Stein and Ben Vershbow at the IFB, first began to map out what this environment might look like after a workshop organized by the IFB and the Annenberg School at USC in May 2006 to address problems with the current state of academic publishing. MediaCommons and IMR were first introduced at the Flow conference in October 2006, and our editorial board was formed soon afterward. The MediaCommons Web site was recently redesigned, thanks in part to a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities.

[2.2] Though MediaCommons was initially envisioned as a digital scholarly press, we quickly realized that academics publishing in a digital environment required not only new modes of writing, but also new ways of thinking about the functions of scholarly writing. Thus we reconceptualized MediaCommons as a scholarly network dedicated to shifting the focus of scholarship back to the circulation of discourse by transforming what it means to publish in a digital environment. MediaCommons is dedicated to making the process of scholarly writing and publishing visible and to encouraging authors, editors, and readers to engage one another throughout. In so doing, we hope that new scholarly processes and forms of writing will emerge, at once collaborative, multinodal, open-ended, and multidirectional. We are currently seeking further funding from the Arthur Mellon Foundation to develop and test an online peer-to-peer review protocol that we hope will become the standard in evaluating online scholarship. The grant is coauthored with NYU Press.

[2.3] IMR is published every weekday and is dedicated to experimenting with collaborative, multimodal forms of online scholarship. Each day, a different media scholar curates a 30-second to 3-minute clip accompanied by a 300- to 350-word impressionistic provocation. IMR offers scholars opportunities to engage in both new ways of writing and new ways of thinking about writing in a digital environment. IMR also regularly hosts theme weeks, which are designed to generate a networked conversation between curators. All the posts in that week will thematically overlap, and the participating curators agree to comment on one another's work.

[2.4] We use the title curator because like a curator in a museum, a scholar who posts on IMR is repurposing an object (in this case, a media object) that already exists and providing context through commentary, which frames the object in a particular way. Our goal is to promote an online dialogue among scholars and the public about contemporary approaches to studying media. Curatorial notes are purposely short because they are intended to enable a lively debate in which the sum total of the conversation will be more valuable than any one particular voice.

[2.5] To date, we have had 361 original curatorial posts to the site from 236 different contributors, including some of the top scholars in the field of media studies. In May
2009, IMR received 8,907 unique visitors (287 per day), averaging 2.67 visits each to the site, for an average of 719 visits per day.

[2.6] IMR recently added to and improved the site's features. We are in the process of adding a feedback feature that will allow curators to get a better sense of how their posts are being used (for example, in research projects, in classroom activities, for intellectual stimulation), which is a necessary step in establishing the legitimacy of these forms of scholarship in the eyes of institutional review boards. We are also developing a customization tool that will allow teachers to create password-protected versions of IMR posts that can be incorporated into lessons. The tool will allow teachers to add lesson-specific questions and prompts for their students.

[2.7] If you are interested in curating a post for In Media Res or have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me.
Repackaging fan culture: The regifting economy of ancillary content models

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Abstract—As "Web 2.0 companies speak about creating communities around their products and services, rather than recognizing that they are more often courting existing communities with their own histories, agendas, hierarchies, traditions, and practices" (Jenkins et al. 2009a), media fandom is rapidly being constructed as a fertile battleground where the territory between online gift economies and commodity culture will be negotiated. My concern, as fans and acafans continue to vigorously debate the importance or continued viability of fandom's gift economy and focus on flagrant instances of the industry's attempt to co-opt fandom, is that the subtler attempts to replicate fannish gift economies aren't being met with an equivalent volume of discussion or scrutiny.

Keywords—Ancillary content model; Commercialization; Convergence culture; Fandom; Gift economy; Transmedia storytelling


1. Protecting fandom's gift economy/Fandom's gift economy as protectorate

Studies of fan culture have been returning with increasing frequency to Lewis Hyde's 1983 anthropological study The Gift: Imagination and the Erotic Life of Property in an attempt to reaffirm the gift economy's central role in the construction and maintenance of online communities (Jenkins et al. 2009a; Hellekson 2009). In particular, recent work on online gift economies has acknowledged the inability to engage with gift economies and commodity culture as disparate systems, as commodity culture begins selectively appropriating the gift economy's ethos for its own economic gain. As "Web 2.0 companies speak about creating communities around their products and services, rather than recognizing that they are more often courting existing communities with their own histories, agendas, hierarchies, traditions, and practices" (Jenkins et al. 2009a), media fandom is rapidly being constructed as a fertile battleground where the territory between online gift economies and commodity
culture will be negotiated. The oft-cited harbinger of such a conflict is FanLib (De Kosnik 2009; Hellekson 2009; Jenkins 2007b), a short-lived fan fiction archive that sought to monetize fan production in exchange for prizes and proximity to the participating shows' producers. FanLib's fatal flaw, according to Karen Hellekson, was "misreading 'community' as 'commodity'"(Hellekson 2009:118). In its attempt to commercialize fandom's gift economy, FanLib was overwhelmingly viewed as an attempt by "(male) venture capitalists to profit financially from (female-generated) fan fiction" (Hellekson 2009:117). FanLib remains the most histrionic example of an attempted (and failed) commercial co-optation of fandom, arguably overshadowing the discussion and analysis of more covert and complex instances of corporate attempts to construct their own fannish spaces for profit. My concern, as fans and acafans continue to vigorously debate the importance or continued viability of fandom's gift economy and focus on flagrant instances of the industry's attempt to co-opt fandom, is that the subtler attempts to replicate fannish gift economies aren't being met with an equivalent volume of discussion or scrutiny.

[1.2] There are a number of important reasons why fandom (and those who study it) continue to construct gift and commercial models as discrete economic spheres. This strategic definition of fandom as a gift economy serves as a defensive front to impede encroaching industrial factions. Hellekson (2009), for one, constructs the strictly anticommmercial nature of fandom's gift economy as a form of legal and social protection. Correctly noting that "at the heart of this anticommmercial requirement of fan works is fans' fear that they will be sued by producers of content for copyright violation" (Hellekson 2009:114) Hellekson goes on to argue that fandom's gift economy also functions as a form of exclusion, a way for fan communities to preserve their "own autonomy while simultaneously solidifying the group" (117). Thus, there is both a legal and social imperative to view fandom as transforming the objects of commodity culture into gifts, a transformative process "where value gets transformed into worth, where what has a price becomes priceless, where economic investment gives way to sentimental investment" (Jenkins et al. 2009b), and where bonds of community are formed and strengthened.

[1.3] For other scholars, who foresee the commercialization of fandom's gift economy as an alternately unnerving and empowering inevitability, the possibility of fans monetizing their own modes of production is posed as an alternate form of preemptive "protection." Justly concerned that fan fiction authors are potentially "waiting too long to decide to profit from their innovative art form, and allowing an interloper to package the genre in its first commercially viable format" (De Kosnik 2009:120), Abigail De Kosnik argues that the "rewards of participating in a commercial market...might be just as attractive as the rewards of participating in a community's gift culture" (123). Here, the possibility of fans initiating the commercialization of fan production is put forth as
an alternative mode of preserving fandom's gift economy, thus gifting insiders, rather than outsiders, the right to profit. Although monetizing fan practice to preserve the underlying ideals of fandom's gift economy might seem counterintuitive, De Kosnik's structuring concern about who will ultimately profit from fandom is well founded. As the industry begins to solicit fan art and fan films/vids to include on their properties' advertisement-laced official Web sites with more frequency, De Kosnik's model clearly identifies the value of fan labor and encourages fans to develop a competitive model to profit from their labors of love rather than continuing to feed an industrial promotional machine.

[1.4] Richard Barbrook, reflecting back on his 1998 essay "The Hi-Tech Gift Economy" in 2005, acknowledges that constructing commodity culture and gift economies in binary terms is problematic. Describing the online economy as a fundamentally "mixed economy," Barbrook (2005) argues that "money-commodity and gift relations are not just in conflict with each other, but also co-exist in symbiosis," even as each economic model "threaten[s] to supplant the other." Far from existing on opposite poles, commodity economies and gift economies are always already enmeshed, and there is perhaps no better example of this than fandom itself (De Kosnik 2009), where grassroots production is inspired by the consumption of commercial media texts. Although few fans or scholars would deny that commercial culture is a defining component of fandom, directionality in terms of how these disparate economic forms mix has always been central to the celebration of fandom's gift economy. Fan studies embraces the move from consumption to production and the reconstruction of texts that circulate within commercial economy into fan-produced texts that circulate as gifts within fan communities. FanLib's efforts to supplant fandom's gift economy with a commercialized model of fan production, on the other hand, was vocally denounced by fans and ultimately led to the site's closure in 2008.

[1.5] Although De Kosnik asserts that "the existence of commercial markets for goods does not typically eliminate parallel gift economies" (De Kosnik 2009:123) and that the commercialization of fan practice might actually be empowering for female fan authors, it is precisely this parallelism that is disconcerting when applied to commercial appropriations of fandom's gift economy model. Again, this is an issue of directionality—specifically, in which direction the profits flow between fandom and the industry that is poised to embrace a narrowly defined version of fandom for purely promotional purposes. Media producers, primarily through the lure of "gifted" ancillary content aimed at fans through official Web sites, are rapidly perfecting a mixed economy that obscures its commercial imperatives through a calculated adoption of fandom's gift economy, its sense of community, and the promise of participation.
The regifting economy that is emerging, I argue, is the result of the industry's careful cultivation of a parallel fan space alongside grassroots formations of fandom. By precariously attempting to balance the communal ideals of fandom's gift economy with their commercial interests, the regifting economy of ancillary content models in particular can be viewed as attempting to regift a narrowly defined and contained version of fandom to a general audience. This regifted version of fandom that ancillary content models represent exchanges grassroots fandom's organically generated output and fluid exchange of fan works for the regulation and resale of fan works through contests and the elusive promise of credibility. Although unofficial fan works and official ancillary content both contribute to the narrative world of a series and do similar textual work, the impetus behind their creation and exchange is fundamentally different. As Hyde (1983:70) stresses, "there are many gifts that must be refused" as a result of the motives behind their presentation; thus, the term regifting economy is meant to synthesize the negative social connotations tied to the practice of regifting with a brief analysis of why acafans and existing fan communities should be aware and critical of these planned communities and their purpose as a site of initiation for the next generation of fans.

2. Regifting: The Seinfeldian roots of a social taboo

Popular culture may locate the popular origin of the term regifting and its negative cultural connotations in a 1995 episode of Seinfeld titled "The Label Maker." Elaine coins the term when she realizes that the titular gift, which she had given to a friend, has been recycled and given to Jerry. Jerry, trying to defuse the situation, suggests that it might simply be an homage to Elaine's original gift. Later in the episode, after the regifting is confirmed, Jerry and George have the following conversation about gift etiquette as Jerry contemplates trying to take back a pair of tickets he had offered to the offending regifter:

Jerry: I can't call Tim Whatley and ask for the tickets back.

George: You just gave them to him two days ago, he's gotta give you a grace period.

Jerry: Are you even vaguely familiar with the concept of giving? There's no grace period.

George: Well, didn't he regift the label maker?

Jerry: Possibly.
George: Well, if he can regift, why can't you degift? ("The Label Maker")

George's fundamental disregard for the unwritten rules of etiquette that surround gifting, reinforced by Jerry's pointed remark that George isn't "even vaguely familiar with the concept of giving," situates George firmly within the logic of commercial culture, from his invocation of the "grace period" we associate with the purchase and return of commodities, to his moral relativism on the subject of regifting or "degifting" (defined in *Seinfeld* as taking a gift back). Conversely, we might frame Jerry as a spokesman for the moral economy of gift exchanges. Henry Jenkins and others (2009a), adopting the term *moral economy* from social historian E. P. Thompson and questioning its applicability to the exchange of digital media, state that the moral economy is "governed by an implicit set of understandings about what is 'right' or 'legitimate' for each player to do." As evidenced by Jerry's response in "The Label Maker" and in the term's ongoing cultural use, the social stigmas attached to regifting are rooted in the act's inherent subterfuge, breaking the rules of the moral economy by masking something old as something new, something unwanted as desirable. If "the cardinal difference between gift and commodity exchange [is] that a gift establishes a feeling-bond between two people" (Hyde 1983:57), then "we cannot really become bound to those who give us false gifts" (70). Regifting literally presents a false gift, in large part because no thought has been given to the construction or purchase of a gift that is meaningful or specific to the recipient, and consequently is less likely to forge a bond between the giver and the recipient.

The social taboo of degifting does not originate in this episode, but rather is a politically correct reworking of the term *Indian giver*, broadly defined by Hyde (1983:3) as one who is "so uncivilized as to ask us to return a gift he has given." Hyde (1983:4) opens his analysis of gift economies and their function with a historical overview of the term's misuse, arguing that the original Indian givers "understood a cardinal property of the gift: whatever we have been given is supposed to be given away again, not kept." Framing the derogatory evolution of the Indian giver as capitalism's inability to comprehend "such a limited sense of private property," Hyde (1983:4) introduces the term "white man keeper" to describe members of commodity culture whose "instinct is to remove property from circulation." This construction of men as agents of capitalism with no understanding of the (frequently feminized) gift economy or its functioning continues to be evoked in anxieties surrounding the masculine/corporate exploitation of female fan communities and their texts.

FanLib, whose male board of directors in no way attempted to understand or reach out to the female fan community from whose labor they were attempting to profit, is a textbook example (Jenkins 2007b), but it is also a spectacular case that
potentially overshadows more covert examples. To some extent, we can characterize online female fan communities as the Indians in this Hydean analogy, and the media producers pushing these ancillary content models as the "white man keepers" of online fan culture who have failed to understand that it is the reciprocity and free circulation of fan works within female fan communities that identifies them as communities. By only encouraging circulation within the boundaries of a text's official Web site, or by restricting the circulation of fan works they've commissioned, media producers have made it clear that like the white man keepers before them, they fundamentally misunderstand how online fan communities form and continue to coalesce. Fan communities, in turn, continue to embrace the "cardinal property of the gift" (Hyde 1983:4): its unrestricted movement. These characterizations are compounded by the fact that male fans have historically sought professional status or financial compensation for their creative works more frequently than their female counterparts, and that fan practices deemed "masculine" (game modding, fan filmmaking) are generally considered more viable as professional calling cards (De Kosnik 2009). It has long been the case that male audiences are more valued and courted, but as media producers shape their definition of an ideal fandom, it is increasingly one that is defined as fanboy specific, or one that teaches its users to consume and create in a fanboyish manner by acknowledging some genres of fan production and obscuring others.

3. White man keepers: Ancillary content models and the regifting economy

Ancillary content models, which are typically constructed around television series with cult or fannish appeal and located on the show's official (network-sponsored) Web site, offer audiences a glut of "free" narrative and behind-the-scenes content in the form of Webisodes, Web comics, blogs, video blogs, episodic podcasts, and so on (note 1). Positioned precariously between official/commercial transmedia storytelling systems (Jenkins 2006:93–130) and the unofficial/gifted exchange of texts within fandom, ancillary content models downplay their commercial infrastructure by adopting the guise of a gift economy, vocally claiming that their goal is simply to give fans more—more "free" content, more access to the show's creative team. The rhetoric of gifting that accompanies ancillary content models, and the accompanying drive to create a community founded on this "gifted" content, is arguably more concerned with creating alternative revenue streams for the failing commercial model of television than it is with fostering a fan community or encouraging fan practices. Grappling with the growing problem of time-shifting, ancillary content models create a "digital enclosure" (Andrejevic 2007:2–3) within which they can carefully cultivate and
monitor an alternative, "official" fan community whose participatory value is measured by its consumption of advertisement-laced ancillary content.

[3.2] By regifting a version of participatory fan culture to a general audience unfamiliar with fandom's gift economy, these planned communities attempt to repackage fan culture, masking something old as something new, something unwanted (or unwieldy) as something desirable (or controllable, or profitable). Although it could be argued that fandom also polices its boundaries and subjects, its motivations for doing so are ultimately about protecting, rather than controlling, the ideological diversity of fannish responses to the text. As Hellekson (2009) notes, "learning how to engage [with fandom and its gift economy] is part of the initiation, the us versus them, the fan versus the nonfan." The "them," in this case, is both the creators of ancillary content models and their intended audience. That Hellekson frames fandom's gift economy, and learning to play by its unwritten communal rules, as an "initiation," a potential form of "exclusion," is especially telling. Although fandom responds to its own mainstreaming within convergence culture by fortifying its borders and rites of initiation, ancillary content models are opening their doors to casual viewers unfamiliar with what fandom has historically valued and how it functions. Whether or not ancillary content models are being actively deployed as a device to rein in and control fandom, they are serving as a potential gateway to fandom for mainstream audiences, and they are pointedly offering a warped version of fandom's gift economy that equates consumption and canonical mastery with community.

[3.3] When ancillary content models do actively attempt to replicate the reciprocity of fandom's gift economy by encouraging fans to submit their creative fan works (typically through contests for fan film or fan vids, or galleries for uploaded fan art), the legal and creative strictures they place on fans circumvents their efforts. One example is the Battlestar Galactica Videomaker Toolkit, which launched in 2007 (figure 1). In exchange for being offered raw downloadable audiovisual files from the series, fans would turn over the rights to their finished product to SciFi (now SyFy) and attach a promotional tag for the show. Importantly, the raw material offered to fans was primarily composed of clips of gun battles, Centurion robots, and ships careening through space—fodder that certainly targeted male fan filmmakers over members of the (predominantly female) vidding community. As this example suggests, ancillary content models offer few incentives for fans already enmeshed in grassroots creative fan communities to contribute, and there is consequently less opportunity for participants to be exposed to and initiated into those fan communities.
More frequently than not, fannish participation is restricted to enunciative forms of fan production (Fiske 1992:38), such as posting to message boards and the collaborative construction of the show’s wiki. Because the ultimate goal of these ancillary content models is ostensibly to create a "unified and coordinated entertainment experience" (Jenkins 2007a), it is unsurprising that a unification of the text, and an attempted unification of responses to the text, is a frequent by-product. This unification is frequently personified in the textual and creative authority of a fanboy author-god (note 2), who serves as both continuity watchdog and conveyor of meaning. The result, according to Kristina Busse (2006), is that "certain groups of fans can become legit if and only if they follow certain ideas, don't become too rebellious, too pornographic, don't read too much against the grain."

Given the long, gendered history of fan communities and their relationship with producers, and the frequent alignment of gift economies with "feminine" forms of social exchange, it's difficult not to construct those overseeing these ancillary content models as convergence culture's white man keepers, in a literal sense. Similar to Hyde's white man keepers, their contemporary counterparts are characterized by a desire to restrict the gift's movement and find some way to capitalize on it (Hyde 1983:4). Despite its glib pop-culture origins, the Seinfeld episode pointedly illustrates the golden rule of regifting: you ought never regift to the original giver or any of the giver's acquaintances. Perhaps one of the central reasons why fans continue to cast a wary eye at these planned communities and their construction of a "legitimate" fandom is because they recognize the gifts being given mass audiences as their own.

3. Notes

1. NBC's Web site for Heroes (http://www.nbc.comHeroes/evolutions/) is an ideal example of an ancillary content model, from the range of content offered to how
frequently it deploys buzzwords like community and interactive to offer the guise of participation. For a more detailed discussion of Battlestar Galactica's ancillary content model and its potential impact on fan production, see Scott (2008).

2. Fanboy author-gods might include Ronald D. Moore (Battlestar Galactica, 2003–2009), Tim Kring (Heroes, 2006–present), Erik Kripke (Supernatural, 2005–present), George Lucas (Star Wars, 1977 and later), and so on.

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Abstract—The current conventional wisdom is that rape is wrong because it is contrary to the interest in bodily autonomy: human beings are entitled to decide the conditions under which they will have sex. That is, it is grounded in an assumption that sexual pleasure is a good thing, and it is wrong to subject a person to sexual contact contrary to that person's intentions. But this assumption has not entirely replaced earlier assumptions, such as that sexual activity is always wrong and can be justified only by the need to reproduce the human race, or assumptions that sexual activity is right and good in the context of a lifelong marital commitment, but not otherwise. Here, I examine a number of subplots, themes and episodes within the series "Dollhouse," "Firefly," "Blake's 7," "The 4400," and "Dawson's Creek" with a view to analyzing the issues of sexual consent and autonomy raised within them.

Keywords—Consent issues; Dollhouse; Prostitution; Rape; TV

1. Introduction


[1.2] Looking back at the entire first season of the low-rated *Dollhouse*, one of my first reactions is that, while I was often disturbed by it, I'm sure that was the intention. But leaving aside the question of whether disturbing the audience is a legitimate creative tactic (it certainly isn't a good way to get a show renewed) I realize that the show raises many issues about sexual consent—perhaps with fully consensual sexual activities as a Goldilockean midpoint with issues of rape and dubious consent on one side and issues about prostitution on the other.

[1.3] Many fans didn't watch *Dollhouse*, or stopped watching early in its run, because of the vast sleaze potential of the premise. For those who have not seen the series: the Dollhouse is a kind of employment agency for Actives who can be hired, in exchange for presumably immense fees, to be programmed with any set of skills or personality traits so that they can do whatever the client wants; between engagements, the Actives are returned to a dormant state, where some flashes of their original personalities are displayed. The Actives are designated by call signals, so, for example, Caroline became Echo and Mellie became November—but there is a hybrid Echo/Caroline or November/Mellie who might even be stronger and more integrated than the original personality. To the extent that an Active's engagement involves some kind of sexual behavior, there is certainly prostitution involved, and possibly rape. The Dollhouse is also figured as a sort of play-for-pay Eden, so emotions about the sexual abuse of children can also be triggered; in their Sleeping state, the dolls suggest the ideal of childish innocence.

[1.4] But to the extent that the Actives are treated as property, it's just some of those comforting family values. In the case of the Dollhouse, Adelle DeWitt is the patriarch: she has the Pater Potestas (the right to decide which infants will be reared and which will be exposed or killed)—that is, who continues to get Treatments and return to the presumably blissful state of freedom from adult concerns and who goes to the Attic—a Sheol or Hell dimension that is mentioned but not seen in the first season of *Dollhouse*. 
[1.5] I suspect that it has always seemed like a stupid question to ask "Why is rape wrong?" but the obvious answer today is not the same as the previous obvious answer; in fact, it's a polar opposite. Dollhouse (by design, I think) makes the viewer uncomfortable by depicting activities that are wrong—sometimes using older concepts about sexual morality, sometimes new ones, but deploying them in ways that accentuate the clash between the two. The viewer (or voyeur?) has to decide which of these beliefs he or she actually holds. Indeed, one of the reasons Dollhouse so disturbs the potential fan is that the show looks at the dolls through the lens of more antiquated ideas about rape and prostitution. Couple that with the dolls' melding of child and sexually mature being, add a dash of mental incompetence and masquerade, and you have a recipe for fan avoidance.

2. Why is rape wrong?

[2.1] The current conventional wisdom is that rape is wrong because it is contrary to the interest in bodily autonomy: human beings are entitled to decide the conditions under which they will have sex. That is, it is grounded in an assumption that sexual pleasure is a good thing, and it is wrong to subject a person to sexual contact contrary to that person's intentions. But this assumption has not entirely replaced earlier assumptions, such as that sexual activity is always wrong and can be justified only by the need to reproduce the human race, or assumptions that sexual activity is right and good in the context of a lifelong marital commitment, but not otherwise. (Irrespective of their personal beliefs, people raised in Anglo-American culture are exposed not only to ideas about rape but to legal codes heavily influenced by this theology. The site http://www.newadvent.org has extensive archives of Patristic theology, including St. Ambrose, "Concerning Virginity," http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/34071.htm; St. Augustine, "On Holy Virginity," http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/1310.htm; St. Gregory of Nyssa, "On Virginity," http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/2907.htm).

