Editorial
Henry Jenkins & Sangita Shresthova, Up, up, and away! The power and potential of fan activism

Theory
Melissa M. Brough & Sangita Shresthova, Fandom meets activism: Rethinking civic and political participation
Henry Jenkins, "Cultural acupuncture": Fan activism and the Harry Potter Alliance
Neta Kligler-Vilenchik, Joshua McVeigh-Schultz, Christine Weitbrecht, & Chris Tokuhamana, Experiencing fan activism: Understanding the power of fan activist organizations through members' narratives
Ashley Hinck, Theorizing a public engagement keystone: Seeing fandom's integral connection to civic engagement through the case of the Harry Potter Alliance
Andreas Jungherr, The German federal election of 2009: The challenge of participatory cultures in political campaigns
Matt Yockey, Wonder Woman for a day: Affect, agency, and Amazons

Praxis
Sun Jung, Fan activism, cybervigilantism, and Othering mechanisms in K-pop fandom
Bethan Jones, Being of service: "X-Files" fans and social engagement
Marcus Schulzke, Fan action and political participation on "The Colbert Report"
Alex Leavitt, Andrea Horbinski, Even a monkey can understand fan activism: Political speech, artistic expression, and a public for the Japanese dôjin community
Tanya R. Cochran, "Past the brink of tacit support": Fan activism and the Whedonverses
Lili Wilkinson, Nerdfighters, "Paper Towns," and heterotopia
Cheuk Yin Li, The absence of fan activism in the queer fandom of Ho Denise Wan See (HOCC) in Hong Kong
Tom Phillips, Too fat to fly: A case study of unsuccessful fan mobilization

Symposium
Jonathan Gray, Of snowspeeders and Imperial Walkers: Fannish play at the Wisconsin protests
Aswin Punathambekar, On the ordinariness of participatory culture
Stephen Duncombe, Imagining No-place
Lucy Bennett, Fan activism for social mobilization: A critical review of the literature
Ritesh Mehta, Flash activism: How a Bollywood film catalyzed civic justice toward a murder trial

Review
Stacey Marie Lantagne, "Fan fiction and copyright: Outside works and intellectual property protection," by Aaron Schwabach
Editorial

Up, up, and away! The power and potential of fan activism

Henry Jenkins and Sangita Shresthova

University of Southern California, Los Angeles, California, United States

Abstract—Editorial for Transformative Works and Cultures, No. 10, special issue, "Transformative Works and Fan Activism."

Keywords—Dream Act; Invisible Children; Kony 2012; Participatory politics, Participatory culture


[Fandom] is built on psychological mechanisms that are relevant to political involvement: these are concerned with the realm of fantasy and imagination on the one hand, and with emotional processes on the other... The remaining question then becomes whether and how politics can borrow from the elements of popular culture that produce these intense audience investments, so that citizenship becomes entertaining.

—Liesbeth van Zoonen, Entertaining the Citizen

Scratch an activist and you're apt to find a fan. It's no mystery why: fandom provides a space to explore fabricated worlds that operate according to different norms, laws, and structures than those we experience in our "real" lives. Fandom also necessitates relationships with others: fellow fans with whom to share interests, develop networks and institutions, and create a common culture. This ability to imagine alternatives and build community, not coincidentally, is a basic prerequisite for political activism.

—Steven Duncombe, "Imagining No-Place"

1. Introduction

[1.1] In 2011, American political leaders and activists were surprisingly concerned with an 80-plus-year-old popular culture icon: Superman. When presidential candidate
Rick Perry was asked by a 9-year-old child during a campaign stop which superhero he would want to be, the tough-talking Texan chose the man from Krypton, because "Superman came to save the United States!" (Well 2011). At almost that same moment, conservative commentators were up in arms because in an alternative universe DC comics story, Superman denounced his American citizenship to embrace a more global perspective: "I'm tired of having my actions construed as instruments of US policy. 'Truth, Justice, and the American way!'—It's not enough any more." Right-wing rage was expressed by one FoxNews.com reader: "This is absolutely sickening. We are now down to destroying all American Icons. How are we going to survive as a Nation?" (Appelo 2011). Such responses suggest a widespread recognition that popular mythologies may provide the frames through which the public makes sense of its national identity.

Meanwhile, immigrant rights activists were questioning when Superman ever became an American citizen or whether he even possessed a green card, given that he entered the country without permission and, we must presume, without documentation, a refugee from a society in turmoil who has sought to hide his origins and identity from outside scrutiny ever since.

Hari Kondabolu, a South Asian comedian, recorded a video entitled "Superman as Immigrant Rights Activist," distributed through Colorlines (http://colorlines.com/archives/2011/10/superman_as_immigrant_rights_activist.html), asking why no one ever tried to deport Superman for "stealing jobs" and suggesting that other immigrants might wear glasses, like Clark Kent does, to mask their identities. Photographer Dulce Pinzon (http://www.dulcepinzon.com/en_projects_superhero.htm) produced a powerful set of images depicting a range of (mostly Marvel) superheroes performing the jobs often done by undocumented workers. As Thomas Andrae (1987; see also Engle 1987) has noted, at the time of his origins in the late Depression era, Superman adopted an explicitly political stance ("the champion of the oppressed") rather than the more vaguely civic orientation of subsequent decades. As Matt Yockey demonstrates in regard to Wonder Woman in this issue, superheroes have long functioned as mythological figures or rhetorical devices for debates around identity politics. Even DC Comics has described Superman as "the ultimate immigrant" (Perry 2011).

Arely Zimmerman (forthcoming), a postdoc with the Media Activism and Participatory Politics Project (part of USC's Civic Paths Project), interviewed 25 undocumented youth activists involved in the campaign to pass the Dream Act. She was struck by how often superheroes cropped up in her exchanges. One respondent described the experience of discovering other undocumented youth online as like "finding other X-Men." Another compared their campaign, which involved youth from
many different backgrounds, to the Justice League. A third suggested that posting a video on YouTube in which he proclaimed himself "proud" and "undocumented" had parallels to the experience of Spider-Man, who had removed his mask on national television during Marvel's Civil Wars story line (note 1). A graphic created for an online recruitment campaign used the image of Wolverine to suggest what kind of hero youth volunteers might aspire to become.

[1.5] On the one hand, we might read these various deployments of the superheroes as illustrating the trends Liesbet van Zoonen (2005) describes: groups promoting social change are tapping the affective and imaginative properties of popular culture to inspire a more intense connection with their supporters. In this issue, Jonathan Gray shows similar appropriations of images from Star Wars and a range of other popular media franchises during labor rights protests in Madison, Wisconsin. Gray argues that such images (which have also been widely associated with the Occupy Wall Street movement) proliferate because popular culture, especially blockbuster franchises, constitutes a common reference point (shared between fans and more casual consumers) within an otherwise diverse and fragmented coalition of protestors and observers. Gray stresses the morale and community-building work performed through the remixing of popular culture for those gathered in an icy Wisconsin winter to express their support for collective bargaining. Zimmerman (forthcoming) also suggests that the Dream activists' use of pop culture references might be understood as part of a larger strategy to signal their assimilation into American culture. Given how much contemporary speech of all kinds is full of snarky pop culture references, it is not surprising that such references are also reshaping our political rhetoric, especially as campaigns seek to speak to young people who have famously felt excluded from traditional campaigns and have often been turned off by inside-the-beltway language. Buffy the Vampire Slayer goes to Washington!

[1.6] Yet as the epigraph from Duncombe (this issue) suggests, such popular culture references also reflect the lived experiences of activists who also are fans, whether understood in the casual sense of someone who feels a strong emotional connection to a particular narrative or in the more active sense of someone who has participated in a fan community or engaged in transformative practices. Civil rights leaders in the 1960s deployed biblical allusions because part of what they shared were meaningful experiences within black church congregations. Zimmerman's Dream activists referenced superheroes because reading and discussing comics was part of their everyday lives as young people, because these references helped them think through their struggles, because they offer such vivid embodiments of heroic conflicts and deep commitments. Unlike Perry, who had only a faint recollection of Superman's mythology and acknowledged that he was no longer actively reading comics, these allusions to superhero comics were apt rather than opportunistic, grounded in a deep appreciation
of who these characters are and how their stories have evolved over time. That is, they show the kinds of mastery we associate with fans. Here, we see what Duncombe describes as the fan within the activist.

[1.7] However, we can push the idea of fan activism one step farther: by now, the capacity of fan communities to quickly mobilize in reaction to a casting decision or a threat of cancellation has been well established, going back to the now-legendary letter-writing campaign in the 1960s that kept *Star Trek* on the air. Fan groups have also had a long history of lending their support to the favorite causes of popular performers and producers, or more generally working in support of charity. Some slash fans, for example, have been motivated to march in gay rights parades, raise money for AIDS research and awareness, or, more recently, work in support of marriage equality. Fans have rallied to challenge attempts to regulate the Internet, restrict their deployment of intellectual property, or censor their content. For example, in this issue, Alex Leavitt and Andrea Horbinski trace the responses of Japanese otaku, involved in the creation of dôjinshi (underground comics), to metropolitan Tokyo ordinance Bill 156, which they perceived as an attempt to curtail their artistic freedom.

[1.8] More recent efforts (such as Racebending, the Harry Potter Alliance, Imagine Better, the Nerdfighters) deploy these same strategies and tactics to support campaigns for social justice and human rights, inspiring their supporters to move from engagement within participatory culture to involvement in political life. Fan activism of the kinds we've known about for years models many effective approaches for using social media to create awareness and mobilize supporters—tactics now being adopted by even traditional charities and activist organizations as they adapt to a networked society.

[1.9] All of this suggests the urgent need for scholars to explore more fully the many different potential relationships between fandom and political life, since fan studies as a research paradigm has something vital to contribute to larger considerations of the relationship between participatory culture and civic engagement. Fan studies has long depicted fandom as a site of ideological and cultural resistance to the heteronormative and patriarchal values often shaping mass media. Such work is and remains highly valuable as we seek to understand the place of fandom in contemporary culture, but our focus here pushes beyond abstract notions of cultural resistance to focus on specific ways that fan culture has affected debates around law and public policy. Many fans have resisted efforts to bring politics into fandom, seeing their fan activities as a release from the pressures of everyday life, or preferring the term *charity* rather than the more overtly political term *activism* to describe their pro-social efforts. Our goal is not to instrumentalize fandom, not to turn what many of us do for fun into something
more serious; fandom remains valuable on its own terms as a set of cultural practices, social relationships, and affective investments, but insofar as a growing number of fans are exploring how they might translate their capacities for analysis, networking, mobilization, and communication into campaigns for social change, we support expanding the field of fan studies to deal with this new mode of civic engagement.

2. Political participation and fan activism

[2.1] This issue's two editors are part of the Civic Paths Project research group, housed in the Annenberg School for Communications and Journalism at the University of Southern California. This group has partnered with the Spencer and MacArthur foundations to try to document new forms of political participation that are affecting the lives of young people. Our work is part of a larger research network that is trying to develop a model for understanding what is being called participatory politics. Through our internal discussions, we had begun to identify the concept of fan activism as central to addressing larger questions about what might motivate young people, who are often described as apathetic, to join civic and political organizations. We had located a core body of scholarship, such as the work of van Zoonen (2005), which examined how the playful, affective, and fantasy aspects of fandom were starting to inform political discourse, or the work of Earl and Kimport (2009), which discussed fan online campaigns as part of a larger exploration of what networked politics might look like, or the work of Daniel Dayan (2005), which debated the similarities and differences between audiences and publics. We had already identified some powerful examples of how fan-based groups had helped support civic learning and had developed resources and practices that could quickly mobilize supporters behind emergencies, charities, or human rights campaigns.

[2.2] We knew that there must be many more examples out there. Still, after we released the call for papers, we were blown away by the range of submissions we received from all over the world, describing other examples of fan activism in practice, debating why calls for fan participation sometimes yield spectacular results and other times fall flat, contesting the borders of fan activism, speculating about its contributions to the public sphere, and making important distinctions between top-down celebrity-run models and bottom-up participatory ones. As you will see, this issue is overflowing with cutting-edge work that takes fans seriously as political agents and that draws on a range of different theories of citizenship and democracy to explain what happens when fans act as citizens. Examples here encompass a wide variety of fandoms—Harry Potter, The X-Files, Buffy the Vampire Slayer, The Colbert Report, comic books, pop music, and Bollywood.
3. Essays in this issue

[3.1] The Civic Paths team is well represented here, with a cluster of three essays offering multiple and complimentary frames for discussing fan activism, and two other contributors (Ritesh Mehta and Alex Leavitt) are active group members. Taking a deep dive into the existing literature around cultural and political participation, Melissa M. Brough and Sangita Shresthova provide an overview of core debates surrounding fan activism, including the diverse forms that participation may take, the tension between resistance and participation as competing models, the value of affect and content worlds, and the criteria by which we might measure such campaigns' success and sustainability. They argue that the study of fan activists may make a significant contribution to cross-disciplinary debates about citizenship and political engagement. Henry Jenkins maps the history of fan-based activism, providing a context for understanding the Harry Potter Alliance, perhaps the most highly visible of the new generation of fan activist groups. Jenkins defines fan activism as "forms of civic engagement and political participation that emerge from within fan culture itself, often in response to the shared interests of fans, often conducted through the infrastructure of existing fan practices and relationships, and often framed through metaphors drawn from popular and participatory culture" (¶1.8). By exploring the concept of "cultural acupuncture," a phrase coined by HPA's founder, Andrew Slack, Jenkins explores how fannish borrowings from J. K. Rowling's fictions inspire and inform the group's diverse interventions (from an initial focus on human rights and genocide in Darfur to more recent campaigns pushing Warner Bros. to tie their chocolate contracts to fair trade principles). Neta Kligler-Vilenchik, Joshua McVeigh-Schultz, Christine Weitbrecht, and Chris Tokuhama share some of the results of Civic Path's extensive fieldwork, interviewing young participants from the Harry Potter Alliance and Invisible Children, the latter a San Diego–based human rights organization that deploys various forms of participatory culture to motivate high school and college students to become more aware of how Ugandan warlord Joseph Kony has kidnapped and conscripted child soldiers. Tracing the trajectories by which these young people become more deeply involved in these efforts, the authors suggest the importance of shared media experiences, rich content worlds, and a desire to help in changing how young people see themselves as political agents. From an initial focus on fan activism, the Civic Paths project has expanded the scope of its research to consider the participatory culture practices associated with Dream Act activism, the efforts of college-aged libertarians, the work of the Nerd Fighters and Imagine Better, and the political and cultural activities of Muslim American youth, each offering models for understanding the cultural and political factors affecting the lives of contemporary American young people.
Ashley Hinck extends this special issue's consideration of the Harry Potter Alliance, drawing on core concepts from the literature of social movements and the public sphere. Focusing primarily on their campaign around Darfur, she argues that the HPA taps into the world of Hogwarts to construct what Hinck calls a "public engagement keystone," defined here as a "touchpoint, worldview, or philosophy that makes other people, actions, and institutions intelligible" (¶4.6). The fact that Harry Potter is so widely read, known, and loved not only by hard-core fans but by many who are not part of fandom makes it a useful resource for bridging the two, helping to revitalize public discourse around human rights concerns in Africa. Lili Wilkinson also explores the value of content worlds from popular culture in facilitating new kinds of political interactions, in this case through an application of Foucault's notion of heterotopia to understanding the links between John Green's young adult novel *Paper Towns* and his involvement in the Nerdfighters, an informal network of young people who use social media and video blogging to "reduce world suck." Though coming from different theoretical backgrounds, Kligler-Vilenchik et al., Hinck, and Wilkinson all converge around the importance of reimagining the world through shared fantasies.

Another central strand running through the discussion has to do with the differences between efforts of celebrities (authors such as John Green, pop stars such as Hong Kong's Ho Denise Wan See, cult television actors such as Gillian Anderson, filmmakers such as Kevin Smith, television show runners such as Joss Whedon, and comedians such as Stephen Colbert) to mobilize their fans around their pet causes and more grassroots efforts by fans to draw resources from popular culture to help fuel their own efforts at social change. A group like Nerdfighters straddles the line between the two—they are partially a response to the ongoing cultural productions of the brothers John and Hank Green (as Wilkinson suggests) but also a much more open-ended, participatory space, where anyone who wants to claim the nerdfighter identity can produce media and rally support behind his or her own ideas about what might constitute a better society. Lucy Bennett offers a critical review of the literature surrounding celebrity-based activism, exploring how such causes often take off because of the sense of intimacy the stars create with their following. Bethan Jones challenges a tradition of research that has tended to pathologize the parasocial relations between media fans and celebrities by describing the ways that *X-Files* cast member Gillian Anderson was able to inspire her fans to raise money for various charities. Tanya R. Cochran examines the efforts of Joss Whedon (*Buffy the Vampire Slayer, Firefly, Angel, Dollhouse*) to use his blog to increase awareness about sexual violence against women. Cochran sees Whedon's promotion of feminism as consistent with the focus on strong female characters across his television series, reinforcing the themes that draw fans to his properties in the first place.
The idea that the personality of celebrities, as much as the themes of popular fictions, may shape what issues fan activists embrace (and in this case, which issues generate little or no response) is further explored in Tom Phillips's exploration of the failed attempt by Kevin Smith (*Clerks, Chasing Amy, Dogma*) at stimulating fans to write letters to Southwest Airlines when the filmmaker was removed from his flight because he was viewed as "too fat to fly." Although the incident sparked online conversations around "corporate practice, body image, and consumer rights" (¶0.1), Smith's fans were not able to cohere around a strategy for exerting pressure on the airline. Cheuk Yi Lin explores why a sexually ambiguous pop star in Hong Kong has offered fans new language and images to represent their own erotic identities, but her queer fans have not coalesced into institutional politics around the rights of sexual minorities. Any urge toward more overtly political responses are dampened both by the cultural traditions of Hong Kong and by the institutional structures surrounding the fandom.

Although the first wave of research has stressed the potentials for fan activism, such practices are still relatively rare, with most forms of fandom stopping at the level of creative expression and not translating into collective action. For this reason, studies such as those by Phillips and Lin, which help us to understand the constraints on fan activism, may prove as useful in the long term as those studies which document successful models for translating fan investments into social change. Further challenging a utopian view of fan activism, Sun Jung explores antifandom around the K-Pop star Tablo, showing how some fan discourse may incorporate intense nationalism and even racism, even as other groups actively and productively challenge these discourses.

Contributing to van Zoonen's notion of the entertained citizen, several articles engage the direct connection between the political sphere (as traditionally defined) and participatory cultures. Andreas Jungherr investigates the German federal elections in 2009, arguing that citizen use of new media platforms and practices challenges the candidates' top-down communication practices. Contrasting design and deployment of such strategies across the German political spectrum, Jungherr finds that the participatory possibilities of emerging political practices vary depending on ideology. Jungherr concludes that the more liberal German Social Democrats (SPD) were more successful in designing an online environment that supported grassroots participation than the German conservative party (CDU). In the United States, *The Colbert Report*, a satirical late-night television program featuring Stephen Colbert, a character who is a parody of conservative media personalities, further blurs the lines between politics and entertainment. Marcus Schulzke shows how the program encouraged audiences to remix content and otherwise manipulate the words and images of political figures in ways that foster critical media literacies. By now, the idea that young Americans are
as apt to learn about the political system through such news-comedy programs as from traditional journalism has become commonplace, while the program producers have sought to link creative expression and political participation to what it means to be a fan of their shows.

The simultaneously transnational and local dimensions of fan activism are another strand that runs through this issue. With examples of fan activism that include South Korea, Japan, Hong Kong, Germany, Australia, and India, the essays in this issue expand the transnational dimensions of fan activism. These examples highlight some of the similarities between various instances and discussions of fan activism (including the role of communities and content worlds, catalyzing moments, and challenges to sustained mobilization), but we are also acutely sensitive to the local dimensions and specifications of these mobilizations. In sharp contrast to the United States, where we are constantly working to establish participatory culture links to the political sphere, Aswin Punathambekar aptly observes that the connection between participatory culture and politics is "not news to anyone in India." Punathambekar goes even further, observing that the struggle in India is to, in fact, demonstrate the "ordinariness of participatory culture." Complementing this observation, and using a public protest inspired by the a Bollywood film to demonstrate his argument, Ritesh Mehta proposes "flash activism" as a crucial element of India's civil society.

4. Kony 2012

The power and challenges of activism through fanlike engagement with content worlds came into sharp focus with Invisible Children's Kony 2012 campaign, an effort to increase public awareness of the human rights violations and genocide conducted by a Ugandan warlord. At the time of writing, the 30-minute Kony 2012 film released at 12 PM on March 5, 2012, has topped 76 million views on YouTube to become one of the most viewed and fastest-spreading videos in YouTube history. In The Daily Show's coverage of Kony 2012 on March 12, 2012, host Jon Stewart sets up the popularity of the film by saying, "This guy Kony is probably dropping some sick beats." The show cuts to an excerpt from Kony 2012 in which Jason Russell's voice describes the war crimes committed by the LRA set to images of what we gather are victims of those atrocities. We now cut back to a shocked Jon Stewart who goes on to exclaim, "So a thirty-minute video on child soldiers has gone viral—how popular can this thing be? I am sure it's not teenage girl sings song about day of the week hot." The show cuts to mainstream news media coverage of Kony 2012 focused on its extraordinary reach (http://www.thedailyshow.com/watch/mon-march-12-2012/my-little-kony).

Given this almost overwhelming visibility, the film—and with it Invisible Children as an organization—was the subject of sharp debate. In the following days,
IC's financials, their activities in Uganda, and their support of military action to "bring Joseph Kony to justice" were examined, debated, and critiqued ad nauseam in news media, through discussion forums, and on IC's own public Facebook page. The importance of these issues notwithstanding, these debates have by and large failed to recognize why the IC has been so incredibly spreadable (to borrow Henry Jenkins's term). Yes, the film is very well edited, and yes, its message, "make Kony famous," is compelling. But as Henry Jenkins (2012) points out, the success of the Kony 2012 YouTube campaign owes much to the fanlike support IC has built around its films over its past eight years of existence. In asking their supporters to reach out to a range of celebrities and policy makers who have a high level of visibility through social media, the organization also tapped into the desire of fans to see their favorites take a stand on issues that matter to them. With Kony 2012, IC activated this supporter base, which then willingly, strategically, and enthusiastically tweeted, posted, and then reposted the film to set its phenomenal spread in motion. They supported it with such fervor that they surpassed IC's goal of getting 500,000 views by the end of 2012 within a few hours.