[2.2] Traditionally, the rape of an unmarried woman was contrary to her father's interest in securing a good bride price for a virgin, and rape decreased the daughter's market value. But fortunately, the Old Testament allows a happy ending—the rapist can purchase the rape victim at a low, low discount price. In this analysis, a rapist is like someone who jumps a subway turnstile or someone who buys bootleg booze without the tax stamp; he's trying to avoid a payment obligation (Deuteronomy 22). As Susan Weidman Schneider (1985:220) notes,

[2.3] The Jewish laws concerning rape, which derive from a few verses in Deuteronomy, basically view women as helpless creatures, very much the property of their fathers or husbands. A convicted rapist must compensate a father or husband for the rape of his daughter or wife, and only an unmarried orphan is permitted to keep any fine awarded...One of the most
appalling consequences of the rape laws, and one that highlighted women's
dependent status, was that an unmarried woman who was raped became the
bride of the man who raped her.

[2.4] The rape of a married woman—by someone other than her husband—was
counter to the husband's interest in his wife's marital fidelity, as a guarantee of the
parentage of the sons who would inherit his property. Until very recently, U.S. law did
not recognize marital rape as a crime—by consenting to marriage, a woman had
consented to have sex whenever her husband wanted.

3. Why is prostitution wrong?

[3.1] Again, there has been a millennia-long consensus that prostitution is wrong,
but for changing reasons. There has always been a demand, among men who were
economically capable of paying, for at least some quantity and quality of sexual
services, despite religious ideologies calling for a celibate vocation, sexual abstinence,
or marriage, with fornication and adultery condemned as sinful. As for the nexus
between prostitution and rape, prostitution has often obtained official tolerance on the
grounds that without sexual outlet, men would ravish pure virgins.

[3.2] One aspect of the culture war in the United States is that some subcultures
continue to place a high value on premarital virginity, whereas others are skeptical
about the value of whatever virginal purity continues to exist. The former group would
say that prostitution is wrong because it is a form of nonmarital sexuality; the latter,
that it is wrong because people should have sex with partners who are genuinely fond
of them for aspects of their person or character beyond wallet level. Some Dollhouse
viewers say that if anything, the wrongfulness of prostitution is compounded by
inducing the provider of sexual services to believe that he or she is, in fact, genuinely
fond of the recipient of those services.

4. Tell me what you fear and I will tell you what you are

[4.1] Perhaps on a societal level we can paraphrase Brillat-Savarin by looking at the
culture's fears rather than its diet. The rationale for a law against statutory rape is that
there is an age of consent below which a person is deemed unable to understand the
consequences of sexual activity, so his or her consent is irrelevant. Some states have
"Romeo and Juliet" laws that decriminalize voluntary sexual contact where both parties
are close in age, on the theory that adults should be held criminally liable for taking
advantage of younger partners—a community interest that is not present when both
partners are young.
However, 21st-century U.S. culture is caught in a paradox: the age of sexual maturity continues to drop, while the age of social adulthood continues to increase. As the economy worsens and there are fewer and fewer jobs to be had, fewer and fewer young people will be able to achieve their own households, so social maturity will be delayed even further. So for at least several years, adolescents are both culturally idolized as the most sexually attractive members of society and are also viewed as children in need of protection from predators.

5. The special hell

[5.1] The Blake's 7 episode "Deliverance" has a character named Meegat, a priestess who decides that one of the lead characters, the antiheroic Avon, is actually the deity her people have been awaiting for centuries. Despite his quite high opinion of himself (shared by a large portion of the fandom) he spends most of the episode fending her off and trying to disabuse her of this belief.

[5.2] A Blake's 7 fan seeing the Firefly episode "Our Mrs. Reynolds" for the first time would therefore probably view Saffron as another Meegat and agree with Shepherd Book's warning that taking sexual advantage of an apparently guileless maiden is wrong—even though Saffron is, according to the laws of her hometown, Mal's wife. Mal initially agrees with this moral stance, but later comes close to yielding to Saffron's articulate (and naked) presentation of herself as a mature woman who genuinely desires him. If Saffron really were who she pretended to be, then it could be argued that Mal would be a rat to break Inara's heart by choosing Saffron over her, but he wouldn't be at fault in expressing mutual desire between consenting adults who have ended up married to each other (even if one of them didn't know it at the time).

[5.3] As it happened, however, Saffron is a scheming polygamist con artist, and it's a good thing she never met Captain Jack Harkness, or the universe would implode.

6. Damages

[6.1] Elizabeth Spencer's novella Light in the Piazza has been made into a movie and a Broadway musical. It's about two American women, a mother and daughter, in Italy in the 1950s, and the mother's moral crisis when a handsome young Italian aristocrat falls in love with her daughter. The problem, exacerbated by the difficulties of members of one culture understanding members of another culture, is that the daughter is not, or is not just, the charming innocent that her suitor sees—she experienced brain damage in an accident.
This might be a useful analogy for *Dollhouse*—it could be argued that in the resting state, the dolls have suffered induced brain damage. Or as those of us who have suffered critical-level computer problems might say, there has been a clean install but only the operating system has been reinstalled, none of the programs.

*The 4400* is about a group of alien abductees who return to Earth with various occult powers. One of the abductees (Lily) became pregnant during the abduction, and her daughter, Isabelle, goes immediately from being a very scary baby to being a beautiful young woman with serious boundary issues. Isabelle becomes sexually involved with Shawn, the leader of the returned "4400s." At first, Isabelle's father (or stepfather, or Joseph-like husband of Isabelle's mother) warns Shawn not to become involved with Isabelle, who is really a mere child despite her mature appearance and seductive demeanor. Shawn doesn't listen, although he soon becomes involved in a massive *Fatal Attraction*-esque meltdown that suggests that Adam's first and second wives would have had a lot to talk about—that Edenic innocence and Lilith's sexualized malice are easily joined in a single being.

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**7. Martyr of purity**

Yet in the discourse of rape and virginity, there is often a blurring, or even a crossing over, between blaming the rapist and blaming the victim. According to the Catholic.org Web site ([http://www.catholic.org/saints/saint.php?saint_id=78](http://www.catholic.org/saints/saint.php?saint_id=78)), St. Maria Goretti, "patron of youth, young women, purity, and victims of rape," died in 1902, when she was 12. An 18-year-old neighbor threatened to rape her at knifepoint. She told him she would rather die than submit; he stabbed her multiple times, and she died, although not before she forgave him. Maria Goretti was canonized in 1950. Catholic.org says that "she is called a martyr because she fought against Alexander's attempt at sexual assault," but the main factor in her canonization is that she forgave her attacker.

However, unless they happened to be calling Potential Slayers in Anzio that day, it doesn't seem physically impossible for an armed assailant to rape a 12-year-old girl, so her "submission" or "refusal to submit" says a lot more about concepts of maidenly purity and womanly honor than about sexual assault.

Even outside the context of rape, women can be blamed for tempting men into rape or into unchaste behavior. In *The Winter's Tale*, Polixenes says that as boys, he and Leontes were innocent twinned lambs frisking in the sun: "We knew not the doctrine of ill-doing nor dreamed that any did," and if they had continued that way, before the temptations thrown in their path by their eventual wives, they would have
been free from the taint of original sin. Hermione's reply is "Of this make no conclusion, lest you say your queen and I are devils" (*The Winter's Tale*, 1.2.67–85).

8. Who raped whom?

[8.1] Returning to *Dollhouse*, I think it's clear that Sierra's handler, Hearn, raped her—Sierra obviously knew that something painful, frightening, and unwanted had occurred when she was powerless to defend herself. Insofar as the dolls are conditioned to place absolute trust in their handlers, abuse of a doll by a handler is a kind of incestuous abuse within the created family that is a constant theme in the Jossverse (although it's a shame that she blamed poor Victor, a fellow doll who wasn't guilty and really liked her!). And even DeWitt, who is hardly the most punctilious of moralists, knew that there had been a crime requiring redress—indeed, a crime against a woman requiring redress by another woman (DeWitt) using November as a tool. DeWitt commands November to kill Hearn—more or less for committing a crime that DeWitt has committed herself—and I think the episode "Briar Rose" hinted that eventually women will rescue themselves if no one does it for them (note 1).

[8.2] However, I suspect that DeWitt was reacting at least as much to the handler's misuse of valuable Dollhouse property. Topher Brink, the resident mad scientist, is allowed a strictly rationed series of treats in which he is allowed to make Sierra believe that she is his girl-geek counterpart. But what about DeWitt's addiction to sneaking out of the office (at least once in the middle of a crisis), discarding her work phone, and triggering Victor's Don Juan program so often that, as it were, his screen saver is incapable of dealing with the material burned into the screen? Shouldn't she be at work and not damaging valuable corporate property?

[8.3] Less frivolously, however, has DeWitt raped Victor? He seems to be enjoying the engagement while it occurs, and in his resting state, he doesn't know that it has occurred. Is it like a tree falling in an uninhabited forest? Or, as Othello said, that it would be okay if the entire camp enjoyed Desdemona, as long as he never found out about it?

[8.4] I stopped watching *Dawson's Creek* shortly after Kevin Williamson left and the shark was jumped, but I still vividly remember the season 1 plotline about Pacey and his English teacher, a development that seemed less shocking than it actually was, perhaps because Joshua Jackson did not do a very convincing job of appearing to be 15. If the teacher had gotten caught (I believe she hotfooted it out of town before it got past gossip to the indictment stage), then she would have been legally liable, as an adult having sex with a minor, although I think it would be fair to say that in moral terms she was a victim of his failure to disclose the crucial fact of his age.
[8.5] Looking back at the epigraph, in *All's Well that Ends Well*, did Helena rape Bertram? This is one case in which modern thinking would be more likely to find rape than traditional concepts. To the early modern mind, it would probably be deemed licit or even praiseworthy for a wife to engage in marital sex in order to produce a legitimate heir for her husband—however little her husband actually liked her. Today, however, we would be more likely to point out that Helena used deceit to induce her husband to perform a sexual act that he had explicitly refused to perform.

9. Conclusion: C'mon and rescue me?

[9.1] As the William Morris epigraph shows, the Jossverse is not the first realm of the imagination in which women are perfectly capable of physical, or even violent, response to attacks on their purity, or their autonomy—however they choose to analyze it. Nowadays, or in the imagined future (for example, *Firefly*’s Kaylee Frye) "innocence" can be a matter of hope and optimism, not virginity, and rescue can be performed by the endangered maiden herself, or as a collaborative affair.

[9.2] One reason I found the later episodes of *Dollhouse* more satisfying than the earlier episodes (although even the later episodes leave many questions unanswered and issues unexplored) is that the initial presentation of the situation was obviously simplistic (and intended to be perceived as such). FBI agent Paul Ballard started out, in his own mind, as an unproblematic hero intent on saving Caroline. After losing his job, alienating everyone he knows, and seemingly turning himself into a facsimile of the kind of obsessed loner who becomes the object of the hunt for an assassin or serial killer, Ballard discovers that in many ways, Echo (or Echo/Caroline) is stronger than he is; she may not need his help and may not want it. The end of the first season also hints at a revolt of the dolls—but very much relying on their own resources.

10. Note

1. TV.com's episode summary (http://www.tv.com/Dollhouse/Briar+Rose/episode/1244286/summary.html) refers to Echo's use of the story of "Sleeping Beauty" in her engagement as a therapist in a facility for troubled youth, to help a traumatized—and violent—girl recover from trauma; Echo tells the girl in so many words that girls can save themselves and needn't—shouldn't—rely on a prince to save them.

11. Work cited
Symposium

Playing [with] multiple roles: Readers, authors, and characters in "Who Is Blaise Zabini?"

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[0.1] Abstract—Fans who produce fan works in genres such as fiction, music, and music video take on dual roles in the process, as readers of the original canon and as creators of their own products. These roles—and more—are creatively explored in the Parselmouths' wizard rock composition "Who Is Blaise Zabini?". Like many works of fan fiction, the Parselmouths' songs move beyond a reader's ordinary role, taking on an authorial role to generate new characters and events in the Harry Potter universe. What makes this particular work unusual is that at the same time that they are adopting the roles of authors, and even of participants, the Parselmouths also restrict their own authorial and participatory power, claiming that the Slytherin characters they portray could not perceive their classmate Blaise Zabini until J. K. Rowling provided a complete description of him. To untangle their multiple roles and to recognize the creativity exercised by the Parselmouths in collapsing the boundaries among them, it will be helpful to turn to a theory of audience response that delineates specific roles and that specifies the limitations and the powers inherent in them.

[0.2] Keywords—Harry Potter; Philosophy of literature; Wizard rock


1. Introduction

[1.1] Fans who produce fan works in genres such as fiction, music, and music video take on dual roles in the process, as readers of the original canon and as creators of their own products. These roles—and more—are creatively explored in the Parselmouths' wizard rock composition "Who Is Blaise Zabini?" (note 1). Like many works of fan fiction, the Parselmouths' songs move beyond a reader's ordinary role, taking on an authorial role to generate new characters and events in the Harry Potter universe. What makes this particular work unusual is that at the same time that they are adopting the roles of authors, and even of participants, the Parselmouths also restrict their own authorial and participatory power, claiming that the Slytherin characters they portray could not perceive their classmate Blaise Zabini until J. K. Rowling provided a complete description of him. To untangle their multiple roles and to
recognize the creativity exercised by the Parselmouths in collapsing the boundaries among them, it will be helpful to turn to a theory of audience response that delineates specific roles and that specifies the limitations and the powers inherent in them.

[1.2] In the course of considering the relationship of fiction to truth and the truth value of sentences describing fictional characters and events, Peter Lamarque and Stein Haugom Olsen (2002) make some distinctions that are also useful in discussing audience response to literature. Using these distinctions, we can recognize the Parselmouths as creating and maintaining three distinct roles for themselves, and as crossing the boundaries of these roles in playful and imaginative ways. First, however, it will be helpful to situate the Parselmouths in a fannish context.

2. What is wizard rock?

[2.1] It is safe to say that the oldest form of fan work, and the form most written about in the scholarly and popular press, is fan fiction. Whether you trace it back to the unauthorized continuation of the Pickwick Papers in penny-dreadful publications (note 2) or prefer to restrict it to science fiction media fandom and date it to the 1967 publication of Spockanalia, the first Star Trek fanzine (Verba 1996:1), fan fiction has a long history indeed. There are, however, other forms of fan work, and one that has received little attention is the practice of filking, the writing, performing, and recording of songs based on fannish texts.

[2.2] Filking is a practice adopted by media fandom from earlier science fiction fandom (note 3); the term reportedly comes from a typo for "folk music" in an early science fiction convention program. Earlier forms of filk music, such as filks based on literary science fiction texts or describing original science fiction universes, continue to coexist with media-fandom filk music. As the name's origin suggests, most filk music is performed or recorded in a folk-based style, featuring primarily voices and acoustic guitars. Some works are original compositions, while others fit new words to well-known tunes. Some describe or comment upon events or characters from the fannish universe; others, like fan fiction, create new narratives within the fannish universe. Still others describe or comment upon fandom itself, offering insights into the ways that fans view and depict themselves.

[2.3] As a casual collector of media-based filk recordings, I have observed that they have been circulated in an underground fashion for years among media fans, originally in the form of cassette tapes, some made in studios, others at live performances; some of them are now available on CD. Like fanzines, they are usually sold at a cost designed to recoup the expenses of creating the recording without making a profit; their creators hope to stay under the radar of those who own the copyrights and
trademarks of the commercial properties concerned. Filks are frequently performed at science fiction conventions; there are even conventions specifically devoted to the practice of filking. Some fantasy-based filkers also perform at Renaissance fairs. In my experience, however, traditional media-fandom filking rarely takes place outside these venues.

[2.4] Young Harry Potter fans have reconstructed filking in an exciting new way. Teenaged and young-adult musicians have formed bands on a rock 'n' roll, rather than a folk, pattern. They record and release music in genres ranging from garage-band rock to techno to rap. Their recordings are available on CDs and from iTunes; most of the bands have free samples available on their MySpace pages. Many also post videos of their performances on YouTube; more are posted there by their fans. While these bands do perform at conventions, they also stage concerts at libraries, schools, and other venues. Operating with the blessing of J. K. Rowling and openly supporting a number of charities with their revenue, these bands do not have to follow the same underground protocols as traditional filkers. The genre is known as wizard rock.

[2.5] Like traditional filks, wizard rock compositions may describe or comment upon events or characters in the Harry Potter series, create new narratives within the Harry Potter universe, or comment upon Harry Potter fandom or upon the world of wizard rock itself. The wizard rock band known as the Parselmouths, founded by Brittany Vahlberg and Kristina Horner, engages in all of these practices. The philosophers Lamarque and Olsen shed an interesting light on the practice of fiction that can be brought to bear on the Parselmouths' approach.

3. What is the practice of fiction?

[3.1] According to Lamarque and Olsen, what makes a given work a work of fiction is the participation by both the storyteller and the audience in a social practice governed by rules that have arisen through custom (2002:33–34). The practice of fiction is therefore a collaboration between the storyteller and the audience, who mutually agree that the statements made by the storyteller are "fictive utterances," statements that both the storyteller and the audience recognize as creating a fiction.

[3.2] The ontological status of, and the truth-value of statements about, fictional entities are matters of concern to Lamarque and Olsen. For example, to what extent is it true that Harry Potter attends Hogwarts? Harry Potter does not exist. Neither does Hogwarts. Nonetheless, it is clear that the statement "Harry Potter attends Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry" is true in some sense, whereas the statement "Harry Potter attends St. Brutus's Academy for Incurably Criminal Boys" is not true in that sense.
Lamarque and Olsen address this issue by establishing that "fictional content is such that how things are (in the fiction) is determined by how they are described to be in a fictive utterance" (2002:51, emphasis theirs). Thus events, settings, characters, and other objects described in a story have truth value within the story according to the author's descriptions of them. Statements about these objects are "the focus of a special kind of imaginative effort" made jointly by the author and the audience (2002:76). Although the characters and settings within a fiction, such as Harry Potter, Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry, and St. Brutus's Academy for Incurably Criminal Boys, may not exist outside that fiction, "what we call fictional names refer within a fiction to actual objects...Only from the external perspective are the names 'fictional' or identify fictional characters" (2002:83).

In an especially intriguing passage, speaking of a fictional character, Lamarque and Olsen state, "In the fiction, for her fellows, she is a person, an actual flesh-and-blood human being" (2002:87). Thus, within a story, the characters regard other characters and objects in the story as real, although for us, the audience, they are in fact fictional. Harry Potter is fictional to us, but to Ron and Hermione, he is quite real; Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry is fictional to us, but to its students, it is their home (note 4). And, most important for the topic at hand, from the perspective of the other students at Hogwarts, Blaise Zabini is a real person.

4. Who is Blaise Zabini?

Blaise Zabini is mentioned briefly in chapter 7 of Sorcerer's Stone as a student who is sorted into Slytherin by the Sorting Hat. No description is offered of this character, who does not appear in the books again until chapter 7 of Half-Blood Prince. Even Blaise Zabini's gender is undefined, although famous historical bearers of the name have been male (note 5). This indeterminacy presents a problem for readers. In their discussion of fictional characters, Lamarque and Olsen observe that "if a name were to be introduced in a fiction without any descriptive support a reader would not be able to make sense of sentences (in the fiction) using the name nor be able to make-believe that the name has a reference" (2002:84). This appears to be exactly what has happened here: lacking a description by the author, readers have no clear mental picture of Blaise Zabini.

On the other hand, this indeterminacy also offers readers the opportunity to fill in the blank for themselves. According to this theory, as part of their collaborative role in the social practice of fiction, "readers 'fill in,' or just take for granted, an enormous amount of detail which is not explicitly given...Much of the pleasure of reading fiction derives from the imaginative 'filling in' of character and incident" (2002:89). The reader does not supplement willy-nilly; Lamarque and Olsen argue that the customary
practice of fiction requires that the filling in be "authorized," that is, governed by a number of clues furnished by the author as well as external clues such as conventions associated with the author's choice of genre (2002:89–90). Readers of the Harry Potter series could safely assume from the context in which Blaise Zabini appears in Sorcerer's Stone that the character was a young person with some magical ability. Moreover, given that the series fell into the genre of children's fantasy rather than genres such as the cold war thriller, the science fiction novel, or the police procedural, Blaise Zabini was unlikely to turn out to be a communist spy, a cyborg from the future, or a serial murderer. Until the publication of the sixth book in the series, however, other details were left to the modified discretion of the individual reader. One paratextual factor that would somewhat inhibit the filling-in process for readers of the first five books in the series, prior to the publication of the sixth, was the knowledge that further books were yet to come, and any details formulated by the reader might turn out to be contradicted later on by the author (note 6).

[4.3] Nonetheless, according to Lamarque and Olsen's theory, Blaise Zabini always existed within the fictional world of Harry Potter as a "flesh-and-blood human being" from the perspective of the other characters. The Parselmouths playfully imagine, however, that the fictional characters in the Harry Potter series could not initially perceive Blaise Zabini clearly. Speaking as fellow Slytherins, they report, "We all gave him second glances / But all we saw was fuzz." Their attempts to determine Zabini's gender by observing which dormitory he slept in proved fruitless: "Don't know where he sleeps at night / he just kind of disappears." In fact, the problem is not experienced only by Zabini's classmates; Zabini too is equally limited in knowledge, and has no idea what gender has been assigned by the author: "Poor Blaise was Confunded / about his gender role." This was especially problematic when it came to using the restroom: "The biggest issue was the fact / he didn't know which room to use" (Parselmouths 2007).

[4.4] Once J. K. Rowling describes Blaise, however, the other characters are suddenly able to perceive him, and he becomes aware of his gender identity: "He's secure in being a boy now" (Parselmouths 2007). It is clear that Rowling's description of Zabini is the turning point, since the indeterminacy is described as persisting "until our sixth year." The narrators observe that "he would have been a nice girl as well," which emphasizes his earlier gender indeterminacy as a potentiality that could have gone in either direction. The comment may also be interpreted as an olive branch offered to fans who had previously imagined the character as female and were disappointed to have their version deauthorized.

5. The Parselmouths and the practice of fiction
In describing the manner in which the audience "makes believe" with respect to a fictive utterance, Lamarque and Olsen describe an "internal perspective" that readers may choose to take. "In adopting the internal perspective of the fictive stance readers project themselves into imaginary 'worlds' and observe them, as it were, subjectively from the point of view of an observer or participant. In doing so they can acquire a sense...of 'what it is like to be' someone in a situation or world of that kind" (2002:153). The Parselmouths extend this internal perspective to the point of crafting fictional identities for themselves within the imaginary world of Harry Potter and writing narratives in the form of songs, usually told from their characters' points of view. Since their characters are students in Slytherin, the Parselmouths present the Slytherin perspective on various characters and events in the series with gusto and imagination, and also invent entire new episodes, such as a disastrous double date with Crabbe and Goyle in "Who Are These Boyz?" (Parselmouths 2007). This activity clearly has its roots in the reader's customary projection of the self into the imaginary world, but the Parselmouths' creation of original compositions describing their adventures goes beyond the ordinary practice of reader response to the point of creating a new work (note 7).

The term *Parselmouths* itself, then, actually has three meanings in this context: it can refer to the groups' members as readers of Rowling's stories, as the authors of transformative works based on Rowling's stories, and as the fictional characters who narrate these works and take part in the events described therein. As readers, they are aided and hampered by textual and paratextual factors in their efforts to construct and enter into the imaginative world of the Harry Potter series. As authors of transformative works, they are free to reshape the original material to their own purposes, unconfined by the conventions of "authorized" make-believe. Finally, as fictional characters, they perceive the world described in the Harry Potter series as real.

The Parselmouths playfully transgress the ordinary boundaries of these roles not once but twice. As authors of their own transformative works, they are free to imagine Blaise Zabini, and indeed any other character, however they please, but they ordinarily stick fairly close to a perspective authorized, in Lamarque and Olsen's sense, by the original author's descriptions (note 8). As fictional characters, they would ordinarily perceive Blaise Zabini as a real person, one perhaps not yet known to readers of the story, but real to them as characters within it. Lamarque and Olsen point out that although a narrative will never spell every detail out completely to the readers, "we can infer that 'In the fiction, these details are determinate' (normally internal to a fiction there will not be widespread vagueness of fact)" (2002:91). The Parselmouths take the indeterminacy that is presented to them as readers and pass it along to themselves as authors and even to themselves as fictional characters so that
the vagueness seems to exist within the fiction itself. Conversely, they also give their
version of the character of Blaise Zabini a readerlike stance so that he too perceives
himself as undefined until the original author (J. K. Rowling) provides him with a more
distinctive description.