[4.3] IC and its supporters were caught off guard by the barrage of criticism levied at Kony 2012. Some, such as Ethan Zuckerman (2012), have suggested that the rapid spread of the video was a consequence of its simplification of complex political issues, wondering how online networks might be deployed to further complicate and nuance the frames that it proposes. As Civic Paths researcher Lana Swartz (2012) suggests, IC focused more on having their media be spreadable (widely circulated) rather than drillable (open to deeper investigation). For example, before Kony 2012, few IC supporters were encouraged to actively seek out more information about the Lord's Revolutionary Army, the militia that Kony heads. Instead, they were generally content with carefully replicating the accurate but somewhat simplistic narrative they received through IC's media. Fans of many media franchises have sought to drill deeper into their content worlds, trying to encapsulate everything that was known about what happened on the island in Lost or expanding the story line through fan fiction writing projects. In this way, fandom's search for hidden depths in seemingly simple texts offers an alternative model for how a group like IC might achieve the more nuanced framing Zuckerman sought and might give their rank-and-file members greater skills at parsing competing truth claims made about what is happening on the ground in Uganda.

[4.4] In our call for submissions, we set out to understand how the imaginative practices supported by fandom, at times facilitated by digital media, may inform civic and political mobilization and how we may rethink our understanding of engagement in the civic and political spheres through the lens of fandom. The articles included in this issue not only exceed these objectives, but they also point to the extreme timeliness
of this endeavor. From undocumented superheroes to humanitarian assistance in the name of Harry Potter, fandom clearly has a lot to teach us about activism in the age of social media and participatory culture.

5. Acknowledgments

[5.1] Based at the University of Southern California, the Media Activism and Participatory Politics Project (MAPP) is part of Civic Paths Project (http://civicpaths.uscannenberg.org/). The project gratefully acknowledges support from the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation Research Network on Youth and Participatory Politics (YPP) and the Spencer Foundation.

[5.2] We thank the authors in this issue, whose original work makes TWC possible; the peer reviewers, who freely provide their time and expertise; the editorial team members, whose engagement with and solicitation of material is so valuable; and the production team members, who transform rough manuscripts into publishable documents.

[5.3] The following people worked on TWC No. 10 in an editorial capacity: Henry Jenkins and Sangita Shresthova (guest editors); Kristina Busse and Karen Hellekson (editors); Anne Kustritz, Patricia Nelson, and Suzanne Scott (Symposium); and Louisa Stein (Review).

[5.4] The following people worked on TWC No. 10 in a production capacity: Rrain Prior (production editor); Beth Friedman, Shoshanna Green, and Mara Greengrass (copyeditors); Wendy Carr, Kristen Murphy, and sunusn (layout); and Kallista Angeloff, Amanda Georgeanne Michaels, Carmen Montopoli, and Vickie West (proofreaders).

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

[5.6] TWC thanks all its board members, whose names appear on TWC's masthead, as well as the additional peer reviewers who provided service for TWC No. 10: Katherine Chen, Bertha Chin, Matthew Costello, Ashley Hinck, Ian Hunter, Alex Jenkins, Jeffrey Jones, Rachael Joo, Deborah Kaplan, Flourish Klink, Michael Koulikov, Bingchun Meng, Christopher Moreman, Nele Noppe, Amy Shuman, Fred Turner, Emily Wills, and Ethan Zuckerman.

6. Note
These quotes are excerpted from interviews carried out by Arely Zimmerman for the Media, Activism, and Participatory Politics Project between December 2010 and July 2011. Institutional review board approval was secured for this research.

7. Works cited


Fandom meets activism: Rethinking civic and political participation

Melissa M. Brough and Sangita Shresthova

University of Southern California, Los Angeles, California, United States

Abstract—Fan activism lies at the intersection of cultural and political participation. The study of fan activism can inform our understanding of contemporary collective action more broadly. We suggest four key areas for analysis: the relationships between cultural and political participation; the tension between participation and resistance in the context of fan activism; the role of content worlds in civic and political mobilization; and evaluation of the impacts of fan activism. By drawing on work across several disciplines including media studies and social movement literature, the analysis of fan activism through these lenses offers insights for theorizing contemporary cultures and modes of collective action.

Keywords—Affect; Civic engagement; Consumer citizenship; Content worlds; Evaluation; Fandom; Narrative; Participatory culture; Social movements


Fan and consumer activism are more visible than ever before, and the lines between these and traditional civic and political activities are blurring in today’s increasingly "participatory" media and entertainment landscape. How might research on fandom and participatory cultures inform our understanding of contemporary forms of civic and political action? As we considered responses to this question across various disciplines, we confronted some recurrent themes and debates about how fandom and participatory entertainment cultures influence and at times reshape our understanding of civic and political mobilization.

First, we explore the intersections of cultural and political participation; second, the tension between participation and resistance in the context of fan activism; third, the role of affect and of content worlds in mobilizing civic participation; and finally, how to assess the impact of fan activism or fanlike mobilizations. We argue that these four areas of analysis not only help us to further theorize fan activism, but also highlight several ways in which the study of fan activism can inform theorizing of contemporary civic and political action more broadly. Throughout, we emphasize the applicability of existing scholarship on contemporary social movements—a body of
work that has been underutilized in fan studies—for the analysis of fan activism.
Conversely, we urge social movement scholars to explore the fertile but understudied
terrain of fan and fanlike forms of civic and political participation.

2. Setting the stage: Key concepts and definitions

[2.1] Fans are typically understood to be individuals who engage deeply with, and
often assert their identity through, popular culture content. Fan activities commonly
include writing or producing pop-culture related content such as fan fiction or remixed
videos ("vids"), self-publishing analyses of media content, role-playing, and organizing
conventions or other fan group activities (Hellekson and Busse 2006; Jenkins 1992).
Groups of individuals constitute a fandom through interest-driven affiliations, forming
a sense of collective or subcultural identity around shared tastes.

[2.2] Traditionally, activism is understood to be intentional action to challenge
existing hegemonies and provoke political and/or social change. Fan activism,
however, has most often been associated with active fans lobbying for a content-
related outcome, such as a program staying on the air (Lichtenberg, Marshak, and
Winston 1975; Scardaville 2005), the representation of racial or sexual minorities
(Garber and Paleo 1983; Lopez 2011), or the promotion of social themes in program
content (Ross 2008). Earl and Kimport (2009), for example, defined fan activism as
being "not about the mix between political concerns and culture but rather action that
looks like political activism but is used toward nonpolitical ends" (221). Such a
definition seems increasingly problematic, given the porous boundaries between
cultural and political concerns, as well as the overtly political orientation of many fan
activist campaigns today.

[2.3] Fan groups may organize around real-world issues through extended
engagement with and appropriation of popular culture content. Fan activism can thus
also be understood as fan-driven efforts to address civic or political issues through
engagement with and strategic deployment of popular culture content. Such efforts to
change the status quo are "often conducted through the infrastructure of existing fan
practices and relationships, and often framed through metaphors drawn from popular
and participatory culture" (Jenkins 2012).

[2.4] This is not new; there have been several historical instances in which fans used
fandom as a resource or springboard for civic and political action. In Uranian Worlds
(1983), Eric Garber and Lin Paleo note that several of the early pioneers of the 1950s
homophile movement met through fandom. Fan groups have also historically mobilized
around charity causes, but very few of these efforts are well documented in the
academic literature. A more recent example is fans of Joss Whedon and the canceled
TV show *Firefly* (2002–3), who continue to gather every year to organize "Can't Stop the Serenity," a fund-raiser for the women's rights advocacy organization Equality Now. Contemporary fan activism is increasingly prolific and diverse in its forms and tactics, and a clear-cut distinction between fan activism and real-world activism remains elusive. We thus use the term *fan activism* broadly to incorporate the range of intentional actions by fans, or the use of fanlike strategies, to provoke change.

[2.5] Despite the growth of fan studies in recent years, few analyses have considered fan activism and its relationship to civic participation, with notable exceptions, such as van Zoonen (2005) and Burwell and Boler (2008). Here, we also use the term *civic participation* broadly to include activities including civic engagement, traditional political action, and various forms of activism in order to capture the range of manifestations of fan activism.

[2.6] As a form of participatory culture, fan activism is a rich site for exploring contemporary dynamics of civic participation. There are varied notions of what constitutes a participatory culture; that of Henry Jenkins—which emerged from work in fan studies—includes relatively low barriers to entry, artistic expression, informal mentorship, sharing of one's creations, and a sense of community (Jenkins et al. 2006). The behaviors and skill sets typical of popular media fan cultures—appropriating and remixing content, developing communication infrastructures and practices within fan communities, online networking among groups with shared interests, self-publication in dialogue with popular content worlds—are increasingly relevant to contemporary modes of collective identity formation (note 1).

[2.7] On the one hand, we have fans or audiences collectively mobilizing for political and social goals. Some of these mobilizations have been prompted by specific historical events, as in the case of fans of the *Roswell* television show using existing online fan forums and repertoires from the show to debate and collectively mourn the 9/11 terrorist attacks, and to organize charitable contributions (Stein 2002). Others are more sustained efforts to mobilize fans toward a variety of civic actions, as in the case of the Harry Potter Alliance (HPA). The HPA is a US-based nonprofit organization that works "for human rights, equality, and a better world just as Harry and his friends did" (http://thehpalliance.org/what-we-do). Inspired by Dumbledore's Army in the Harry Potter narratives, the HPA taps fan community practices to run advocacy and activist campaigns through a decentered network of paid and volunteer staff and local chapters. The HPA builds on active and creative engagement with the Harry Potter content world, connecting this content to social justice aims in the real world, such as fair trade and marriage equality. The HPA has also motivated some nonfans to join their collective actions. (For more on this case, see Jenkins 2012 and Kligler-Vilenchik et al. 2012.)
On the other hand, we see activists (fan or other) reconfiguring pop culture content for specific political goals, as in the example of so-called *Avatar* activism. In these cases, indigenous and Palestinian rights groups draw on imagery from James Cameron’s 2009 Hollywood sci-fi blockbuster about the Na'vi, an aboriginal population on the utopian moon of Pandora whose existence is threatened by exploitative colonizers from planet Earth. Real-life rights groups have used *Avatar*’s imagery and tropes to attract mainstream media attention. For example, protesters in the West Bank village of Bil'in dressed as the Na'vi; covered with blue body paint, they approached an Israeli military barricade, where they were subjected to a tear gas attack. Photographs and video of the protest were then circulated online, catching the attention of news media outlets.

**Video 1.** "Bilin Reenacts Avatar Film 12-02-2010 By Haitham Al Katib."

The cameras present at the protest reveal the mediated (and remediated) nature of this event. As Simon Faulkner describes, "Organisers of the *Avatar* demonstration in Bil'in aimed to produce strong images that would have an impact upon those who saw them and would attract the attention of a much wider audience" (2010). Such a deployment of popular culture helped draw mass media attention to a well-known and protracted campaign, combating media fatigue by offering new, visually striking imagery linked to a recent global entertainment media event. Mark Deuze describes a similar case from Orissa, India, where indigenous anti-mining advocates appealed to international support by relating their struggle to *Avatar* in an ad placed in *Variety*, a Hollywood entertainment magazine; a CNN reporter subsequently dubbed the campaign's success an "Avatar victory" (Deuze 2010, 7). *Avatar* activism is not an example of fans mobilizing as activists, but rather of activists using fanlike tactics, including appropriation and remixing of pop culture content, to
provoke dialogue and mobilization. These fan and fanlike activities raise the decades-old debate about the politics of culture and what 'counts' as a political act.

3. Intersections of cultural and civic/political participation

[3.1] Although increasingly contested, political participation in modern democracies has traditionally referred to those actions and associations that seek to directly interact with institutions of the nation-state and its electoral processes. In political science, the concept of political participation is typically linked to government institutions, confining it to a narrow definition of citizenship and the ways individuals and groups may access or enact political agency. Verba, Schlozman, and Brady, for example, note that "political participation affords citizens in a democracy an opportunity to communicate information to government officials about their concerns and preferences and put pressure on them to respond" (1995, 37).

[3.2] However, scholars across several disciplines have argued that informal, cultural engagement (or cultural citizenship) may also be usefully analyzed for forms of political participation (Burgess, Foth, and Klaebe 2006; Cohen 2010; Jenkins 2006; Levine 2007; Livingstone 2005; Pettingill 2007; Bennett, Freelon, and Wells 2010; Amadeo, Andolina, and Torney-Punta 2010; Higgins-D'Allessandro 2010). Over the last several decades, younger generations in particular have become civically and politically engaged in new and different ways, related less to electoral politics or government or civic organizations and more to personal interests, social networks, and cultural or commodity activism (a form of protest that is typically levied against private companies rather than governments). These modes of political participation are often enacted through informal, noninstitutionalized, nonhierarchical networks in and around the Internet (Bennett 2008; Ito et al. 2009; Jenkins et al. 2006; Kahne, Feezell, and Lee 2011). They are political insofar as they aim to influence or change existing power relations.

[3.3] Analyses of social movements in the last half century show a well-established trend toward culturally defined solidarity as opposed to traditional forms of politically defined solidarity through parties, trade unions, or interest associations, and largely characterized by more flexible forms of organization (Touraine 1985; Melucci 1996; Castells 1997). Alain Touraine (1985), who offered one of the first and most influential discussions of the changing characteristics of social movements in postindustrial society, articulated a shift from a sociopolitical form of collective action (that traditionally sought greater access to, and/or transformations of, the state in response to labor and economic problems) to more sociocultural movements. Touraine argued that the "new" social movements are struggles waged over—and through—"symbolic goods, that is, of information and images, of culture itself" (774).
This shift toward culturally defined solidarity does not, however, represent a detachment from the political. Central examples of new social movements, such as the feminist and environmental movements of the late 20th century (Castells 1997), are political in nature and have entailed both formal and informal political participation, shifts in relations of power, and changes in public policy. Thus, defining political participation as explicitly linked to legislative processes or traditional political institutions alone obscures the role of culture in social and political change. What is the significance of social movements engaging with pop culture iconography to struggle for power and change? And how can we better understand why fandom may motivate fans—and sometimes even nonfans—to organize and take such action?

In the political science of modern Western democracies, the public sphere is seen to provide the crucial space for political debate (Habermas 1989; Fraser 1990; McIntosh and Youniss 2010). From a different angle, media studies and analyses of fan cultures have considered whether participative audiences constitute publics. Lisbet van Zoonen (2005) argues that the positioning of "audiences and publics, fans and citizens" as fundamentally dissimilar is not "tenable" because it assumes that politics and culture exist in completely separate spheres (56). Daniel Dayan (2005, 44) has argued that too often the notion of publics is conflated with "the dominant model of political publics," but he observes that political publics are often intertwined with "identity-seeking" or "text-oriented" publics (note 2). Both of these latter forms of publics may describe fandom, which often engages actively, critically, and collectively with popular culture. Traditionally, audiences were conceived as passive receivers or consumers of content (a notion the field of fan studies has contested), while publics were construed as active citizenry. Although not all audiences are fans, Dayan argues that "even the crudest of quantitative audiences"—audiences understood as aggregates of individual viewers—"share at least two characteristics with publics":

1. Like that of publics, the experience of audiences involves a dimension of imagination, concerning the others who share with them a given participative frame...or whom they join in "audiencing."

2. Like that of publics, audiences embody a fundamental dimension of social experience: collective attention, "watching with." (2005, 55)

As Dayan, Sonia Livingstone, and others have shown, audiences can and do turn into "issue publics'...linked to the political" (Dayan 2005, 54; Livingstone 2005). In fact, "Publics must always have been audiences. In the political domain, they stop being audiences when their concern for an issue prevails over their engagement with the narrative that calls for it. It is this concern for—and focusing on—an issue that constitutes an audience into a public" (Dayan 2005, 57). Dayan observes, however, that for an audience to become a public, they must go public, announcing their
relation to a particular issue and performing as a collective public. Thus, the HPA moves from audience to a public by going public with a collective identity formed not only around the Harry Potter content world but also—crucially—around real-world issues.

[3.9] Fans and fan activists, like other publics, may also offer a counterframe to narratives consumed by audiences (Lichtenberg, Marshak, and Winston 1975; Russ 1983; Jenkins 1992; Radway 1991; Bacon-Smith 1992; Hellekson and Busse 2006). The example of Avatar activism illustrates this dynamic; the film's depiction of the struggle to resist colonization on the fantastical moon Pandora is repurposed (and remixed as a YouTube video) to represent Palestinian activists' struggles in the West Bank. The coverage of this case, combined with other reports of indigenous rights campaigns using Avatar, fueled international public debate about the narrative merits, contradictions, and potential impacts of the film for indigenous rights and environmental activism (Wachman 2010; Barrionuevo 2010; Heath Justice 2010; Lee 2010). Dayan's analysis suggests that when fans publicly and collectively offer a counterframe to a narrative that is tied to a particular issue or problem, they are acting as a political public.

[3.10] Ross (2008) and others have documented fan organizations and practices as spaces of political debate. In Convergence Culture (2006), Jenkins argues that when there are low barriers to entry, popular culture and its surrounding participatory cultures (including fandom) can function as spaces where civic skills may be cultivated. Of course, fan communities, like others, are also susceptible to the homogenizing of views that may preclude, or even at times silence, others. What is most relevant here, however, is that fan communities often form around content worlds that may not be explicitly political in nature, but that can offer resources or spaces for political engagement.

[3.11] Exploring the relationship between audiences and publics can thus help clarify how fan activism moves between the two. Fan or pop culture engagement can be productively analyzed as both a potential space for developing civic skills, and a catalyst for change. However, we may risk diluting our notion of the political to a point that makes it difficult to debate the merits of different strategies and tactics for civic participation, and difficult to focus on their material (not just cultural) outcomes. Framing all acts of engagement with popular entertainment as political acts can have a depoliticizing effect and limit analytical and tactical advancements. Yet privileging a purist view of politics over one that embraces people's dreams, desires, and consumption of popular culture may lead "to hypocrisy and self-deception and a politics obsessed with purity and authenticity" (Duncombe 2007, 76). The quality of civic participation is not inherently compromised by a critical engagement with
commercial pop culture. Perhaps, as van Zoonen (2005), and J. K. Rowling (2008) herself suggest, such critical engagement can help us "imagine better."

4. (Fan) activism: Acts of participation and/or resistance?

[4.1] Activism is often understood to be a resistant practice, resisting or pushing back against a hegemony in order to provoke change. Thus, the recent discourse of participatory culture in the new media space and the longer history of fan participation in pop culture suggest a possible contradiction in the term fan activism. How is it that fans can both participate in a commercial pop culture space, and at the same time resist or attempt to change the status quo within or through the same hegemonic space? When and how does commercial consumption become civic or political participation?

[4.2] A large body of scholarship, particularly since the 1970s, has analyzed "culture that is used, consciously or unconsciously, effectively or not, to resist and/or change the dominant political, economic and/or social structure" (Duncombe 2002, 5; see also Hall and Jefferson 1990; Hebdige 1979). Manifest in many forms (for example, remixing to produce a counternarrative), cultural resistance is positioned in opposition to the dominant culture but may draw on its resources in the formation of what Duncombe (2002) calls a creative free space where ideas, particularly political ideas, may be fleshed out and practices tested and implemented—and civic skills may be cultivated.

[4.3] In contrast, more recent scholarship (particularly in media and fan studies out of the United States and Europe) has emphasized the paradigm of participation. A participatory culture has been characterized as fostering collaborative processes enabled through horizontal modes of communication (Jenkins et al. 2006). In this line of thinking, horizontal collaboration can foster critical engagement with popular culture because it shifts subjects from passive consumers to active participants who make decisions that influence their fan communities, and in some cases the content worlds in which they are engaged.

[4.4] This body of work has been critiqued for underemphasizing structural inequalities in the political economy of the entertainment and telecommunications industries (Andrejevic 2007; Fuchs 2011) and obscuring forms of resistance aimed at shifting power relations more radically (note 3). Indeed, the recent literature on participatory culture in the United States has focused primarily on participation in mainstream entertainment spaces rather than alternative activist practices; this area merits further attention. However, binary thinking that positions participatory cultures in opposition to cultural resistance is problematic (Jenkins, Ford, and Green
Decades of cultural studies have shown examples of resistant practices within or through commercial spaces; the commercial/noncommercial dichotomy is often too simplistic to be analytically useful.

[4.5] The field of fan studies has, since its inception, made important interventions at this junction. Studies of the genre of slash (Doty 2002; Busse 2006; Alexander and Harris 1998), which centers on homoeroticism between fictional characters, have argued that fan appropriation of content is itself a form of resistance to heteronormativity (not to mention copyright law). Lori Kido Lopez's (2001) study of Racebending.com (http://www.racebending.com/) offers a recent example of a fan-driven critique of hegemonic whitewashing casting practices and unequal racial representation in Hollywood cinema. Racebending.com is a fan effort to protest casting decisions for the film version of Avatar: The Last Airbender (2010), in which white actors were cast in several Asian character roles. Although the fans did not succeed in reversing the casting decisions, Lopez (2011) argues that their protests helped promote dialogue about whitewashing in Hollywood's casting practices and critically reframed public perception of the film beyond The Last Airbender fan base.

[4.6] Recent cultural studies on commodity activism also offer some important insights. Roopali Mukherjee (2011), for example, analyzed Kanye West's music video indicting human rights abuses in the international diamond trade, tracing the tensions of this activist stance coming from a hip-hop celebrity whose very success and artistic style is enmeshed in a culture of bling. She discusses the troubled history of the African American community's relationship to consumer citizenship, from exclusion from the market to strategic attempts to access power through market-based practices, including boycotts and buycotts. As the closing caption of West's music video implies ("Please purchase conflict-free diamonds"), this form of commodity activism is squarely situated within a notion of consumer citizenship, in which political agency is seemingly enacted through consumption choices.
Critics have argued that consumer citizenship is emblematic of neoliberal political culture, characterized largely by the privatization of government services and shrinking of the liberal welfare state. Consumer citizenship may be increasingly normalized as the primary mode of access to political agency while obfuscating traditional civic responsibilities and structural issues of inequality (Mukherjee 2011; Cohen 2003; Cronin 2000; García Canclini 2001). Rather than dismissing commodity-based forms of activism, however, Mukherjee argues that such cases "allow us to trace how neoliberal citizens actualize their political subjectivities, not through rejections of commodity culture, but rather, from within circuits of consumption and exchange" (2011, 7). Commodity activism thus complicates our understanding of resistance, forcing us to consider "civic politics in the neoliberal era" as possibly "enabled by, and nurtured within, modes of consumer citizenship" (ibid. 9, 16).