[5.4] Part of what makes this indeterminacy especially interesting is that the
audience (both of the original series and of the transformative work) knows that it was
resolved in the sixth book. Absent a lucky guess, any speculation in which the
audience engaged before the publication of that book was probably overturned as
incorrect. In a sense, this makes Blaise Zabini more indeterminate from the readers'
perspective because they were not free to create a specific Blaise Zabini for
themselves. On the other hand, although Blaise Zabini was indeterminate during the
first five books, readers can now engage in retroactive continuity: since they are now
familiar with his appearance, attitude, and family background, they can imagine him
as a younger version of the boy they met in Half-Blood Prince while rereading the
earlier books.

[5.5] This indeterminacy did in fact cause disagreements in fandom, not once but
twice. Before the publication of Half-Blood Prince, some fans chose to portray Blaise
Zabini as a girl in their fiction, others as a boy, which led to disputes. Moreover, many
fans who used Blaise Zabini as a character in their fiction assumed that the character
was white; Rowling's revelation that he was, in fact, black led to some very negative
reactions and bitter online arguments (note 9). While "Who Is Blaise Zabini?" may
easily be interpreted as referring indirectly to the first controversy, it appears to
sidestep the second entirely, although its overall positive description of the revealed
Blaise—"we knew that he was cool"—suggests a desire to maintain a positive
standpoint on the character.

[5.6] Of course, the characters in the books are not capable of reading ahead and
retroactively recognizing themselves. Thus, the Parselmouths-as-authors behave not
only like readers (in imagining Blaise Zabini only to the extent authorized by Rowling's
initially minimal description of the character and in recognizing that even authorized
speculation will probably be overturned) but also like characters (in limiting their
knowledge of Blaise Zabini chronologically) (note 10). Taking on these roles
simultaneously renders them unable to perceive Zabini clearly, and also makes Zabini,
as written by the Parselmouths-as-authors, unable to perceive himself.

6. Conclusion

[6.1] Fan fiction authors take on dual roles as readers and as authors; each role
carries its own limitations and privileges. As readers, their collaboration in the rule-
governed practice of fiction limits their authorized filling in and making believe, which includes a possible third role, imagining their own participation in the world created by the original author. As authors of their own transformative works, however, they are not bound by these conventions, although they may freely choose to follow them. I would venture to say that a significant distinction between conventional fan fiction on the one hand, and professionally published transformative works such as *The Wind Done Gone* or *Wicked* on the other, lies in the respect that fans demonstrate for the conventions of authorized filling in and their tendency to follow these conventions despite the wider range of possibilities open to them as authors.

[6.2] In "Who Is Blaise Zabini?" the Parselmouths draw attention to these practices by choosing to stay within the confines of restrictions placed on them as readers that do not apply to them as authors, and by further projecting these restrictions directly onto the characters they imagine themselves to be, as well as onto other characters portrayed in their transformative work. By applying these restrictions across role boundaries, they generate a humorously absurd situation, producing a creative, playful, and thought-provoking reflection on the multiple roles enjoyed by fans as readers, authors, and participants.

6. Notes

1. A live performance of the song may be seen at [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mS_kT9Asn0o](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mS_kT9Asn0o).

2. "Such was the voracious public appetite for anything Dickensian that some of the more imaginative pirates even began to lift the most popular characters such as Sam Weller and Mr Pickwick and transport them to different countries...for new and still more varied adventures" (Haining 1976:69).

3. An in-depth discussion and analysis of filking, as text and practice, may be found in the chapter "Strangers No More, We Sing: Filk Music, Folk Culture, and the Fan Community" in Jenkins (1992). The entries on "filk," "filker," and "filksing" in Rogow (1991) are also highly informative.

4. Lamarque and Olsen address as a separate issue the reality of extrafictional objects that make an appearance in fiction; for example, King's Cross Station exists outside as well as within the Harry Potter corpus. While fascinating, this issue is not relevant to the current topic.

5. Historical persons named Blaise include the philosopher-mathematician Blaise Pascal; St. Blaise, a fourth-century bishop and martyr; and Blaise, the legendary teacher of Merlin.
6. The popular term in fandom for fan speculation being proven wrong by later canonical revelations is jossing, after Joss Whedon, the creator of universes such as Buffy the Vampire Slayer and Firefly, whose fans often found their speculations overturned. Professional as well as fannish examples exist; Alan Dean Foster's Star Wars novel, Splinter of the Mind's Eye (1978), for example, hints at a romantic undercurrent between Luke and Leia that is frankly disturbing in light of later revelations about their true relationship.

7. Although they do not directly address participatory culture, Lamarque and Olsen do address cases in which an author transforms previously created material: "Material initially produced with one set of intentions can be appropriated by the fiction-maker under a different set of intentions. In that way a new work can come into being, not just an old work treated in a new way" (49). While their focus is on the transformation of nonfictional texts into fiction, this discussion appears to be applicable to other transformative works as well.

8. For example, when characters clearly defined in canon, such as Professor Slughorn, Rubeus Hagrid, Moaning Myrtle, Draco Malfoy, Vincent Crabbe, and Gregory Goyle, appear in other works by the Parselmouths, they are portrayed in a manner consistent with their portrayal in the books.


10. The one concession to the possibility of applying the knowledge retroactively is the group's consistent use of a masculine pronoun to refer to the character.

7. Works cited


"A Jedi like my father before me": Social identity and the New York Comic Con

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Abstract—Very few venues exist for adults to play dress-up, with Renaissance festivals, comic and other media conventions, and live-action role-playing games comprising the bulk of these venues. This sort of behavior is expected of people in their formative years—children and teenagers—where they try on and receive feedback about the "range of possible extensions of the self" (Elliot 1986, quoted in Kaiser 1996:162). What might be the reasoning behind the behavior of adults doing so, especially after primary socialization has occurred?

Keywords—Comic Cons; Community; Cosplay; Fan studies; Generation X; Identity; Performance studies; Sociology; Star Wars

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1. Introduction

Obi-Wan looked amazing! His costume was meticulously detailed, right down to a film-quality light saber. He walked a fine line between staying in character, which was delightful because he was really good, and discussing the well-organized Star Wars cosplay (costume role-play) fan base (figure 1). I became even giddier at finding no fewer than five slave Leias. And when asked by a storm trooper if I wanted to try on the helmet, I said, "Hell, yes" (figure 2). Examining identity and how people choose to perform it places me in unusual circumstances. In this case, the experience was both enjoyable and enlightening.
Figure 1. Obi-Wan Kenobi, Jennifer Gunnels, Anakin (Star Wars III: Revenge of the Sith, 2005). Photo by Nicole Fellows. [View larger image.]

Figure 2. The author as clone. Photo by Nicole Fellows. [View larger image.]
I was at the 2009 New York Comic Con to ask Obi-Wan and his friends why they did this. Very few venues exist for adults to play dress-up, with Renaissance festivals, comic and other media conventions, and live-action role-playing games comprising the bulk of these venues. This sort of behavior is expected of people in their formative years—children and teenagers—where they try on and receive feedback about the "range of possible extensions of the self" (Elliot 1986, quoted in Kaiser 1996:162). What might be the reasoning behind the behavior of adults doing so, especially after primary socialization has occurred? Susan B. Kaiser, in her study of clothing, wonders whether role-play dress is important "in terms of providing some means for 'escaping' from mundane daily routines, as well as for expression of creativity," but she concludes that "little is known about fantasy dressing; this is an area with a great deal of potential for contributing to an understanding of creativity and self-expression" (1996:163). Very little has been written on the subject, beyond mentioning that this behavior happens.

As my ongoing research is showing, the behavior isn't necessarily mere escapism. Adults engage in costumed role-play to explore an identity that may not be practicable in everyday life. For comic and other media conventions, the behavior also has a social, communal nature. In the case of Star Wars, members of Generation X, who saw the original Star Wars trilogy, are reminded of its effect on their childhood. Star Wars helped socialize this generation and may be providing a template for their own parenting, especially because current socioeconomic issues are not dissimilar to those of 1977. In this way, cosplay, as a performed identity, can provide a means of permitting individual agency and social commentary on current and past social stresses.

2. Ordering identity

When examining performed identities, such as those seen in Star Wars cosplayers, two things should be kept in mind: How is the identity being ordered? And what is the framework surrounding its construction? These are important not only because identity is fluid, but also because it can be perceived or misperceived on the basis of the social framework into which it is being projected. To answer the first question, Henry Tajfel (1982) posits that identity is self-determined, and that a person can have multiple identities in place. The individual determines the dominant identity through hierarchically organizing potential identities—for instance, I am a woman, an academic, a mother, and a friend, among other identities. However, the ordering of identity is largely based on the notion of framing, which determines not only how we decide to order our identity in that moment, but also how others will either read or misread what is presented (Goffman 1959). A frame is usually socially and historically
determined: I wouldn't dress as slave Leia to go to work, and regardless of Leia's introduction to the cultural consciousness, no one would dress like that in the 1950s.

3. Cosplay and the New York Comic Con

[3.1] Some identities can be performed and explored as cosplay. The study of cosplay and its practice specifically within the United States is sparse. Most studies of cosplay are framed within its expression within Japanese popular culture, particularly manga and anime, and its export to the United States and other points West (as can be seen at http://www.cosplay.com/); other studies discuss cosplay in terms of gender. What has not been examined is its nature as performance and as identity play as found at sites such as conventions. The site of my fieldwork, the New York Comic Con, began in 2006. In 2 years, it has grown explosively from a total attendance of 33,000 to a total attendance of 67,000 in 2008. It is the second largest popular culture convention in the United States. The con is an amalgam of material, cultural, and visual consumption. In addition to vendors, areas are set up for gaming tournaments, demonstrations, film previews, and media podcasts; other activities include seminars and professional panels (with writers, artists, and other professionals), and artists autograph material and network for future work (like a job fair).

[3.2] When I attended the Comic Con in 2009, very few of the audience choose to participate in costume—as an offhand guess, I'd estimate that perhaps less than 5 percent of the attending audience was in costume—although all of them were having a good deal of fun (figure 3).

![Figure 3. Non–Star Wars cosplayers. Photo by Nicole Fellows.](View larger image.)

[3.3] The quality of the costumes varied but tended toward the virtuoso, with a great deal of detail, such as the costume worn by Obi-Wan, a cosplayer who became one of my interview subjects. In fact, I was surprised to find that many of the cosplayers drew from the Star Wars universe (figure 4). I took an informal tally that broke the
character representations down as follows: one Obi-Wan Kenobi, one Anakin Skywalker (both from *Star Wars Episode III: Revenge of the Sith*, 2005), five slave Princess Leias (*Star Wars Episode VI: Return of the Jedi*, 1983), four Wookies, one Han Solo (*Star Wars Episode IV: A New Hope*, 1977), three Imperial officers (two men, one woman), and, at a conservative guess, a dozen Jedi and perhaps another 8 or 10 storm troopers from the 501st Legion, Vader's Fist, a national Star Wars costuming organization. All were networked with groups specifically created to assist people in cosplaying the characters from the Star Wars universe (note 1). Intrigued, I found myself examining the cosplayers' possible purposes for choosing these specific identities.

![Figure 4. Slave Leias and Wookies. Photo by Nicole Fellows.](View larger image.)

4. Fandom through performance and fetish

[4.1] When observing cosplayers, regardless of the universes they represent, some might wonder why they choose to connect with their fandom through performance, as opposed to other manifestations of fan engagement. Two reasons in particular come to the fore: the immediacy of the physical, and applying archetypes/fetishes to aspects of personal identity. Francesca Coppa (2006) notes that fanfic can be read as performative when viewed through the lens of Richard Schechner's well-known ideas on performance. Fiction, however, lacks the level of real, constructed immediacy found in a true performance environment. Yes, you can imagine that you are Obi-Wan
Kenobi as you read a fan text, but wouldn't you rather be him? Of course, this isn't possible, but cosplay serves as a middle ground.

[4.2] Further, Schechner's concept of the subjunctive mood in performance (1985:37)—not me, not not me—allows people to incorporate aspects of the character into their own identity. This can, and sometimes does, lead to a fetishization of both costume and character. Donning the costume, or even simply carrying a small prop such as a light saber, allows cosplayers to tap into the character as archetype and the costume piece as fetish: "The fetish is empowering, transgressive of the realm of the everyday and mundane, and transforms the user, thus marking a return in a sense to the original meaning of the fetish" (Wetmore 2007:177). Essentially, both become a totem, or a meaningful emblem or symbol, and "people will act towards totems in such a way based on the meaning they have given the totem." Meaning will then manifest as social interaction (Garrard 2008:17).

[4.3] In an interview I conducted on February 7, 2009, Obi-Wan shared with me his view of why he admires Obi-Wan—what meaning he has given his chosen totem: "The nobility, the warrior, the leadership, following the Jedi Code, all these things, I think, make him that great archetype that we've come to know and love." When I asked him more specifically if there were any aspects of Obi-Wan that carried over into his everyday life, he replied,

[4.4] I'd like to think there's a lot, but I could certainly be more noble. I could certainly be a better leader in my own life. But when it comes right down to it...I could be a better person in my own life. Probably when I step into costume, into the role, I think I become a better person than I am in real life and could certainly aspire to be as good as Kenobi.

[4.5] Becoming the character acts as transformative moment: he is not Kenobi, but not not Kenobi. As he remarks, aspects of the character are specifically tied to donning the costume. He may not believe that he carries specific aspects of character identity over into everyday life, yet they are available to his identity when in costume.

[4.6] Another of my interview subjects, Steve Koets, a member of the 501st Legion, summed up being a storm trooper as a question of enjoying the sense of shared community. In an e-mail interview I conducted with him on January 22, 2009, he stated that he participates because he "never really let go of an aspect of childhood that lets you truly believe that you're a race car driver whilst peddling your big wheel down the sidewalk. Or Luke Skywalker flying down the Deathstar trench." An anecdote he shared further stresses the aspect of his childhood love of the Star Wars universe:
A few years ago my wife threw a 40th birthday party for me. Knowing my closet love for Star Wars (from my childhood)...[she] surprised the dickens out me with a Star Wars theme party. Everyone came in a costume Cantina Band DJ, full-size Jabba the Hut Statue, Millennium Falcon cake my wife in a Princess Leia metal bikini...and my indoctrination into the 501st Legion...I was absolutely impressed by the squad of storm troopers, Darth Vader, Bobba Fett and many more that marched into the room to present me with my present an actual set of storm trooper armor. The costumes were very screen accurate and worth up to $3000 a piece after being "sworn to the empire"...what is cooler than being a storm trooper?

Indeed, what is cooler than being a storm trooper? Determined to find out why so many cosplayers were drawn to this role, I asked many storm troopers, all of whom were either already members of the 501st or were in the process of requesting membership, about the appeal of this role. Koets replied, "They are the 'misunderstood bad guys'...the troopers began with the clone army—OWNED by the republic—they were the military force that protected the rights of Democratic government—that turned into one run by the emperor—but because they were owned—and had allegiance, they ended up with the bad rap" (e-mail interview, January 26, 2009). Another member of the 501st (figure 5), in an interview at the con (February 7, 2009), remembers being 7 years old: for him, the first guys who really stood out in the films were the storm troopers. Now that he's old enough, he "can afford to indulge in having wanted to be a storm trooper."
[4.9] The most interesting similarity with nearly all of the Star Wars cosplayers was their ages. Most of them represented a spectrum of Generation X, which I’m defining following William Strauss and Neil Howe (1992) as members of the population born between 1961 and 1981. The release of the original trilogy films (1977, 1980, and 1983, respectively) meant that members of this generation were impressionable children. The content of the films becomes progressively more complex, thus presenting more complicated ideas concerning life to progressively older (and appropriately so for the messages) audiences. As an example, I fall into the middle range of Generation X. At the release of the films, I was 9, 12, and 15—very age appropriate for considering what the films had to say about navigating the path to adulthood and society.

[4.10] Why Star Wars? Why now? Several cosplayers, particularly those who decided on characters from the original trilogy, pointed to a backward entry into cosplay: participation began with their children’s interest in the franchise, even though they themselves had been fans since childhood. Koets, like many others I interviewed, found that he connected with his children through his own childhood love of Star Wars. Koets and one of the Wookies I interviewed were pulled into Star Wars cosplay through building an R2D2 robot with their children. Koets "hopp[ed] around the house for a good lightsaber battle [with his children]," and the Wookie cosplayer, after completing the R2D2 model, felt compelled to have a costume to go with it. When I met him at the 2009 Comic Con, he even carried his own childhood Chewbacca action figure.

[4.11] The fact that they are parents is telling. Through their involvement, the adults reaccess their memories of seeing the original film and how this material helped them navigate the circumstances of their own childhood. They revisit these memories while immersed in similar social circumstances to their first viewings. Then, as now, a new generation of children are discovering Star Wars while the country is in dire socioeconomic circumstances. As children, members of Generation X found themselves thrust into a period of rapid value shifts, the breakdown of the nuclear family, and economic upheaval. In addition, the parenting style of the baby boomers, in opposition to their own strict upbringing, tended to leave their Generation X children to their own devices. This proved detrimental in bequeathing the cultural information—"the teaching of society's acceptable values, norms, beliefs, and actions" (Garrard 2008:9)—necessary for navigating a path to adulthood. Star Wars filled the gap.

[4.12] Several scholars, such as Bruno Bettelheim (1991), explain how fairy tales and myth provide a vehicle for this teaching. Today’s fairy tales and myths are
expressions of popular culture—films, TV shows, video games. The Star Wars films are relevant here, as producer and film critic Dale Pollock acknowledges in his remarks about the mythic power behind the original Star Wars film: "Children get the message—they know eventually they'll have to leave home, take risks, submit to trials, learn to control their emotions, and act like adults. What they don't know is how to do these things. Star Wars shows them" (Garrard 2008:67). Children of Generation X understood, as most children eventually do, that they would need to learn to negotiate the world as adults. They knew the "what" but not the "how," and Star Wars bridged that gap: George Lucas used the structures of the mythic journey throughout the original trilogy, and Generation X in turn used it as a model for navigating their path to adulthood. All of this blossomed in 1977's sociohistorical context: economic downturn, rising housing prices, rising gas prices, rising inflation, and falling real wages (Garrard 2008:87). Sound familiar?

5. Conclusion

[5.1] As with any area of study, particularly those (like this study) with scarce secondary literature to consult, my examination of Star Wars cosplay within the New York Comic Con raises more questions than it answers. Why do cosplayers choose the characters they do? How do cosplaying communities, like the 501st Legion, work on a larger scale? Are cosplayers at other comic cons portraying Star Wars characters for similar reasons? Why do people choose cosplay over other forms of fan participation—or do they participate in other fan areas as well? If so, to what extent?

[5.2] The Star Wars cosplayers are clearly tapping into their childhoods: today's social context eerily mirrors the context that members of Generation X grew up in, and the children born to Generation X are growing up in parallel circumstances characterized by economic instability. For some cosplayers, dipping into the Star Wars universe may be a way to cope, as well as a way to share coping strategies with their own children—to pass on the same myth that enabled them to negotiate their own growth within our culture. Will we point them in the direction of Luke Skywalker and Obi-Wan Kenobi to learn how to best negotiate the times? In all honesty, I would like to think so. Perhaps they will forge a New Jedi Order to balance the mistakes of the Knights of the Old Republic.

6. Acknowledgments

[6.1] A version of this paper was presented at the 2009 PCA/ACA Conference in New Orleans for the Faires and Festivals group. I thank Nicole Fellows for her assistance in gathering field material and shooting footage at the 2009 New York Comic Con.
7. Note

1. The cosplayer within the Star Wars universe can find enormous help and support online. My discussion with Obi-Wan Kenobi revealed two major sources for assisting the would-be Star Wars cosplayer: The Padawan's Guide (http://www.padawansguide.com/) and Padme's Wardrobe and Closet (http://www.anakinsangel.net/PadmesPic.html). These provide sources and materials for organizations such as the 501st Legion (http://www.501stlegion.org/index.php), "the world's definitive Imperial costuming organization" and a national charity organization, the beginnings of which are outlined in the documentary film Heart of an Empire (2007).

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Symposium

The Hunt for Gollum: Tracking issues of fandom cultures

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Abstract—The fan-produced film The Hunt for Gollum (Independent Online Cinema, 2009) was released May 3, 2009, for free viewing on the Internet, garnering much interest from The Lord of the Rings fan communities and fan reviewers. Reviews of the film—whether in major science fiction fan communities, on the film's page in the Internet Movie Database, or in individual blogs and LiveJournals—have been positive to glowing. The consensus seems to be that the film is atypical of fan productions because of its professional production values. What the reviewers fail to consider are circumstances of production and reception that relate to gender differences in fan and mainstream culture. To address this lack, I first discuss the film as a fan production, then question how choices made by the creators regarding media and genre and the critical reception can be situated in the broader context of gender.

Keywords—Adaptation; Appropriation; Fan community; Fan film; Filmmaking; J. R. R. Tolkien; The Lord of the Rings; The Hunt for Gollum


1. Introduction

The fan-produced film The Hunt for Gollum (Independent Online Cinema, 2009) was released May 3, 2009, for free viewing on the Internet, garnering much interest from The Lord of the Rings fan communities and fan reviewers. The film does an excellent job of bringing to life a subplot of J. R. R. Tolkien's novel and creating a strong visual sense of Peter Jackson's film. Especially compelling are long shots of mountains and forests, as well as closer shots of characters, particularly Aragorn, traveling through Middle-earth. The cinematic aspects of the film are outstanding, but the script, even with dialogue from the novel, is less so.

Reviews of the film—whether in major science fiction fan communities, on the film's page in the Internet Movie Database, or in individual blogs and LiveJournals—have been positive to glowing. Reviewers praise the high quality of the work done on a low budget (£3,000). The consensus seems to be that the film is atypical of fan productions because of its professional production values. The reviews focus on the
quality of the film and its close relationship to the source texts. What the reviewers fail to consider are circumstances of production and reception that relate to gender differences in fan and mainstream culture. To address this lack, I first discuss the film as a fan production, then question how choices made by the creators regarding media and genre and the critical reception can be situated in the broader context of gender.

2. The film

[2.1] The cinematography parallels Jackson's work. Executive producer Chris Bouchard's use of light and dark evokes important themes in both novel and film. The soundtrack, collaboratively created by Adam Langston, Andrew Skrabutenas, and Bouchard, hints at Howard Shore's work. The acting ranges from strong to excellent, and costuming and makeup are well done. The setting, various locations in Britain, is superb. Adrian Webster is convincing as a younger Aragorn, and in some shots mirrors Viggo Mortensen's Aragorn. Webster conveys the physicality of Aragorn as a hunter and tracker, a man used to a solitary life and able to see beyond the material world. The creators clearly attempted to recreate or imitate, rather than transform, Tolkien's and Jackson's work, and they have achieved that goal.

[2.2] The sense of imitation extends to the film's Web site (http://www.thehuntforgollum.com/), which includes forums, invitations to submit fan art, and contest announcements as well as downloadable content. Media sites that build in more fan-oriented features did not originate with Peter Jackson's films, but The Lord of the Rings film site (http://www.lordoftherings.net/) and Jackson's communication and perceived responsiveness to fan input are praised by fans. The Hunt for Gollum site covers visual concepts and art, special effects, makeup, props, costumes, location shots, fight choreography, and a narrative of how the character of Goblok developed over the course of the production. The director's blog (http://www.hunt4gollum.blogspot.com/) includes information on the film, including the current translation efforts, which have resulted in versions with subtitles available in a wide variety of languages, including French, German, and Turkish. The blog invites volunteers to do translations in other languages, an example of the volunteer work done in all other areas of the production, which supplemented the low budget.