Fan activism makes sense in such a context; social movement scholarship has shown that the form a collective action takes often reflects the culture and structure that are its target of change (Della Porta and Diani 2006; Juris 2004). Put another way, "In a world where the importance of corporations is increasingly prominent in daily life, studying fan activism offers one window into the private power dynamics of corporate-civil contests" (Earl and Kimport 2009, 239).

Fan participation in and through commercial entertainment spaces is not predetermined to be resistant or complicit—in fact, it is often both—but its political significance lies in part in the changes in relations of power that may occur through such participation. In industrialized democracies of the Global North, we can understand power as circulating primarily through discourses and networks (Castells 2009; Foucault 1980). In that case, the political potential of participatory...
entertainment cultures lies in the ways cultural codes and discourses are contested and remixed, as well as the ways in which the resulting content is consumed and reconfigured as a resource for mobilization. In other words, we need to pay attention to how particular actors construct, use, and circulate their voices through the production or reproduction of cultural content, as well as whether and by whom content is consumed and engaged. Fandom has historically grappled with the problem of voice as consumers asserted agency over media content in an attempt to be heard by other fans and by the content producers. How to move from having a voice within a subculture to being heard more broadly in civic and political spaces is a central challenge for all activists, and examples like Avatar activism and the HPA offer strategies emerging from fan and fanlike practices.

[4.10] In a fragmented cultural and political context, where politics is no longer played out primarily through institutional affiliations, we thus arrive at an expanded understanding of participatory entertainment cultures as spaces that may support, and at times even encourage, grassroots activism and civic participation. The HPA exemplifies this possibility. It was mobilized by drawing on the Harry Potter narratives: the best-selling book series and films released by Warner Bros., a subsidiary of Time Warner—the world's largest media conglomerate. Yet in their fight against media consolidation, which they describe as "fighting for what Harry, the Order of the Phoenix, and Potterwatch did not have: the right to a free press" (note 4), the HPA has confronted the very system that has so successfully produced and distributed the Harry Potter content worlds. This example illustrates the fluidity—and potential contradictions—of fan activism, in which networked activists strategically draw resources from and at the same time fight against structures of commercial pop culture. HPA's work may point to a deep-rooted allegiance to narratives rather than to the commercial structures that circulate them; it certainly illustrates the complex relationship between resistance and participation in contemporary forms of fan activism. The content worlds created, maintained, and contested through the telling and retelling of narratives play a key role in this complex relationship.

5. Content worlds: Questions of affect, collective identity, and authenticity

[5.1] Is buying a conflict-free diamond because of a hip-hop video really activism? Is protesting whitewashing casting decisions activism? What is authentic activism? Does it need to look like the high-risk, disciplined actions of Martin Luther King Jr. and the Greensboro Four's civil rights struggles to be taken seriously, as Malcolm Gladwell (2010) has suggested?
Duncombe (2007) argues that taking activism too seriously can be a pitfall; the tendency of progressives in particular to insist on the logical and rational as the most legitimate mode of persuasion overlooks the ways play, performance, spectacle, and affect motivate civic action. Alberto Melucci argues that individuals mobilize for social change only when their affective and communicative needs, as well as their needs for solidarity, coincide with the collective's goals; these are fundamental to the development of collective identity and subsequent collective action (1996). Engaging affect is thus central to the process of changing society's values, beliefs, and cultural patterns (Melucci 1996; Castells 2009). Melucci further argues that social change entails struggles over the cultural codes through which social meaning is produced, maintained, or changed. Social movements challenge dominant codes and discourses (and ultimately the legitimacy of existing social configurations of power) by producing and diffusing alternative codes, such as new ways of living and new forms of language.

Even as the opportunities to challenge codes through user-generated content networks grow, the inability to achieve visibility in the mass media can still obscure a group's cause, even—and especially—in today's fragmented mediascape (Thompson 2005; Castells 2009). Recent examples of activism mobilized in large part through user-generated content platforms and social networks illustrate the ongoing importance of the interplay between social and broadcast media to attain mass visibility and influence public opinion. In the Arab Spring and the Occupy Wall Street movements, for example, user-generated material provided crucial content for national and international broadcasters, which in turn was vital to the visibility and spread of the movements as well as subsequent shifts in public discourse. Content produced by members of the Occupy movement has frequently remixed pop culture tropes (Trope and Swartz 2011). Although pop culture codes may not always play a role in such mobilizations, they can help draw attention to the campaigns or movements and fuel collective identity formation around shared social meanings. Fan culture offers a history of appropriation and critical engagement with pop culture that could inform broader activist strategies toward increased visibility and collective identity formation.

Most important, perhaps, is what might be learned from fan cultures about storytelling and the use of content worlds to prompt participation. Dayan writes, "Fiction turns into a political force by providing scripts for action" (2005, 53); he sees dramaturgy and performance as key components in the conversion of an audience into a public. Other contributions from media and cultural studies have debated the role of fantasy and cultural engagement in helping to inspire civic participation (Fiske 1989; Hartley 2008; Radway 1991; Jenkins 2006; Duncombe 2007). John Street articulates the connection between entertainment, content worlds, and politics thus: "Politics, like popular culture, is about creating an 'audience,' a people who will laugh at their jokes,
understand their fears and share their hopes. Both the popular media and politicians are engaged in creating works of popular fiction which portray credible worlds that resonate with people's experiences" (in van Zoonen 2005, 59). Fan-driven civic participation, fueled by affective engagement in content worlds, offers overt examples of such linkages and how storytelling and other fan practices may scaffold mobilization for real-world action.

[5.5] Fan culture also asks us to consider not just storytelling but transmedia storytelling as a catalyst for collective identity formation and mobilization. Transmedia storytelling is "a process where integral elements of a fiction get dispersed systematically across multiple delivery channels to create a unified and coordinated entertainment experience" (Jenkins 2007). Transmedia storytelling has proliferated throughout the entertainment industry, but it has also been taken up as an activist strategy. Lina Srivastava has defined transmedia activism as creating "social impact by using storytelling by a number of decentralized authors who share assets and create content for distribution across multiple forms of media to raise awareness and influence action" (2009) (note 5). Avatar activism is an obvious example where transmedia storytelling is taken up by activists to strategically borrow, remix, and gain visibility across media platforms; in such cases, it is both activists using social media platforms and the mainstream media that move the story content across platforms. Future research on fandom and fan cultures could help further elaborate the possibilities (as well as the challenges) of transmedia activism.

[5.6] Although this focus on storytelling is by no means new and has been addressed in the social movement literature (Poletta 2006), the centrality of content worlds to fan cultures pushes us to rethink storytelling as a collective activity in which individuals and groups contribute to the telling, retelling, and remixing of stories through various media platforms. In doing so, they help shape the contours of content worlds that may serve as affective resources and organizing structures for the mobilizing of collective action. At the same time, this focus on narrative reminds us to remain watchful of the ideological and structural hegemonies that these content worlds may perpetuate. What, for example, do we make of Palestinian activists dressed as blue Na'vi drawing international press coverage by engaging iconography from a film critiqued for its problematic treatment of colonialism (Žižek 2010; Heath Justice 2010)? A noncritical romanticizing of appropriation ignores the complexity of the cultural politics and histories of pop culture imagery in relation to real-world injustices.

6. Evaluating the impact of fan activism

[6.1] How do we understand the effects of contemporary fan and fanlike activism? Do we value change at the individual level, or change at the community or societal
level? In reality, the lines between these are often blurry, and change occurs in complex, nonlinear ways. To complicate matters further, social change is sometimes measured as an aggregate of the individual, as in the case of Robert Putnam's much-debated *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (2000). That is, change may be viewed from a more distributed perspective, in which individual-level change aggregates to broader society-level change (that is, the sum of individual parts), or from a more communitarian perspective, in which the social change occurs through the interaction of a group, as in Pierre Levy's (1997) collective intelligence model. Although political participation as it was traditionally conceived can be relatively easily documented through statistics such as voting trends (an aggregate of individual actions), this broader, more nuanced understanding of political participation requires different approaches to evaluating impact.

[6.2] Fandom is characterized by what Ito et al. (2009) would label as interest-driven participation, where participation is prompted and structured by specialized interests and activities. The quantitative study by Kahne, Feezell, and Lee (2011) makes an important link in measuring the potential correlation between youths' participation in online, interest-driven cultural activities and their civic engagement; they argue that such interest-driven activities can "serve as a gateway to participation in important aspects of civic and, at times, political life, including volunteering, engagement in community problem-solving, protest activities, and political voice" (20). Although the study of Kahne, Feezell, and Lee includes traditional measures of civic and political activity, the findings suggest that in order to capture the range of modes of youth civic engagement, we need to look at spaces and forms of participatory culture.

[6.3] We thus suggest that fan activism necessitates an exploratory move away from traditional frameworks of assessment. The broader understanding of civic participation allows researchers the space to identify modes of engagement that are more organically based on actual practices, rather than grafting a traditional model onto them (Pettingill 2007). We must also consider where groups and their members place value in terms of their impacts; a participatory culture should not be evaluated solely through nonparticipatory means (see Bennett 2008). For example, in asking how HPA encourages civic participation, we must also take seriously the organizing that happens within the practices that define the broader Harry Potter fandom; these may include the discussions, creative production, and collaborative efforts around sites like MuggleNet (http://www.mugglenet.com/) and The Leaky Cauldron (http://the-leaky-cauldron.org/), the Wizard Rock scene, the Quiddich tournaments, and annual fan conventions. We may consider these modes of participation as possible spaces of collective identity formation and mobilization that are supported by fan cultures, and seek out the insights that these social and cultural formations offer to analyses of contemporary civic participation.
Wellman (2001) has introduced the term networked individualism to "describe the hybrid quality that combines the communitarian nature of community with the 'strength of weak ties' which [are] found in social networks" (Burgess, Foth, and Klaebe 2006, 6). Networked individualism may be used to characterize both fan cultures that organize around a shared interest (increasingly online) and contemporary activist mobilization (Castells 2007). In this sense, some forms of contemporary civic participation may increasingly exhibit characteristics common to fan culture; both are adapting in similar ways to new capacities offered by digital media. It is ever more common for collective identities of fan groups to emerge through online interactions with strangers, sharing, remixing, and debating content worlds (Hellekson and Busse 2006); the same may increasingly be said about contemporary mobilizations. Although some (like Gladwell) bemoan "weak(er)-tie" activism (note 6), we might instead consider whether fandom and online participatory cultures facilitate a flow between networked individualism and collective action—that is, from individuated participation to a collectivity or a public.

Fan activists may have no other social tie but their shared interest in a particular content world, around and through which they come together, interact, and develop a sense of collective identity that may then be mobilized toward collective action. Melucci's (1996) analysis of collective identity formation in social movements suggests that preexisting affective communities (for example, fan networks) can play an important role in provoking participation in a movement, particularly when dealing with networks of loose affiliations.

But how sustainable is activism that relies on the appeal of ever-changing pop culture content, trends, and online networks? As Jenkins (2012) explains, HPA is working toward the longer-term sustainability of the organization through cross-fandom alliances in preparation for the decreased visibility of Harry Potter now that the last film in the series has been released. In this case, longer-term, real-world campaigns are driving alliances between different fandoms and linkages across different content worlds; an area for future study is to explore how and to what effect fan activists traverse distinct content worlds. In contrast, the case of Avatar activism raises the question of how to think about continuity in a context where immediate visibility was the primary objective of the use of pop culture (note 7). Together, these cases illustrate that pop culture may be utilized to provoke short-term or immediate actions, while at other times, content worlds are engaged in extensive and multifaceted ways to move toward ongoing civic engagement. The intended life span of fan or pop culture activist campaigns must be taken into account when evaluating their effectiveness.
The importance of incorporating participatory approaches to understanding and evaluating fan activism, the complexity and nonlinearity of social change, the proliferation of new modes of organizing through online platforms, and the particularities of different fan cultures all suggest the need for case-based studies to enhance our understanding of how fan cultures may inform, influence, and help to mobilize around political and civic action. The four areas of analysis presented here may be productively applied to future studies to further theorize fan activism and other forms of contemporary civic action. Such studies may also want to consider Dayan's (2005, 52–53) framework for analysis of six key features of public action: performance (broadly defined, and connecting the public to the public sphere); styles of interaction (or "manners" of performing as publics); reflexivity (self-awareness needed to define the community); commitment (definition of what it means to be a member); issues (addressing defined problems); and stability (a certain sense of continuity). There is clearly much work to be done.

7. Conclusion

Work across several scholarly fields permits us to identify productive points of tension and debate that may inform future research on civic participation through fan and fanlike pop culture engagement. We organized these points into four thematic areas: intersections of cultural and political participation; the relationship between participation and resistance in the context of fan activism; the role of affect and content worlds in mobilizing civic participation; and issues of evaluating impact. These are key areas for future analysis of fan activism and civic participation.

We have noted some increasing similarities between fan cultures and contemporary mobilizations; the modes and structures particular to fan cultures may inform our analyses of contemporary civic action more broadly. The study of social movements, a body of work that has rarely been taken up in fan studies, can help us to think about visibility and the relationship between affect, cultural codes, and collective identities in the mobilization process. Across the literatures and cases reviewed, we saw the significance of content worlds and storytelling (including transmedia storytelling) in the development of collective identity and the formation and mobilization of publics. We problematized the false dichotomies of commercial versus political (or activist), and participation versus resistance. At the same time, we cautioned against framing all acts of engagement with popular entertainment as political acts; not only could this have a depoliticizing effect, but it also limits analytical advancements based on the specificities of particular pop culture and fan activist tactics. We thus call for further case-based studies as a next step toward more nuanced understandings of how fan cultures may mobilize around political and civic goals. Finally, we challenged the shortcomings of conventional measures of civic and
political participation and emphasized the need to situate impact studies of fan activism within a participatory framework more appropriate to the participatory cultures that support it.

[7.3] Future research should consider emergent (as well as existing) modes and structures of engagement in fan activism, such as how content worlds may serve to bridge networked individualism and collective action. There is a critical need for transnational analyses of fan activism. Although our examples here contain transnational elements, we have not considered the specific dynamics of transnationalism in relation to fan and pop culture activism. There is also a clear bias toward Western popular entertainment in our examples, which could be greatly improved—and perhaps called into question—through comparison with cases of non-Western fan activism. Finally, in our review of the literature, we found little in the way of direct critiques of fan activism, perhaps because it is a relatively new topic of study and has yet to be seriously engaged by scholars outside of the field of fan studies.

[7.4] We close with a provocation about the analytical boundaries of fan activism: At what point does the concept of fandom become too diluted to be analytically useful? Just as we may risk diluting the notion of the political, so too we risk diluting the notion of a particular cultural formation—fandom—that fans have long struggled to have valued on its own terms.

8. Acknowledgments

[8.1] We thank Henry Jenkins, Zhan Li, Nina O'Brien, Liana Thompson, Neta Kligler Vilenchik, and Arely Zimmerman for their feedback on previous drafts of this article. We also gratefully acknowledge support from the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation Research Network on Youth and Participatory Politics (YPP).

9. Notes

1. We define content worlds as the narratives and practices shared by the members of a particular audience or community. In the case of fandom, content worlds refer to both the popular culture content and to the individual and collaborative creative expressions produced by the fan community.

2. Dayan defines taste publics as "generally focused on works, texts, or programmes; the performance of these publics is generally 'verdictive' (evaluative)." He contends that "'identity publics' (such as those of music, games or sports fans) display their response to games or performances in order to endow themselves with a visible identity" (2005, 54–55).
3. In other literatures, such as the field of participatory communication in Latin America, participation is often understood as a counterhegemonic practice through which marginalized communities become agents of change in their communities. This field has not, however, considered participatory culture in commercial contexts in the ways discussed here. For a historical review of the participatory paradigm as a resistant practice in Latin America, see Dagron and Tufte (2006).


5. See also "Transmedia Activism: Basic Framework" at http://transmediaactivism.wordpress.com/the-basic-framework/; for further discussion of some of the potentials and risks of transmedia mobilization, see Constanza-Chock (2010).

6. In a widely debated article published in the New Yorker, Malcolm Gladwell (2010) argued that social media, as platforms built around weak ties, "seldom lead to high-risk activism," which he implies is more valuable.

7. Faulkner (2010) discusses the opportunities and objectives of instant visibility in Avatar activism. For a further discussion of the notion of flash fandom and its primary objectives of visibility, see Mehta (2010).

10. Works cited


Mehta, Ritesh. 2010. "'Flash Activism': Civic Justice Catalyzed by a Bollywood Film." From Participatory Culture to Public Participation. https://sites.google.com/site/participatorydemocracyproject/.


"Cultural acupuncture": Fan activism and the Harry Potter Alliance

Henry Jenkins

University of Southern California, Los Angeles, California, United States

[0.1] Abstract—Fan activists have struggled to defend series from cancellation, defend themselves from cease and desist orders, promote alternative representations, and raise money for charity. Building on this background, this article examines how the Harry Potter Alliance encourages young people to speak out as fans on a broad range of human rights and social justice issues through what the group's leader, Andrew Slack, calls "cultural acupuncture." The group's practice of mapping the fictional content world onto real-world concerns helps empower young people to become civically engaged and politically active.

[0.2] Keywords—Civic engagement; Star Trek; Youth


1. Introduction

[1.1] The teenage girl fan of Madonna who fantasies her own empowerment can translate this fantasy into behavior, and can act in a more empowered way socially, thus winning more social territory for herself. When she meets others who share her fantasies and freedom there is the beginning of a sense of solidarity, of a shared resistance, that can support and encourage progressive action on the micro-social level.

—John Fiske, Reading the Popular (1989)

[1.2] By translating some of the world's most pressing issues into the framework of Harry Potter, [the Harry Potter Alliance] makes activism something easier to grasp and less intimidating. Often we show them fun and accessible ways that they can take action and express their passion to make the world better by working with one of our partner NGO's [nongovernmental organizations].

—Andrew Slack, Harry Potter Alliance (2009)

[1.3] Written two decades apart, these statements by Fiske and Slack illustrate shifts in how fan activity connects the popular imagination and real-world politics. Both claim fandom's "sense of solidarity...[and] shared resistance" empowers individuals to make decisive steps toward collective action. Fiske sees fandom as an informal set of everyday practices and personal identities, while Slack describes organizations with institutional ties to NGOs. In Fiske's view, participants' fantasies shape how they see themselves and the world, while Slack describes a conscious rhetorical strategy mapping fictional content worlds onto real-world concerns, what he calls "cultural acupuncture." Slack notes how dispersed members of fannish communities are connected into a networked public capable of coordinated action.
While Fiske's concepts of resistance, fan discrimination, and semiotic productivity shaped the early evolution of fan studies, his claims that fan participation might lead to enhanced political agency and civic engagement have been less explored. Nonetheless, they seem to offer a starting point for more contemporary work on fan activism. Twenty years ago, the relationship between the micropolitics of everyday life that Fiske describes and the macropolitics of public policy was the subject of debate between critical and cultural studies. Jim McGuigan (1992), for example, singles out Fiske's claims about Madonna fans as indicative of a tendency to substitute meaning-making for "material" politics. Adopting a position closer to Fiske's own, David Buckingham (2000, 29) warns, "'Micro-politics' should not come to be seen as a substitute for 'macro-politics.' On the contrary, the challenge is surely to find ways of building connections between the two." Slack offers us a much more fully articulated theory of how fan activism can bridge the micro and macro, one tested by the Harry Potter Alliance's successful mobilization of fans in human rights campaigns.

Fiske's Madonna fans, however far-fetched his claims may have seemed at the time, were among the forerunners of Third Wave feminism, much as Riot Grrls moved from being fans of popular music to producers of their own DIY culture (Conti 2001). The Riot Grrls performed as fans, as cultural producers, as activists, and as ideological critics, helping to map potential links between these roles and activities. Third Wave feminism has, in turn, provided models for subsequent forms of fan activism. For example, Clan PMS and the Game Grrls movement challenged hurtful gender stereotypes in computer games and the surrounding culture (Jenkins 2000). The Sequential Tarts (DeVries 2002) confronted representational and retail practices hostile to female comics readers. In both cases, participants' claims of fan status gave them credibility for critical interventions focused on pop culture industries.

Some might still dismiss these activities as not fully political, in that they direct their energies at changing corporate practices rather than governmental policies. Yet attempts to shape policies, institutions, and values are increasingly recognized as political even if they are not directly tied to parties or governments. Lizabeth Cohen (2003) argues that throughout the 20th century, many groups—among them, women and racial and ethnic minorities—have sought to reform or transform dominant practices through coordinated efforts as consumers. In the digital world, the forums for expressing political concerns, and the policies and infrastructures shaping our capacities to do so, are controlled by private interests. Our political struggles often take place through languages and contexts heavily shaped by commercial culture, making fan and consumer activism central to contemporary social movements.

A striking feature of postmillennial politics is the ways that pop culture references are shaping political rhetoric and movement practices, while at the same time, as Earl and Kimport (2009, 223–25) suggest, the characteristics of social and political movements are "perpetual" and "ubiquitous" features of everyday lives. Accordingly, fan activism has moved from a crisis response to, for example, program cancellations into a consistent, ongoing engagement with real-world concerns.

For the purposes of this discussion, "fan activism" refers to forms of civic engagement and political participation that emerge from within fan culture itself, often in response to the shared interests of fans, often conducted through the infrastructure of existing fan practices and relationships, and often framed through metaphors drawn from popular and participatory culture. I am describing as "civic" those practices that are designed to improve the quality of life and strengthen social ties within a community, whether defined in geographically local or dispersed...
terms. As we seek to better understand the logics of fan activism, we may need to explore points of overlap between it and other, closely related forms of cultural politics. How, for example, might we describe groups that deploy practices from participatory culture, seek to construct their own media content worlds, and adopt a more playful approach to activism, but do not originate in a preexisting fan community? Or how might we characterize efforts to mobilize specific images from popular culture within more conventional partisan or activist campaigns? (See Brough and Shestrova 2012.)

[1.9] Following a brief history of fan activism, I will explore the Harry Potter Alliance, a sustained effort to mobilize a network of fans of J. K. Rowling's fantasy books around an array of different issues and concerns, ranging from human rights in Africa to rights to equal marriage, from labor rights to media concentration and net neutrality. My focus will be on the HPA as an organization, addressing its tactics, rhetoric, and underlying theory of cultural activism, rather than on how individual members develop greater agency and efficacy (see Kligler-Vilenchik et al. 2012). The HPA embraces a politics of "cultural acupuncture," mapping fictional content worlds onto real-world concerns. A content world is the network of characters, settings, situations, and values that forms the basis for the generation of a range of stories, in the hands of either a commercial producer or a grassroots community. So the content world around Harry Potter includes characters such as Snape and Dumbledore, settings such as Hogwarts, situations such as sorting of students into houses by the Sorting Hat, and values such as friendship and maternal love, any or all of which can be used to generate new narratives or to tap into the meanings associated with the original stories. What Slack calls cultural acupuncture is a means of deploying elements of the content world (and their accumulated meanings) as metaphors for making sense of contemporary issues. The HPA speaks of the "eighth book" in the Harry Potter series (which canonically has only seven) to describe how participants extend the story through their choices and practices as fan activists.