[2.3] The film demonstrates a strong knowledge of the novel, but the selection of story creates its own limitations. The plot is what is known in fandom as a gap-filler, showing more than is related in the original text (novel or film). Hunt narrates directly events that are related in expository scenes in the source texts. Besides the appendices, there are two scenes in the novel where Gandalf and Aragorn's search for Gollum is related. The first recounting is brief: Gandalf relates the story of Gollum to Frodo in "The Shadow of the Past," focusing primarily on how Gollum acquired the
Ring and what he did after losing it—actions that led to Sauron becoming aware of the Shire for the first time. The second occasion occurs later, when, as part of the exposition in "The Council of Elrond," Gandalf and Aragorn discuss their search for and Aragorn's capture of Gollum. This section of the novel is directly related to the film because the focus is on what the wizard and Ranger do rather than on Gollum's story. Jackson deletes the story of Aragorn's hunt for Gollum; instead, viewers see Gandalf journeying to Minas Tirith to find Isildur's written account. In Hunt, as in the novel, Gandalf asks Aragorn for help, and Aragorn alone captures Gollum, takes him to Mirkwood, and turns him over to the Elves.

[2.4] This gap in the source narratives is exactly the sort of space that fan creations can fill, and the directors, producers, cast, and crew of Hunt have done an excellent job, with a professional-appearing production faithful to the two source texts. Hunt opens with a prologue that provides background on the Third Age and the scattered line of kings, on the Rangers, and on Mordor's rising threat—and the immediate threat of the One Ring. The main story arc is Aragorn's search for Gollum after he meets Gandalf at the Prancing Pony at Bree. During his journeys into the wilderness searching for Gollum, he visits a weatherworn statue of his ancestor, Elendil, asks for his help, and sees brief visions of the future related in The Lord of the Rings.

[2.5] Aragorn has no luck in his search until he meets Arithir, an original character. In language mirroring Gandalf's when he speaks to Frodo in the novel, Arithir relates rumors from Ithilien to Mirkwood of a ghost that drinks blood and steals food. As Aragorn searches for Gollum, and after he captures him, he must fight Orcs and the Black Riders who have come west of the river. After a major battle with a large group of Orcs, Aragorn is badly injured and nearly collapses. He sees a white flower, not identified in this film but clearly meant to be athelas (a healing herb), and then has a vision of Arwen speaking Elvish, who assures him of her love and seems to heal him. Gollum escapes as Aragorn is unconscious. Aragorn then tracks Gollum through the night, only to be attacked by a Black Rider. The Elves come to Aragorn's aid after he has fought off the Nazgûl, and Gollum is captured. Gandalf and Aragorn then plan to move to protect Frodo, and Aragorn tells Gandalf to send the hobbit to Bree, where Aragorn will wait to help guard him.

3. The reception

[3.1] The fan reception, as judged by Internet reviews, has been positive. I have seen no commercial media review the film, nor would I expect to. Most reviewers agree the film is a better homage to Jackson than to Tolkien. The assumptions these reviewers have in common are that fan productions are amateur—meaning "not done very well"—and not worth viewing by any but the most dedicated of fans, who by
definition have flawed critical standards. Because of its high production values, *Hunt* is seen as an exception to this rule, and indeed it is worthy of praise in terms of professional criteria. Ken Denmead (2009) praises the film for looking like footage leftover from Jackson's film; Michael Marano (2009), although claiming that the quality of Bouchard's film is better than professional fantasy films from the 1980s, is the only one to criticize the "flawless re-creation of flawed filmmaking" (Jackson's) and to claim that Bouchard is better when creating his own vision. Reviewers note that the audience for this film consists of fans of the book or film: except for the prologue, the film provides little background information on the characters' history. Whereas Jackson's film had to appeal to viewers who had never read the book, *Hunt* provides no context, instead presenting scenes that require work on the part of the viewer to place into sequence as part of a larger metatext including both novel and earlier film.

[3.2] However, *Hunt*'s Web site provides some clues about their understanding of the "fan" part of the fan text. The FAQ section notes, "The film is completely unofficial and non-profit. We have reached an understanding with Tolkein [*sic*] Enterprises to allow the film to be released non-commercially online but the project is completely unofficial and unaffiliated" ([http://www.thehuntforgollum.com/faq.html](http://www.thehuntforgollum.com/faq.html)). This text acts as a disclaimer that firmly places the film within the fan realm. Yet the Web site also indicates that the creators are overwhelmingly men, primarily white. Additionally, many either wish to have or already have careers in acting and filmmaking. This film can be read as a fan production that also serves as an audition or promotion piece for aspiring professionals. The science fiction community in particular has long been known for raising few barriers between fan and professional and for close interaction between pros and fans, and *Hunt* follows this lead. However, certainly not all fans engaged in fan production in any media are interested in professional careers, as opposed to enjoying fan activities as a hobby.

[3.3] Higher status relating to professional and original works compared with the lower status relating to hobbies and amateur productions has already been well described as a (gendered) part of capitalist culture (Jenkins 1992). This hybrid fan/pro film emphasizes one split in fan cultures and values: works done primarily for the community, as hobbies, out of love for the text, are received differently than works done as a type of apprenticeship, which includes love of the source text but has professionals as part of the potential audience. The upshot: slickly designed fan films created by men hoping to enter the profession generate a lot of attention—and may really lead to the very job opportunities they are hoping for. Artworks and fictions created by women, despite what in some cases are equally high production values, are criticized for being amateur. There are also genre distinctions: most of the fan-produced films or episodes of shows—including *Star Trek: The Hidden Frontier*, the *Star Trek* fan film that includes gay (male) characters—are primarily produced by men
while women tend to work with the shorter art form of videos, or vids.

[3.4] One film being created by a group of fans that includes more than one or two women is the partner film to Hunt, called Born of Hope (2009). The crew page lists Kate Madison, Teja Hudson, Sara Austin, Keira Robertgon, and Vanessa Mills (http://www.bornofhope.com/Crew.html). This film focuses on the storyline of Arathorn II and Gilraen, parents of Aragorn, and the trailer shows the action set in a community, the Dúnedain. While Hunt focuses on Aragorn as an epic hero, alone, performing deeds beyond the skills of most men, Born of Hope focuses on another element in Tolkien's novel: the communities and families who were threatened by Sauron's war with the West. The appendices to The Lord of the Rings include the information that Aragorn's father, the Chief of the Dúnedain, was killed by Orcs, and that his mother, with their child, took refuge in Rivendell, where Aragorn was raised. The gendered nature of film topic and creators seems clear: the men focus on the epic hero, and the women focus on community. The decision to focus on a storyline that is even less present in the text than Aragorn's journey, referenced in only a few lines in appendix A and B, is an example of what Henry Jenkins (1992) has identified as refocalization.

[3.5] Refocalizing involves changing the focus away from major characters or events in a source text and making minor characters or events the focus of the fan production. Refocalizing allows women characters to become protagonists and, in the case of Hope, can show Aragorn as a baby and a young child, within the heart of his family and community, even though that community is later destroyed. Since the majority of media texts (and, arguably, the literary canon as well as much popular genre fiction outside the genre of romance) tend to focus on the solitary if not always epic male hero, it seems clear that fan productions that recreate the characterization and plots of the source texts will always be more male-dominated (even if women are involved, which happens).

[3.6] Transformative works, which shift the focus to minor or underused characters or, in the case of slash fiction, foreground relationships, including romantic relationships between the main male characters in action adventure narratives, tend to be the creative domain of women fans. While the focus of this essay is on gender, it is important to note that gender must be understood in the context of race and class. In the case of these films, the fan creators are British; however, pictures on Web sites are not clear indicators of ethnicity. The issues of constructions of race in media and print texts, as well as how race operates in fandom productions and communities, must be the focus of another essay: for example, the discussion of the Orcs in Tolkien's work as raced others is a part of ongoing dialogues in fandom.
In theory, fan productions and creations will be valued in the fan community, whether imitative or transformative, on their own merits, rather than on the gender or race of the creators. However, *The Hunt for Gollum*’s reception raises the question of whether fan stories of a more transformative sort—including slash—would stand any chance of being created on film, given the necessity of raising money even for a low-budget film. The choice of women to produce vids, transformative works utilizing already created graphic and audio materials, shows that women are neither averse to nor lack the skills to work in visual media. However, a film of any length requires greater resources, which may also not be as available to women as to men. The probability is that stories that transform source texts too radically with regard to gender and sexuality are unlikely to attract the support that more traditionally constructed stories (stories like *Hunt* and *Born of Hope*) have, regardless of the love and passion of the creators for the source texts and the quality of their work. Because mainstream culture tends to value productions that reflect the dominant values regarding gender and sexuality, fandom is one cultural space where those values may be questioned.

My purpose in this essay is not to reverse the hierarchies that exist in mainstream culture, that is, to dismiss one type of fan space and fan production, the space and work that aims for professional employment, as inferior to or less than another type of fan space and production, one that questions mainstream attitudes and is created for love. Both are valid, but it is possible to note that mainstream culture tends to valorize the professionalized space, equating it with masculinity, and to ignore or marginalize the other spaces where equally exciting work, including work that meets various types of professional standards, also exists.

4. Works cited


1. Introduction

[1.1] In early 2009, science fiction fandom's online landscape erupted with discussions of race. A post regarding cultural appropriation on author Elizabeth Bear's blog sparked a wide-ranging conversation that soon became acrimonious, with professional science fiction and fantasy writers and fans of science fiction literature and media weighing in. More recently, criticisms of Patricia C. Wrede's decision to set her young adult novel, *The Thirteenth Child* (2009), in an America empty of indigenous people have spearheaded new waves of discussion. Often the more widely read summaries of these debates have focused on what they mean for writers and aspiring writers who plan to represent minority cultures in their works. But what has their significance been for members of fan communities?

[1.2] Debates about racism and other forms of global structural inequality—seen as unproductive Internet drama to some and as a form of social justice activism by others—have increasingly shaped the public online landscapes of some sectors of science fiction and media fandom in recent years. This is a discussion among participants in these debates, primarily fans of color, about how discussions about race and fandom have shaped their experiences and politics, and of what the emerging movements mean for fandom and antiracism. The conversations took place informally at WisCon (http://www.wiscon.info) and have been transcribed, edited, and supplemented by e-mail discussion afterward.

[1.3] The participants in this conversation are as follows (some are contributing under their fan names, other under their legal names): Coffeeandink, Deepa D., Jackie Gross, Liz Henry,
Oyceter, Sparkymonster, and Naamen Tilahun.

[1.4] Coffeeandink is a white feminist who sometimes blogs about science fiction, fandom, and race at http://coffeeandink.dreamwidth.org/. Deepa D. is a South Asian Indian woman whose public blog is http://deepad.dreamwidth.org/. Jackie Gross (ladyjax) is a black lesbian feminist fan living in Oakland, California (http://ladyjax.dreamwidth.org/). She’s still bitter about Space: Above and Beyond being canceled by Fox. Liz Henry is a feminist SF/F fan and netizen from the San Francisco Bay Area, and is white, queer, and disabled, a Web developer, blogger, and translator. She blogs at http://badgerbag.dreamwidth.org/ and http://blogs.feministsf.net/. Oyceter is a Chinese American woman who grew up partially in Taiwan. She blogs about books at http://oyceter.dreamwidth.org/. Sparkymonster is a 34-year-old geeky, mixed-race (black and white), fat, queer, femme, feminist woman of color who brings her love of intersectionality everywhere she goes. She blogs at http://sparkymonster.livejournal.com/ and sporadically at http://www.fatshionista.com/. Naamen Tilahun is a 26-year-old geeky black writer and fan living in the Bay Area. He blogs in various places online, but his main home is http://naamenblog.wordpress.com/.

[1.5] The discussion was moderated and transcribed by TWC symposium editor Alexis Lothian, a white fan and academic who has written about fannish antiracist activism in both scholarly and fannish contexts. Her academic blog is at http://queergeektheory.wordpress.com/.

2. Changing the terms: Bingo?

[2.1] Alexis Lothian: Online political discussions have produced their own kinds of transformative works. A genre that has become especially important in fan discussions of race has been the bingo card, where common arguments are debunked by a visual demonstration of how clichéd they are.

[2.2] Liz Henry: I’ve seen bingo cards in online activist discussions for many years. I have a collection in a Flickr set (http://www.flickr.com/photos/lizhenry/sets/72157612897466679/) that includes several race bingo cards as well as cards for anti-breast-feeding arguments, fat hate, and more.

![Fantasy and Science Fiction Bingo, No Racism in Fiction Edition](image)
[2.3] **Sparkymonster:** I first encountered bingo cards in the feminist blogosphere, where they were explained on an amazing feminism 101 blog (http://finallyfeminism101.wordpress.com/).

[2.4] **Deepa D.:** Bingo cards have evolved as a shorthand for something that people have personally experienced. Without that personal experience, the bingo cards can seem unnecessarily simplistic and generic—almost cruel. A problem occurs when people are exposed to bingo cards without the experience of being socialized in the way fandom has talked about things. For example, I've had the meat-space experience of showing antiracist bingo cards to people who are not in fandom. People of color who weren't part of these discussions online had a sense of wonder and awe that people have come up with simple, clear language to explain all the diffuse experiences that have hurt them in various ways. They haven't had someone to do that for them—to say, "You're not alone. This happens so often that we can give it a name and a three-word term to put on a square." On the other hand, for white people who haven't seen those arguments happening, it's the reduction of something that's a personal experience to a pattern that they feel puts them into a mold. So I think that the value of bingo cards is layered according to who is experiencing them.

[2.5] **Coffeeandink:** It's interesting that the people of color in this discussion find value in the fact that the bingo cards *don't* explain, that they say, "You are too ignorant for me to talk to, your argument is not worth my energy and time." Because that's what's always made me feel ambivalent about them. What I really want is for each square to be linked to a wiki explanation of the argument and counterargument, so that if the person making the racist argument takes the initiative to click, there's an explanation available. But that again puts the burden on the person linking to bingo, the person of color, to be the educator, whereas it seems like people prefer to use the bingo cards as a protest *against* that expectation.

[2.6] **Sparkymonster:** I don't use bingo cards as a tool of discussion. But when I get so frustrated, angry, and hurt and someone says, "Ooh, bingo!" it breaks the toxic buildup for me. Humor, especially bitter humor, is really critical for helping me make it through these kinds of discussions. Laughing at the stupidity is one form of release.

[2.7] **Deepa D.:** What we're really talking about here is what people of color experience, and I want to bring it back to that. Bingo cards might be useful for white people, but they are important for people of color because they say, "What you are experiencing is not personal; you're not alone; this is part of a structure." It's important to recognize the parts of the pattern because then it ceases to be about one person; it ceases to be about one incident that can be forgiven and becomes part of an institution that cannot be forgiven.

[2.8] **Oyceter:** It's naming something. It's like L. Timmel Duchamp's 2008 WisCon guest of honor speech (http://ltimmel.home.mindspring.com/Duchamp-WisCon32-GoH-speech.pdf) about sexual harassment—being able to have the term, to say, "This is racism." To name some of the arguments we might find on a bingo card: this is white women's tears, this is the tone argument.
Deepa D.: All this was revelatory for me because I realized I found strength through having pattern recognition. I was able to parse instantly what someone was saying, to not take it personally or focus exclusively on the details, but to see it as part of a pattern and classify it accordingly. So I don't have to waste time having a personal reaction. I can go straightaway into strategies to deal with a pattern of oppression. And a lot of people don't have that, because depending on where you are in a white-majority country, lot of people of color lack a supportive, educational network, especially if you are young and not in an activist community.

Oyceter: Or if your family doesn't teach you to recognize those patterns.

Deepa D.: In education, teaching people to recognize patterns is a basic pedagogical tool; it's how we learn to understand math, to recognize cause and effect. Unless you can recognize patterns in racism, you won't recognize institutional racism for what it is and how it manifests in individual people.

3. Manifestations: The tone argument

Alexis Lothian: A bingo card definition of the tone argument goes something like, "You are alienating people with your anger. If you would only explain your criticism politely, everyone would understand your point."

Oyceter: When I started to get involved in discussions of race in fandom, I thought that the people of color calling people out for their racism were too mean and snarky. Then, as I got more involved, I realized that the snark is self-protection against the ignorance and abuse that comes up when white people are asked to confront their racism. Sometimes all I can do is use cat macros because I am wordless.

Coffeeandink: I noticed the phrase "a civil conversation" in the most recent rounds, coming from men in particular, from white people who hadn't previously engaged in discussions about race with people of color or in an antiracist space. It's another version of the tone argument, the vocabulary argument. It ignores the subjectivity of reading tone and the unequal standards applied to people perceived to be white versus those who are perceived to be of color. There's just no way to politely challenge privilege, because the privileged party defines politeness. The "civility" of the conversation is defined by the vocabulary used or the amount of ritual deference offered, not by whether or not someone just claimed that by virtue of your race, you were incapable of reasoned argument.

The thing that blew up the tone argument for me was the treatment of Zvi when she criticized a Harry Potter fan community for using the term *miscegenation* without understanding its history (note 3). She was patient and civil, yet people were saying she was uncivil—even insisting that her icon was inappropriately violent because it said, "If you can't be educated, you will be killfiled" (that is, summarily discarded, without reading).

Deepa D.: The tone argument is important because almost all of us have made it—at least in our heads and sometimes, unfortunately, online—about another person of color. Because we have hope! We have hope that being polite, being generous, being kind, or explaining something in the right way, works. We are used to treating individuals as individuals
and persons, but talking about the tone argument again reinforces that it's a pattern: this is a systematic thing, not a one-person thing, and systems can't be dismantled by politeness. You can dialogue politely with an individual, but you don’t dialogue politely with an institution of oppression. You act disruptively with an institution of oppression—even if it’s nonviolent anarchism or nonviolent protest. You disrupt, you do not dialogue.

3.6 Oyceter: And I think that's specifically why tone comes up: it's a form of systemic oppression. To make the tone argument is to say don't be violent; don't connect; talk on this individual level, and let me break alliances up into individual pieces.

3.7 Sparkymonster: It's also a way for white people, or privileged people in general, to deny all responsibility by saying, "I will only educate myself if you will say it the perfect way." This is something I struggled with for a long time. I would say, "Have you heard of this thing called white privilege?" and people would respond, "You are so mean and racist." I would think, "What did I say?" But then I realized that it doesn't matter what I say—if someone is going to have that reaction, they will have that reaction whether I cover it with bunnies or tell them to die in a fire. I started to comment with lists of links because I realized I don't need to restate these articles, just get people to read them. I've had people say I'm being mean and dismissive, that I'm treating them like they're stupid. But if I'm giving you links, if I'm bothering to comment at you, I probably think you're someone who can have a discussion with me. If you flip out in response, you don't have the same respect for me.

3.8 When people describe fans of color challenging racism as a mean, undifferentiated horde, they're not seeing how so many are being scrupulous and polite. My response is, "Who are you talking about? Stop smushing us!" There are people using many different kinds of strategic arguments, and they can include anger, which is a powerful and important tool.

4. Manifestations: Race and white femininity

4.1 Alexis Lothian: The intersection of race and gender is crucial to a lot of the terminology that comes up in discussions of race in fandom, particularly because much of the discussion takes place in online spaces that are dominated by white women.

4.2 Sparkymonster: The common experience that gets shorthanded in bingo card terms as "white women's tears" is when you're talking about race and a white woman's response is, "When I was in high school these black girls were so mean to me!" or, "When you talk about race it makes me cry!" And then suddenly everyone is comforting the white woman instead of continuing to discuss race.

4.3 Oyceter: It becomes about the white woman's pain for being jumped on for saying something racist, or about her pain from looking at the pain of an oppressive situation.

4.4 Deepa D.: One of the purest, most crystalline forms of white women's tears comes when white women are genuinely upset about racism.

4.5 Oyceter: And they aren't strong enough to take it. They think women of color are strong enough to deal with racism, but white women aren't. I would like to link to Chrystos's
poem "Those Tears" (http://resistracism.wordpress.com/2008/05/21/those-tears/), about the tears of a white woman who was challenged for trying to enter a "women of color only" space, which may be where the term comes from. Some women of color then created the specific term "white women's tears" as a reference not only to the poem, but also the term "white women's syndrome" (http://www.racialicious.com/2008/08/27/white-feminists-and-michelle-obama/#comment-917278) as a way to codify patterns of white women's behavior about racism and sexism in general. Terms are shorthand for this giant intersectional thing: how white men "chivalrously" spring to the defense of white women "under attack" from women of color, and the entire system in which white womanhood is set up as the example of womanhood and how that erases women of color as women. And it's all there in three words as "white women's syndrome."

[4.6] **Liz Henry:** It's also connected to missing white woman syndrome (http://www.allacademic.com/meta/p_mla_apa_research_citation/2/3/1/3/3/p231334_index.html) where a white woman goes missing and white men everywhere rush to the rescue—but black women go missing and aren't given any of the same attention (http://www.whataboutourdaughters.com/).

[4.7] **Jackie Gross:** Another pattern that all this connects to is the nice white lady—as demonstrated in the *MADtv* skit (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZVF-nirSq5s). It's the trope of the white woman who comes to the benighted inner city youth to save them from themselves, in movies like *Dangerous Minds* (1995) and *Freedom Writers* (2007).

[4.8] **Sparkymonster:** To bring us back to Wrede's *The Thirteenth Child* and its erasure of Native American people, in some ways, this reminds me of the reservation school system: "Kill the Indian and save the man" (http://historymatters.gmu.edu/d/4929/).

[4.9] **Deepa D.**: There's an explicit link to missionary societies. It's easy to criticize missionaries who went out and tried to convert people to Christianity, but they were supported by women who stayed back and were nice and did social charity work, had sewing circles, raised money to send to the heathens. *Nice* is an important term because, much as Jane Austen deconstructs in *Northanger Abbey* (1817), nice is small. Nice says that what you are doing is not aspiring to greatness, just everyday goodness, and that provides an easy lens to say that expecting it is not demanding heroism, but demanding common decency.

[4.10] Without power differentials, the obvious answer to the question "shouldn't we all be nice?" is "yeah, sure." But when you bring race back in, it looks different. A white person being nice to a person of color is a privilege and a condescension that they can choose to bestow or withhold, while for a person of color, being nice to a white person is a chore and a duty and in many cases a safeguard that we have to undertake for our own protection. It's pretty telling that while the mistress can be very "nice" and "kind" and "patient" to and with her servants, the powerless perform the same behaviors and courtesies as a duty and job.

5. The landscapes of fan communities
Deepa D.: The fannish demographic is implicated in the terms we use especially when we talk about gender. People who self-identify as female are the majority participants in the culture of transformative fan works based on media, so it's acceptable to carry an assumption that fannish space is a different space for using gendered words. It's good to deconstruct that, but the casual use has to be from a female-dominant space, as opposed to the larger context where the default is male. For example, I use the word pretty as a compliment for men online in a way that routinely raises eyebrows and disapproving reactions off-line from men. I'm also much less bothered by terms like bitchy and slutty and hysterical when I know they are being used among women, although they can still undeniably be weapons we use to hurt each other. Another telling example is that fandom, as comprising women, immediately understands the power of the phrase character rape, while it does not so swiftly regard the words colonial or Oriental with equal visceral horror, even though the effects of rape and colonialism have been equally scarring on women of color.

Oyceter: That's very different from science fiction and fantasy (SFF) book fandom, which is mainly male. That was part of the miasma around the RaceFail (note 4) debate: the old boys' club of SFF book fandom that led to the dismissal not only of people of color but also of LiveJournal. They had the idea that LJ is full of hysteria and shrieking, and they asked, "Where are the rational people in this discussion?" That's very gendered.

Coffeeandink: Another difference between the book and media fandoms is that book fandom is filled with aspiring writers who want to make a living from their work, while media fandom isn't about making a living at all. Status in media fandom isn't based on whether you make money from your work.

Oyceter: I think there's a greater distance between creators of media in media fandom and the fans and that allows for a flatter fandom, whereas in SFF book fandom, I think that there's less of a distance between creators and fans because it is easier for SFF book fans to become SFF book creators than it is for media fans to become media producers—which in some ways is cool, because fans can influence professional production, but it also creates a more hierarchical structure.

Deepa D.: In media fandom, social capital is policed quickly, because it's the only kind of status writers have. If your fic is called racist, you lose a lot of social capital, while Elizabeth Bear can lose that social capital and gain financially from the additional sales the discussion brings her.

Sparkymonster: On the one hand, if everyone agrees your fic is racist, then media fandom can trash you in 4 seconds. But on the other hand, there is also a weird forgetting, where people change their user name or the memory of the trashing just fades with the passage of time. So I'll see someone who got trashed for sexism, transphobia, or racism pop up under another user name, which is very easy to do—and sometimes people remember, sometimes they don't. I think that's part of why people can get so defensive in media fandom—because they are so caught up in their social capital.

Deepa D.: While fic is archived and vids are shown publicly, in fandom, there is also always the idea that it's possible to rewrite things. Fans who are involved with the production of
transformation works are used to discussions where a community can constantly reinvent itself, where it can self-correct if things are going wrong. You can edit something that you've posted online.

[5.8] For SFF, it's a case of, "We published a book that was edited a year ago, written 2 years ago, and it's done. What do you want us to do about it now?" It's ironic and ridiculous in some ways, but the fact that we know we can change things makes us more responsible about changing things. We recognize that things are permanent when they're on the public record, that anyone can take a screencap and save it, but because things are constantly changing, it's our duty to document that change. We recognize that we self-correct, that sometimes that's for good and sometimes for bad, and we try to acknowledge that power and create a structure that takes account of it. However, in a lot of SFF, there's a sense that there are real words on dead trees that are set in stone and can't be changed, as opposed to empty words online that are a great publicity tool or ego massage, but that writers do not need to be held accountable for.

6. Racialized spaces and erased histories

[6.1] **Coffeeandink:** I'd like to talk about the gendering and racialization of space, both physical and virtual. Multiple white people posted about being frightened by RaceFail, that it made them afraid to write about people of color. My take is that this is a conversation that shouldn't be had in a public space. By having the conversation in a public space, he is marking this public space as a white space, where the white guy gets to announce that his racial anxiety is a concern everyone, especially people of color, should focus on. It's an assumption that all space belongs to me and my concerns: it's private if I want it to be, even if it's public and online, so it's outrageous if someone comes in and disagrees, yet this space is public and I can say what I want. People being checked on their privilege repeatedly have defensive reactions and have conversations about it in public—crying white women's tears. These reactions are natural—there's nothing wrong with the emotions, but in having them publicly, you're saying the entire world should be focused on you.

[6.2] **Sparkymonster:** It's a way for people to affirm their status as a nice white lady.

[6.3] **Coffeeandink:** It's a way of affirming the public space is white, as a space where white concerns are paramount.

[6.4] **Naamen Tilahun:** A lot of fans have a different idea of safe space than I and a lot of activists do, I think. Safe space for me has never included the idea that you won't be offended, won't be hurt, won't be angered, won't leave crying. From the activist spaces I was in, safe space was a way to air grievances, check in with each other, and discuss our differences. Fans, for some reason, seem to look at safe space as a place where they won't be challenged or asked to explain their actions and thoughts—just the opposite. A safe space is where you should be challenged, where you have to explain yourself. I remember the Queer Alliance at my undergrad school having a discussion on whether we were going to take a stance on marriage equality or not. I and one other member were against an in-favor stance for the organization, specifically because of our feminist issues with the institution of marriage. There was a knockdown, drag-out fight. We were challenged on some sides pretty harshly for our stance. It
was uncomfortable. I had to explain myself, and eventually some of the other members and I simply had to agree to disagree. Safe space is where it's safe to call someone out for something they said or did. Safe space is not yet another place where your privilege is supposed to protect you.

[6.5] The comments David Levine and other people made about not wanting to write characters of color any more show me that if you can give it up that easily, you were never invested.

[6.6] **Oyceter:** It's those people who say, "You people of color are making me rethink antiracism!"

[6.7] **Naamen Tilahun:** If what I say makes you rethink equality, then you were never invested in that equality to begin with. Fighting for equality isn't easy—it has never been easy—and if you are trying to be an ally in any situation, you will inevitably get called out.

[6.8] **Oyceter:** A horde of people kept popping up to say that they marched in the 1960s and that they knew the civil rights movement. They refused to accept the terms being used in the contemporary antiracist movement.

[6.9] **Jackie Gross:** It's the same as when white feminists use Audre Lorde's "The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House" essay (1981) to signify how down they are.

[6.10] **Sparkymonster:** Lorde's essay was written because she was invited to speak at the Second Sex conference in 1979 at New York University, where the speakers were almost entirely straight white women. Lorde spoke directly about straight white feminists who cling to racist and homophobic power structures because they don't want to give up their privilege. It depresses me that 30 years after she wrote this essay, feminists still put together conferences of white women talking to other white women. Our viewpoints are still being ignored. I don't think feminists have really dealt with Lorde's letter to Mary Daly (http://tinyurl.com/lorde-daly-letter), which is a critique of a white feminist co-opting bits of African culture for her own purposes, while ignoring the input and voices of actual African and African American women. Mary Daly never responded publicly to that letter. I'm still appalled that Daly dismissed Lorde, and that Daly's acts of cultural appropriation are not part of the dialogue around gyn/ecology.

[6.11] **Naamen Tilahun:** During RaceFail, people would often not link to posts critiquing racism. They would pick and choose what people of color had said and use it to prove their point, but they wouldn't include what came before or after. That's the same way Lorde gets used.

[6.12] **Deepa D.:** Everyone here has commented on RaceFail, and we're all familiar with this level of detail in the history of antiracism. And in online discussions we've all been accused of being nonexistent or ignorant or too academic or not academic enough. We participate in fandom as equals, which means we're no more but no less than any other fan. As fans, we accept that there are different viewpoints—we're all online talking about Spike and Buffy or whatever, and we do that as equals. We give that respect to other fans automatically even though, when it comes to racism, we are the experts.
[6.13] **Jackie Gross:** I'm 43, and part of me remembers this same conversation from 1986. Women of color walked out of the '86 or '87 National Women's Studies Association meeting because they were angry about being tokenized. This is not new. In feminist spaces, it stuck and was documented in books and articles. People remembered. There were articles in newspapers, and there were books like Barbara Smith's *Homegirls* (1983), publishing houses like Kitchen Table Press that documented all of this.

[6.14] **Deepa D.:** To bring this back to the Organization for Transformative Works and its focus, media fandom has done that archive work. There are entire communities dedicated to what can be talked about in which space, providing links to past debates that have shaped the conversation in fandom. International Blog Against Racism Week (http://community.livejournal.com/ibarw) is just one example. In RaceFail, Rydra Wong rose up to record what was taking place, linking to every part of the widespread conversation. Then Naraht rose up in her place for the next round. Because they're burning out, we now have a community called Linkspam (http://linkspam.dreamwidth.org/).

[6.15] But we have to talk about the fans of color who have been participating in fandom for the last 10 or 15 years—they're not activists.

[6.16] **Sparkymonster:** Yes, people like Te (http://teland.com/remember/) and Stormfreak, an early voice in comics fandom who was vilified by Fandom Wank (http://www.journalfen.net/community/fandom_wank/) but in retrospect spoke a lot of truth. Witchqueen, now known as Zvi, and Witchwillow, now known as Avalon's Willow, were powerful influences on me. One of Zvi's posts from 2002 (http://zvi­likes­tv.livejournal.com/2385.html) really struck a chord and got me thinking/speaking.

[6.17] **Deepa D.:** They haven't filed a grant, they haven't got support to do activism; they're just people who want to be fans and who've laid the groundwork by fighting again and again in spaces where they shouldn't have had to fight in the first place. They've made it safer for us to speak up and find each other. In the fandom versus professional SFF discussion, we can feel pride in the way fandom in general has policed itself. But that was at the cost of fans of color, who were burned out, hurt, not paid, and not rewarded. They paid the price by having to retreat from something they love.

7. Notes

1. The discussions which followed Elizabeth Bear's original post (http://matociquala.livejournal.com/1544111.htm), and their significance within race-related online fan discussion as a whole, are summarized at Logophilos (http://logophilos.net/blather/?p=1162), the Feminist SF Wiki (http://wiki.feministsf.net/index.php?title=RaceFail_09), and Fanlore (http://fanlore.org/wiki/RaceFail_%2709).

2. This book led to controversy not just because Wrede chose to eliminate indigenous peoples, but because the elimination of native peoples only resulted in geographic locations having different names. Many people were perturbed that rather than tackle writing nonstereotyped Native Americans, she chose to eliminate them from the book.

1. Introduction

Science fiction and fantasy publishing is no longer completely dominated by large conglomerate publishers. Small or independent presses are growing in number and influence, producing award-winning, best-selling authors whose voices often better reflect the ever-more diverse SF readership. However, there are still many underrepresented voices in the genre, including people of color (POC).

Enter Verb Noire ([http://www.verbnoire.com/](http://www.verbnoire.com/)). Early in 2009, writer Mikki Kendall, who blogs under the name Karnythia, and writer Jamie Nesbitt Golden conceived of an independent e-publishing press that specialized in fiction featuring POC protagonists. Their mission is to "celebrate the works of talented, underrepresented authors and deliver them to a readership that demands more." Verb Noire's first book, River's Daughter, by Tasha Campbell, was released in May 2009.

K. Tempest Bradford, who blogs as The Angry Black Woman ([http://theangryblackwoman.com/](http://theangryblackwoman.com/)), first met Kendall through blog and LiveJournal discussions about race, SF, and fandom. After a successful month guest blogging on theangryblackwoman.com, Bradford invited Kendall to become a regular contributor. They met in person for the first time this year at the WisCon Feminist Science Fiction Convention, where they discussed Verb Noire, SF publishing, fandom, and community.

2. Perspective

KTB: Knowing how tough it can be for small presses, are you worried or scared for the future of the enterprise?
[2.2] **Karnythia:** Yes and no. I would be an idiot not to have my "what if" moments. I also know that even if we don't make it, we will (to borrow a phrase) have changed the face of the industry. I feel like we have to try, because sitting around waiting to be let in isn't going to work. Even if we personally fail, maybe the next person will succeed, or the one after that.

[2.3] **KTB:** Someone has to step up and lay the groundwork.

[2.4] **Karnythia:** Exactly. Mind you, I'm hoping that we do knock the ball out of the park. And I plan for us to keep trying as long as possible, marketing as aggressively as we can.

[2.5] **KTB:** One thing I have been thinking about is how to deal with people who just can't seem to "get" fiction written from POC perspectives. For instance, with Nisi Shawl's Tiptree Award–winning collection *Filter House*, there's been a lot of discussion around Matt Cheney's review of it in *Strange Horizons* (note 1). He really panned the book to hell. The whole time I was reading his review, I thought: "The real reason he doesn't like this book is because it is not written for him, for his perspective, for his comfort, because he's a white guy."

[2.6] **Karnythia:** I think that those people will have to finally accept that they don't get to have the only view. There is no right way to do SF. The whole "I need a white perspective to enjoy a book" is so self-involved and racist. It is not about the authors, or even really about much of the prospective audience. Honestly, "This touched uncomfortable places and that makes it bad," says a lot about the industry that no one really wants to discuss, but the truth keeps playing out at the least opportune moments.

[2.7] **KTB:** No, it's not. Also, Matt didn't even explicitly say that, but I grokked that's what his problem was. When I first read *Filter House* I was a little shocked, but in a good way, to read so many stories that had an essence of, "I am written by a black woman and you just need to get used to that." I'm not used to reading a lot of fiction that makes me feel this way. I wish I could get more.

[2.8] **Karnythia:** I've been working on something that is all about the black woman's perspective in horror because I really got tired of women who didn't fight back or say no. I'm noticing as I go along that it's not that I dislike horror movies so much as I dislike the lack of real heroines. I think Nisi had a similar moment of, "I am not a white woman, so why is she supposed to be the example for me?"

[2.9] **KTB:** Exactly. Her stories resonated with me because she took that tack. But this may not work as well for others. Often we are the ones being asked to take the point of view of the so-called default/mainstream culture, yet it's not often people from the mainstream are asked to take ours.
3. POC and the wider community of SF publishing

[3.1] **KTB:** Verb Noire is obviously all about making POC visible and countering POC disappearing in other published works. How do you think the press's impact is going to be felt in the wider community of SF publishing? Sometimes the big houses end up following the lead of the indie presses.

[3.2] **Karnythia:** I can pretty much guarantee we'll see some new imprints being created. See what happened with Kimani Press in the romance genre (note 2). BET books owned a bunch of imprints that Harlequin bought and turned it into Kimani. Four books a month, all African American romance. I think we'll see the same happening with Tor or Baen, maybe Daw.

[3.3] A lot of the bigger publishers are so busy putting out new versions of the same old thing that nothing fresh is getting out. I can go the rest of my life without another young hip wealthy white person now with magical powers/vampire/ghost story.

[3.4] **KTB:** It's that thing media has where it finds a good, comfortable spot and, like an old cat, refuses to leave it. Media is so afraid of game-changing. As you said, publishers are like that, too.

[3.5] **Karnythia:** And it's so sad because, while *Lord of the Rings* was groundbreaking, the knockoffs? Not so much. And the romance genre is surviving off SF's castoffs.

[3.6] **KTB:** I do realize that there's plenty of market research to back up the oft-repeated notion that people want to see or read what they like over and over and don't want new things. But I don't think it has to be that way.

[3.7] **Karnythia:** You can make market research say anything if you pick the right sample.

[3.8] **KTB:** This extends to the fiction I read, too—the same stories told over and over but without any kind of fresh perspective on them, not even the fresh perspective of, say, another culture.

[3.9] **Karnythia:** It's *The Last of the Mohicans* approach where the hero is white but uses the skills from *x* society to save them. If they taught him the skills, why can't they save themselves?

[3.10] **KTB:** Obviously their skills work better when wielded by a white man.

[3.11] **Karnythia:** Everything is better with a white man—except, you know...not.

[3.12] **KTB:** I think it's part of an invisibility problem. Hollywood people seem to feel that "mainstream audiences" need a white person to identify with in a film, show, or
book, like adding the white character to the *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee* movie (note 3).

[3.13] **Karnythia:** There was a lot of hullabaloo over Jill Scott's show—*The No. 1 Ladies' Detective Agency*—and the BBC deciding not to insert a white character. Highest ratings in years, blows the doors off HBO, and I am an addict. But...they still kept believing the audience needed a white guy. That's why they've ruined *Avatar: The Last Airbender* by casting white actors as characters who, in the original animated version, were all clearly portrayed as of color and will be shocked—shocked—when it flops.

[3.14] **KTB:** It's frustrating. You know there has to be a tipping point where it is deemed not okay by people in power to do this, even if their reasons for saying it's not okay is that it means they will lose money.

[3.15] **Karnythia:** I think, especially as we start to turn to our own markets, that the so-called mainstream will follow out of curiosity, if nothing else.

[3.16] **KTB:** And maybe in search of something that's not the rehashed product they continue to see.

[3.17] Since I've started coming to cons and being active in the science fiction and fantasy community, the landscape has changed. I see more POC both in the "visible"/con-going community just as I am seeing more POC writing books or being in them. I feel like those two things are connected, though I'm not entirely sure which came first.

[3.18] **Karnythia:** I think it isn't a question of POC writing more or trying to participate more so much as that the doors are open a little more so that they get published. Plus, with the Internet, we don't have to rely on the old methods. Look at the Web comic based on African American folklore, *Bayou* (note 4). It is growing in popularity, and that has a lot to do with stuff like link spam (note 5) from readers who are also bloggers.

[3.19] **KTB:** It's important to note that this is just a tech-enhanced version of what POC and really all fans did before. But pre-Internet, the conversations were more in-group.

[3.20] **Karnythia:** Yep. We always had our lit, even if it was just passed as family lore. But now other people can (and want to) see what we're talking about.

[3.21] **KTB:** Even as they are shocked and appalled that it's not what they assumed we would talk about.

[3.22] **Karnythia:** The idea that we're not really thinking about white people never occurred to them, much less that we wouldn't really care about their opinion of what we are talking about.

[3.23] **KTB:** That we are having conversations with each other. Or even between different kinds of POC.
4. Creation of Verb Noire

[4.1] **KTB:** When you decided to start Verb Noire, what finally pissed you off enough to say, "Okay, let's do this"?

[4.2] **Karnythia:** It was all about this year's eruption of arguments over racism and cultural appropriation in science fiction fandom (RaceFail) *(note 6)* and the realization that while authors of color are turning themselves inside out, the mainstream really has no interest in letting us tell our own stories.

[4.3] I want sci-fi to actually reflect us—our voices, our views. And I'm thinking, in this day and age, why keep up the abusive relationship of yesteryear?

[4.4] People will swear that POC aren't into SF, but, like Pam Noles *(note 7)*, people get disgusted seeing us marginalized, erased, or made into caricatures.

[4.5] **KTB:** I wonder, do people tell themselves that POC don't watch or read SF because they believe it, or because they want it to be true so they can go on ignoring us?

[4.6] **Karnythia:** They want it to be true. I know when I first started participating in Doctor Who fandom, there was a lot of "I didn't know black people were watching" and lots of "you only started watching because of Martha." I just don't have the energy to battle to love a show.

[4.7] **KTB:** And it can be a battle. This is why we need Verb Noire. We need this kind of effort for other media too. Spike Lee was/is doing it. And BET is stepping up a bit with their animation department. But for SF TV/movie media, there doesn't seem to be a collective of people looking to bring our stories to the screen. Do you think that if we up the ante in the literature world, film and TV would follow suit?

[4.8] **Karnythia:** Yes! Best-seller lists are the key, then standing strong on casting and writing, like Alexander McCall Smith did for *Ladies' Detective Agency*. They were way too trusting with *Avatar*, and we see what happened there. I think McCall's method of "I won't sell the rights unless you make these guarantees in the deal" was the best approach. The one thing writers of color and writers who create characters of color can't afford to do is get blinded by the dollar signs or else their work is ruined. Look at the *Wizard of Earthsea* movie, where a world that was explicitly depicted as having very few white people ended up almost entirely white on screen *(note 8)*.

[4.9] **KTB:** Yes. In that case, I think that Le Guin never considered that the Sci-Fi Channel and the producers would be so completely stupid about casting.

[4.10] **Karnythia:** I'm sure she didn't. What happened to her was a major lesson, though.
[4.11] **KTB:** If you weren't aware before of what they can and will do to you and your book, you should be now.

[4.12] **Karnythia:** Exactly. That's something our authors, should they hit big, will be reminded of. I want them to succeed, but not at the expense of their vision.

[4.13] **KTB:** In 2008 I was on a panel called "Can Internet Drama Change the World?" at WisCon. I'm a veteran of many online arguments and other dramas, often finding myself frustrated, angry, and in despair over the possibility of change. But the panelists and I all agreed that extremely fraught Internet arguments (often labeled drama) are useful and often lead to change. Almost every major fight, discussion, debate, or argument I've had online led to something positive: new connections, strong friendships, and, very often, important projects.

[4.14] My blog, The Angry Black Woman, came about because of online discussions around race—which can be filled with drama—and my desire to foster more advanced dialogue. The latest major debate, RaceFail, was wider-reaching and longer than almost any Internet drama I've ever been involved in. It generated a lot of heat and a lot of anger, but it doesn't surprise me that it also generated substantial community action and a project like Verb Noire. The positive reaction is often equal to or greater than the negative "action" of Internet drama.

[4.15] Ultimately, the good things generated by drama will outlive the memory of the drama, especially online. I have high hopes that Verb Noire will instigate important changes in science fiction and fantasy publishing.

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5. Notes


3. "This reminds me of the fantasy v. reality casting session for Anansi Boys that went on in the inboxes last year," by Pam Noles, And We Shall March, May 11, 2007, [http://andweshallmarch.typepad.com/and_we_shall_march/2007/05/this_reminds_me.html](http://andweshallmarch.typepad.com/and_we_shall_march/2007/05/this_reminds_me.html).


5. Blog posts that contain large lists of links with little or no commentary for the purpose of keeping record of scattered posts and discussions around a single topic.


1. Introduction

[1.1] This is an interview with the owners of Dreamwidth Studios, LLC (http://www.dreamwidth.org/), and founders of the Dreamwidth open source software project, Mark Smith (http://xb95.com/) and Denise Paolucci (http://denise.dreamwidth.org/tag/about+me). Mark and Denise were both employed for several years by former owners of LiveJournal.com, with Mark working on software development and Denise heading user management.

[1.2] LiveJournal and other Web sites that run on its code, known as LJ clones, are widely used by a portion of both media fandom and speculative fiction fandom as a blogging platform, newsreader (known as the friends list), and social media platform.

[1.3] Dreamwidth, the software, is a fork—that is, an independently developed version of existing software with functionality that deviates from the original—of the LiveJournal code. Mark, Denise, and approximately 40 volunteer coders have transformed the software in a number of important ways. Perhaps the most important change that developers face may be the massive rewrite that reorganizes and simplifies the code's structure. Similarly, the most important change for users may be the separation of the friends list into a reading page and an access list. On a LiveJournal-code Web site, *friending* someone means to both allow them to see secured entries on one's own journal and to have them appear on one's friends page—that is, one's newsreader, where journal entries are aggregated for reading. In the Dreamwidth software, these two functions are separated into giving access and
subscribing. This change had been requested by LiveJournal users for years. It is a fundamental change in the privacy capabilities of this journaling model, which is significant because the finely granulated privacy controls have long been one of LiveJournal's unique features.

[1.4] Dreamwidth.org is the installation of the code owned and managed by Mark and Denise. In contrast to the practice of LiveJournal's various owners, Mark and Denise intend that anyone will be able to set up his or her own installation of the Dreamwidth code in a straightforward manner, with all of the functionality required to host users and administer the Web site. (Much of the code required to fully administer a LiveJournal clone is not available as free software; an LJ clone has to reimplement some fundamental software, such as a payment system, on its own.) The Dreamwidth code and the Dreamwidth.org Web site are currently in beta testing.

[1.5] This interview was conducted via IRC and the text then edited for brevity and clarity. Zvi (http://zvilikestv.net/), who conducted the interview, is project leader for the Dreamwidth Cool Hunters and a former Webmaster for the Organization for Transformative Works.

2. Software

[2.1] **Q:** What's your goal in starting Dreamwidth?

[2.2] **DP:** I think one of the major things about Dreamwidth that I personally find interesting is the fact that we're getting a chance to do things again. Both Mark and I are approaching this project with a major eye toward our professional experience—things that went well, things that went poorly—and taking that experience to heart. People have called DW "a bunch of ex-LJ staff rebooting LJ from the outside," which is a slightly glib, but reasonably accurate, description.

[2.3] We're trying to avoid framing things as anti-LJ or LJ-opposite, but we really have learned so much from our time on LJ about what makes for a good online community, and I think that it's really helping us as we go.

[2.4] **Q:** Is that familiarity the reason you went with what is, if you're only looking at the open source stuff, an incomplete and out-of-date software suite, instead of integrating a modern open source blogging tool and a modern open source bulletin board, or whipping something up from scratch?

[2.5] **DP:** Joel Spolsky (of Joel on Software) has a whole rant about why it's important to never throw out your code and start over again (http://www.joelonsoftware.com/articles/fog0000000069.html), essentially boiling
down to this: when you reuse code, you get the benefit of all the work that's already been done on that code, both in terms of architecture and bug finding and fixing.

When we really set out to build an online community site, we knew that if we "rolled our own," we'd be in development for years and the product, when we finished it, wouldn't have that benefit of 10 years' worth of bug fixes, architecture, and design.