2. A brief history of fan activism

[2.1] Fans have often entered civic discourse when they assert their collective rights as the most active and engaged segments of the media audience. The fan identity is often an embattled one, and efforts to save shows from cancellation or to rally support for a film project have helped to cement social ties between fans, define their shared interests, and shape their public status. The 1969 effort to "save Star Trek," led by Bjo and John Trimble, was the defining early example of fan activism (Lichtenberg, Marshak, and Winston 1975). Having run the art show at the annual World Science Fiction Convention for more than 15 years, the Trimbles were deeply immersed in fandom’s infrastructure, practices, rhetoric, and values (Trimble 1999). Through ties to Gene Roddenberry and his longtime secretary, Susan Sackett, the Trimbles identified strategies for intervening in NBC’s decision-making process to ensure the series's survival. Bjo Trimble’s "Do's and Don'ts of Letter-Writing" (n.d.) still informs more recent "save our show" campaigns. The spread of these practices across different fan communities illustrates a complex, interlocking history, with fans forging collective identities sometimes around specific texts and sometimes around genres or subgenres. The resulting structure has sustained itself over decades of shifting tastes; its traditions are handed down to subsequent generations. Such a structure means that fans of a particular franchise have a more extensive set of allies for more localized campaigns through cross-fan alliances—fandom’s latent capacity.

[2.2] More recent campaigns innovate practices designed for an era of networked communication.
More recent campaigns innovate practices designed for an era of networked communication. For example, fans of Stargate SG-1 responded rapidly to news of the series' cancellation (Jenkins 2006b). Affiliated Web sites included sophisticated analyses of how networks make decisions about shows and provided arguments in Stargate's favor, contact information for key decision-makers and a range of potential tactics to gain their attention, and, perhaps most significantly, sample letters in multiple languages. Stargate's declining ratings in the United States were not matched in other markets, and thus its fans sought to mobilize international affiliates to keep the series in production. In another case, the campaign to save Chuck used social media to get supporters to buy foot-long sandwiches from Subway, a series sponsor (Seles 2010). Subway's increased sponsorship, inspired by this show of support, tipped the scale for Chuck's renewal.

Whether such efforts constitute activism by traditional political criteria is an interesting question. Political scientists recognize some forms of cultural activism, such as rallying to protest budget cuts for public broadcasting, to protect local arts institutions, or to save public landmarks. Functionally, fan attempts to protect texts they see as meaningful represent similar efforts to shape the cultural environment, though they rarely get taken seriously in literature about activism, suggesting a residual distinction between high and low culture. Gene Roddenberry's efforts to link science fiction with a utopian and humanist philosophy, which included support for racial and gender equality (Fern 1996), helped fuel the Save Star Trek efforts. Martin Luther King Jr. allegedly urged Nichelle Nichols to remain on Star Trek because Uhura's presence on the bridge was a statement that his dream might be realized. Nichols in turn redirected support for Star Trek to promote female and minority participation in NASA's manned space program. Barbara Adams, an alternative juror in the 1996 Whitewater trial, made fan activism more visible when she wore a Star Fleet uniform into the courtroom, citing Star Trek's idealism as an alternative set of virtues against which to position the trial's legal and political struggles.

Andrew Ross (1991) recounts how science fiction fan organizations such as the Futurians and the Committee for the Political Advancement of Science Fiction functioned in the 1930s and 1940s as spaces for debating radical political ideas, recruiting fans into larger labor and social movements, and paving the way for more socially conscious forms of science fiction. The female-led fandom of Star Trek was closely affiliated with larger movements to promote feminist themes through science fiction (Tulloch and Jenkins 1995) and discussions of the Vulcan philosophy of "Infinite Diversity in Infinite Combinations" anticipated more recent fan debates about the genre's representation of racial diversity (such as the extended online discussion within the science fiction community which became known as "Racefail '09"). These recent debates have spawned activism around the "white-casting" of genre films (Racebending.com) and the formation of an alternative press focused on publishing genre fiction by people of color (Verb Noire) (Klink 2010).

Such utopianism also empowered a group of queer fans, the Gaylaxians, to organize their own letter-writing campaign to get a gay or lesbian character added to Star Trek: The Next Generation (Tulloch and Jenkins 1995, 237–66). While the first letter-writing campaign partnered with Roddenberry against the networks, the Gaylaxians put pressure on Star Trek's producers to remain true to Roddenberry's ideological commitments, seeing the inclusion of same-sex couples as following the same logic that had led to the inclusion of female officers and a multiracial crew. The Gaylaxians sought to reach queer youth at risk because of our homophobic climate, as does Dan Savage's more recent It Gets Better campaign. The producers dismissed the Gaylaxians as "activists" or "interest groups," but they asserted their status as "fans" with a deep investment in Star Trek. This rhetorical move hints at fans' sense of entitlement, based on their emotional
Star Trek. This rhetorical move hints at fans’ sense of entitlement, based on their emotional engagement with and extended support for "their" series. These fans, collectively and individually, defined themselves in opposition to commercial interests while supporting the values embodied within these content worlds, even against the worlds' own producers.

[2.6] By the time these fan groups had defined an issue, identified decision-makers, developed tactics, and educated and mobilized supporters, they had done all of the steps required for activism. Those who participated in such efforts had built the infrastructure and acquired the personal and organizational skills to take meaningful action. Those who succeed in such efforts might also find their civic voices and be more likely to take such actions in the future. In Entertaining the Citizen, Liesbet van Zoonen concludes that fan practices embody, "in abstract terms, the customs that have been laid out as essential for democratic politics: information, discussion, and activism" (2005, 63). All of this suggests that fandom may represent a particularly powerful training ground for future activists and community organizers.

[2.7] Other well-established forms of fan activism center on efforts to resist censorship or to defend participatory practices against threats from commercial rights holders. Muggles for Harry Potter was organized by the American Library Association, the American Civil Liberties Union, and the Electronic Frontier Foundation in response to efforts by the Christian right to ban Rowling's books from schools and public libraries. Alternatively, Defense against Dark Arts arose when Warner Brothers sent take-down notices to fan Web sites the studio claimed infringed on franchise materials, and the group helped to reshape the company's policies for dealing with fan participation (Jenkins 2006a). Both efforts moved from a desire to defend fan practices toward a more critical perspective on constraints on participatory culture, from specific crises to a critique of current intellectual property regimes. The Organization for Transformative Works, which publishes Transformative Works and Cultures, represents a concerted effort by fans to defend participatory culture, including by developing new platforms for distributing fan-produced materials outside the commodity logic of Web 2.0 and new academic and legal defenses of fan cultural practices.

[2.8] As this brief account suggests, fan activism includes many different kinds of mobilizations, some directed at promoting the interests of the fan community (lobbying to protect series from cancellation, organizing against censorship or cease and desist orders), some involving struggles over representation (such as the Gaylaxians' efforts to get a queer character on Star Trek), and some involving commenting on public policy (whether Adams's personal statement or the HPA's collective action). All tap into fandom's communication infrastructure and social networks, and all deploy fictional content worlds and fan rituals, practices, and rhetoric to motivate participation.

[2.9] John Tulloch (Tulloch and Jenkins 1995, 143–72) characterized Doctor Who fans as a "powerless elite," who cannot influence the decisions that most impact their cultural pursuits, but who exert considerable discursive power in shaping the popular memory of favorite texts. Fans leverage that discursive power to extend their voices beyond their own community, forming alliances with other invested groups, attracting mainstream coverage, and increasing their persuasiveness. Lori Kido Lopez (2011) reaches a similar conclusion in her account of Racebending.com, an organization launched to protest the "white-casting" of characters presumed to be Asian when the animated series Avatar: The Last Airbender was made into a live-action feature film: "Some of the organization’s strongest and most effective tactics rely on the skills developed as members of the fan community: honing their arguments through community discussions, producing and editing multimedia creations, educating themselves about every facet of
3. Enter the Harry Potter Alliance

[3.1] The experience of reading, debating, performing, and rewriting Harry Potter has been shared by many in the millennial generation (Anelli 2008). Rowling's stories of the boy wizard, the remarkable school Hogwarts, and the battle against the Dark Lord became global best sellers. Emerging alongside the popular embrace of the Web, Harry Potter fandom has developed new media platforms and practices (Scott 2010). The community was among the first to use podcasting and blogs, to develop beta reading practices to improve fan fiction, to distribute mp3 files (such as those of Wizard Rock) through social networking sites, and to use machinima production practices to construct fan vids. Over the coming decade, Harry Potter fandom will function as the feeder for many subsequent fan communities, much as Star Trek fandom modeled Baby Boom fan practices and politics. The Harry Potter Alliance needs to be understood as yet another example of innovative practices emerging from this fan community.

[3.2] Started by Andrew Slack, a twenty-something trained community organizer who has a background in working with troubled youth, the Harry Potter Alliance (HPA) is fan activism on a previously unimagined scale. The group currently has more than 100,000 members in more than 70 active chapters across the world, organized and mobilized by Slack and his 40-person staff, both volunteer and paid. The group collaborates with more traditional activist and charity organizations, such as Doctors for Health, Mass Equity, Free Press, The Gay-Straight Alliance, and Wal-Mart Watch. When the HPA takes action, the results can be staggering: for instance, it raised $123,000 to fund five cargo planes transporting medical supplies to Haiti after the earthquake. Its Accio Books! Campaign has collected over 55,000 books for communities around the world. HPA members called 3,597 residents of Maine in just one day, encouraging them to vote against Proposition 9, which would deny equal marriage rights to gay and lesbian couples. Wizard Rock the Vote registered more than a thousand voters.

[3.3] Fan communities have long supported favorite charities, including efforts on behalf of the homeless (popular among fans of Beauty and the Beast), the Elizabeth Glaser Pediatric AIDS Foundation (Starsky and Hutch), and Equality Now and Kids Need to Read (Serenity and Firefly fans, known as Browncoats). Fans of a particular franchise often choose to support specific causes because they perceive them as tied to the theme of the franchise or because key actors or producers are involved. The HPA links members to a range of such charity and relief efforts, but it also promotes activism around structural changes. As Slack explains, "We do want people to both volunteer with people at a local AIDS clinic as well as advocate for better treatment of AIDS victims in Africa. We want our young people tutoring underprivileged kids and helping them read, getting them engaged in the Internet and learning those things, but then also challenging the rules of the game that are making it possible for kids to go without food" (Jenkins 2009).

[3.4] Running the HPA from his living room in Somerville, Massachusetts, Slack is a charismatic leader who inspires his volunteer army and part-time paid staff, but also embraces more dispersed and decentralized power structures that allow members a greater voice in the organization's decisions. Local chapters participate in national campaigns but also initiate their own activities, which reflect their own agendas (veterans' rights, say), and solicit participation by other chapters.

The HPA's regular online exchanges become places to negotiate the group's sometimes competing
The HPA's regular online exchanges become places to negotiate the group's sometimes competing priorities. Unlike most activist groups and charities, the HPA is not defined around a single mission: rather, it embraces a flexible framework inspired by Rowling's content world, enabling it to respond quickly to any crisis or opportunity and to its dispersed members. This mixture of strong leadership, dispersed membership, social networks, and flexible structures informs many contemporary forms of activism, ranging from the US Tea Party movement to youth uprisings in the Arab world. The Harry Potter Alliance demonstrates how the pop culture worlds central to fandom offer particularly rich resources for supporting collective action and reaching young people who have not yet embraced political identities.

Among Slack's first moves was to join forces with prominent fans, directly courting Wizard Rock stars, podcast producers, fan fiction editors and writers, high-profile bloggers, and convention organizers. Paul DeGeorge, who, together with his brother Joe, fronts Harry and the Potters, was an early and important HPA supporter, recruiting other performers to participate in Wizard Rock the Vote, Rock Out against Voldemortia, and other HPA campaigns (Scott 2010, 263–64). Paul DeGeorge helped spearhead the Wizard Rock EP of the Month Club (http://www.wizardrockclub.com/), which for 2 years raised money for literacy-related nonprofits by offering members exclusive CDs by groups such as the Whomping Willows, the Moaning Myrtles, Tonks and the Aurors, Danny Dementor, MC Kreacher, and the Shrieking Shack Disco Gang. Many groups wrote songs tied to specific HPA campaigns; the HPA uses their concerts as major recruiting sites.

While Slack was relatively new to fandom, support from other prominent fans helped to establish his credibility and broaden his reach. In July 2007, the group worked with the Leaky Cauldron, one of the most popular fan news sites, to organize house parties around the country focused on increasing awareness of the Sudanese genocide. Participants listened to and discussed a podcast that featured real-world political experts such as Joseph C. Wilson, former US ambassador to Gabon, and John Prendergast, senior advisor to the International Crisis Group, alongside performances by Wizard Rock groups. While some fans contested his allegiances, Slack's own mastery of the Harry Potter texts helped overcome any lingering perceptions that he was an "outside agitator," a concern echoing the reality of Communist Party interventions in the science fiction fan world in the 1930s.

Instead, Slack worked within the structures of fandom, using such things as the House Cup competition. Hogwarts is organized around four houses, Gryffindor, Slytherin, Ravenclaw, and Hufflepuff, each of which embodies different ideals and virtues. Harry Potter fans deploy many different "sorting" mechanisms to place members into appropriate houses, and many feel a strong sense of identification and affiliation with their house. (I am, for the record, a loyal member of the House of Ravenclaw.) The HPA recruits high-profile heads for each house who encourage members to take action for the cause. (Ravenclaw's house has been headed by Evanna Lynch, the actress who plays Luna Lovegood, the best-known Ravenclaw character, and by young adult author Maureen Johnson.) For example, Wrock4Equality was a House Cup competition, where members earned points for each person they contacted in the effort to rally voters against Maine's Proposition 9. Such structures respect things fans value, even as leaders sometimes nudge them beyond their comfort zones as budding young activists.

The HPA materials are not always as polished as those of some other activist groups, who work with professional media makers and consultants. Rather, the HPA embraces fandom's own DIY ethos, lowering barriers to participation by respecting the work of novices and amateurs. Many
of the HPA’s most effective videos simply depict students, in their bedrooms, speaking directly into the camera. The HPA has formed a strong partnership with the video blog community Nerdfighters, whose capacity to mobilize its members was a key factor in the HPA’s success in a 2010 Chase Manhattan Bank online competition. Other HPA videos, such as a campaign supporting workers’ rights that depicted Harry’s battles against the Dark Lord WaldeMart, involve broad parodies of the Rowling content world.

4. Imagine better

**Video 1. J. K. Rowling, 2008 Harvard graduation talk.**

[4.1] Speaking at the 2008 Harvard graduation, J. K. Rowling told a generation of young students who had come of age reading her books, "We do not need magic to change the world, we carry all the power we need inside ourselves already: we have the power to imagine better." Neither a generic celebration of the human creative capacity nor a simple defense of bedtime stories, Rowling’s talk describes how her early experiences working with Amnesty International shaped the books. Linking imagination to empathy, she calls out those who refuse to use their imaginations:

[4.2] They choose to remain comfortably within the bounds of their own experience, never troubling to wonder how it would feel to have been born other than they are. They can refuse to hear screams or to peer inside cages; they can close their minds and hearts to any suffering that does not touch them personally; they can refuse to know.

[4.3] Rowling’s speech has become a key source of inspiration for HPA members: her notion of the socially engaged imagination connects their love of her content world with their own campaigns for social justice. Slack has named a recent initiative to forge partnerships between the HPA and other fan communities Imagine Better.

[4.4] Rowling’s call to "imagine better" could describe a range of movements that are embracing "a politics that understands desire and speaks to the irrational; a politics that employs symbols and associations; a politics that tells good stories" (Duncombe 2007, 9). Zoonen (2005, 63) has similarly questioned the divide between the affective commitments of fans and the cognitive processes associated with active citizenship: "Pleasure, fantasy, love, immersion, play, or
impersonations are not concepts easily reconciled with civic virtues such as knowledge, rationality, detachment, learnedness, or leadership." For Duncombe, the way forward bridges this divide by means of "ethical spectacle" (124–75), public performances that are pleasurable, participatory, and playful, yet also confront reality. Whereas Mark Dery (1993) described 1990s cultural and political movements as "jamming" dominant culture, Duncombe alternatively suggests that activists surf the popular imagination, hitching themselves to Hollywood's publicity to reach a larger public.

[4.5] Slack describes this new form of activism as "cultural acupuncture." Writing in the Huffington Post, he explained,

[4.6] Cultural acupuncture is finding where the psychological energy is in the culture, and moving that energy towards creating a healthier world...We activists may not have the same money as Nike and McDonald's but we have a message that actually means something...What we do not have is the luxury of keeping the issues we cover seemingly boring, technocratic, and inaccessible. With cultural acupuncture, we will usher in an era of activism that is fun, imaginative, and sexy, yet truly effective. (2010)

[4.7] Recognizing that the news media was more apt to cover the launch of the next Harry Potter film than the genocide in Darfur, Slack saw the HPA as a way to identify key cultural pressure points, thus redirecting energy toward real-world problems. Pinning political and social causes to Harry Potter works because this content world has a large following, is familiar to an even larger number of people, has its own built-in mechanisms for generating publicity, and is apt to attract many subsequent waves of media interest. Harry Potter constitutes a form of cultural currency that can carry the group's messages to many who would not otherwise hear them and that channels our emotional investments. Fans' previous attempts to tap the power of source material have been primarily focused on the source's power as a shared reference point within the fan community itself, whereas Slack's notion of cultural acupuncture also recognizes and seeks to deploy the larger public's investments in these popular media to get under people's skin and prod them to political action.

[4.8] Unlike some political groups that dismiss popular culture as "bread and circuses" and "weapons of mass distraction," the HPA respects fans' existing emotional investments, seeing them as deeply meaningful and also as potential motivators for political change. Moving beyond fantasy, the HPA educates its community about issues it should be concerned about, returning to the content world for powerful analogies. In that sense, we might draw parallels between the ways that the HPA taps the Harry Potter mythos and the ways, say, that the civil rights movement of the 1960s deployed Biblical allusions, such as the Promised Land and the River Jordan, that were familiar to its churchgoing supporters. Fandom is not a religion and does not depend on literal belief, but it recognizes the power of great stories to move hearts and minds. Catherine L. Belcher and Becky Herr Stephenson's 2011 book, Teaching Harry Potter, describes how a range of educators have offered their students ways into Rowling's content world that reflect their lived experiences as undocumented immigrants, racial and ethnic minorities, special-needs kids, and so forth, seeing it as offering many potential identifications and messages. Fandom represents a space where shared allusions become socially and politically meaningful.

[4.9] Cultural acupuncture inspires civic participation by mapping content worlds onto real-world problems. Writing for In These Times, Slack describes Harry Potter in terms that resonate post-9/11:
Imagine a world faced with unpredictable attacks that are carried out by a cult-like network. Led by a charismatic figure that is rarely ever seen or heard from, this network continues to claim responsibility for heinous acts that include random kidnappings, the destruction of bridges and mass murders. Stateless and living among the masses, its members have become so hard to track down that the government is at a loss. Officials have begun to focus more on the image of "looking tough" than on creating real safeguards to protect its citizens. The world has become haunted by fear. (2007)

Against this backdrop of Death Eater terrorists, bungling or manipulative government officials, a deceptive press, and repressive school authorities, Rowling tells how one young man organized his classmates into Dumbledore's Army, a loosely organized activist group, to go out and fight evil—sometimes working alone, sometimes collaborating with adult groups such as the Order of the Phoenix, but always carrying much of the burden of confronting Voldemort and his minions (Slack 2010).

Slack argues that the Harry Potter books take young people seriously as political agents and thus can inspire youth to change the world:

Young people are depicted in the books as often smarter, more aware of what's happening in the world, than their elders, though there are also some great examples where very wise adults have mentored and supported young people as they have taken action in the world...We are essentially asking young people the same question that Harry poses to his fellow members of Dumbledore's Army in the fifth movie, "Every great Wizard in history has started off as nothing more than we are now. If they can do it, why not us?" This is a question that we not only pose to our members, we show them how right now they can start working to be those "great Wizards" that can make a real difference in this world. (Jenkins 2009)

James Paul Gee (2007, 45–70) argues that games are effective tools for mobilizing learning because they offer their players clearly defined roles and goals, offering compelling identities and new epistemic perspectives, the capacity to act in meaningful ways, and clear paths to success. The HPA similarly offers its participants roles within larger-than-life campaigns, roles that Slack sees as echoing the power of myth as described by Joseph Campbell and Carl Jung: "What if we gave our teenagers the opportunity to imagine themselves as the heroes that they have grown up watching, rather than treating their precious minds as nothing more than a way to line the pockets of some CEO?" (Slack 2010). The HPA’s playful deployment of terms like "Voldemedia" and "WaldeMart" maps the personalized embodiment of evil in the content world to an expanding understanding of real-world harms. Consequently, the HPA allows its young members to know who they are as activists, what they are fighting against, and what they are fighting for, all key steps toward sustaining social change.

5. Battling the Muggle mind-set

For the HPA, overcoming the "Muggle mind-set" and releasing the power of fantasy represent vital first steps in becoming an activist. When many Harry Potter fans think of Muggles, they think first of the narrow-minded Dursley family, who keep Harry locked away in the cupboard under the stairs out of fear of and embarrassment about his magical capacities. Harry is literally
closeted at the saga's start and emerges as a key political figure by the series's conclusion—a classic coming-out story. Building on Rowling's depiction, the HPA depicts Muggles as embodying racism, sexism, and homophobia, as seeking to constrain cultural diversity through shame and fear: "The 'Muggle Mindset'...that pervades our culture is unimaginative and two-dimensional. It is a system based on fear that sets normalcy as one's aspiration" (Slack 2007). The HPA uses the elastic concept of the "Muggle mind-set" as an all-purpose signifier for those forces that resist social justice, including many that are the targets of other kinds of activism, such as conformity, commercialization, authoritarianism, and the politics of terror. The term "Muggle mind-set" is as loose and as encompassing as, say, "neoliberalism" or "dominant ideology," and, like them, it links structures of belief, power, and action. In challenging the Muggle mind-set, the HPA is able to link the personal and the political in ways inspired by feminist and queer activist groups. The Muggle mind-set is, of course, a simplification of the more complex representations of the politics of diversity within the Harry Potter books themselves, given the degree to which Rowling criticizes the Wizarding world for its own insensitivity to "mudbloods" and the rights of House Elves, the ways she uses S.P.E.W. (the Society for Protection of Elfian Welfare) to spoof certain forms of student activism, and the ways Dumbledore himself defends the rights of Muggles (Carey 2003; Horne 2010).

[5.2] In their final struggles with Voldemort, Harry, Hermione, Ron, and their classmates had to seek out and destroy seven Horcruxes, magic objects of supreme evil containing hidden fragments of the Dark Lord's soul. In the months leading up to the release of the final movie, the HPA launched an ambitious campaign identifying and directing its collective energy against seven real-world Horcruxes. Some, such as the Starvation Wages Horcrux, called attention to global human rights issues; HPA members pursuing this Horcrux sought to get Warner Brothers to commit to license Harry Potter candies only to fair trade companies. Others represented concerns in young people's lives. For the Dementor Horcrux, the HPA partnered with Reachout.com, an online support group for teens considering suicide: "Like Harry, many of us may feel debilitated by the dementor-like experiences of anxiety, depression, low body image, and lots of feelings, thoughts, and behaviors that knock us off balance" (Harry Potter Alliance 2010a). The Body Bind Horcrux helped members push back against distorted body images, while for the Bullying Horcrux the HPA joined forces with the Gay-Straight Alliance to battle homophobia in schools. Its efforts against bullying included both collecting signatures for the Make It Better Oath and making phone calls to voters in Rhode Island to urge them to support an equal marriage initiative there. Some of the HPA's Horcruxes required concerted efforts on a national scale, while others encouraged personal reflection and localized action. While critics might see such short, focused efforts as token gestures, the overall Horcrux campaign was designed to help participants to understand the links between campaigns for social justice and the internalized fears and anxieties that block many from taking meaningful action. The Horcruxes were pedagogical devices helping participants see themselves and the world differently, much like the preparation Hogwarts students underwent prior to their final confrontation with the gathering forces of evil. They were intended less to create immediate fixes than to map the terrain upon which social change must take place.

[5.3] As they battle the Muggle mind-set, HPA members often draw sage advice from Hogwarts' headmaster, Albus Dumbledore. A 2009 campaign asked members to wonder, "What would Dumbledore do?" Slack refers often to the Dumbledore Doctrine, a loose set of ideas drawn from the books:

[5.4] [Dumbledore] discusses how prevailing ideas of racial superiority for full-blood wizards must be transformed into curiosity and interest in people's differences. Half-
wizards must be transformed into curiosity and interest in people's differences. Half-giants, like Harry's friend Hagrid, shouldn't have to hide their identities. House elves in servile positions must be allowed freedom and respect. Indigenous populations, like the Centaurs and Merpeople, must be treated with the reverence and fairness they deserve. And unconventional marriages, such as the one between Lupin, the werewolf, and Tonks, the full-blood witch, should be welcomed so long as they bring more love into the world.

(2007)

[5.5] The Dumbledore Doctrine provides a launching point for the group's efforts to support legalizing gay marriage, because they see the acceptance and embrace of diversity as core values in the Harry Potter narratives. Slack sometimes compares Dumbledore with real-world political and philosophical leaders, such as Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King, and the Dalai Lama, on the basis of their shared philosophies of tolerance and social justice. Some HPA members challenge this tendency to read Dumbledore as the moral center of the books, arguing that Dumbledore's motives are not always pure or wise. Other critics have questioned whether the books offer a consistent or progressive focus for fan activism, pointing out that, like many other popular texts, the Harry Potter franchise is a contradictory blend of progressive impulses and retrograde elements. Such debates about character morality reflect fandom's existing interpretive practices, sustaining fan engagement as new members offer their own insights into core ethical and psychological dilemmas. Should fan activism in the future be understood as acting on a shared set of ideologies and dogmas that shape how fans read the world, or can we imagine a kind of politics that builds on the ongoing debates fans have over how to interpret and how to evaluate the characters, actions, and values depicted in a favorite text?

6. Empowering youth

[6.1] While the Harry Potter Alliance is open to members of all ages, the group has focused its energies on attracting young people who have grown up reading the books and on helping them find a path toward political engagement. According to HPA chapter coordinator Sara Denver (pers. comm., July 2011), of the organization's 98 chapters, 24 are hosted by high schools and 33 by colleges and universities, suggesting strong student representation in the group. An informal survey conducted by Ben Stokes of the University of Southern California's Civic Paths research group found that the median age of members is 21, again suggesting a strong youth focus, which has also been borne out by the Civic Paths team's fieldwork and qualitative interviews with 27 members of the Harry Potter Alliance. The fieldwork provides rich examples of young people who have assumed leadership roles in the organization and who have come to embrace activism as a result of the HPA's rhetoric and practices. (For more on this fieldwork, see Kligler-Vilenchik et al. 2012.)

[6.2] In starting with a fantasy about youth empowerment, the HPA addresses many prevailing concerns about young people and civic engagement. Current scholarship (Gibson 2003; Bennett 2008; Wattenberg 2008; Buckingham 2000; Levine 2007) suggests that young people are rarely addressed as political agents, that they are not invited into the political process, and that they are not consulted in the political decision-making process, whether local, state, national, or global. Existing literature suggests that young people are most apt to become politically involved if they come from families with a history of citizen participation and political activism, if they encounter teachers, especially in the civics classroom, who encourage them to reflect on and respond to current events, if they attend schools where they are allowed a voice in core decisions, and if they
current events, if they attend schools where they are allowed a voice in core decisions, and if they participate in extracurricular activities and volunteerism that gives back to their community. Most forms of activism reach the same core group of participants, who already are politically engaged, and redirect them toward new issues. But the HPA is targeting young people who are engaged culturally, who may already be producing and sharing fan culture, and it helps them to extend their engagement into politics, often deploying existing skills and capacities in new ways. Kahne, Lee, and Feezell (2011, 2) discovered that involvement in online networks focused around shared interests (fandom, for example) also shapes political identities: "online, nonpolitical, interest-driven activities serve as a gateway to participation in important aspects of civic and, at times, political life, including volunteering, engagement in community problem-solving, protest activities, and political voice."

[6.3] As researchers such as David Buckingham (2000) have long argued, young people often feel excluded from the language and processes of adult politics. In most cases, they are not invited to participate; their issues are often not addressed; and the debates are framed in a language that assumes familiarity with debates and policies. By contrast, the HPA's "cultural acupuncture" approach is imaginative and playful, offering an alternative set of metaphors and analogies that are already part of young people's lives, much as Fiske understood fans as transforming mass media content into "cultural resources" for critiquing the dominant order (Jenkins 2011, xxx–xxxi). The HPA embraces grassroots appropriation as a way of generating a new vocabulary for talking about political change.

[6.4] HPA leaders and members may object to Fiske's characterization of such practices as "resistance" (Jenkins 2011, xxxiii), since they see themselves as building on the framework Rowling, herself a human rights activist, provided. Nevertheless, they do prioritize the struggle for social justice ahead of those commercial motives that shape Warner Brothers' management of the Harry Potter franchise, as is made clear by the HPA's November 2010 campaign to encourage the studio to contract with candy companies that observe fair trade policies. The effort defines HPA members as fans of the franchise and as consumers likely to buy affiliated products, but also mobilizes content-world expertise to challenge studio decisions:

[6.5] When Hermione Granger discovers that the food at Hogwarts, chocolate included, is being made by house elves—essentially unpaid, indentured servants—she immediately starts a campaign to replace exploitation with fairness...In Harry Potter's world, chocolate holds a unique place: it is a Muggle item with magical properties. Chocolate is featured prominently throughout the books as a powerful remedy for the chilling effects produced by contact with dementors, which are foul creatures that drain peace, hope and happiness from the world around them...It is doubtful that chocolate produced using questionable labor practices would have such positive effect, both in Harry's world and ours. (Harry Potter Alliance 2010b)

[6.6] Rather than seeing the licensed candies as mere commodities, the HPA evaluates them according to their meaningfulness in the content world and then links their "magical" powers to the ethics of how they are produced and sold: "As consumers of Harry Potter products, we are interested in supporting and purchasing products that are true to the spirit of the Harry Potter franchise." Throughout its campaign, the HPA holds open the prospect of a meaningful collaboration with corporate interests, but it also pledges to use boycotts and buycotts against the studio and its subcontractors.
In The Future of Democracy, Peter Levine argues, "There are limits to what adults and institutions can accomplish, given the opacity of youth culture and young people's resistance to being manipulated. Therefore, it is important that young people themselves have the skills and values they need to make their own sphere as constructive as possible" (2007, 76). In some ways, fan activism flies in the face of Levine's claims: fandom has historically been a space where youth and adults work together, outside of the hierarchies that shape relations at school or home, because of their shared interests and mutual passions. Strikingly, though, Slack and many of the other core HPA leaders are in their 20s and early 30s, closer in age to the young activists than their parents and teachers, though experienced enough to mentor them and to help negotiate with more adult-centered organizations.

7. Beyond the Potter franchise

7.1 The HPA has long hitched its campaigns to the release of the books and, more recently, the release of the feature films. Such moments offer a window of visibility as the news media goes into a feeding frenzy around all things Harry. For example, the HPA drew coverage from mainstream media outlets through a bit of imaginative (if geeky) street theater, staging an epic battle between the Death Eaters and the Order of the Phoenix in New York's Columbus Circle tied to the 2010 release of Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows: Part 1. These releases also represent moments where new fans discover the series and old fans renew their commitments.

7.2 With the 2011 release of the final feature film, then, the HPA's leadership faces a crisis of sustainability. Will what they have built over the past 5 years function in the absence of new waves of media attention? Many fan communities—including those centered on the Star Trek franchise, Doctor Who, Star Wars, The Lord of the Rings, and Firefly—have sustained creative energy and social ties over a decade or more of lapses in commercial output, although they have often retrenched, growing smaller but more intense, and taking greater ownership over the content world. Yet an activist group, by its very nature, needs to reach beyond its own community if it wants to make a difference. So, under the banner "Imagine Better," the HPA is now seeking to forge alliances with other fan communities (for Firefly, True Blood, Lord of the Rings, Twilight, and Glee, among many others). But, as it does so, it may need to disconnect its goals and practices from the specifics of the Harry Potter content world. How far can it go, and remain Dumbledore's Army?

7.3 One factor working in its favor is that many fans are nomadic, moving across content worlds and sometimes genres in the course of a lifetime in fandom. Many fan conventions are organized around broader generic rather than franchise-specific categories—and some of these, such as slash, originate from fan reading and production practices rather than industry discourse. So perhaps the HPA's core themes can be grafted onto a broader range of popular myths that may also motivate young people to take political action. Linking together Harry Potter and Twilight seems, on the surface, a smaller step than bringing in Glee fans, since they are both fantasy worlds rather than mundane ones, but to see them in this way is to focus on only one dimension of these franchises, and not necessarily the one most relevant to fans. Perhaps further expansion will result in innovations in new media platforms and practices, new issues and tactics for reading and responding to real-world problems through acts of collective imagination. What happens next will tell us a lot about how much we can abstract from the HPA model to forge new theories of youth
and civic engagement.

[7.4] My focus here has been on the processes of cultural acupuncture, deploying popular culture metaphors and analogies to refresh political rhetoric. In the case of the HPA, such metaphors remain closely linked to fan culture. But what happens when fandom incubates new discursive frames that feed back into mainstream politics? For example, Whitney Phillips (2009) has written about how 4Chan, a controversial online community that started as a place to discuss manga and anime, has deliberately generated memes and spread them across the Internet. Among them, she argues, was the Obama Joker imagery deployed in the Tea Party's campaign against "Obamacare." Or consider how undocumented youth, organizing in support of the DREAM Act, have claimed Superman as another "illegal alien" who has nevertheless contributed to truth, justice, and the American way (Zimmerman, n.d.).

[7.5] Such efforts deploy pop icons, already holding affective power, to grab media and public attention. (See Brough and Shresthova 2012.) Such efforts defamiliarize the issues and offer a welcome sense of play and pleasure to struggles for social justice. As the Joker might put it, "Why so serious?" Writing about this larger movement to integrate pop culture and politics, John Hartley claims, "While it may not look very much like the Habermasian public sphere, it is clearly attracting the attention of those who are notoriously hard to reach by traditional technologies of citizenship" (2012, 147). Such efforts rely for their success on general knowledge rather than fan expertise: they deploy aspects of popular culture texts familiar even to those who have not encountered them directly.

[7.6] Fan activism pushes deeper, dealing not with isolated references but with the full content world, recognizing and rewarding fans who know more and imagine better. Certainly, some of the HPA's allusions are widely recognized—Dumbledore's Army, perhaps—facilitating meaningful partnership with nonfan organizations that value the creative energy the Harry Potter books unleashed. Yet, as fan activists, the HPA members mobilize obscure characters and events, even quoting specific dialogue, and thus reward fan mastery. Fan activism works because of its fannishness. This fannishness extends beyond specific ways of reading texts to specific forms of fan participation (including cosplay, Wizard Rock, fan fiction, and fan vidding), some of which may look strange outside the community. But each contributes to fandom's ability to organize and mobilize quickly, to frame issues and educate supporters, to get the word out through every new media platform and channel. This ability is what ultimately distinguishes fan activism from more casual deployment of pop culture references.

8. Acknowledgments

[8.1] This essay was informed by the ongoing conversations of the Civic Paths Research Group in the Annenberg School of Communications and Journalism, University of Southern California, and by the MacArthur Network on Youth and Participatory Politics. Our research on fan activism has been funded by the Spencer and MacArthur Foundations.

9. Works cited


Praxis

Experiencing fan activism: Understanding the power of fan activist organizations through members' narratives

Neta Kligler-Vilenchik, Joshua McVeigh-Schultz, Christine Weitbrecht, and Chris Tokuhama

University of Southern California, Los Angeles, California, United States

[0.1] Abstract—Fan activism, forms of civic engagement and political participation growing out of experiences of fandom, is a powerful mode of mobilization, particularly for young people. Building on 40 interviews with members of two organizations representing different configurations of fan activism, this article discusses three emerging elements that are key to the experience of membership in such groups. We suggest that the strength of fan activist groups builds on successfully combining these elements: two that are common to fandom, shared media experiences and a sense of community, and one that is traditionally ascribed to volunteerism and activism, the wish to help.

[0.2] Keywords—Activism; Civic engagement; Fandom; Harry Potter; Invisible Children; Kony 2012; Politics; Youth


1. Introduction

[1.1] In both general and academic discourse, there is a concern about young people's apparent disconnection from public life. Young people, in this view, spend most of their time with media or on the Internet, rather than being involved in their communities, helping others, or creating political change (e.g., CIRCLE 2003; Galston 2001). Increasingly, however, scholars show that younger generations tend toward new forms of civic and political engagement, ones that are closely tied to their personal interests and social networks (Bennett 2008; Ito et al. 2009; Jenkins et al. 2006; Kahne, Lee, and Feezell 2011). According to this approach, popular culture and participatory culture, rather than being causes of disengagement, serve as resources around which young people come together and are mobilized to social action.

[1.2] Bringing together the worlds of entertainment and politics is a key venture of the work of Liesbet van Zoonen. In her book Entertaining the Citizen (2005), van Zoonen lays important ground in suggesting analogies between fandom and citizenship. She claims that many activities of fans—intensely investing in the text, discussing and deliberating about the quality of the text, and proposing and discussing alternatives to it—also underlie thriving democratic politics. How, then, she asks, could the emotional investment of fan communities be harnessed toward citizenship? What, in short, can politics learn from fandom?

[1.3] Fan activist groups present an excellent embodiment of van Zoonen's theorization. In the past, scholars have used the concept of fan activism as a response to the allegation that fans are
merely the passive recipients of media. Indeed, fan studies literature shows numerous accounts of fans' collective action around their areas of passion, including elaborate campaigns to protest the cancellation of their shows or to fight for their right to participate in the shaping of their content worlds (Jenkins 2012). While these examples clearly show fans as active participants within their cultural worlds, we propose to take the concept of fan activism further, to include the way powerful investments in popular culture can mobilize explicit civic or political participation.

[1.4] Our understanding of fan activism is one that brings together elements from fandom with elements that have traditionally been attributed to volunteerism and activism. While van Zoonen theorizes what the marriage of fan communities and politics may look like and how this combination may fuel participation in civic life, we identify groups that embody this hybrid and ask, how are fan activist organizations uniquely positioned to recruit young people into civic life? How do they sustain members' participation and involvement? How do they create shared—and exclusive—identities for members? And what may account for their success in mobilizing young people to civic action?

[1.5] We answer these questions by focusing on the experiences of members in two organizations, each representing a different configuration of fan activism. On the basis of interviews and ethnographic research, we find three common elements of experience in members' narratives, and we suggest that they may be common to many manifestations of fan activism: shared media experiences, a sense of community, and a wish to help. Through these elements, we seek to show how fan activism successfully builds on two experiences that are at the heart of fandom, shared media experiences and a sense of community, and augments them with an element traditionally attributed to the worlds of volunteerism and activism, the wish to help.

2. Case studies and method

[2.1] Jenkins (2012) defines fan activism as "forms of civic engagement and political participation that emerge from within fan culture itself, often in response to the shared interests of fans, often conducted through the infrastructure of existing fan practices and relationships, and often framed through metaphors drawn from popular and participatory culture" (1.8). We present two case studies, one that clearly embodies this model, and another that questions its boundaries.

[2.2] The Harry Potter Alliance (HPA) was established in 2005 by activist Andrew Slack. Inspired by the student activist organization Dumbledore's Army in the Harry Potter narratives, the HPA uses parallels between the fictional content world and the real one as an impetus for civic action. It claims to mobilize over 100,000 young people across the United States—mostly, but not exclusively, Harry Potter fans—to work for diverse causes including literacy, equality, and human rights. Building mostly on volunteer staff members and a network of local chapters, the HPA has run a variety of campaigns, raising impressive amounts of money and achieving a number of civic and political goals. As the organization builds heavily on the preexisting community of Harry Potter fandom and uses the story world as an impetus for social action, its work clearly meets Jenkins's definition of fan activism.
[2.3] Invisible Children (IC) describes itself as a movement built around a movie. *Invisible Children: Rough Cut* documents the long-running civil war in Uganda, particularly focusing on the hardships of child soldiers conscripted into the Lord's Resistance Army. The movie is told through the viewpoints of three young Southern California film students, Laren Poole, Jason Russell, and Bobby Bailey, who produced the film themselves. In response to its success, the three filmmakers established Invisible Children (IC), dedicated to "us[ing] the power of media to inspire young people to help end the longest running war in Africa" ([http://www.invisiblechildren.com/what-we-do](http://www.invisiblechildren.com/what-we-do)). IC's campaigns have recently focused on raising awareness of the war in Uganda and urging the US government to pass the Lord's Resistance Army Disarmament and Northern Uganda Recovery Act, which was achieved in May 2010. IC now focuses on long-term development in Uganda as well as creating infrastructure in the Congo. Relying extensively on innovative media to promote its goals, IC claims to reach hundreds of thousands of young Americans through screenings and local clubs, encouraging them to become politically aware and to take political action, as well as mobilizing them to raise money for the movement.

[2.4] IC requires us to stretch our understanding of fan activism farther than the HPA. Rather than building on popular culture texts and an existing fan community, this organization was created with an activist goal and has, almost inadvertently, built a fanlike public around its self-produced documentary media. Yet IC members, as the organization acknowledges, in many ways resemble fans: they share an enthusiasm for the media, an avid knowledge of its narratives, and a wide range of practices of collective consumption and production around IC media products. Rooted more integrally in the world of nonprofits, IC offers an intriguing comparison to the HPA, as the two organizations represent different interrelations of fandom and activism.

[2.5] We have acquainted ourselves with these organizations in several ways. In addition to following their media, conversing with their leadership, and conducting participant observation at some of their public events, we conducted 40 semistructured interviews in 2010–11 with members of the two organizations. The interview protocol and process have been approved by the institutional review board at the University of Southern California. Interviewees were given an information sheet explaining the goals of the study and gave verbal consent to be interviewed and
information sheet explaining the goals of the study and gave verbal consent to be interviewed and recorded. Interviews were conducted both in person and through audio and video conferences, and lasted between 45 and 90 minutes. Interviewees were asked how they came to be involved with the organization and what role they played in it, as well as how they perceived it. Interviewees were initially suggested by the organizations, with additional interviewees recruited through snowballing. They include rank-and-file members, but our sample skews toward members with higher levels of involvement: volunteer staff members (for the HPA), roadies and interns (for IC), and local chapter organizers and club presidents.

[2.6] The remainder of this article is structured around the three emergent elements of experience: shared media experiences, a sense of community, and the wish to help. These elements help us to understand the power of fan activism in recruiting members, sustaining their involvement, and creating shared identities.

3. Connecting around shared media experiences

[3.1] Kathy (note 1), 24, grew up as a "theater kid and a bookworm." She had read the Harry Potter novels as a young adult and was drawn in by the realness of the characters. After college, she became an active "spectator" of the online fandom: "I was basically just an online lurker who was obsessively checking." She encountered the HPA on Harry Potter fan sites, "but it took a very long time before I actually volunteered." Volunteering for the HPA was her first step into any form of civic engagement: "I didn't know social activism. I didn't care about social activism. I came to it from Harry Potter fandom." For her, joining the HPA was a way to keep her investment in the content world alive: "I was so invested in these characters… when the books were finally over, there was nothing to do. I couldn't give that up yet. I wasn't ready. So I joined this community that was also just as invested and wanted to really use that investment towards good things. I was like, good, I can be a part of this at least. It was still Harry Potter." Today, Kathy is a full-time member of the HPA, holding a key position in envisioning its current activities and future directions.

[3.2] As Kathy's narrative exemplifies, fan activist groups recruit through the power of the media experience that their members share. This is true of both IC and the HPA, though they rely on different forms and genres of media.

[3.3] For the HPA, the media experience is one emanating from mainstream culture. The Harry Potter franchise is an extraordinarily successful transmedia phenomenon. HPA members, like members of the fandom, often pride themselves on being "original" fans of the series, tracing their involvement to the release of the first book, or having bought British editions prior to their US release. While the movie series has brought a significant increase in the Harry Potter fandom, involvement with the narrative is tiered, with book readers deemed by many members of the HPA to be the more "authentic" fans. Despite these subtle demarcations of status within fandom, a shared acquaintance with and, generally, passion for the world of Harry Potter builds significant common ground between members of the HPA. This world offers them a language, one that may mark off those who do not share the same acquaintance with the text (the word "Muggle" is already common knowledge, but acquaintance with "S.P.E.W." may be more limited) (note 2), an elaborate set of metaphors, and a common worldview.