[2.6] Part of the final decision was, of course, that both Mark and I intimately know the LJ code, and part of it was that we knew we'd be able to make it do what we wanted it to do. Having to learn from scratch would delay us considerably. It took us nearly a year to get DW production-ready as it is, and that was with an already established code base. Part of it was a really emotional decision: we both knew LJ, sweated LJ, bled LJ over the years, and having a chance to fix all the things that always annoyed us was really compelling.

[2.7] But more than that, there are a lot of things that LJ does right. Most of the major Web 2.0 features or functions that are de rigueur on other sites these days were in LJ circa 2002–2004 or so, either in nascent form or fully featured. To the best of my knowledge, LJ was the first to have threaded comments with e-mailed notifications of replies, for instance, and most of the community/group blogging tools that are standard on the Internet now started out on LJ.

[2.8] **MS:** LJ was the first service, and one of the only (to my knowledge), to allow voice posts. To have a reasonably integrated photo system. To have security for your posts (and still probably the only to have such a fully articulated security system, although Vox [http://www.vox.com/] comes closer). To have a built-in aggregator (friends page). LJ Talk, an instant messaging service. The list goes on; there are a lot of things that LJ does or did first, and still is the only site that does a lot of them.

[2.9] **DP:** And a lot of the reason why LJ never got the credit for having pioneered those features was due to either poor promotion or usability fail—that is, making a tool less useful by implementing it so that it is difficult to use. We really wanted to fix that.

[2.10] **Q:** One of the concerns in some segments of online fandom has been about that separation between LiveJournal and the rest of the Internet. Specifically, there's concern that the LJ code doesn't play well with others (neither its own clones nor other blogging platforms) in a way that a lot of other blogging software does now. Will Dreamwidth further that splintering effect?

[2.11] **DP:** I think (correct me if I'm wrong here, Mark) that was actually one of the first things I pointed out as something I specifically wanted to address with DW! Like, within the first 10 minutes of us talking about DW.
MS: This was something we talked about extensively back when we were deciding whether or not to use the LJ code. Going with the LJ code base meant we would not end up with an interoperable site, by default. We're against that.

DP: I'd say that about 50 percent of the work we've done has been to improve the interoperability functions. Our medium- to long-term goal is to make it so that anyone on any DW-based site can communicate seamlessly with anyone on any other DW-based site, with what site they choose to host on being totally transparent.

MS: We have addressed it, so far, in the context of interoperability mostly with other LJ code sites. However, all of the core features we're working on have future growth in mind. Andrea Nall built the importer so it can import from WordPress, for example. It does not presently, but it's modular to make it do so. It's the same with the crossposter, which posts a Dreamwidth entry to another blog. Allen Petersen built that modular as well, so it's reasonably straightforward to support that.

Q: So when you say interoperable, you mean DW code to DW code and DW to Internet in general. Do you have any feelings on whether LJ or the other clones are going to work with you for greater DW-LJ compatibility? How and to what extent?

MS: The interoperability standard LJ has maintained for the past decade is woefully out of date and will not be Dreamwidth's policy. I want to support OAuth/OpenID 2, Open Social, and whatever other cross-platform functionality that makes sense for the community or for the Internet at large. I would rather us be more compatible with, for example, WordPress and Blogger than focus purely on LJ-code platforms.

DP: LJ's been pretty good so far with working with us. Tupshin Harper, LJ's director of engineering, is really interested in working with us on feature development and the like. I think there's going to be a limit to the amount of cross-site interoperability that LJ is willing to uptake, just for business reasons, but I'm hopeful that we can achieve a better set of features over time.

And I think that with our stated commitment to accessibility, we'll see a lot of people who start using DW as an overlay to their presence on the rest of the Internet, and I really want to support that. I have this pie-in-the-sky dream of DW eventually evolving into a centralized dashboard of our users' Internet presence, pulling together all of their various social media uses in one place.

3. Accessibility
We've already seen a lot of people saying that they find DW so much easier to use than LiveJournal and other blogging platforms, specifically because we work so hard to be accessible to people with disabilities or people who need assistive technology, that I think it'll be a major use case.

Why are you so focused on accessibility?

Because it's the right thing to do, in my opinion.

It sounds glib, but really, it's because it's just the right damn thing to do! I have disability issues myself, of a physical nature that don't tend to impact my computing use, but I know what it's like to live in an inaccessible world, and I know the relief that comes when you find someplace or someone who just gets it. Part of what we really believe, from the very beginning, is that DW should be welcoming of everyone. So the accessibility is part of that.

In what ways is it making the development process harder or easier? Who benefits from this push for accessibility, just people with disabilities?

I think we all benefit, really, both on a practical and on a social scale. Socially, it teaches everyone to be aware of the people around them and their needs, and practically, a lot of the functions and features that make DW work well with assistive tech also make DW more usable for everyone, and make DW display better for low-bandwidth users, people on mobile devices, and people on older computers.

It makes the development process a little harder, both in that we have to constantly be thinking about it and in that it can take some extra time to add assistive tech or code around some of the inherited accessibility problems, and there have been times when it's taken more time to finish a feature or when fixing something for accessibility purposes means introducing new bugs.

Designing an accessible Web site is a harder task than making something just shiny and pretty with the latest whiz-bang features. Practically, we have had to, and will have to, spend more effort to build a site that is more accessible. I do not believe it has slowed us down any, however, since by making the decision to support accessibility we have gotten some superb volunteers who are contributing to that part of the project who probably wouldn't have contributed to DW otherwise.

And, of course, it's a huge shift in thinking and design. I know that I had a whole bunch of things that I never used to notice until someone would point it out: "Hey, this isn't gonna fly." But we learn from our mistakes.
And yes, by being more accessible, and by making it such a core focus of our dev process, we get so many incredible people coming to volunteer for us, because they see that we're welcoming them and valuing them as people.

**MS:** I think that everybody benefits, too. Especially in today's modern world, having a version of the site that works well for people who use low-resolution screens and large fonts also makes it more compatible with mobile devices, which are increasingly more common.

### 4. Users

**Q:** Welcoming everyone sounds warm and fuzzy and terrific, but "everyone" includes a lot of people who are unpleasant to other users because their ideology is explicitly hateful, or they have poor social interaction skills, or they just like to make other people miserable. Is everyone going to include, for want of a more precise term, jerks?


**MS:** Yes, jerks are welcome on Dreamwidth, but please mind the terms of service ([http://www.dreamwidth.org/legal/tos](http://www.dreamwidth.org/legal/tos)).

**DP:** I think, given my experience on LJ's abuse prevention team, that I've probably seen pretty much every possible variation on "people being jerks to each other on the Internet" that it's possible to come up with!

**MS:** Our general philosophy on users being jerks to each other is to go for a technical, instead of a social, solution: make stronger antiabuse tools, and put their control in the hands of the users. Basically, sites can go for one of two methods when it comes to antiabuse tools. They can either use administrative solutions (site admins banning or blocking people, cutting off IPs [Internet protocol addresses] at the source, issuing warnings, generally behaving as the stern parent figure), or they can code around it.

**DP:** A very basic example of a code solution is LJ/DW's ability to ban a user from commenting in your journal, for instance. Or a community maintainer's ability to remove someone from a community, or screen their comments so they're only visible to the commenter and to the maintainer of the community.

Generally, with my experience on LJ's abuse prevention team, I can pretty conclusively say that as soon as you have a site administrator issuing a "hey, stop being a jerk" warning, or putting down boundaries, the person in question is going to
start looking for ways to dance right up to the line, or (if blocks are set) looking for ways around it. There's something about a rule that makes people want to break it!

[4.8] So our ideal is less us saying "that's not okay" and more letting people tailor their individual DW experience. There are really fine-grained privacy tools, for instance, as well as different commenting settings and different levels of access.

[4.9] I actually think that our split of LJ's "friends" concept into its two component parts is a major step forward there. On LJ, you can't subscribe to people without giving them access to do things in your journal, such as commenting if you have your settings set to only allow friends to comment. On DW, there might be someone whose writing you find interesting, in a "makes my blood boil but I want to keep tabs on it" sort of way, and our setup allows you to do that without giving them any sway in your space.

[4.10] Q: So what do you say to the people who say that because some particular subset of everyone is on the service, they can't use Dreamwidth? I've seen the suggestion, for instance, that if Dreamwidth allows fictional depictions of underage sex, that schoolteachers won't be able to use the service.

[4.11] MS: It seems like an impossibly slippery slope. If we ever say "x or y is not welcome on DW because it offends z," then we are going to become arbitrators of what are valid values for x, y, and z, and that's not a position I want us to ever be in. If we ever tried to do that, not only would Denise and I probably disagree, but we'd also end up making a site that suits our particular worldviews to the exclusion of others. The only reasonable limit that I feel we can ever have on content is the one we have now: what's restricted under U.S. law, and what is harmful to the service itself, such as spam, viruses, and exploits.

[4.12] DP: I think that no matter what we choose to do, someone's going to be happy about it and someone's going to be offended by it or negatively impacted by it.

[4.13] To loop back to a previous discussion point, this is one of the reasons why I really want to improve our federated blog network features: that way, people who feel like they don't want to or can't support Dreamwidth can set up their own instance of the code, or find another instance of the code that's more to their liking, and still participate in the greater community.

[4.14] I'd really question your particular example of underage sex and schoolteachers. I don't think that just sharing server space with someone constitutes an endorsement of their activity, really. Do you know what everyone who's using your e-mail provider is doing?
5. Legal relationship with users

[5.1] Q: I've seen a lot of people questioning what "welcome" will entail, a lot of speculation that, bluntly, Strikethrough (note 1) could happen here, too. In practical terms of not deleting accounts for violation of the site's terms of service and responding to letters of lawyers, what does "welcome" mean?

[5.2] DP: In practical terms, we're not going to take down content unless it's illegal. And by "illegal," we mean, "a court has ruled that this specific content violates the law." This is another case where my experience with LJ really serves us, since a lot of what fannish content creators are concerned about is the possibility of a DMCA (note 2) takedown notice from the rights holder of the specific property that they're fannish about. The DMCA is perhaps the most abused piece of legislation on the Internet.

[5.3] The DMCA does set forth what we have to do, yes. But even within that really strict set of obligations, there's some wiggle room, as outlined in DW's policy (http://www.dreamwidth.org/legal/dmca.bml).

[5.4] Our policy was specifically written to mitigate some of the worst abuses. For instance, the law says we have to deny service to repeat offenders, but it doesn't say what "repeat offender" is. So we wrote the policy as something that a court would likely find reasonable, but which legitimate use (that is, not someone who's using DW solely to spread cracked copies of software or something) isn't likely to trip.

[5.5] Another thing that came from experience is that most services don't forward the takedown notice to the user in question. The law doesn't say "you have to forward the notice," so a lot of places don't. We do. We'll also send it to the Chilling Effects Clearinghouse (http://www.chillingeffects.org/), which is a group that specifically seeks to document abuses of the DMCA.

[5.6] Also, a lot of people don't realize that the law sets forth a way for the alleged copyright infringer to dispute the notification, and again, a lot of services don't educate their users about that right. We're going to be really clear about that too.

[5.7] So if, say, Marvel Comics filed a DMCA takedown notice on someone's X-Men fanfic, the law says we have to disable access to that material. But we'll tell the user what we're doing, forward on the takedown notice, and give them information about where they can learn about their rights. Our DMCA policy actually explicitly says that people should contact the Organization for Transformative Works (OTW) (note 3) if their disputed work is also fan work. I checked with OTW's legal committee, and they were all for us including that link.
Q: So, to clarify, you're not offering any legal assistance, but your concern is more about providing information to your users than avoiding having an intellectual property holder send you lots and lots of letters—or, even if not an IP holder, just a loud and obnoxious third party.

DP: Yes, exactly. We can't offer someone legal assistance or help defend their use, but we can tell them what their rights are and point them to where they can get more information. We're very used to loud and obnoxious third parties shouting at us.

MS: People who are worried about DMCA should protect their posts (http://www.dreamwidth.org/support/faqbrowse.bml?faqid=54). Don't leave it public, where the great Google can turn it up and the DMCA-happy lawyers can find it!

DP: Or even just turn on the "view with discretion" bit (http://www.dreamwidth.org/support/faqbrowse.bml?faqid=146), which is another layer of protection.

Q: Dreamwidth is a for-profit business, and you both to intend to earn a living wage from the site. However, a lot of the work on the site—programming, answering support questions, creating CSS designs for journals—is done by volunteers. Why do you think that profiting from the work of your volunteers is a moral business plan? What rewards, tangible or intangible, do volunteers receive from working on the site?

DP: Our volunteers are going into it with the same attitude we have, really, which is that we're all coming together to make something special and long-lasting, and everyone participates as much or as little as they have the time, energy, and experience to participate. I think our volunteers are mostly people who are looking for an Internet home that treats them with respect, where they can really make a difference and get things done, and we're offering that. Mark and I aren't trying to be the power-hungry dictators or the profiteering creeps—our role is more as the people who are organizing and guiding everyone's efforts, and facilitating everyone's work to work together to benefit the entire service.

DP: Obviously, we are taking in money, because servers don't run on idealism, but we aren't going into this expecting to get rich. Our operating agreement actually specifies that two-thirds of our profits have to be reinvested in the project somehow, and half of that money will get directed as the community specifies. I view it more as a collective project, where we, as the people who can devote full-time attention to the project, get paid a living wage in exchange for the time and effort we put in, while the rest of the income gets used to further the project as a whole—but we're all working together to build something. Mark and I just happen to be the ones legally responsible for the bills in the end.
[5.15] **MS:** Tangibly, we provide active volunteers with free paid accounts. We also provide them with the infrastructure they need to work on what they want: development environments, tools, and so on. Intangibly, there are many rewards to volunteering: knowing that you're contributing to a project you care about, feeling like a part of a team, helping out the community, feeling in charge of the site's destiny, knowing that the things you're contributing are actually being used by thousands of people. There's a lot of positive energy that comes from contributing to something voluntarily.

[5.16] **MS:** Volunteerism, especially as it relates to a for-profit business, is nothing new. I used to volunteer for LiveJournal, as did Denise, when Brad Fitzpatrick, the founder of LiveJournal, was making money and buying himself a house off it. I may not have derived a monetary benefit from that work, but the value I got in terms of professional experience was immense. Learning to deal with a development process, people, and the support team was an intensely valuable thing for me. I would not be where I am professionally without having done that.

[5.17] **MS:** One of the things I least expected when I joined the LJ volunteer team was that I would end up meeting people who would become good friends to this day—nearly a decade later. The people I share a house with, I met through volunteering. My life has been permanently enriched by the experience, and I expect people will have a similar experience with volunteering for Dreamwidth.

[5.18] **DP:** We also get a lot of volunteers who are excluded from the traditional workforce in some way, whether through disability or life circumstances, and a lot of them say that working on the Dreamwidth project really provides them a place they can use their skills that they wouldn't otherwise have. Our accessibility project coordinator, for instance, is totally bed bound, and she's one of the most brilliant people I know. We can offer her a project to work on that fits her schedule and her health issues. A lot of our volunteers are in similar situations, and they've said how much they appreciate having a place where they feel they can make a difference.

6. Dreamwidth and fandom

[6.1] **Q:** A lot of interest in Dreamwidth has been as a place for fannish activity. What kinds of fannish activity were you seeing on LiveJournal? What kinds have you seen move over to Dreamwidth? Are there any fannish activities that you saw on LJ that you are not seeing move to Dreamwidth?

[6.2] **DP:** One of the most prominent pieces of fannish activity, obviously, is fiction writing, and I've been really happy to see—even in our first 3 weeks!—how much of that is appearing on Dreamwidth. In the past few weeks, I've been seeing more and
more stories posted to DW appear on fan fiction recommendation lists, and that's great to see. For instance, five out of every six stories I see recced in the New Trek fandom are posted to DW, and that's awesome! (I think our longer post and comment length limits, compared with LJ, is really appealing there.)

[6.3] One bit of fannish activity that isn't going to be switching to DW anytime soon is anything having to do with icons, graphics, or art—we don't have any form of photo or image hosting yet. We're going to have to do a lot more work to improve the image posting functions, though, since that's something LJ code doesn't really have.

[6.4] **MS:** I've dug a bit through metafandom ([http://community.livejournal.com/metafandom/](http://community.livejournal.com/metafandom/)) to get an idea of how many links are on LJ and how many are on DW, and have been pretty happy to see how many we're seeing on DW.

[6.5] **DP:** We want to be a real home for all kinds of creative work—written and visual. But I have seen some people questioning the "creative work" element of things, and I do also want to be clear that we don't just mean fiction or art. We mean any kind of creation: essays, link organizing, recs, recording your life, everything.

[6.6] **MS:** I think that's part of our drive for accessibility too. I believe, at my core, that everybody has something useful to contribute to the world, even if it's just who they are, their metaphorical voice. "Even if it's just" makes it sound like I'm setting that as a second-class citizen, which is not my intent.

[6.7] **Q:** I was wondering to what extent you'd seen migration among role-playing gamers, music fans, sports fans, or foodies. Were those organized communities on LJ? Are they moving as communities to DW?

[6.8] **MS:** We've had a few people asking us for invites for their role-playing game (RPG) group. We've granted most of those.

[6.9] **DP:** And I can think of a lot of interesting features that we can put in to make RPGs easier—things like switching back and forth between a "master account" and various "sub" accounts more readily.

[6.10] I haven't really seen a lot of adoption among sports fen, music fen, foodies, and so on. Mostly I'm seeing people who are using DW already who have these as secondary interests creating communities for them, rather than moving those interests to DW being the sole drive. But I'd certainly be interested in analyzing those communities, seeing what they want or need in terms of features, and adding some of those as well.
One of the things I always loved about LJ was seeing what various subcultures used the tools for, and what kind of weird and funky adoptions came up. I've been trying to make lists of those types of repurposings, and am really interested in making things easier and more natural for people to use, based on that.

Q: What about the communities that are connected to media fandom: Comics? Speculative fiction? Horror? And are you seeing original fiction writers, pro or amateur but not necessarily speculative fiction, moving to Dreamwidth?

MS: We have briefly talked to the people behind scans_daily from LJ. They were an LJ community that posted scans of comic book pages with commentary; LiveJournal deleted their account because it decided that those scans were a copyright violation and thus violated the LJ terms of service. They are looking at DW as a possible resting place. I don't know about the rest.

DP: We've been doing a lot of outreach in the speculative fiction community, since a few of our core project team have roots in that culture. There are a few pro speculative fiction authors who are really interested in DW and in the drive behind it. The majority of moves so far have been in science fiction/fantasy fandom, but we're seeing some others as well.

Q: What other subcultures, interest groups, and communities are you seeing come to Dreamwidth, and what's attracting them?

DP: Aside from fandom, a lot of our early adopters have been people in various alternative sexual or gender identity cultures: BDSM/kink communities, the queer community, the transgender community—subcultures with really strong identities and senses of community.

And I think part of that is the feeling of unease that a lot of people get on other services, where they fear that their kind of expression might be less desirable or more "edge." Having our diversity statement there and public helps reassure people that yes, we do know about them, we're not scared of them, and we welcome them.

MS: Explicitly welcome them.

DP: Yes! The more varied the voices we have, the happier we are! I've always thought that the strength of an online community lies in its diversity, so it makes me really happy to see differing voices here.

MS: We've had some people write in to ask if they would be welcome. One woman, from the BDSM community, asked us about moving her Yahoo! group over.
She was concerned that they post pictures—and that they were R rated. I told her to come on over.

7. Fan friendly versus fannish

[7.1] **Q:** Your DMCA policy and your general welcoming stance is what you point to when you say Dreamwidth is fan friendly. But you've clarified repeatedly that the service is not fannish. You've also seen a lot of mistaken belief that Dreamwidth is a project of the OTW. Can you explain that distinction and its implications for fannish users and the service in general?

[7.2] **DP:** I think that part of the reason that people confuse us with the OTW is that we are, to the best of anyone's knowledge, the only two majority-female open source projects on the Internet, and another part of the reason is because they both spring out of the same vague social network. A lot of people who are real proponents of DW are also proponents of the OTW, and vice versa.

[7.3] Part of the reason why I really want to clarify that DW is not a "fandom" project goes back to my point about diverse voices, though. For a lot of people, their fan work and fan activity are an important part of their off-duty time, but it's not the be-all and end-all of their lives. One of the really neat things I always thought about fandom's presence on LJ was that you'd get to know someone for their fan work, and in the process, you'd get to know them as a person because the personal posts were mingled in with the fan work. So I think the really neat side effect of having fannish work on a service that's not fan specific is that breakdown effect—that people can socialize both in and out of a fannish framework.

[7.4] **MS:** For me, the distinction is one of focus and priorities. I want to prioritize what we do on Dreamwidth based on what our users need and where we want the site to go, not based on what x group or y group needs. Note that if our users are 90 percent from x group, then certainly most of our effort will go toward making the site better for that group.

[7.5] **DP:** I think, though, that there are things we can do that will be usable and useful for everyone, and that's the design goal I've been trying to keep in mind the whole way—not designing to a specific subculture's usage, but making features that are flexible and powerful and that can be repurposed for a whole bunch of uses. When I'm doing feature design, I always try to make sure that the features I'm designing can be used in at least two or three different ways.

[7.6] Part of where LJ always fell down, to me, was the content management tools. There's a really heavy emphasis on privacy and security, which I love, but it's focused
on creating new content, not finding and categorizing old content.

[7.7] **Q:** One of the ways in which you've been clarifying the distinction to the fannish community is in your personal identities. Mark, you do not identify yourself as a fan, whereas Denise, you do. Can you both explain what you mean with these identifications and how (if at all) they may affect your interaction with your Dreamwidth user base?

[7.8] **DP:** It's less a question of interacting with the user base (although it does mean that I've got a good understanding of the vocabulary and culture that people will be bringing to communications with us) and more of a question of knowing what sort of features and functions "fandom" (by which I mean fannish use cases) will find useful and relevant, because they're usually things that I've wanted myself for a really long time.

[7.9] The question of "what is fandom" is one that will never be resolved in our lifetimes. But for me, when I self-identify as fannish, I mean that I identify as part of the Western-media-based creative subculture, where people engage with source texts in some sort of transformative way. (I personally write in the *Stargate SG-1* fandom.)

[7.10] **MS:** When I say I am not a fan, I mean that I have never been a part of the fannish culture. I've seen it from the outside. I've read some fic, I have a lot of friends who are in fandom, and I think it's interesting. I don't think I'll ever get into the culture as a contributor or avid consumer. Also, I don't believe I am very specific with my terminology. I know enough to know that fandom is a huge, diverse group with many, many distinct overlapping and nonoverlapping groups.

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8. Free and open source software development

[8.1] **Q:** I'm curious whether you've seen or experienced any parallels or perpendiculars with the software development community and open source process, as compared to any sort of fandom.

[8.2] **DP:** The most obvious parallel is that both fandom and the open source software (OSS) community is composed of intensely passionate people who are incredibly dedicated to their particular interest. Other than that...I'm not really sure. I have this vague and unformed idea that it's the difference between male space and female space, but I'm not entirely convinced of it, and I'm not sure I can talk about it without having to resort to insane generalizations and talking out my ass.

[8.3] **Q:** Would you characterize Dreamwidth development as different from run-of-the-mill free software development?
[8.4] **MS:** It's vastly, vastly different—and that's a conscious decision. The biggest differences are in who contributes, and how those contributions are received. Traditionally, most OSS projects expect you to come in knowing what you are doing. You are expected to be a master programmer and understand how it all works. Meritocracy feels like a great idea when you look at the surface, but underneath, it turns it into a competition, not a collaboration.

[8.5] **DP:** I haven't had a lot of experience with OSS development on projects other than LJ, but what I have seen is always something that its proponents describe as meritocracy, and the outside observers view as a small clique. We think that everyone can contribute. There are so many different tasks that we have, development-wise, that need to get done. Some of them are huge and sweeping and do require a lot of experience; some of them are literally one-character changes.

[8.6] By encouraging and teaching people who are less experienced on those one-character changes, we not only free up more experienced developer time and effort for the big things, but we also get people learning as they go until they are those experienced developers. We're never going to run out of the little things. That kind of attention to the small details also gives us a chance to showcase our commitment to excellence and detail. We don't want to fall into the trap of saying, "That's a tiny thing. We can work around it until someone has time to fix it." There's never going to be a shortage of the huge issues, but that doesn't mean we can't pay attention to the tiny things too.

[8.7] **Q:** How have people used to traditional free software development reacted to your process? Does Dreamwidth interact with the larger OSS world?

[8.8] **MS:** They've been reacting very well. It's been surprising to me to see the people who have shown up in IRC. People like Skud (http://infotrope.net/blog/), eagle (http://www.eyrie.org/~eagle/), and adamk (http://ali.as/) are fairly well-known old-school OSS Perl types, and they have been interested in the DW project. As to the development process we're using, Skud has been really supportive and interested in it and is helping us out. I don't have a good sense of how the greater OSS community views our process yet, though.

[8.9] **DP:** One thing that I find really interesting is that there's been a conversation in the OSS world for years about how to interest or attract newcomers, and so a lot of people are seeing DW and our success and getting interested because of that. I know Skud's been doing a lot of advocacy work in that direction, and a lot of the attention we've been getting is due to her promotion.
Q: Based on the assumption that if an old school OSS developer wants a blog, they've already installed a self-hosted solution, is it fair to say they're more interested in your process than your product?

MS: Adamk in particular has been evaluating Dreamwidth as a potential new home for the use.perl.org (http://use.perl.org/) content. Although DW is not yet suitable for what they need, we've started talking about it. At this point, I think the interest is more on the product, but Skud is doing a lot to advocate for the process we're using and attracting more awareness to what Dreamwidth is bringing to the table for OSS.

We have a ways to go. I don't want this to be construed as "hey, look, we've solved it!" because by no means is that the case, but we are fairly unusual in the world of development methodologies, and I hope that over the coming years, we can refine it and educate others on things that we have found to work.

DP: I think one major benefit, in terms of the overall end goal, is that we don't view our way as having totally solved it. We know that we're going to be iterating as we go.

9. Personal identity

Q: One of the big concerns of some parts of fandom is separating the fannish identity from the legal identity—that is, work or family responsibilities. Both of you are now self-employed or transitioning to self-employment, and you have drawn your significant others into working for the business, but I know you also both maintain separate staff and personal accounts, if not identities. Why are you keeping them separate? How willing are people to respect that separation?

MS: I don't feel that either of us have a very strong separation of identity, honestly. On my "mark" account, I send them to my other identity; I say "hey, go read xb95."

DP: For me, part of the reason for maintaining two separate accounts is just so that people have a sense of when we're speaking ex cathedra, so to speak. If people have an issue with the fact that half of the site ownership is writing porn in her spare time, they're probably not going to be the type of people who are going to be happy on DW in the first place.

MS: I also think that maintaining the separate accounts will be useful for separation of work and personal time. Just like they suggest you maintain an entirely separate room of your house if you actually work from home, I think it's useful for me
to be able to be logged in as xb95 and not see official journals, people sending me messages, responding to comments officially, and so on.

[9.5] **DP:** Yes, absolutely. I know that I can go to my alternate account and just see off-duty stuff. It was always really hard for me, when working for LJ, to load my LJ friends page and see people criticizing something that I'd done or something I was involved with, or just people snarking about LJ in general. Having two accounts helps me maintain as much of that emotional separation as I can. Obviously I'm still going to run into people critiquing my baby, but if I'm viewing it in an entirely separate account, it helps me make the internal transition.

### 10. Conclusion

[10.1] **Q:** Was there anything you wish I had asked about—anything you would like to let the readers of TWC know about Dreamwidth?

[10.2] **DP:** I think one of the things that I find most interesting about DW is that in a lot of ways, we're an experiment, business-wise. We're explicitly trying to overturn a lot of the things that "everybody knows" about business on the Internet. Our goal isn't to make it big and sell out to another company, or make an initial public offering for millions.

[10.3] Mark and I are both going into this viewing it as something that we want to support ourselves for as long as market conditions make that possible. So in many ways, that attitude and that idea is informing a lot of our choices. We're designing for the long haul. I see a lot of people saying that our business stance is idealistic or overly optimistic, that "of course" we'll sell out or plaster ads all over the site when economics make it necessary, and that perception is something I want to combat.

[10.4] We built everything on the assumption that we never, ever, ever want to take money from anyone but our users, because we both think that the minute you go to outside funding sources, you give up an element of control over the project that we're not comfortable giving up.

[10.5] **MS:** I want to say, Dreamwidth is not a side project, it's not a clone, it's not a fly-by-night little thing we thought up one afternoon. There have been thousands and thousands of person-hours put into this project. We are here to build a stable, solid foundation, a useful service, and a vibrant, varied, diverse community.

[10.6] This is our business, this is our careers, this is our baby. We know the costs, we know the technical requirements, and we did all of our business design based
around the notion of paying ourselves a living wage for the rest of our careers. We're in this for the long haul.

11. Notes

1. Strikethrough was a 2007 incident in which many LiveJournal user accounts were deleted without warning. LiveJournal initially claimed that these users had violated the terms of service, but they later restored some accounts and admitted that their criteria for deletion were overbroad and not a reasonable interpretation of the terms of service then in force. ([http://fanlore.org/wiki/Strikethrough](http://fanlore.org/wiki/Strikethrough))


3. "The Organization for Transformative Works (OTW) is a nonprofit organization established by fans to serve the interests of fans by providing access to and preserving the history of fanworks and fan culture in its myriad forms" ([http://transformativeworks.org/about/believe](http://transformativeworks.org/about/believe)). OTW sponsors the Journal of Transformative Works and Cultures.
1. Introduction


[1.2] *The Hunt for Gollum* was released on the Internet on May 3, 2009. The film follows Gandalf and Aragorn's search for Gollum after he was released from Mordor. In J. R. R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*, Aragorn explains this quest in the chapter entitled "The Council of Elrond." Aragorn and Gandalf searched for Gollum for some time before Gandalf went to Gondor looking for proof that Bilbo's ring was the One Ring. This left Aragorn to track Gollum through the Wild alone, and eventually capture him.

[1.3] Bouchard's combination of Tolkien's text and Peter Jackson's visual interpretation of Middle-earth is an impressive accomplishment, given the low £3,000 budget and part-time filming. The accomplished feel of *The Hunt for Gollum* is aided by the performances of professional actors, particularly Adrian Webster as Aragorn, and by the collaboration with the makers of sister fan film *Born of Hope* ([http://www.bornofhope.com/](http://www.bornofhope.com/)) for props and costumes.

[1.4] Chris was interviewed via e-mail by E. L. Dollard.
2. The making of *The Hunt for Gollum*

[2.1] **Q:** What led you to decide to adapt *The Hunt for Gollum*? Did you explicitly look for a gap in Peter Jackson's *The Lord of the Rings* film?

**CB:** Yes. Once I realized that such a film might be possible, I started looking for passages in the books and appendices that had been left out. I had seen how the other big fan film, *Born of Hope*, was already in the planning stages and talked to them about collaboration. [*Born of Hope* is another *Lord of the Rings*–inspired film, still in production, to be distributed freely on the Internet at http://www.bornofhope.com]. Luckily they were open to it, and so I already had lots of costumes in place. Eventually I settled on *The Hunt for Gollum*, purely because it was a prequel, and it had the three characters that really interested me in *The Lord of the Rings*.

[2.2] **Q:** Did you find it difficult to accommodate the differing levels of viewer knowledge of the text, or did your adaptation of Tolkien's text work because viewers would already be familiar with Jackson's film?

**CB:** I didn't want to repeat information from the films, so I assumed the audience would already have seen them and tried to give them more information. My editor, Lewis, and I had lots of discussions as we were editing the film together and rescripting some scenes about how to stay true to Tolkien's world, but we also wanted to make sure fans of the films would find something they could connect with.

[2.3] **Q:** The film is remarkably consistent with Jackson's vision of Middle-earth. Do you think that Jackson's *The Lord of the Rings* is inescapable stylistically?

**CB:** For a short film such as this, it seemed sensible to stick to the world as had already been established. For starters, this saved us budget and time on the design and art department stages. Jackson and Co. created a wonderfully rich world, so why change something that works just for the sake of change?

[2.4] **Q:** What was the most challenging aspect of filming *The Hunt for Gollum*?

**CB:** Organizing a cast and crew of over 100 volunteers, plus learning a lot of the processes as we went along. Many of the crew hadn't even worked on a film before, so it was a case of trial and error a lot of the time. Also, this is my first proper film, so polishing it to completion in the edit suite, with all the CGI and sound, was a long and rather arduous experience.

[2.5] **Q:** How was Gollum created in the film?
We used every trick we could dream up. In the wide shots, where Gollum is far away from the camera, that's either Matt or Chris done up in a mask with makeup to look like Gollum, and crawling around either in North Wales or in front of a makeshift green screen I put up on the rooftop of my flat. The shot at the end when you see his face was done at the last minute by a small team of very talented CGI artists. There were several moments when I thought we wouldn't be able to achieve that shot and nearly gave up.

Did you find it difficult to "create" Middle-earth in only 40 minutes of film?

It was tricky to get the length and pacing right. The script was only 25 pages long (25 minutes), but the rough cut turned out to be 55 minutes. We had to ruthlessly cut down the scenes so that it didn't feel too slow, but still showed the richness of the world. I called on help from friends and Lord of the Rings fans in the editing stages, to ensure that the edit and pace of the film were about right before we released it. When you've been working on the same project for almost 2 years, the hardest thing is to watch it with fresh eyes and imagine how a real audience would see it.

What parts of the film are you most pleased with?

I rather like the scenes with Gandalf in them, purely because it was a rare chance to get the actors together in a film that's mostly just Aragorn wandering around by himself. I suppose I'm quite proud of the fight scenes, as they were a huge technical challenge.

Could you tell us more about the script-writing process? You said it was originally conceived as longer than 25 pages. Who wrote the script, and how much did the script writing and the approach to the story influence and shape the final film?

I adapted the script myself, although I had lots of help and input from my coproducers and editor Lewis Albrown, who helped restructure the story, which we developed constantly during the final year of production. I originally wrote it as a 15-page script, trying to keep things simple on our microbudget, but as things went on, I got more ambitious, and new ideas were incorporated. So the script went through about 20 versions, and then we changed around the order of scenes a lot in the edit, experimenting and eventually even reshooting a couple of scenes to fit the new structure. The ending of the film changed substantially while we were editing the first scenes shot, and the final Black Rider fight was only added to the script at the last minute when I realized we might be able to pull it off. Originally the Orc attack was
halfway through the film (before Aragorn captured Gollum), but we decided ultimately it was better to save up the Orcs until near the end. At one point, I had a rough cut at 55 minutes, but Aragorn spent most of that time alone, tracking, and we realized it was dragging, so we brutally chopped it down to 38 minutes a few weeks before it was released.

[3.3] Q: One remark by reviewers is that the cinematography really strives, and in many cases succeeds, to match that of Jackson's films. Can you talk about why, in the context of a fan work, this would be considered high praise? Why do you think viewers of Gollum would prefer an homage rather than a wholly new look or style?

[3.4] CB: As a fan, I wanted to see more of Peter Jackson's trilogy, so that's what I set about trying to achieve. Most of the viewers seem to have wanted the same thing. However, our cinematography is not yet quite up there with feature-film quality, so we had to cut many corners, and use whatever natural light Mother Nature provided. Everything was done on the bare minimum, with the cheapest HD cameras we could borrow; however, there are tricks to try to make digital look more cinematic, and on every shot, I was thinking about how to avoid the home video look.

[3.5] Q: Fan films have been described as essentially derivative by nature. Do you think this is a fair assessment?

[3.6] CB: Certainly. Fan films are designed purposely for audiences to experience an extension of an already established world. If they did not derive their stories/characters/worlds from those existing works, then they would not be able to reach out to an audience on the Internet and would not be recognized at all. Of course there's the opportunity for filmmakers to put their own mark on the way things are shot and made, how the stories are told, but the main aims are to please the existing fan base and to do that you have to remain true to the world of the original works.

[3.7] Q: Do you see yourself as part of a process of adaptation (the conscious transformation of material into a new medium such as book to film) or appropriation (the act of knowingly or unknowingly making reference to a specific text such as Jackson's 'nod' to Bakshi's animated *The Lord of the Rings* [http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0077869/])? Do you think that your work is in a lesser league because it is an amateur/fan effort—not just because of lack of resources, but also because of your own more fannish perspective?

[3.8] CB: With this film, it was definitely a process of adaptation, and this was intended from the outset. The film industry doesn't recognize nonprofit films, fan films, or media as being in the same league simply because they don't generate any
revenue. I don't think of the film as being in the same league as Hollywood feature films because it is a fan film. It can't stand alone.

[3.9] **Q:** Was it a difficult process to draw the narrative together? The story of Gollum's capture by Aragorn is relayed in a number of places from *The Fellowship of the Ring* to *The Unfinished Tales* to the appendices. What was the most challenging aspect of adapting the story to film?

[3.10] **CB:** I suppose the difficult thing was to make it interesting when most of the film was Aragorn traveling alone. So characterization was difficult, as was pacing it to keep it interesting. Also, there's so much background history and information to get across that it was difficult to balance that with elements of characterization. Plus getting it all into a short film was tricky. It could have been feature length if we'd added a few more characters. The other difficult thing was writing for a budget; Gollum had to remain in the sack because a fully CGI Gollum in multiple shots would have been impossible. So that limited the dialogue we could write between Aragorn and Gollum, which was a shame.

[3.11] **Q:** What led you to the changes you made to Tolkien's story? I'm particularly interested in the places where *The Hunt for Gollum* diverges from Aragorn's account in "The Council of Elrond," such as Aragorn's conversations with Gollum—which I personally found to be engaging and compelling, but which do not appear in Tolkien.

[3.12] **CB:** It was hard to imagine these conversations, and it was difficult on set because most of the time, Adrian was acting with an immobile sack. I decided that Aragorn would have attempted to talk to Gollum, first because Aragorn is an intelligent man and knows much of Gollum's state of mind. If he were taking the creature on a long journey, I imagine he would have been curious and tried his hand at questioning Gollum. I only wish we could have perhaps taken this a lot further, as Gollum is a fascinating character, and in some ways, there are parallels with Aragorn. Both are lonely and lost, and their fates are tied up with the Ring. Gollum is obsessed by it and Aragorn's forefathers once possessed it. I wish we could have taken that further, but we ran out of time and money.

[3.13] **Q:** Can you discuss process of filling gaps, as opposed to any other possible strategies that a fan filmmaker might take? We are interested in the different approaches that your movie and the companion production *Born of Hope* take.

[3.14] **CB:** Filling the gaps was the fun, creative challenge of writing the script, I drew on my own love of the books to imagine what might have happened, based on Tolkien's incredibly deep development of the characters we were using. I was always careful to try to please the fans, sometimes at the expense of showing more
interesting character arcs. For example, we could have had Aragorn refuse the journey and give him an arc of overcoming his self-doubt. While this would have been more dramatic, it wasn't true to the original, so I rejected it to avoid losing the fan base, while knowing the narrative arc of the short film would be weaker as a result. *Born of Hope* does not have key characters from the original films to write about, so they've had more freedom. There are many differences in that *Born of Hope* is actually a feature-length film, with a large cast of Rangers, so it's got the opportunity to have a lot more interesting character stuff going on. Plus the books give very little detail, so producer Kate Madison has been more creative with fleshing out an original narrative and adding additional characters, while still remaining true to the events Tolkien specified.

[3.15] **Q:** How much collaboration did *The Hunt for Gollum* and *Born of Hope* have, apart from your project borrowing costumes? Were there discussions between the two groups? Did you share or exchange ideas? Do you see yourselves as supplementing one another?

[3.16] **CB:** There was some collaboration in that I did some camera work on their shoots and we shared some equipment, and Kate Madison helped with wardrobe and production management on some of our shoots too. We also ended up using the same locations for forest scenes—getting permission is very difficult if you don't have money, so we shared our research, and at least 20 crew members, artists, and technicians have worked on both productions. At the same time, there was a healthy sense of rivalry happening, with each of us trying to outdo each other in terms of ambitious shoots and large-scale fight scenes. *Born of Hope* has gone for something far more ambitious than *The Hunt for Gollum*, both in terms of length and scale. They have orchestrated fight scenes on a scale I've never seen on a volunteer film.

[3.17] **Q:** Obviously, one the biggest issues surrounding fan films such as *The Hunt for Gollum* is the issue of copyright. There have been any number of high-profile fan films in the last year, and even *Be Kind Rewind* took it as a central theme. (*Be Kind Rewind* [http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0799934/] is a 2008 film where the main characters attempt to recreate a homemade version of hit movies such as *Ghostbusters*. ) How important do you think it is that filmmakers have the freedom to appropriate texts and rework them?

[3.18] **CB:** I think it's very important, purely as a learning experience. It's so hard to establish oneself as a filmmaker in the industry, especially if you don't have contacts or family there already. So making a fan film can be a way to showcase skills and talent that would otherwise have been undiscovered.
Q: Again on copyright: could you talk about your relationship (if any) with the Tolkien estate, which is disclaimed on The Hunt for Gollum's Web site?

CB: Tolkien Enterprises reached an understanding with us, but I can't comment further than that on the details.

4. Cast, crew, audiences: A gender divide?

Q: How did you come to be involved in cinema? As a filmmaker, who do you think has particularly influenced you?

CB: I was studying engineering and music at university and joined a filmmaking society that made digital short films. I got addicted to it there and haven't stopped since. Influences: lots of people. Some of the filmmakers I've worked with are Shane Felux and Adam Dymond. And from the wider world, there are the directors I admire: Ridley Scott, and of course Peter Jackson.

Q: Some of your early work in film has been as a composer. What led you to move across to directing? As a composer, were you particularly conscious of the effect of the soundtrack in the film?

CB: I think that as soon as I got the opportunity to play around with a camera and edit software, I was nurturing a desire to direct a film. Before that, I'd been musically trained and found film music an interesting way to take part in the filmmaking process. Coming from that background, I did try to put more thought into the soundtrack, and initially I wanted to compose it myself. However, I soon realized that I'd never have time to do that as well as finish the editing and the rest of the postproduction; composing for film is incredibly slow. So I got Adam Langston and Andrew Skrabutenas to kindly lend their musical talents to the score. Luckily they let me be involved and went to great pains to understand what I wanted for the film.

Q: The cast and crew of the fan film are clearly mostly men (while we understand Born of Hope has a higher percentage of women in the cast and crew). Of course the plot you chose to emphasize, the gap you chose to fill, was male centered, but why are women, traditionally associated with fan works, so absent?

CB: While you're right, our cast was five men and one woman, our location crews were almost a 50/50 male-female split. There are a lot of female Lord of the Rings fans out there, and talented producers, crew, costume, and makeup artists. To be fair, the postproduction team was more male dominated.

Q: Again on gender, this time looking at the audience. When shooting Gollum, did you have a specific audience in mind for your film—hard-core fans, industry pros,
or others? Were you keeping in mind the need to make it accessible to a wider audience? If we look at this in terms of gender, was there a difference in your mind between a female and a male audience? This is interesting because both genders share their love of the source text, but—if I may generalize and simplify a bit—it appears that most of the male fans see their transformative work as a means to an end, like a step up to a professional position, whereas most female fans see the work as a gift to their fan community and as an end in itself.

[4.8]  **CB:** I was hoping to make it accessible to the widest audience possible—the fans. I aimed to please fans of the films without alienating fans of the books. In terms of gender, I didn't really think about it at all, apart from deciding to expand the love/dream scene with Arwen at the request of my female coproducers. The scene was actually written by my coproducer, Julianne Honey-Menal. I love the way it turned out.

5. What's next

[5.1]  **Q:** Did the people who worked on the fan film see this as a kind of entrée into the professional world of filmmaking? A few seemed to be in the industry. What was their motivation for doing a fan work? How many of them self-identify more as fans than as movie professionals?

[5.2]  **CB:** Definitely. For most of the crew this was their first film, their first ambitious film, or their first chance to do something they haven't done before. So it was an opportunity to get experience, learn the filmmaking process firsthand, network, and express themselves creatively. Plus it's another credit to add to their CVs and show reels. Most of the crew would probably not self-identify as fans but saw it as an opportunity to contribute to an unusual large-scale production. But the core contributors were hard-core fans as well as skilled artists, and that showed through in their work.

[5.3]  **Q:** On the basis of your experiences, would you make another _The Lord of the Rings_ fan film, and if so, what would you most like to film?

[5.4]  **CB:** If I had the money to make another fan film, then I'd probably want to do _The Scouring of the Shire_. I really missed that last chapter from the trilogy. Anyway, I've no intention of doing another fan film. Instead, I'm starting work on an original feature film. Hopefully I can make something that gets distribution in a more conventional way, although we are looking at the Web as a possible launch platform.

[5.5]  **Q:** If you didn't think _The Hunt for Gollum_ would attract the interest of pros, would you have made the film anyway? You say you have no intention of making
another fan film. Why not? Generally fan writers, artists, filmmakers, and vidders do not stop at one effort.

[5.6] **CB: The Hunt for Gollum** actually hasn't attracted very much interest from the film industry. It hasn't been mentioned in any industry papers I'm aware of. The awareness in the general press is higher. Why not make another fan film? Money! It's a ridiculously expensive hobby. I've invested 2 years of hard work and funded the film myself. If I am to continue making films, I need to do something that will recoup its investment. So an original feature film will be my next move.
**Book review**

*Camgirls: Celebrity and community in the age of social networks*, by Theresa M. Senft

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*Milan, Italy*


[0.2] **Keywords**—Ethics; Gender; New media; Online social networks


[1] *Camgirls: Celebrity and Community in the Age of Social Networks* discusses, in the words of its author, "what it means for feminists to speak of the personal as political in the age of networks" (115). The book defines politics as "leveraging of power between connected entities" (5): therefore the dialectical nature of communication on the Web makes it an inherently political medium. Senft then acutely notes that common assumptions about these two categories—political and personal—make commentators forget to analyze and understand the political values of personal blogs and of other online network/community-building tools, exemplified here by Webcamming (that is, dramatizing one's life and views on the Web with a camera), and focus by contrast on apparently more openly political expression on the Web.

[2] After this framing introduction, the core of the book is divided into five chapters, each of which identifies different issues regarding Webcamming. Through case histories with which the author was personally involved, Senft shows how ordinary notions related to ethics, feminism, and personal and political issues on the Web are based on false assumptions and are proven, to different levels and extents, to be wrong.

[3] Chapter 1, "Keeping It Real on the Web: Authenticity, Celebrity, Branding," considers the ideology of publicity, which for camgirls (that is, girls who practice
Webcamming) translates into essentially three strategies: theatrical authenticity, self-branding, and celebrity. The most interesting point here is a critique of the concepts of self-branding and microcelebrity (as opposed to "real" celebrity): the desire and the practice to present oneself to others over the Web using tools typically associated with celebrity promotion—with the key difference that "on the web popularity depends upon a connection to one's audience, rather than an enforced separation from them" (26).

[4] According to sociologist Erving Goffman, identity amounts to little more than a series of performances directed to particular audiences in our lives. Hence, the difference between real celebrities and people such as those camgirls engaged in microcelebrity practices lies in the ways in which members of these groups address their respective audiences. The chapter also suggests that celebrities are commodities masquerading as people, while those engaged in microcelebrity are people experimenting with branding themselves as commodities, a point that the author discusses in chapter 2. The issues at stake are particularly significant, but unfortunately, Senft's book does not deal further with the concept of microcelebrity, only focusing on self-branding; microcelebrity is announced as the subject of an upcoming volume still being written.

[5] The end of chapter 1 transitions to themes developed in the rest of the book: the idea that the Web can be a tool to practice micropolitics, meant as "conversations and actions in non-political arenas that set the stage for macro politics by rendering people receptive or unreceptive to certain messages and plans of action" (31).