[3.4] We're all bonded by our weirdness. It's kind of unspoken. We like different things than the public, we talk about different things on Saturday nights. Different from what you might say is "normal." We don't really need to talk about it. because we all
[3.5] These shared experiences and shared perspectives, common to experiences of fandom, are mobilized by the HPA in connecting stories from the content world to real-world issues. Andrew Slack, founder of the HPA, sees the world of Harry Potter as a deeply political one, where questions of social justice, equality, and freedom are key. He claims that any real-world problem can be "mapped onto it" in a process he calls "cultural acupuncture" (see Jenkins 2012), channeling passion for the text toward passion for social issues. The links between the content world and the real-world issues the HPA engages with are not limited to the rhetoric of the founder. HPA members take on the metaphor, creating their own connections between the social issues they engage with and characters, terms, and themes from the magical world:

[3.6] We like to link everything back to Harry Potter. We have to get a little creative sometimes, but we can still link. We were trying to get involved in some environmental issues so we called it herbology, and with animal things we call it "care of magical things." (Davia, HPA chapter organizer)

[3.7] Unlike the HPA, Invisible Children is itself the creator of its members' media experience. The organization describes its mission as inspiring young people to end the war in Africa by using film and media storytelling. As an organization centered around media production, and building on the founders' strong identification as filmmakers, IC focuses on artistic values. Attention to production is very evident in IC's media products, which include documentary movies, trailers and short films, music mixes, podcasts, and apparel (while the HPA produces its own media as well, they generally do not involve very elaborate production). These media are key tools for recruiting members and raising awareness of the IC movement.

**Figure 3.** IC roadies, as depicted on the IC Web site. [View larger image.]

[3.8] One way IC distributes its media and, through it, raises awareness is through screenings. IC screenings are 1.5–2-hour events, led by IC roadies: volunteer staff members who spend 3 months on the road, holding up to three screenings a day in different venues. In screenings, roadies supplement the media with their own experiences, but it is usually the IC-produced movies that most resonate with IC members over time. Members speak of these movies—particularly the first one, Invisible Children: Rough Cut—as having an almost magical effect on their worldview:

[3.9] They showed me the film and I remember being so floored, like, "I cannot believe that this is going on" and "why have I never heard about this." I remember something in me shifted that night. (Ruth, IC intern)

[3.10] Most IC members consider the main strength of the movie to be the feeling of
Most IC members consider the main strength of the movie to be the feeling of identification it allows with its protagonists—the three filmmakers and future IC founders, young people not much older than themselves, who go out to Uganda, encounter a social issue, and launch a movement:

[3.11] The movie is just very raw, and it's—even though they were older than me they were kids, and you see these kids just go, they see something, they run into a problem and they're like, OK, now we have to fix this problem. (Beth, IC intern)

[3.12] IC media play an important role in creating IC members' shared identity. This is evident in the way members ritually ask each other to tell their "IC story"—meaning how they first came to see Rough Cut:

[3.13] We've all heard people's IC story on how they first watched the documentary. "What's your IC story?" And then you tell how you got involved. (Jade, IC intern)

[3.14] By connecting members through the content world of its media, IC—while not a preexisting fandom—creates fanlike affiliations between its members. IC media are key not only as entry points into civic engagement, but also because they sustain action by creating shared collective identities. The organization's "media savvy," which members identify as unique, has an important role in creating IC's self-perceived image as a young, hip nonprofit:

[3.15] It has a lot of a younger feel to it. Last spring I interned at [a traditional nonprofit], and you can definitely tell that the people who work here are a lot younger, they are a lot more media-savvy than a lot of the orgs. They draw in a different crowd than a lot of organizations; other orgs draw large donors and we are staffed by young people, we focus on young people and we realize that young people can make a difference if they're really passionate about it. (Jade, IC intern)

[3.16] For both IC and the HPA, then, shared media experiences play significant roles, both in recruiting young people into the organizations and in sustaining membership by creating shared (and exclusive) identities for participants. For the HPA, it is a fictional story world that creates strong bonds between members, a shared worldview from which to launch social action. Using metaphors from the story world further helps channel passion toward real-world issues. IC, on the other hand, recruits members to social action through the power of its independently created films, as well as sustaining members' perception of the organization as cool through the hipness of its media.

4. Building on existing communities and creating new community experiences

[4.1] Dave is an intern at IC, creating short videos in the production department. He first saw Rough Cut in high school, at a screening organized by a friend. He and his friends "just didn't know what to do, because before that we were never really exposed to anything like that." While attending a private, Christian-oriented college, he encountered IC again: "Somebody at our college was interested in Invisible Children, so they got a copy of the film and showed it, and then it kind of pushed the Global Night Commute (note 3) at our school." Through IC events at his college, Dave met good friends who became his roommates. After college, he contemplated his opportunities. He had applied for an IC internship before and hadn't been accepted, but he was encouraged by a friend on Facebook to apply again—this time successfully. Dave enjoys attending the same church as several IC members, and he sees his faith as underlying his social action. He feels that his sense of
community has broadened through IC. It includes not only fellow IC members, but also the Ugandans whom they are helping. "Even though I haven't met anyone from Uganda, I feel like they're kind of my extended friends now. I care about them—not just a far-off 'Oh, I want everybody to be okay,' but I really feel somewhat connected."

[4.2] Dave's story introduces some of the means by which fan activist groups use existing community structures as a recruitment base. Dave's involvement in IC relied on repeated exposure to it through friends. He did not become instantly hooked; instead, it took several rounds of involvement with others in his community, and their continual encouragement and support, for him to become a committed member. While the HPA and IC build on different kinds of preexisting communities, both create a new sense of community for their members, one that is broader and more inclusive of those outside of previous community configurations.

[4.3] IC's main recruitment and awareness-raising structure—roadie tours—significantly builds on preexisting communities, networks, and institutional affiliations. Roadies hold screenings mostly at high schools, colleges, and churches, with most recruitment relying on local members. IC's recruitment efforts benefit from this format in several ways: institutions provide physical structures in which to hold screenings, harness the networks of their members to promote the event, and also ensure that attendees at a screening share a common ground (e.g., high school students, or members of a certain church). Within this structure, most members hear about screenings through personal networks and arrive at them with friends. Sharing the powerful experience of watching *Rough Cut* or other IC movies with friends can inspire groups toward further action, while building on strong preexisting relationships:

[4.4] A ton of people from my school wanted to do something after they saw the documentary, and [the Global Night Commute] was a perfect action step, so we all did that. Afterwards we wanted to do something more. We formed a club around that at our school. I went to a Christian college, so it was a really good community, we all knew each other really well, and it wasn't like we'd only meet and talk about what to do. We prayed for Uganda and we prayed for each other. (Don, IC roadie)

[4.5] In Don's retelling, there is a form of collective action: "we" participated in the event, "we" wanted to do more. This "we," however, is still a rather limited one, denoting a group of close friends at a Christian college. Those who get more deeply involved with IC often come to see their community as defined more broadly, to include the Ugandan people. Janelle, an IC intern, is one of the few IC members who have visited Uganda. She says of her trip,

[4.6] It was such an eye-opening experience. You put faces to the people you're helping; it's not just helping others but building friendships and exchanging. It was definitely what [the Ugandans] were giving, they were giving to us as well, [we were] learning from their culture. (Janelle, IC intern)

[4.7] IC leadership repeatedly declares that the organization's relationship with the Ugandans is one of friendship and mutual learning, not only one-directional aid. This view is strongly echoed by members, who repeatedly express affiliations with the people of Uganda, whom they have never met.

[4.8] The existing community on which the HPA builds is mostly that of Harry Potter fandom. This
immense fandom is a relatively young one, both because the books are aimed at young people and because youth are more able than ever before to participate in fandom online, from their own bedrooms. Furthermore, it is an extraordinarily creative fandom, with a wide range of activities (note 4). Throughout our research, we have witnessed fans producing fan fiction, fan art, musical theater, a play, and an opera, as well as a new sport (Quidditch). As in these other outlets for fan creativity, HPA members’ sense of community is closely tied to their shared identity as Harry Potter fans. Previous works on fan communities have shown how cultural references create affiliations among people who are otherwise strangers (Hellekson and Busse 2006), or, in Bury’s terms (2005, 215), how they enable connections with "like-minded others":

[4.9] Being there [at a fandom event] and getting involved in HPA was this bizarre, almost homecoming, feeling. All were there because all are excited and passionate about the same thing. Just to be able to cut loose and not worry about anything, knowing you’re among a group of friends. (Jessie, HPA staff member)

Figure 4. HPA members at LeakyCon 2011, a fan-organized Harry Potter convention. [View larger image.]

[4.10] By building on Harry Potter fandom, the HPA thrives on a preexisting shared identity and sense of community among many of its members, due to their passion for and engagement around a shared text. The HPA goes further, in utilizing the institutional structures of the fandom. Harry Potter fandom has a strong online base, centering on established online sites like the Leaky Cauldron and MuggleNet (see Anelli 2008), as well as various off-line sites. For the HPA, these sites serve as a recruiting base. Ashley and Millie, who opened a new HPA chapter, posted a message on their Leaky Cauldron page, reaching potential HPA members in their area. Joanne, who works at a Harry Potter theme store, hands out HPA flyers to interested customers. Wizard rock musicians, who play Harry Potter–themed music they have written themselves, are a long-standing ally of the HPA, offering their nationwide tours as venues for HPA recruitment.

[4.11] HPA members and staff are widely nationally dispersed. Staff members, almost all of whom are volunteers, do the majority of their communication online, through e-mails, video conferences, social networking sites, and shared documents. The HPA’s physical headquarters amount to the founder’s living room, and many staff members and chapter organizers know each other only online. Carrying on most of their communications from their homes, with little face-to-face contact, confronts members with challenges:

[4.12] It’s really hard being online. I didn't realize how hard it would be. You don't see people a lot of the time, and things can be lost in translation. The tone and sarcasm
any people a lot of the time, and things can be lost in translation, like tone, and sarcasm
cannot come through. (Kristina, HPA staff member)

[4.13] In such an environment, creating a sense of community takes on increased importance.
The HPA deals with this on two levels: through extensive online communication and through off-
line chapters. Chapters embody the local component of the HPA. Organized around schools,
colleges, and local communities, chapters start with the initiative of a local chapter organizer and
are sustained through the ongoing efforts of chapter members, and particularly of chapter
organizers. The HPA offers chapter organizers various online resources, as well as sending them a
weekly e-mail newsletter (called Galleon Day, after the currency in the magical world), updating
them on news, ideas for activities, and upcoming campaigns. This online support system is
designed to compensate for the lack of physical contact, as well as take into account that most
chapter organizers are young people who have never before started a civic-minded group:

[4.14] There is a lot of support through phone conferences and online systems...First of
all, this is new and it can be hard for people to come into a new leadership position and
[be] trying to get things organized, and also because what we do is so different. (Carrie,
HPA staff member in charge of chapters)

[4.15] Like IC's local club structure, the HPA's chapters enable locally based action, while
providing the support of a national network. Relations between the local and national
organizations, however, are not always seamless. At times, chapter organizers may feel pressed
by "national HPA" to maintain high levels of engagement. Chapter organizers may also feel
tensions between the national campaigns and those that their local members initiate. In spite of
these challenges, however, chapters are an invaluable component of the HPA's structure and, for
many members, they are the key point of identification:

[4.16] HPA for me is definitely the local one that I'm part of. [National HPA is] basically
an email for me. But the local chapter is a lot more than that because I [can put] faces
to it and it's people that I know, and two of my closest friends are the organizers. (Maya,
HPA member)

[4.17] Maya's involvement serves as an example of local chapters widening the HPA's scope
beyond the fandom. While she read the Harry Potter books and liked them, she does not consider
herself a fan, and her main reason for joining the HPA was her friendships. Still, she finds that the
HPA gives her the opportunity to engage with issues that are important to her, with people she
feels close to, and under the facilitating umbrella of a national organization. Through local chapters
and personal networks, the HPA broadens its community beyond fans.

5. Wanting to help: Narratives of altruistic desire and self-transformation

[5.1] Beth, an IC intern, is an international relations major. Her role at IC includes updating the organization's Web site
with news on the war in Uganda: "I write a peace and conflict update every week...the latest info that we can find on where
the LRA is, attacks, legislative news." Retelling her experiences with social justice work, Beth describes herself as originally
an apathetic, selfish kid (though her family had always been involved in aid in Africa). In high school, she went with a friend
to a Christian youth group, where Rough Cut was shown by a youth pastor. She describes watching the movie as a formative
moment, an embarking on a journey of engagement in activism: "I guess it affects everybody differently. For me there was
no way I could do anything else. I couldn't go get a white-collar job...I don't even remember what other selfish tracks I was
on." The movie opened her eyes to the world of nonprofits, and she began researching them online. She became engaged
The movie opened her eyes to the world of nonprofits, and she began researching them online. She became engaged with the student antigenocide organization STAND and is now the president of its local chapter. Through her work with STAND she reconnected with IC. Today, she sees no other option for herself but being involved in activism: "That life to me just seems like the kind of life everyone should live, a life where you're not doing something only for yourself; whatever you're doing is putting something back into the world."

The two elements of experience that we have so far described, shared media experiences and a sense of community, are ones that are at the root of fandom. The broad wish to help, on the other hand, may be seen more specifically driving volunteerism and activism. Fandoms have unquestionably always involved a significant component of helping others: teaching other members about resources and tools, giving feedback on others' fan fiction, offering personal support and even charitable donations. In our case studies, however, we see a different discourse about helping others, one that is often expressed in terms of social justice or equality. The key difference in this discourse is its outward focus, its concern for those who aren't part of the narrowly defined community, as well as some participants' desire to create structural social change. The motivations for this wish to help are also distinctive, many times involving perceptions of one's own good fortune versus the hardships of others, or a feeling of obligation to do good in the world, whether due to upbringing, political views, or faith. While the wish to help has been found in members of both groups, it is expressed very differently.

As Beth's story shows, IC members' wish to help is often expressed within a narrative of self-transformation. In this narrative structure, IC members often describe their "former selves"—who they were before joining IC, in contrast to who they are today. Beth describes her former self as apathetic and selfish, in many ways echoing prevalent stereotypes about disengaged youth. In her narrative, watching the IC movie represents a life-changing turning point. Her wish to help, then, seems to have been created at that moment of, in her words, "understanding that there's more to life than the mall."

These narratives by members are extremely powerful. Yet certain elements raise doubt about whether seeing Rough Cut created an altruistic drive where none previously existed. Digging down deeper reveals that many IC members (though not all) had been previously socialized to social justice–oriented values and practices. For example, while Beth understates the significance of her parents' involvement in aid in Africa to her own activist desire, research shows that parental modeling is a key variable predicting youth civic engagement (Andolina et al. 2003). Other members say that their wish to help predated their exposure to IC. For Dave, for example, it is rooted in religious belief:

Jesus said true religion is looking after orphans and widows in the time of their distress, and so I think that's, like, kind of the foundation. (Dave, IC intern)

However, even when altruistic desire exists, many members say that finding ways to get meaningfully involved is a challenge. Many traditional activist organizations, like the Peace Corps, offer limited possibilities for youth under 18 and often require extensive volunteer commitments. Other organizations may offer young people ways to become involved, but are perceived by them as old-fashioned and outdated, "charities run by middle-aged women" (Edie, IC intern). A key strength of fan activist organizations, then, is offering young people actionable steps, concrete channels through which to express a preexisting activist desire, while doing this in a young, hip environment:
[5.7] I had been trying to find ways that I could get into volunteering or working to become part of a more global community. I saw the screening and they were in the process of trying to get the bill passed and they were encouraging us to talk to senators to hold a meeting, a cool way that you guys can make a big change, and so I got really involved from there. (Tina, IC roadie)

[5.8] IC still has a youthful, hip vibe; everyone in the boardroom is 30 years and younger. I guess it does have that work and fun, complete great intertwining of it. One example is my supervisor, one of the most brilliant men ever, but so young—works until he goes to sleep, but also brings in Nerf guns. (Janelle, IC intern)

[5.9] Wanting to become involved, but not knowing how, was a prevalent theme among HPA members as well. At a wizard rock concert, for example, a young woman enthusiastically signed the contact list of the local HPA chapter, explaining, "I always wanted to volunteer, but I never knew how." Narratives of self-transformation from apathy to engagement, however, are less common among HPA members. Instead, they express their wish to help in terms that are much less dramatic. Darlene, for example, explains that the mission of the HPA for her is

[5.10] um..."to decrease world suck"...that's pretty much what every single thing we do comes down to. (Darlene, HPA member)

[5.11] "Decreasing world suck" is a phrase that derives from a close ally of the HPA, the Nerdfighters. This online group describes itself as made up of nerds who "fight to increase awesome and decrease suck" (http://nerdfighters.ning.com). While "decreasing world suck" is not the formal mission statement of the HPA, its flexibility fits nicely with the HPA's involvement with a variety of issues. HPA members build on founder Andrew Slack's mapping of the story world onto real-world dynamics, but they do so in a way that is flexible enough to mobilize action around various causes. In this way, HPA members derive solidarity from a shared media experience, but they also creatively map this shared experience onto a multiplicity of problem spaces. For many members, this flexibility is a point of attraction:

[5.12] We don't have a specific set of goals, we're not a green org, we're not specifically political, we don't have one cause other than a general one: to help people and become better people ourselves. That's what I like about it, we're not locked into one thing. (Maya, HPA member)

[5.13] The HPA's wide range of issues also offers multiple points of entry for members, who can bring causes they feel strongly about into the scope of collective action. This may happen nationally, but more often locally. Joanne, for example, is strongly connected to soldiers' and veterans' causes, as both her father and grandfather were in the military. In addition to her chapter's key areas of action, she initiated a project of sending packages of supplies and gifts to soldiers: "With HPA, anybody can propose an idea and we put it out there."

[5.14] The empirical debate on whether today's youth are engaged in or disengaged from public life is widespread (see Bennett 2008). Whether connected or disconnected to empirical reality, young people too are aware of prevalent stereotypes of apathetic youth, and react to them in their narratives. Countering these stereotypes, however, members of both the HPA and IC manifest a wish to help, whether it was triggered by exposure to the organizations or predated it. Part of
these organizations' strength is in giving young people with a wish to help actionable steps to do so. To comprehensively understand how this mobilization succeeds, we will now examine how the three elements of experience intersect.

6. The power of fan activism

[6.1] The three elements of experience we have discussed—shared media experiences, a sense of community, and the wish to help—emerged as we talked with members of IC and the HPA about their experiences. We did not begin by assuming that they were either defining characteristics of fan activism or a formula explaining why it may succeed. Yet, in their interrelations, they may show how fan activism successfully brings together elements of fandom with elements traditionally ascribed to activism.

[6.2] Building on numerous works of fan studies scholars, we argue for a view of fandom as a social, active experience. In the conclusion to Textual Poachers, Jenkins (1992) offers a framework for reconsidering fandom, seeing it as a mode of reception, a set of interpretive practices, a base for consumer activism, a form of cultural production, and an alternative social community. Two decades later, the experiences of members of the HPA and IC reflect these possibilities. Of the three elements of experience presented in this article, shared media experiences and a sense of community have been shown to be particularly rooted in broader worlds of fandom. Within fan studies, these elements of experience have been found to bring people together, create shared identities, and often encourage collective action and production around shared areas of passion.

[6.3] Activism is traditionally understood as action geared toward social change. Within the elements of experience described here, an activist desire is mostly reflected in the wish to help. In members' narratives we witness a strong commitment to working for social justice through social action. Both organizations perceive themselves as activist groups, though their activist stance often takes the form of a somewhat broad notion of "changing the world in small ways that hopefully will spread like ripples" (Maya, HPA member). For many members, this reflects how their generation believes change can be achieved, though they are aware this belief is often perceived as naive by members of their parents' generation, whom they see as more skeptical or cynical.

[6.4] Taken together, these three elements of experience help us understand some of the shapes of fan activism, as well as highlight its strengths. Fan activism can be understood as embodied in a community, created and maintained around shared media experiences, that channels members' wish to help toward social action (and sometimes even creates it). In doing so, fan activist groups bring together the power of fandom to connect, engage, and mobilize its members and an explicit civic goal toward which this energy and enthusiasm are channeled. They thus answer the question posed by van Zoonen (2005, 66) of "whether and how politics can borrow from the elements of popular culture that produce these intense audience investments, so that citizenship becomes entertaining." The answer to the "whether" question, we claim, is yes. One possible answer to the "how" question is through the interrelation of the three elements of experience described here. These can help to explain fan activist groups' success in mobilizing young people through different configurations of experiences from fandom and activism.

[6.5] The HPA, a classic case of fan activism, builds on an existing fandom, one that already thrives on media experiences and a sense of community that its members share around a common
text. The organization channels these powerful experiences in inspiring its members to social action around a variety of different causes. Members' wish to help may come from different sources, but it may also be created through their involvement with the organization.

[6.6] IC stretches our definitions of fan activism, as it developed not from a fan community but from a specific activist cause. The organization's self-created media create powerful experiences that members come to share. For some members, these media inspire a wish to help; for others, this wish may be rooted in previous experiences. A sense of community is then built around these media and the organization itself, allowing IC to successfully mobilize young people to action.

[6.7] Through these elements, as well as through their use of preexisting structures and offering of actionable steps, these organizations successfully merge the worlds of fandom and activism, creating a space for young people to become involved in social action, in an environment that feels inherently theirs. In the context of prevalent discourses about youth disengagement, organizations like the HPA and IC provide encouraging contrasts, pointing to the ways in which many young people in fact devote significant amounts of their time, money, and energy to social causes they strongly believe in, while doing so within environments of passion and belonging. Further research will help us understand how the elements we identified may translate to other contexts in young people's lives, including, but not limited to, explicit political participation.

[6.8] A key question that may arise regarding fan activism is to what extent participation in such groups represents members' first experience of civic action, or whether these are the same participants who would be active in other civic groups. In their quantitative research, Kahne, Lee, and Feezell (2011) found that interest-driven online participation was a significant predictor of civic participation, even when controlling for parental civic participation. While we cannot generalize from our limited data, we found that for about a third to half of our interviewees in both organizations, their involvement was their first experience of civic participation. These are significant numbers. The literature on young people's civic engagement often raises concerns that participation is determined largely by parental or school socialization (e.g., Andolina et al. 2003). Those who do not benefit from this socialization may remain outside of the loop of political life. Through its elements of experience, fan activism enables new and multiple points of entry into political life, by linking civic engagement to fandom and other forms of participatory culture.

[6.9] Some caveats need to be added to this optimistic picture. Although IC and the HPA work for social justice, the lack of ethnic and socioeconomic diversity among their members is troublesome. Like other nonprofit organizations, these groups rely on members' volunteering of their time and efforts in ways that may exclude youth coming from less affluent environments, and increasing member diversity is one of the challenges these organizations face. A second challenge is that of sustainability. Presently, both organizations are facing situations that drive them to evolve. As IC matures and institutionalizes, there is concern about how to maintain young people's sense of identification with the organization, which for many was based on the representation of the founders as young, inexperienced students who set out to reach a goal. As IC plans future action in central Africa, as well as increasingly promoting American youth engagement in general, the organization aspires to maintain the enthusiasm of its members. For the HPA, the release of the last Harry Potter movie in July 2011 brings with it questions about the future of the fandom, and, by inference, the future of the organization. In an attempt to remain relevant, the HPA has partnered with over 20 other fandoms to launch a new movement called Imagine Better. This
movement will face the challenge of continuing social action while broadening the scope of the community and the variety of content worlds inspiring it. We continue to follow these organizations as they face these challenges, which will impact not only IC and the HPA but also the shapes of fan activism.

7. Addendum: Prefiguring Kony 2012

[7.1] Since this article was completed, Invisible Children has come to the foreground of attention with the release of its half-hour documentary video, *Kony 2012*, through YouTube on March 5, 2012. This video was astonishingly successful in the scale and speed of its spread—it received 800,000 hits online in the first 24 hours of its release and then reached an unbelievable 112 million views in 6 days, becoming the fastest-spreading video of all time (http://corp.visiblemeasures.com/news-and-events/blog/bid/79626/Update-Kony-Social-Video-Campaign-Tops-100-Million-Views). Along with its astounding spread, the video received harsh criticism for both its content and the nature of Invisible Children as an organization (see a key critique by Ethan Zuckerman: http://www.ethanzuckerman.com/blog/2012/03/08/unpacking-kony-2012/). A more extensive overview of the debate over the campaign was compiled by Zhan Li and Rhea Vichot (http://henryjenkins.org/2012/03/a_brief_outline_of_kony_2012_a.html).

![KONY 2012](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vjR4k9cChl0)

**Vid 1. Kony 2012.**

[7.2] We argue that at least one of the key themes of the debate around this video—the role of young people as civic actors—is prefigured in the analysis of experiences of IC members found in this article. Much of the debate around young people's involvement with *Kony 2012* revolved around issues of slacktivism (that is, easy and thus meaningless forms of social action). However, approaching it from the context we describe in this article sheds a different light on the debate.

[7.3] For most of its viewers, *Kony 2012* was their first encounter with Invisible Children. Academics and nonprofit practitioners who reacted to it online were perplexed by the organization’s use of storytelling and film to portray human rights abuses in Africa, but most of all, they were amazed by the attention the video received, most of all by American youth. In its first days after its release, the video was most popular with 13- to 17-year-old Americans (http://www.telegraph.co.uk/technology/news/9134431/Kony-2012-Stats-breakdown-of-the-viral-video.html). These viewers became not only the most active in spreading the video to their
These young viewers were not only the most active in spreading the video to their own social networks, but they were also the ones signing up to participate in action on the ground, joining Facebook group pages for IC's Cover the Night event planned for April 20, 2012. Gilad Lotan's analysis of the spread of the video online highlights the importance of preexisting networks that actively shared the video (http://blog.socialflow.com/post/7120244932/data-viz-kony2012-see-how-invisible-networks-helped-a-campaign-capture-the-worlds-attention). These are the members of Invisible Children who have been active with the organization for years, just like the members interviewed in this article, who felt part of the Invisible Children community and were committed to its cause. The role of these active preexisting members was largely overlooked in the debate around the video. The reactions of new young viewers, however, were key to bringing the video beyond its existing supporters. Many commentators tried to understand what it was about Kony 2012 that propelled young people to action, but we can learn from the interviewees in this article who talk about identifying with the young protagonists and about the trendy feel of the movies. The members we interviewed describe watching previous IC movies as a life-changing moment that may start a trajectory of civic involvement—though we call to read these statements within more complex narratives of increasing engagement over time.

[7.4] Although we end our article with optimism about the potential of fan activist groups to mobilize and engage young people, Kony 2012 also presented some of the challenges that this genre of activism may face. From interviews we held with several youths in the weeks after Kony 2012, we learned that the harsh critiques launched against Invisible Children quickly dampened the enthusiasm of many of its new supporters. Young people who saw the movie and who were moved and felt propelled to action, just like the interviewees in this article, were quickly called to question their own excitement and even criticize it as premature. For some young people, this may have led to engaging with the war in Africa or with other social issues through other means; however, many others preferred to disconnect themselves from the cause altogether, thus obstructing the potential mobilization process we describe.

[7.5] At least some of the critique around Kony 2012, we argue, can be read as a policing of the boundaries of social action, and what it should look and feel like. Many of these critiques claimed that social advocacy should be left to experts—to politicians, to "serious" NGOs, to erudites. Although some of the criticism was undoubtedly unique to Invisible Children, fan activism, which calls for a different genre of activism that is playful, imaginative, social, and fun, may encounter similar critiques in the future. Kony 2012 thus powerfully exemplifies the power of fan activism while presenting a cautionary tale about some of the harsh reactions with which it may be met.

[7.6] For a more thorough linkage of Kony 2012 to the themes raised in this article, see http://henryjenkins.org/2012/03/why_youth_are_drawn_to_invisib.html.

8. Acknowledgments

[8.1] Research for this article was supported by the Spencer Foundation and the Annenberg Project for Online Communities. The authors thank members of the Civic Paths team at the University of Southern California, and particularly Henry Jenkins and Sangita Shresthova, for their role in the research and helpful comments on previous versions of this article.

9. Notes

1. All interviewee names, except the names of founders, are pseudonyms.
1. All interviewee names, except the names of founders, are pseudonyms.

2. Muggles are nonmagical people; the term is widely used in all Harry Potter media. S.P.E.W. is the Society for the Promotion of Elfish Welfare, an organization mentioned in Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire that did not appear in the movie series.

3. The Global Night Commute, held on April 25, 2006, was an event in which youth spent the night in city center parks to show support for the "night commuters"—Ugandan children who congregated in town centers to avoid being conscripted into the Lord's Resistance Army.

4. As one of our reviewers helpfully pointed out, fans' artistic creativity often engages with issues of social justice. For example, slash fan fiction may be used to articulate sexuality and address queer representation in mainstream texts. See, e.g., Tosenberger (2008).

10. Works cited


Theory

Theorizing a public engagement keystone: Seeing fandom's integral connection to civic engagement through the case of the Harry Potter Alliance

Ashley Hinck

University of Wisconsin-Madison, Madison, Wisconsin, United States

[0.1] Abstract—The Harry Potter Alliance (HPA) has invited thousands of Harry Potter fans to view politics and activism through the lens of Harry Potter. HPA members have signed petitions, sent letters, made videos, and raised money in efforts to affect laws and public policies. These activities circulate and operate within the public sphere through an engagement with others. If we are to consider the political actions of fans, we must consider how fans insert arguments into the public sphere, constitute publics, and ultimately assert their own public subjectivities. By drawing on social movement and public sphere theory, I first develop the theoretical concept of the "public engagement keystone." I conceptualize the public engagement keystone as a touch point, worldview, or philosophy that makes other people, actions, and institutions intelligible. Next, I use the case of the HPA to demonstrate how the Harry Potter story operates as a public engagement keystone, opening the door to public subjectivities on par with the healthy public formation of John Dewey, Doug McAdam, or Peter Dahlgren. I offer an interdisciplinary approach to how fandom encourages and invites civic engagement. By doing so, public sphere theory can better account for a wider variety of types of civic engagement, including fandom activism.

[0.2] Keywords—Activism; Fandom; Public sphere


1. Introduction

[1.1] The Harry Potter Alliance (HPA) has invited thousands of Harry Potter fans to view politics and activism through the lens of Harry Potter. HPA members have signed petitions, sent letters, made videos, and raised money in efforts to affect laws and public policies. The HPA, founded in 2005, has conducted 25 social justice campaigns and boasts 120,000 members. In a single campaign to end the genocide in Darfur, the HPA donated more than $10,000, helped collect 7,500 petition signatures, mailed postcards to President Obama, and increased total phone calls made to 1-800-
GENOCIDE by more than 50 percent. During an auction to raise money to help respond to the 2010 earthquake in Haiti, the HPA donated more than $123,000 to the nonprofit organization Partners for Health. The HPA donated more than 55,000 books to nonprofits in the Mississippi Delta and a youth village in Rwanda. Last year, the HPA won the Chase Community Giving contest, in which the HPA beat out more than 10,000 other charities to receive the most votes, earning a $250,000 grant from JP Morgan Chase ("HPA 5 year Anniversary BLOWOUT" 2010; "Success Stories" 2010; "What We Do" 2010).

[1.2] The HPA invites members to engage in very traditional expressions of citizenship: petitioning, donating money, sending letters to government representatives, and so on. Yet these traditional expressions of citizenship are still met with skepticism by scholars of civic engagement because they are done in the name of Harry Potter, instead of solely in the name of duty to one's country or ideological commitment to a political party. While fandom scholars might immediately recognize the connection between fandom and politics, Buckingham (2000), Gray (2006), and Marcus (2002) have all shown that those outside of fan studies have questioned the legitimacy of entertainment media's role in citizenship and civic engagement. It seems scholars of civic engagement, politics, and communication are still hesitant about young people blending the Democratic Party with Harry Potter. In online discussions of the MacArthur Foundation series on Digital Media and Learning and quoted in Civic Life Online, David Buckingham raises such questions. Thinking specifically about the Daily Prophet, a Harry Potter fan-operated newspaper, Buckingham wonders whether some examples of fandom activism are better characterized as media engagement than civic engagement (Bennett 2008, 4).

[1.3] In some ways, Buckingham is right. Most studies of fandom activism examine how fans mobilize themselves to defend their media text (Jenkins 1992; Harris and Alexander 1998). The studies that consider political or social issues focus on personal transformation rather than mobilization (Jenkins 1992; Radway 1991; Enstad 1999). That is, they consider how media texts offer fans a more manageable arena to reconsider social and political issues within a personal context. Few studies have considered the intersection of the two: large-scale mobilizations of fans that also affect political institutions. This is the kind of action Buckingham might more readily characterize as civic engagement because of its mobilization of citizens of the polis and success in impacting deliberation within the public sphere (Bennett 2008, 4). The case of the HPA offers fandom scholars an opportunity to consider how fans affect the public sphere, and thus how fandom can be integrally connected to public engagement. If we are to consider the political impact of fans, we must consider how fans insert arguments into the public sphere, constitute publics, and ultimately assert their own public subjectivities.
Here I take up the question of how fandoms and their fan groups become publics—groups of people who affect and act within the public sphere. When it comes to public engagement, fan groups can operate in much the same way the Democratic Party might. Political party affiliations, neighborhood membership, and civic organizations are the traditional building blocks of citizenship. These institutions and memberships help individuals view themselves as citizens or members of a public, meaning that individuals view themselves as having a stake in public life, politics, and the lives of people around them. Fandom can function similarly, as a way to come to see oneself as a member of the public, capable of civic engagement.

To understand how fandom can be integrally connected to public formation, I examine the HPA, a nonprofit organization that uses parallels between Harry Potter and the real world to do social justice activism. I use the HPA to demonstrate how Harry Potter opens the door to public subjectivities on a par with the healthy public formation described by John Dewey, Doug McAdam, or Peter Dahlgren. By drawing on social movement and public sphere theory, I develop a theoretical concept of the public engagement keystone. I conceptualize the public engagement keystone as a touch point, worldview, or philosophy that makes other people, actions, and institutions intelligible. I argue that the HPA uses the Harry Potter story as a public engagement keystone to invite public formation in three ways. First, the HPA invites its members to insert arguments into the public sphere through institutional and expressive actions and discourse. Second, I argue that the HPA public engagement keystone enables the HPA to invite its members to cultivate public subjectivities, making public engagement newly intelligible to Harry Potter fans. Third, the HPA privileges discursive engagement by establishing an ethic of action that must be performed within the public sphere. Ultimately, this project brings together literature on fandom and literature on the public sphere to consider how fandom encourages, invites, and demands civic engagement.

2. Locating the public sphere in fandom activism scholarship

Fan studies has grown into a robust field as scholars engage in key debates, including concern with studying both individual fans and fan communities, considering both fans and fan texts, finding fandom underground and in the mainstream, and studying fans for the sake of studying fans and to better understand other aspects of our social, political, and mediated lives (Hellekson and Busse 2006; Busse and Gray 2011; Sandvoss 2003, 2005; Gray 2006; Gray, Sandvoss, and Harrington 2007; Fiske 1992; Jenkins 1992). Key among these classic debates is fandom's relationship to social and political activism.
Two areas of scholarship consider how fandom extends to the real world through activism: media as cultural resources and fan mobilization through media engagement. First, many scholars have considered how the texts of fandoms become cultural resources available to fans, allowing fans opportunities to redefine themselves and their social roles (Dell 1998; Enstad 1999; Radway 1991). Texts provide the cultural resources with which to examine difficult social and political questions in a more manageable context. For example, Henry Jenkins (1992, 82) explains that within Star Trek fandom, fans may consider discrimination or favoritism as they ask why Uhura has not been promoted but Chekov and Sulu have, and now each commands his own ship. In a similar vein, Nan Enstad (1999) argues that working-girl novels provided the cultural resources needed for women workers to reimagine themselves as both workers and ladies at the turn of the 20th century. Such reimagination made factory strikes for fair working conditions possible. Texts become cultural resources that can work against established orders and systems, offering a means to reconsider contested social and political questions, and allowing fans to redefine themselves.

Fandom scholars have also documented instances when fans organized themselves and took collective action to protect their fandom texts. In *Textual Poachers*, Jenkins (1992, 28–33, 120–51) explores the case of the television show *Beauty and the Beast* (1987–89), in which fans mobilized to convince producers to return the show to the air after it was canceled. Other scholars have also paid close attention to media engagement by considering case studies focused on returning television shows to the air (Scardaville 2005; Harris 1998; Menon 2007; Earl and Kimport 2009). Even case studies about fan activism in sports focus on engagements with media industries, either in marketing or broadcast choices (Rowe 2010; Muller 2007). Fandom scholars have yet to consider how and why fans engage in collective action that affects political institutions.

Fans are certainly well equipped for such activism. Liesbet van Zoonen (2005, 61–62) points out that fans already excel at the kinds of activities citizens engage in as part of democratic participation, such as deliberation, consensus seeking, and information filtering, as a part of involvement in a fan community's fan fiction practices. Henry Jenkins makes a similar point: "The political effects of these fan communities come not simply through the production and circulation of new ideas (the critical reading of favorite texts) but also through access to new social structures (collective intelligence) and new modes of cultural production (participatory culture)" (2006, 257). Van Zoonen and Jenkins are right to point to skill sets, organizational structures, and production practices that extend fandom to democratic participation. But even with these skills in place, not all fans choose to participate in public engagement. Public engagement continues to decline even as fandom activity continues to increase (Earl and Kimport 2009, 220–21; Bennett 2008; Coleman and
Blumler 2009; Benkler 2006). Thus, fandom scholars are confronted with a number of questions: What encourages some fans to translate their fandom activities to civic engagement? How do some fans decide to engage in expressions of citizenship? How do fans come to see themselves as citizens? Ultimately, how do fans form publics that affect the public sphere?

[2.5] Jürgen Habermas's *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (1989) sparked an onslaught of academic scholarship on the public sphere. In this seminal book, Habermas advanced a notion of the public sphere as a discursive arena in which all citizens are free to rationally discuss public issues. He based his conceptualization on the coffeehouses and salons of Europe in the 18th century as places where citizens could come together to discuss issues of public concern. For Habermas, the public sphere is where deliberation between citizens occurs. This deliberation produces public opinion, which then influences the state.

[2.6] Despite the criticisms of Habermas's public sphere for its problematic exclusions and rational bias, Fraser (1992) argues that Habermas's conception of the public sphere is too useful to abandon. Fraser argues that scholars ought to articulate a new kind of public sphere, and he begins that articulation by conceptualizing the public sphere as composed of multiple publics. Since Fraser's initial critique, scholarship on the multiplicity of the public sphere through consideration of counterpublics has exploded, developing a robust area of research into the many publics and counterpublics of the public sphere (Felski 1989; Asen 2000; Brouwer and Asen 2010; Fraser 1992; Goodnight 1982; Hauser 1997; Warner 2002; Asen and Brouwer 2001).

[2.7] Coming to see oneself as a political subject means seeing oneself as a member of the citizenry, addressed by the government, and included as a member of the public. Being a political subject means being able to participate in the public sphere by contributing arguments and deliberating with other political subjects. Arguing that scholars should understand citizenship as a process, Dahlgren advances the theoretical concept of a civic culture as "a way to conceptualize the factors that can enhance or impede political participation—the enactment of citizenship understood as forms of social agency" (2005, 157). Citizens are social agents, Dahlgren posits, because of cultural factors. This perspective emphasizes the process of becoming a citizen through a cultural practice that involves values, affinity, knowledge, identities, and civic practices. Citizenship might be conceptualized as public engagement that results from understanding oneself as a public subject. In her study of 19th-century antislavery petitions signed by American women, Susan Zaeske (2002) emphasizes that subjectivity is a process. Women signed petitions to pledge support for freeing
black slaves, but through the process of signing petitions, they began to see
themselves as political subjects and as citizens (Zaeske 2002, 148).

[2.8] Building on earlier fan studies of fan identities, Matt Hills (2002) and Cornel
Sandvoss (2005) shift fan studies' focus toward conceptualizations of fan
subjectivities. Sandvoss (2005) argues that the fan text is an extension of the self,
and through self-reflection between the fan and the object of fandom, the fan forms a
subjectivity. Hills (2002) critiques implicit subjectivities found in fandom scholarship,
arguing that fans' struggles to explain their process of becoming fans violates values
of rational, comprehending subjects. By employing a suspensionist position that
refuses to pronounce fandom as good or bad, fan studies scholars can begin to
consider "what fandom does culturally rather than how fandom can be fitted into
academic norms of 'resistant' or 'complicit' readings" (Hills 2002, xiii). Ultimately,
Hills's emphasis on fan cultures "obliges us to consider the creative spaces of fans as
subjects with psyches as well as members of 'interpretive communities'" (Hills 2002,
xiii–xiv). Hills's and Sandvoss's conceptualizations focus attention on fan subjectivity,
but a kind of subjectivity that is neither public nor political. To understand how fans
come to see themselves as citizens, we must examine how fans constitute emerging
publics that act in the public sphere.

3. Methodology and texts

[3.1] I use the HPA as a case study to start to reconsider our understanding of
fannish activity as beyond traditional conceptualizations of public engagement.
Founded in 2005, the HPA is a nonprofit organization that seeks to engage in social
justice activism, using parallels between the real world and Harry Potter. The HPA has
engaged in campaigns that support fair trade, workers' rights, same-sex marriage, and
literacy, among others. Calling itself "Dumbledore's Army for the real world," the HPA
tasks itself with carrying on Dumbledore's mission by waking up governmental bodies
to injustices around the world. Among the HPA's more than 25 campaigns, I focus on
the their first Darfur campaign because it was the HPA's first major campaign, setting
a precedent for later social justice campaigns. The 2007–8 Darfur campaign consisted
of blog posts and two podcasts, through which the HPA asked its members to contact
government representatives, post photographs and videos to raise awareness, and
raise money for Civilian Protection, a nonprofit organization that works to protect
women in Darfur and civilians in Burma ("Success Stories" 2010; Harry Potter Alliance
and PotterCast 2007).

[3.2] In December 2007, the HPA joined STAND, a student branch of the Genocide
Intervention Network, for their annual STANDFast project. Participants in the project
chose to give up one luxury item for a week, then donated the money they saved to
STAND. The donations went to protect civilians in Darfur by providing alternative fuel, thus relieving refugees of the need to abandon the relative safety of refugee camps to collect firewood. HPA members gave up luxuries like morning coffee, books, and movie tickets, and donated the money they had saved (note 1). During the 2008 Summer Olympics in China, the HPA asked its members to not support Olympic sponsors who were implicitly funding the genocide in Darfur through overseas investments. While the campaign formally ended in 2008, the HPA continues to post blog entries updating its members on the situation in Darfur.

[3.3] For most HPA members, the Darfur campaign was their introduction. As its inaugural campaign, the HPA articulated its mission, ethics, and policy goals for Harry Potter fans for the first time. The HPA's first podcast introduced the Darfur campaign and the HPA. The podcast was titled "Becoming Dumbledore's Army: Harry Potter Fans for Darfur" and was broadcast as a special edition of PotterCast, one of the most well-known Harry Potter fandom podcasts. News outlets have long served an important role in fandom, in the form of fanzines (Lewis 1992, 22, 212–15) and now in the form of podcasts as well. Indeed, podcasts are characterized by an amateur aesthetic and low cost of production (Sterne et al. 2008), making them an ideal media form for many fandoms.

[3.4] The HPA's project was well received, with the first podcast being downloaded more than 120,000 times, a surprising and encouraging number for the fledgling nonprofit organization. The podcast features HPA staff members and Harry Potter fandom celebrities, as well as guest speakers like State Department ambassador Joe Wilson, MTV news journalist Jennifer Vineyard, former official for the Clinton administration John Prendergast, and peace activist Dot Maver (Harry Potter Alliance and PotterCast 2007). For this article, I focus on the first Darfur campaign podcast, which I downloaded through the iTunes directory and analyzed as a transcript.

4. Theorizing public engagement keystones

[4.1] Through its rhetoric, the HPA invites Harry Potter fans to participate in public engagement, in many ways targeting the generations of youth that have been most criticized for political apathy (Bennett 2008). In this section, I explore how the HPA is able to construct an environment that invites fans to see themselves as citizens and political subjects. First, I link multiple theories of the formation of publics by turning to John Dewey, Peter Dahlgren, and Doug McAdam's explanations of the most basic requirements for healthy public formation. Second, I advance a theoretical conceptualization of the public engagement keystone.
Peter Dahlgren, a media and communication scholar, argues that in the process of becoming citizens, anchoring is necessary. Dahlgren explains the "key assumption here is that a viable democracy must have an anchoring at the level of citizens' lived experiences, personal resources, and subjective dispositions" (2005, 158). Philosopher John Dewey (1954) shares with Dahlgren a similar affinity for anchoring individuals in community, though Dewey does so by emphasizing the importance of the local. For Dewey, the local is the instantiation of community, and as such involves communality, free and full communication, intimacy, and shared knowledge. These aspects of community are what give way to a shared sense of commitment and a recognition of direct consequences, both of which are requirements for well-functioning publics necessary for democracy. For Dewey, these characteristics rise out of everyday interaction—interaction that is face to face and makes a community a community. This common, regular interaction grounds or anchors the community and allows a public to come into existence. Without such grounding, cultivation of a public is not possible.