[6] Chapter 2, "I'd Rather be a Camgirl Than a Cyborg: The Future of Feminism on the Web," demonstrates how the concept of self-branding is not an exhaustive depiction of Webcamming. The inherently transformative online aesthetic of the "grab," which allows viewers/consumers to take what they want and rework or discard the rest, makes Webcamming a relentlessly confrontational activity. Webcam girls don't simply sell a product; they also engage in a very specific kind of emotional labor, which prompts speculation on how much a camgirl can have in common with other first and third world emotional laborers who don't broadcast on the Web. This speculation is formulated via the concept of strategic essentialism, a practice through which individuals create new names for themselves, generating feelings of affinity and at the same time antagonism toward other individuals, thus acknowledging all identities to be inaccurate and/or incomplete. Particularly relevant here for its implications with regards to transformative culture, the concept of grabbing implies both that a casualty principle is at work in the production of camgirls' Web site materials, but also that consumers play an active role in choosing, collecting, interpreting, and putting back into circulation on the Web these same visual materials.
Chapter 3, "Being and Acting Online: From Telepresence to Tele-ethicality," assumes that forestalling ethical action in mediated environments like the Web is very dangerous and advocates for such a danger to be avoided by "tele-ethicality": that is, to "engage, rather than forestall action in our mediated communities, despite the potential for fakery and fraud" (56). This means that physical interaction with an individual known only on the Web should be taken into consideration by members of network communities, since usually viewed and lived experiences are considered to be mutually exclusive (the author reports the case of an attempted suicide, watched by more than 1,000 viewers, without anybody but two of them calling 911 as a "concrete" reaction).

The author makes explicit here the book's overall prescriptive approach to ethics. Contrary to her promise of a descriptive position in her introduction, Senft is not distanced from the phenomena under examination, and she shifts from analysis to activism. The same happens in chapter 5, which urges "reflective solidarity," and in the conclusion, where the author concludes with five recommendations ("Emphasize the Cultural," "Respect the Local and the Strangers," "Think Heretically," "Take Ethical Action," and "Seek Solidarity with 'Friends' and Friends"). Such recommendations are not theoretical but rather grounded on the personal experiences reported in the text, where they provide a sort of manifesto. By repeatedly quoting Donna Haraway's 1985 "Cyborg Manifesto," Senft wants to update her message for a contemporary feminist audience. This is a perfectly acceptable aim, but it sacrifices the theoretical aspects of the book as initially formulated.

Chapter 4, "The Public, the Private and the Pornographic," follows logically from the need to derail, through tele-ethical strategies, the process by which camgirls become virtualized and considered as pornographic icons. Senft refers to Haraway's usage of the word cyborg in discussing a pornographic ideology, defined as the belief that specific, feminized bodies ought to be scapegoats for shifting relationships between public and private in a culture—even if this definition seems to describe a social interpretation of the phenomenon, and not the phenomenon per se.

One of the most interesting observations made in this chapter is the notion that, throughout history, women have responded to their exclusion from the public sphere by establishing counter-public places where democracy is regularly critiqued and strengthened. Camgirls specifically resist the intimate public sphere through performance, creating networks through what is called "strange familiarity"—that is, the familiarity arising from exchanging private information with otherwise remote strangers. Senft points out two limits of feminist porn-camp on the Web, the most cogent one being the fact that camp loses much of its force as a result of the
appropriative aesthetic of the grab—which blurs the boundaries of the supposed counter–public space in which the Webcam performance takes place.

[11] Chapter 5, "I'm a Network: From 'Friends' to Friends," examines the concept of community building, focusing on what the author calls "networked reflective solidarity": a political identification and alignment with the other, performed by acknowledging not identity but difference. As Senft explains, "In reflective solidarity, I acknowledge that others are knowable to me only via conjecture or fantasy, yet I chose to believe in them and the affinity we share, and I vow to listen to them" (108).

[12] Here, the concept of dialectic confrontation is again taken up when talking about both identity performance and community/network building, and through them elaborating the notion of ethical narcissism, which further strengthens the idea of "the personal is political" already stated in the introductory chapter. According to the concept of ethical narcissism, if the author of a blog (or any other personal space on the Web) accepts the possibility of interaction with a network, as opposed to a purely nonconfrontational exposition, the narcissistic practice of personal blogs can become ethical in the sense that it becomes dialectic and creates the opportunity to spread a dialogue beyond the established network in which it was originally formulated.

[13] Camgirls is an innovative take on the ethics of rules building in online communities. The book makes a strong point of showing the fallacy of naive beliefs in the not-political nature of narcissism and pornography, two positions stereotypically associated with camgirls and in general with developing personal spaces online.

[14] The overall conclusions are twofold. First, tele-ethicality allows women to have a stronger political impact on the Web, and it helps build a larger and more significant arena for micropolitics. Second, activism can spring from spaces not designed for political action but that end up facilitating it, such as Web communities based on the ostensibly personal practice of Webcamming. However, Senft opts not to overtly theorize these conclusions and ties up her prescriptions only by their being based on multiple observations of her personal experience. Since Senft is writing two more essays on microcelebrity and tele-ethicality, it is to be hoped that reading Camgirls together with the next volumes will provide a more organic, theorized, and complete vision. In any case, the book stands out among studies on Web communities because it provides an ethical theorization of community building online filtered through a feminist point of view.

[1] Author of several articles and books about films with a particular focus on Asian cinema and culture, Colette Balmain here gives us an overview of the development of the horror genre in Japan. As she argues in the introduction, notwithstanding the universality of horror, it also exhibits features that are culture bound. Applying major theoretical points to a variety of interesting examples from Godzilla (Gojira, 1954) to Ju-on: The Grudge (2003), Balmain highlights the differences between Western and Japanese horror movies. Balmain's contention is that on one hand, U.S. horror films are mainly based on the fear of "otherness," usually personified by a monster, as they are built on what is described as the "twin processes" of repulsion of the unknown and the "desire to know" (4), but on the other hand, Japanese horror films represent the rejection of the social transformation that Japan had undergone after World War II. The war and the country's forced modernization, as well as its consequent economic success, had a devastating effect on Japanese society and its national identity.

[2] Even though this book is primarily oriented toward an audience with film and media background, it can be appealing to anyone who is interested in Japanese horror movies and Japanese anime and manga. In fact, through sustained references to Japanese mythology and folktales, it provides the reader with a deep insight into Japanese culture and the Western influence on its evolution. This book can actually be considered an original analysis of a transversal type of transformative work because it showcases the continuous cross-cultural influences between the United States/Europe
and Japan that are elaborated and incorporated in each country's movie production. Of particular interest are the author's frequent comparisons with American horror that underline Western and Eastern cultural differences and how they are reflected through a film genre that has universal connotations. Thus, the book successfully overcomes Western readers' possible biases and allows them to fully understand the intrinsic meaning of symbols and archetypes that permeate the Japanese horror genre.

Introduction to Japanese Horror Film is structured in two parts. In part 1, composed of four chapters, the author analyzes the origins of Japanese horror cinema, while in part 2, she focuses on Japanese horror as a genre and on its key motifs, such as the vengeful virgin, the monstrous mother, the demonic child, and supernatural killers.

Chapter 1, "Laying the Foundations," provides the historical and cultural context behind the development of early Japanese cinema. The author characterizes the Japanese studio system as highly influenced by the power of directors who could choose the team of people whom they trusted and would be associated with for most of their career. In the same way, traditional Japanese art forms, such as theatre, had a great impact on film structure and theme. As a result, films borrowed the Kabuki theater's taxonomy of two main genres: the *jidaigeki*, "historical dramas relating the tragedy of following society's rules," and the *gendaimono*, a portrayal of "contemporary situations in which choosing personal happiness over filial and feudal loyalty often led to suicide" (15). In this way, the author introduces the concept of *ie*, the "system of obligations and duties that determined relationships" (8) in Japanese society, and explains how the imposition of Western democratic ideals, such as censorship and endorsement of individualism, affected Japanese society. Although Hollywood cinema deeply influenced Japanese films, especially after the occupation, encouraging more realistic dramas instead of the traditional stereotyped models set by Kabuki theatre, it also pushed Japanese cinema to redefine itself through the self/other opposition. Thus, the threat of Westernization induced Japan to construct films around the theme of Japanese nationhood.

In chapter 2, "Horror after Hiroshima," Balmain explores the rise in popularity of the horror cinema in relation to the "physical devastation and psychological trauma" left by the war. As she argues, "the horror film provided one of the most suitable mechanisms through which to express apprehension and concern over the changing nature of Japanese society" (31). Balmain analyses the two most important postwar movies of Japanese horror: *Godzilla* and *Tales of Ugetsu* (*Ugetsu Monogatari*, 1953). Both films deal with a disruption of the balance between man and nature and between man and society that can only be restored through the female figure. *Godzilla* introduces the reader to the concept of apocalyptic destruction (so well known to all
manga readers), a clear reference to the atomic bomb. The monster represents destruction, disease, and death as the only possible outcome of man's violence and attempt to overcome nature; thus it "can be interpreted as a physical manifestation of the disruption of wa, the harmony between man and nature" (38). Because the male element is here strongly associated with the disruption of this fragile balance, it is up to the female element to restore harmony—hence the importance of the female element, the tragic young heroine who through her sufferings redeems men's bad deeds. Tales of Ugetsu instead "expresses fears around modernization" (31) caused by the introduction into Japanese society of consumerist values. The author highlights how the film condemns the introduction of Western individualistic values that lead men to develop "unrestrained appetites" (45), thus failing to fulfill their duties to the ie system. The protagonist abandons his wife and child, thus disrupting the balance between man and society on which the ie system is based. Again, the female element is the only one that can restore the lost harmony as the man's abandonment and failure as a member of family/society is expiated through his wife's suffering and self-sacrifice. The analysis of this movie also introduces the reader to the figure of the yuurei: the vengeful ghost, mostly female, dressed in white and with "long unbound black hair" (47).

[6] Chapters 3 and 4 conclude the overview on the origins of contemporary Japanese horror cinema by exploring the main motifs of its early days. Expanding on the previous chapter, where the yuurei figure was presented, the author introduces us to the figures of the deceitful samurai, the wronged woman, and the vengeful ghosts that characterize the prolific production of Edo Gothic and Pinku Eiga films in the '50s and '60s.

[7] Describing the family unit as a microcosm of the ie system, Balmain shows that the deceitful samurai embodies the man's selfish desire for individualistic assertion, abandoning or killing his wife, as in the Ghost Story of Yotsuya (Tokaido Yotsuya Kaidan, 1959). By neglecting his social obligations toward his family, the samurai engenders a threat "to the very structure of Japanese society" that is traditionally based on the "ties that bind men to women and parents to children" (55). The abandoned/killed wife thus becomes the wronged woman, victim of the man's selfish desire. The author interprets the figure of this vengeful ghost as "the symbolic outcome of the loss of traditional and pre-modern values" (54). Although these spirits appear to be vengeful only toward those who were "wrong" to them, Balmain points out how in the erotic ghost story, a subgenre of Pinku Eiga film, "the revenge of the wronged women is not just limited to those who committed offences against them, but is taken generally against Japanese paternalism as a whole" (75). In the erotic ghost story, the author shows how scenes of romantic passion are used in juxtaposition with scenes of carnal desire, thus again providing a "mechanism of articulating cultural
anxieties at a time of rapid transformation in Japan's socio-economic structure" (72). The theme of metamorphosis is tightly linked with the female figures who, through their monstrosity, drift away from tradition. It is interesting as well to notice how certain key archetypes of the modern Japanese horror movies are already present at this stage. Not only do we find the ghost of the wronged woman with unbound black hair, but also the well, where the will-be ghost is thrown, and the cat, a supernatural creature that can assist those who died violently in their search for vengeance and justice.

[8] In the second part of the book, the author tackles the topic of horror as a genre, clustering it into five subgenres, according to the identification of similar patterns in the movies she analyzes, including rape-revenge, zombies, haunted houses and family melodramas, serial killers and slashers, and techno horror and urban alienation.

[9] In the chapter on rape-revenge film, Balmain describes the evolution of the rape fantasy movies in Japan. She starts her analysis with a description of the late '70s series, Angel Guts (Tenshi no Arawata, 1979–94), which is a useful starting point to discuss the emergence of the more recent rape-revenge genre in Japanese horror films. As she emphasizes, rape in Japanese society has not been considered a crime until recently. This attitude lies in the Japanese ideal of female obedience and submission that sees the woman as to be blamed for the violent expression of male desire. As the author states, the '70s saw a common trend in American, European, and Japanese films where acts of violence toward women by men are portrayed as homosocial, nearly homosexual, bonding activities. In Japanese movies specifically, rape becomes a sexless act of cruelty committed on the woman's body, whose main role is to reestablish the power relationship (domination-submission) between men and women. Therefore, rape is "only significant within the main narrative theme of the male alienation in the modern industrial Japan" (101). The protagonists of rape-revenge films such as Freeze Me (1999) and Audition (Ōdishon, 2000) establish a pivotal point of further development of the wronged, abused woman as they transform themselves into "avenging angels who mutilate the male body, transposing it into a series of body parts, the narrative position originally occupied by the woman" (107). Roles are subverted, and as the author points out, both films suggest the existence of an abyssal gap between man and woman as they "expose the contradictions with the Japanese society in which the commodification of sex exists side by side with its traditional discourse on appropriate femininity" (111).

[10] In chapter 6, Balmain provides a description of the zombie genre that retains in Japan its own specificity. Zombie movies have emerged in Japan after the release of the popular video game Resident Evil (1996) and in the aftermath of the collapse of the economic bubble of the '90s. They can be seen as a "type of counter-cultural and
sub-cultural resistance to traditional Japanese structures and cultural forms." As representatives of the "trend towards the super-flat aesthetic," they are the mirror of an angry youth cinema that criticizes Japanese modernity and the rising obsession with the consumption of luxury goods. As the author argues, "the zombie film articulates the adolescent struggle for identity in a society built upon knowing one's place in the larger structure" (127). Thus, this battle for self-determination seems to lead to an apocalyptic future of destruction of the world-society as people know it.

[11] "Haunted Houses and Family Melodramas" focuses on how the domestic space, which is considered sacred and safe, becomes instead the source of horror and dreadful acts. The threat, as the author underlines, does not come anymore from outside, but is "inside and knocking on the door of the last bastion of Japanese patriarchy: the family as embedded within the wider community" (129). The author opens her analysis with a discussion of the monstrous mother, who embodies the "patriarchal fear around female power" (133), to introduce an in-depth analysis of two movies, Dark Water (Honogurai mizu no soko kara, 2002) and Ju-On: The Grudge (2003). Dark Water represents the way in which society has been contaminated by modernity: the figure of the monstrous mother reflects the presence of an extreme mother complex that develops as a result of the "absent father" and the "the competitive education system which gave rise to the 'education mother'" (129). Modernity, in fact, affects the nuclear family and diverts the mother from her obligations toward the child. Hence, the death of a child as a result of a neglectful mother's behavior inspires the figure of the "vengeful foetus" that can only be appeased through self-sacrifice of a mother (137–47).

[12] Ju-On: The Grudge, whose comparison with its American remake is the core of the author's conclusion, utilizes the traditional Japanese figures of the wronged woman together with that of the vengeful fetus. Balmain points out how the movie expresses society's fears of the growing episodes of violence in domestic environments as a result of growing feelings of isolation and alienation. The concept of domestic violence, she argues, threatens "not just the notion of patriarchal privilege within marriage, but also the very construction of Japan as a [safe] nation" (145), in contrast to the decadent and dangerous Western countries. The family home thus can be considered a microcosm of Japanese society. Even though, throughout the movie, the female yuurei acts as a dreadful figure, it is rather the male figure of the husband who is infected with anger and a grudge toward the house and all those in contact with it.

[13] In her analysis of the genre of serial killers and slashers, Japanese style, Balmain points out how "Japanese 'monsters,' whether psychological or supernatural, are substantially different from those that proliferate in the mainstream (American) horror" (165). Japanese serial killer and slasher movies focus on "unmotivated, or
sexually motivated, crimes" that cannot be simply investigated through the "pop-
psychoanalysis" that is used in American horror or thriller movies. Balmain argues, in
fact, that the Japanese serial killer can be identified as a "pathological symptom of
modernity" (166). Thus, the emergence of the Japanese psychopath is to be blamed
on the breakdown of the societal structure that recognizes individuals through a
collective identity, and consequently, these films defy traditional beliefs around gender
roles in terms of sexual behavior and position in society. As the author suggests, the
horror of such movies originates in their "refusal to construct an identifiable subject
rather than the actions of that subject" (167).

[14] The last chapter is "Techno Horror and Urban Alienation." The author includes in
this section her analysis of movies such as Ring (Ringu, 1998), One Missed Call
(Chakushin ari, 2003) and Pulse (Kairo, 2001), which have enjoyed a worldwide
success thanks to their American remakes. As Balmain shows, these films associate
technology with isolation, alienation, and finally death; indeed, sometimes this process
is portrayed as the apocalyptic doom toward which humanity is moving. The emptiness
and isolation of the individual in the society is mirrored by the progressive disruption
of the family. Parents' neglect of their familial duties generates the figure of the
abused child, who transforms into the "vengeful yuurei archetype of conventional
Japanese horror" (174), perfectly embodied by Sadako in Ring.
Book review

Pride and prejudice and zombies: The classic Regency romance—Now with ultraviolent zombie mayhem!, by Jane Austen and Seth Grahame-Smith

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[1] It is early 19th-century England. Mr. and Mrs. Bennet have five unmarried daughters, and though the Bennets are well enough off, at Mr. Bennet's death, his estate will go to a cousin, Mr. Collins, upon whose mercy Mrs. Bennet and the girls will be forced to depend unless the daughters can be made suitable matches. When rich and attractive Mr. Bingley moves in nearby, the unsubtle Mrs. Bennet works to secure a marriage for eldest daughter Jane. Bingley's boorish friend Mr. Darcy incites loathing in Elizabeth Bennet through his callous nature and past mistreatment of Elizabeth's friend, Mr. Wickham. Complications ensue, reversals are themselves reversed, Bennet sisters imperil their reputations, and in the end, three Bennet daughters have been matched with husbands. Oh, and there are some zombies. And ninjas.

[2] That is the basic plot of Seth Grahame-Smith's Pride and Prejudice and Zombies, and, minus the zombies and ninjas, of Jane Austen's Pride and Prejudice. The congruity is perhaps not surprising, but it is disappointing. Grahame-Smith's revision declines a thorough reimagining of Austen's work, an extrapolation of what would happen if Elizabeth Bennet and Mr. Darcy met in an England beset by the walking dead, and is instead simply what the title page admits: "The Classic Regency Romance—Now with Ultraviolent Zombie Mayhem." With ninjas. The result of Grahame-Smith's
fidelity to Austen's plot is an amusing parody of the original, *Pride and Prejudice* with a few scenes of martial arts battling and zombie killing that highlight the sublimated conflict of the source novel.

[3] Regrettably, the derivative work's premise—that by the time Elizabeth and Darcy meet, England has been fighting off a plague of zombies for more than five decades—has far more potential than Grahame-Smith exploits. An infection that causes both the dead to rise from their graves and the living bitten to become zombies, a plague that makes it unsafe to travel the roads and requires the fortification of London, ought to have altered English society more significantly than it seems to have. The novel flirts with exploring the implications of this fundamental change. For example, the Bennet sisters have been trained in zombie killing by Shaolin monks. While the Chinese connection (and the Japanese ninjas who also appear in the novel) may seem forced, training in self-protection hardly seems far-fetched, given the circumstances. However, in Grahame-Smith's zombie-riddled England, martial training and the exertion required by it remain what they would have been in Austen's England: markers of the Bennet sisters' unsuitability for marriage into respectable upper-class families.

[4] Perhaps it is unfair to ask a book that clearly aims to be cute and goofy for a rigorous reexamination of Regency society under pressure from zombie hordes, but 300 pages is a long way to stretch one joke, and Grahame-Smith's work does so less successfully than some other of contemporary derivative literature, like Jasper Fforde's *The Eyre Affair* (2003), for example. The book never rises to the level of derivative works such as John Gardner's *Grendel* (1971) or even Gregory Maguire's *Confessions of an Ugly Stepsister* (2000), but in a side plot, Grahame-Smith gives a glimpse of what the book might have accomplished without becoming overly cerebral or ponderous. As in Austen's original, in *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies*, Elizabeth Bennet rejects the advances of her cousin, Mr. Collins, even though marrying him would help ensure a secure future for her mother and sisters. In both the original and derivative works, Mr. Collins's attention then turns to Elizabeth's neighbor and friend, Charlotte Lucas, who cultivates his affection. In both works, Charlotte is driven by the practical considerations that drive marriage in her culture: she must secure the best marriage she can manage, regardless of romantic notions. Doing so means honestly assessing her prospects and pursuing suitable opportunities. While Charlotte's actions may seem mercenary and cold in contrast to Elizabeth's passionate emotions, they reflect a realistic response to her cultural context. Given that Charlotte is judged to be plain and aging, her pursuit of Collins makes sense. When Grahame-Smith adds to this Charlotte's awareness that she has been infected by a zombie bite, he integrates the zombie plague into the already existing social pressures that guide the characters' decision making. As the plot and Charlotte's disease progress, zombieism takes its
place alongside sex, love, and money as things not talked about in polite society, even when they are obvious. Charlotte's subplot hints at what might have been if the zombies, and the idea of zombiness, were fully intertwined into the text as more than excuses for action scenes as characters travel from one Austen scene to the next. Sadly, the novel's central plot, Elizabeth and Darcy's relationship, remains largely oblivious to the zombies at the door. Despite their oft-mentioned martial prowess, Grahame-Smith's Bennet sisters are in the end married off, just as Jane Austen's are.

Interestingly, *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* is likely of more interest to Jane Austen fans than zombie aficionados. The plotting, characterization, and much of the description is Austen's work—so much so that the book would be more accurately titled *Pride and Prejudice (with Some Zombies and Ninjas)*. The zombie killing interludes inserted by Grahame-Smith don't detract from Austen's work; rather, they highlight that well-crafted scenes in which characters spar with words and react to subtleties of manner can be far more suspenseful than campy fight scenes and copious vomit. Although this may sound like the out-of-hand dismissal of a derivative work by a faithful defender of the Austen original, it is not. A more ambitious work would have been of interest both to Austen scholars examining the resilience of her work in the hands of subsequent authors, and to scholars of derivative narratives interested in the strategies used to craft such reimagined narratives. Unfortunately, there is likely more of interest to scholars in the book's astoundingly successful viral marketing campaign than in the text itself. The novel is a part of Quirk Books' Quirk Classics line, literature no longer protected by copyright deemed ripe for enhancement by the insertion of zombies, robots, aliens, monkeys, and other miscellaneous elements (Quirk's follow-on, *Sense and Sensibility and Sea Monsters*, reworked by Ben H. Winters, appears this month). Originally slated for a print run of 10,000 copies, the leak of the striking cover image and back cover blurb for *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* led to its going viral, the book's appearance on the *New York Times* best-seller list, and 850,000 copies in print. Hollywood rumor has production companies vying for the rights to adapt the work. The book's success is a tribute to the power of viral marketing, enduring interest in Austen, and the current zombie zeitgeist.

Zombie literature needs powerful and enduring works: the history of zombie narratives is dominated by important films and influential computer games. Book-length zombie literature has a sparse and inglorious history, with few texts that successfully exploit or explore the power of the zombie as metaphor. It can be done, as a work like Max Brooks's 2006 novel *World War Z* (which history may regard as the zombie genre's *Dracula*) demonstrates. Zombie narratives can make social commentary without losing a sense of humor, as in the film *Shaun of the Dead* (2004), which implicitly equates the routinized lives of the urban working class with the shuffling zombies invisible among them. *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies*, coming as it
does in the midst of a zombie renaissance, simply misses the opportunity to be something more than a clever title and a striking cover image.