Sociologist Doug McAdam (1986, 1988) makes a similar claim. McAdam examines volunteer applications submitted for participation in Freedom Summer, a summer-long effort organized in 1964 by the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Commission (SNCC) and the Council of Federated Organizations (CFO), in which mostly white, Northern college students traveled to Mississippi to register black voters and run citizenship schools. McAdam argues that both the applicants who followed through and participated in Freedom Summer, and the applicants who were accepted but withdrew, demonstrated similar levels of commitment to the ideology of SNCC, CFO, and the broader civil rights movement. The difference between the two groups was not the strength of ideological belief, but rather the strength of ties to the organization, other applicants, and other civil rights activist events and groups. McAdam explains, "An intense ideological identification with the values of the campaign acts to 'push' the individual in the direction of participation while a prior history of activism and integration into supportive networks acts as the structural 'pull' that encourages the individual to make good on his [or her] strongly held beliefs" (1986, 87–88). For McAdam, it is the intensity of the anchoring in a network or community that helps an activist move from passive belief in a social movement project to action.

I wish to link the perspectives of anchoring, grounding, and strong ties by developing a theoretical conceptualization of the public engagement keystone. For Dahlgren, Dewey, and McAdam, anchoring and grounding are necessary starting points for an emergent public. Linking Dewey's grounding, Dahlgren's anchoring, and McAdam's strong ties under a single theoretical conceptualization offers three advantages. First, the development of the public engagement keystone helps us understand scholars like Dahlgren, Dewey, and McAdam as having similar projects.
These scholars discuss similar concepts, though with different emphases and different terms. Bringing their concepts together under a single term clarifies scholarship in the field. Additionally, the varied research that can be seen contributing to a conceptualization of a public engagement keystone makes it a particularly rich theoretical concept for use in future scholarship.

[4.5] Second, the development of the public engagement keystone as a theoretical concept better allows scholars to talk across disciplines about public engagement. Fandom scholars cannot talk about fandom's public engagement as being anchored in the local in Dewey's sense. However, we might say that both Harry Potter and local communication serve to anchor an individual, offering the possibility for public formation. A term that encompasses the local, an anchor, and strong ties would allow sociologists, fandom scholars, political scientists, rhetoricians, and others to more easily talk about the process of public formation. Third, this term would allow scholars to better account for a wider variety of public formation. Fandom need not be an unusual exception to traditional public formation. By developing the theoretical conceptualization of the public engagement keystone, I seek to place fandom on par with the local as a legitimate method to healthy public formation.

[4.6] I conceptualize a public engagement keystone as a touch point, worldview, or philosophy that makes other people, actions, and institutions intelligible. A public engagement keystone accomplishes two things. First, it provides an orientation by metaphorically grounding and anchoring an individual. By theorizing a public engagement keystone, one can understand how an individual might be anchored in a local community like Madison, Wisconsin; anchored in a lived experience of racial oppression; or anchored by a philosophical framework like Catholicism. In each instance, the public engagement keystone serves to orient an individual by providing a way to understand others, and consequently a way to engage the public.

[4.7] Second, individuals strongly and intensely identify with a public engagement keystone. We can contrast the individual who has a philosophical framework of Catholicism but does not act upon it with another person who shares the same Catholic philosophical framework and feels compelled to act according to it, perhaps volunteering at his or her church's soup kitchen. The first person might adhere to the beliefs inherent in the ideology but only passively believe them, and would not identify strongly with them. The second person would strongly identify with the beliefs and therefore would feel compelled to act. Strong identification combined with a lens that makes other things intelligible creates an anchoring public engagement keystone.

[4.8] Taking my cue from Dewey, Dahlgren, McAdam, and others, I argue that public engagement keystones are necessary to cultivating publics. The HPA's traditional civic actions would have us predict that the HPA is grounded and anchored in a public
engagement keystone because HPA members seem to be performing citizenship through public engagement, yet the HPA cultivates citizenship activities through nontraditional means—that is, through the use of a fictional story. By developing a theoretical concept of the public engagement keystone, I try to place fandom activism within the context of broader political activism. In this way, we might understand fandom activism not as an unusual departure from traditional public formation, but rather as an expected part of citizenship on par with more traditional public formations.

[4.9] How does the HPA invite formation of a public? First, the HPA frames its Darfur campaign as requiring public engagement, requiring members to insert arguments into the public sphere. Second, the HPA invites its members to come to see themselves as public citizens able and obligated to participate in public engagement. Here, I argue that the HPA deploys the Harry Potter story as a public engagement keystone, helping Harry Potter fans come to see themselves as public subjects that allow and require action within the public sphere. Lastly, I argue that the HPA constructs a broader ethic for its members that is grounded in practices of public engagement and necessitates performance within the public sphere.

5. Harry Potter fandom takes on the functions of a public

[5.1] The HPA invites Harry Potter fans to engage in activities beyond the regular purview of fandom by asking fans to sign petitions and send letters to government representatives, among others. These actions require HPA members to function as a public—that is, HPA members begin to address other citizens on public issues with the possibility of shifting public opinion and institutional actions at the governmental level. The HPA's podcast invites members to insert arguments into the public sphere through two types of actions and discourse: institutional and expressive.

[5.2] The institutional acts the HPA staff members invited Harry Potter fans to engage in are some of the most readily recognized and long-established forms of public engagement: petitions and letters sent to government representatives. First, through the use of petitions, the HPA asked Harry Potter fans to help stop the flow of money that enabled the Sudanese government to enact genocide (Harry Potter Alliance and PotterCast 2007, 10) (note 2). Fans were invited to sign a petition to pressure Fidelity to change its holdings of some Chinese oil companies. The HPA also asked Harry Potter fans to pressure their government representatives to take action. One way to do that was to call 1-800-GENOCIDE, an antigenocide hotline that connected callers directly to their representatives in Congress and provided callers with updates about the situation in Darfur and related legislation (Harry Potter Alliance and PotterCast 2007, 2). The HPA also encouraged its members to educate themselves
on how their elected government representatives stood on the issue of Darfur by going to DarfurScores.org (http://darfurscores.org/). This nonprofit organization assigned each member of Congress a letter grade depending on his or her stance on Darfur. The HPA encouraged individuals to send their representatives a letter praising them if they had a good score and asking them to change their stance if they had a poor score (Harry Potter Alliance and PotterCast 2007, 11). To further affect political institutions, the HPA asked its members to submit a YouTube video of a question for the July 23, 2008, primary debate for the 2008 Democratic presidential nomination (Harry Potter Alliance and PotterCast 2007, 13). All of these actions placed arguments about ending the genocide in Darfur into public spaces where these arguments might circulate further, might be noticed by other citizens and thus affect public opinion, and might directly affect political and social institutions through government leaders. By inviting Harry Potter fans to engage in activities that meet the functions of publics, the HPA invited fans to begin to form a public.

[5.3] In addition to utilizing traditional tactics to affect political and social institutions, the HPA also asked its audience members to engage in expressive and creative acts, demonstrating support and expressing their political position and identity. These creative acts were both public and political, placed in public spaces easily accessible to many and political in their overarching message. As additional messages inserted into the public sphere with the potential to affect public opinion, these expressive acts further bolstered the function of Harry Potter fans as a public. On the Darfur podcast, the HPA asks fans to post videos as part of 24 Hours for Darfur, a project that sought to create a 24-hour-long video composed of many individual video testimonials of citizens expressing their support for ending the genocide in Darfur. The HPA encouraged fans to "dress wizardly," sing, or rap (Harry Potter Alliance and PotterCast 2007, 6). Guest speaker Joe DeGeorge from the band Harry and the Potters says, "Have fun, express yourself, and post it at 24 Hours for Darfur" (Harry Potter Alliance and PotterCast 2007, 6). As a publicly accessible Web site, 24 Hours for Darfur offers another avenue for Harry Potter fans to pledge support for intervention in the Darfur genocide and to ask other individuals to join them, thus potentially influencing public opinion and government representatives. Additionally, Andrew Slack, the Harry Potter Alliance executive director, asked fans on the podcast to post photos on CNN.com's Harry Potter edition of IReporter. CNN's IReporter asked Harry Potter fans to submit their photos and videos as IReporters and to "show their love for all things Harry Potter" (Harry Potter Alliance and PotterCast 2007, 14). However, Slack asked fans to show their Harry Potter love while also holding signs that said "Save Darfur." CNN's IReport offered the chance for HPA members to insert their arguments into the public sphere through traditional mass media messages that circulate through the public sphere. While CNN's goal may have been to cover Harry
Potter fans, CNN's call opened up the opportunity for Harry Potter fans to ask CNN's viewers to "save Darfur."

By asking fans to post videos and photos, write to their elected officials, and sign petitions, the HPA invites Harry Potter fans to function as a public by inserting arguments into the public sphere. But how does the HPA help fans come to see themselves as public subjects, capable of inserting arguments into the public sphere? How are fans invited to see themselves as public subjects capable of public engagement and obligated to take action? In the next section, I argue that the Harry Potter Alliance invites public engagement through the use of a public engagement keystone.

6. Emerging as a public through the use of a public engagement keystone

For the HPA, the Harry Potter story operates as a public engagement keystone, opening up possibilities for fans to see themselves not only as fans, but also as public subjects. It is through the deployment of a public engagement keystone that the HPA is able to transform the Harry Potter Alliance members into an emerging public. The HPA draws on Harry Potter as a public engagement keystone by first orienting the Harry Potter fan to Darfur activism, then using the Harry Potter story as a lens, and next pushing fans to take action because of intense identification.

In its podcast, the HPA invites Harry Potter fans to view the world in terms of Harry Potter equivalents or parallels. These parallels orient Harry Potter fans. Andrew Slack, HPA executive director, explains that the HPA seeks to fight "the Dark Arts in the real world by using Harry Potter and Albus Dumbledore as role models" (Harry Potter Alliance and PotterCast 2007, 1). Here, Slack invites Harry Potter fans to follow the examples of Harry Potter and Albus Dumbledore, acting as Harry and Dumbledore might if they were here in the real world. The characters of Harry Potter and Albus Dumbledore become comparisons, touchstones, or anchors for Harry Potter fans. Since news coverage of the Darfur genocide was somewhat sparse at the time of the podcast, the revelation that genocide was occurring could easily have been jarring. With so much new information and such a large, distant, and amorphous problem, it can often be difficult for citizens to determine where to start. Slack addresses this problem by using Harry and Dumbledore as anchors to provide a familiar starting point for Harry Potter fans. From there, HPA members can better grasp the problem and consider what actions to take. As anchors, characters like Dumbledore and Harry help fans orient themselves to other people and situations.
These figures orient fans to the problem by offering an anchored starting place, but also provide a lens through which to view the problem. The HPA deploys the Harry Potter story as a public engagement keystone, which functions to make the problem of genocide intelligible to Harry Potter fans. At the beginning of the podcast, Andrew Slack says, "And what better way to send Harry off in his journey to destroy each Horcrux than in joining him in our global fight to destroy the Horcrux that is genocide once and for all, for the people of Darfur, and for the memories of all those who have been affected by genocide" (Harry Potter Alliance and PotterCast 2007, 1). Here, Slack reframes genocide as a Horcrux. By viewing the Darfur genocide through the lens of Harry Potter, it becomes clear that, like Horcruxes, the Darfur genocide is one of the biggest problems in the world, a problem that demands immediate action.

The Harry Potter public engagement keystone makes not only the problem intelligible, but also the solution. Near the end of the podcast, Slack says, "When we, like Harry was in Dumbledore's office at the end of The Order of the Phoenix, get tired of being human, Harry, Ron, and Hermione are right there in the Gryffindor common room inside of us. Playing Wizard Chess, conspiring, laughing, and ready to take on the Dark Arts whatever it takes. Let's join them in that fight together, with our greatest weapon, love" (Harry Potter Alliance and PotterCast 2007, 15). Here, Slack articulates action as the solution, rejecting apathy. Slack responds to concerns that Harry Potter fans may feel as if the problem is too large, that they cannot make a difference, that the problem is so overwhelming it is better to ignore it. Through the Harry Potter public engagement keystone, Slack invites fans to respond to the overwhelming problem of genocide in the same way that Harry, Ron, and Hermione responded to the Dark Arts. While fans may not have cared much about the problem of Darfur before listening to the podcast, Slack asks fans to view themselves as Harry, Ron, and Hermione, who took action even when it was hard, even when they were tired, even when it was dangerous. Through this lens, the solution to the problem of the Darfur genocide is to take action, rather than wait for others to step in. By serving as a lens through which to view public issues (both problems and potential solutions), the Harry Potter story serves as a public engagement keystone in the HPA's podcast rhetoric.

The intense identification with the Harry Potter text and its characters grounds Harry Potter fans and pushes them not only to recognize what actions to take, but also to take those actions. When Slack asks fans to see themselves as Harry, Ron, and Hermione, he draws upon an intense identification fans have with the Harry Potter characters and a strong desire to be like those characters in particular ways. For HPA members, it is desirable to follow in Hermione, Ron, and Harry's footsteps. At the same time, it is problematic to be aligned with Lord Voldemort and his Horcruxes. HPA members come to the podcast with a strong judgment that Lord Voldemort is bad.
When HPAl staff align the genocide and Lord Voldemort, HPA members are faced with a choice of choosing not to participate in public engagement actions against genocide and thus be like Lord Voldemort, or to participate in public engagement and thus work against evils like Lord Voldemort. This intense identification with the Harry Potter public engagement keystone pushes fans to engage the public.

[6.6] The HPA deploys the Harry Potter story as a public engagement keystone, using Harry Potter as a starting point, a lens, and a source of intense identification to make public engagement intelligible and immediate to Harry Potter fans. So far, I have demonstrated how these functions of a public engagement keystone apply specifically to the case of the Darfur campaign. However, the HPA also deploys Harry Potter as a public engagement keystone in its broader mission. As a social justice organization, the HPA advances a particular ethic, or right way to act. I argue first that the HPA develops an ethic of discursive engagement through the use of a public engagement keystone. Next, I argue that this ethic is inherently political and public. If we conceptualize public engagement as deliberation, discussion, and talk with other people, the HPA's ethic is inextricably bound to ethics of public engagement. The HPA ultimately calls on its members to engage in citizenship through discourse and talk, achieved through translating Harry's duels with enemies into discursive engagement with citizens. Such an ethic places the HPA's actions firmly in the public sphere.

7. An ethic of discursive engagement

[7.1] The HPA constructs an ethic of speaking out through the use of the HPA public engagement keystone, one that takes discursive engagement as its central theme. The HPA calls itself a Dumbledore's Army for the real world. In the Harry Potter books, Harry forms a student group called the Defense Association when Professor Umbridge forbids students from learning defensive magic. When Umbridge finds out about the secret group, she uses it as an excuse to remove Dumbledore from his position as headmaster of the Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. Dumbledore had been speaking out against the Ministry of Magic, the government in the wizarding world. The Ministry of Magic had been reassuring the citizens that Lord Voldemort, a powerful and evil wizard, had not been regaining strength. Dumbledore was attempting to convince the public that Lord Voldemort had returned. Dumbledore was correct and Voldemort had indeed returned, but the Ministry refused to admit they failed to keep Voldemort at bay. The Ministry removed Dumbledore from his post at Hogwarts to silence his embarrassing accusations. Harry, Ron, and Hermione took responsibility for picking up where Dumbledore left off and transformed their Defense Association into Dumbledore's Army. As members of Dumbledore's Army, these students trained themselves in defensive magic in preparation for Voldemort's return, and they
continued to work to wake up the ministry and the public to the truth of Voldemort's rise to power.

[7.2] In the podcast, the HPA explains that "we're gonna be talking about ways today that we can be like Dumbledore's Army, who woke the world up to Voldemort's return, and wake our ministries, our businesses, and our world to ending the genocide in Darfur" (Harry Potter Alliance and PotterCast 2007, 1). The HPA takes "waking up the world" as its mission. This is at its core a discursive mission, one defined through communication and awareness, rather than fund-raising goals or policy changes. The HPA explains they are "dedicated to spreading our love and fighting the Dark Arts in the real world" (Harry Potter Alliance and PotterCast 2007, 1). Here it becomes clear that discourse that wakes up the world is needed to fight the Dark Arts in the real world: social injustice. The HPA recasts Harry's violent fights and wizarding duels as discourse. Speaking out is what it takes to carry on the mission of Albus Dumbledore and Harry Potter.

[7.3] The HPA's ethic of speaking out rejects apathy disguised as neutrality. Silence is compliance with the corrupt Ministry of Magic and Lord Voldemort's supporters. An ethic of speaking up requires regular performances, takes work, and is an accomplishment. Slack draws attention to Harry's choice to locate and destroy each Horcrux and explains that Harry recognized that the right path was the hard path. Slack says, "And in these dark and difficult times, where choices between what is right and what is easy continue to emerge, we have the opportunity to let our light shine" (Harry Potter Alliance and PotterCast 2007, 14). Slack frames the public engagement of Harry Potter fans as neither automatic nor easy. Rather, performing the ethic of speaking out through public engagement is most important in the most difficult times. The HPA constructs an ethic of discursive engagement through the Harry Potter fandom public engagement keystone.

8. Conclusion: Theorizing many kinds of citizenship

[8.1] I link multiple perspectives on how publics emerge through my advancement of a theoretical conceptualization of the public engagement keystone. I argue that the public engagement keystone offers an orientation to individuals, which makes consequences, problems, and people intelligible, and offers an anchor, which provides a reason or justification for action. By linking Dewey's grounding, Dahlgren's anchoring, and McAdam's strong ties, the public engagement keystone better accounts for a variety of public engagement activities in a variety of contexts. Importantly, it allows fandom scholars to place civic engagement done in the name of Harry Potter next to civic engagement done in the name of loyalty to a political party. This will, I hope, allow fandom scholars to better enter the conversation on public engagement,
providing us with a more sophisticated vocabulary that translates between 1960s civil rights action and 2007 Harry Potter campaigns.

[8.2] A more expansive conceptualization of a public engagement keystone might open up other cases in which people have found reasons to participate in public engagement beyond political party membership or social movement involvement. If we search for other public engagement keystones in media texts, lived experiences, and beyond, we might find innovative public engagement. This becomes an important task for public sphere and fandom scholars in an era when civic engagement is often said to be declining (Coleman and Blumler 2009; Benkler 2006; Bennett 2008). Perhaps fandom activism as public engagement done in the name of a media text does not operate as far beyond the conventions of traditional public engagement as some like to think.

9. Acknowledgments

[9.1] I thank Jonathan Gray, Kyra Hunting, Rob Asen, Rob Howard, and Anne Szczubelek for their valuable insights. Research was approved by the University of Wisconsin–Madison's institutional review board.

10. Notes

1. It is important to note that giving up one's morning Starbucks coffee was the primary example offered by STAND and the HPA of the kind of luxury individuals could give up. Both STAND and the HPA operate on the assumption that many of their members have such luxuries to give up, restricting participation in the campaign to middle- and upper-class individuals with disposable income.

2. All page numbers cited for the HPA podcast refer to page numbers in the printed transcript. The transcript had a total of 16 pages.

11. Works cited


1. Introduction

[1.1] Increasingly, traditional political actors have to adapt to new communication environments on the Internet, and the ever-growing popularity of Web 2.0 services forces politicians to rethink their traditional top-down communication approach (Lilleker and Jackson 2010). The well-publicized online activities of Barack Obama's presidential campaign of 2007 and 2008 served as an international reference point, after which no major international campaign could afford not to be present on Web 2.0 services (i.e., social networking sites, online video sharing sites, or microblogging services). On these social media channels, politicians did not meet a passive audience eager to receive political messages on one more communication channel. Instead, they met with networked publics, recipients demanding the possibility of active participation. "Now publics are communicating more and more through complex networks that are bottom-up, top-down, as well as side-to-side. Publics can be reactors, (re)makers and (re)distributors, engaging in shared culture and knowledge through discourse and social exchange as well as through acts of media reception” (Ito 2008, 2f.).

[1.2] Often these networked publics share participatory practices and skills that enable them to adapt original communication objects (for example, images of politicians, audio files of speeches, or campaign videos) and create transformative works that build on existing works but add another layer of meaning to the object (for example, for satirical purposes). These practices and skills can be collected under the term participatory cultures. Analytically, these phenomena have been addressed in three different literatures: the technological and business literature on the development and use of Web 2.0, the legal literature on the creation and licensing of transformative works, and the culture studies literature on the constitution of the participatory cultures producing these objects.

[1.3] This (re)making or co-production of political communication objects provides a challenge for political campaigns. On the one hand, campaigns have to engage networked publics so that their members choose to participate through the (re)making or co-production of political communication objects. Failing this, the campaign will seem out of touch with online culture and fail to authentically communicate on the Internet. On the other hand, campaigns have to find moderate approaches to dealing with the often satirical communication objects produced by supporters and critics that more often than not seem to come straight from negative campaigning handbooks.

[1.4] It’s not only traditional political actors who have to adapt, but also members of networked publics who have to learn how to deal with the sudden presence of politicians and campaign operatives in their communication environments. It is far from clear how participatory cultures manifest themselves in political contexts. The ironic nature of most political remixes and the often ephemeral nature of ad hoc political participation through online channels prove to be a challenge for the sustained political engagement of participatory cultures (Coleman and Blumler 2009, 137f.).

[1.5] Traditional political actors react differently to the challenges of these new communication environments. Some encourage their offline supporters to become increasingly vocal online and engage with and learn from online publics (section 4). Some adopt the look and feel of online objects in official campaign material in an attempt to appeal to online publics (section 5). The case studies selected for this paper will show that these approaches do not necessarily result in stronger political engagement by online...
To understand the significance of the election year 2009 it is important to understand Germany's political system. Germany is a federal republic consisting of 16 states. Elections on the state level strongly influence the process of policy making on the national level, since representatives of the state governments are involved in all national legislation that also concerns the states (Schmidt 2007, 196–208). State elections are also important since they are often read as indicators of the public's satisfaction with the work of the party governing on a national level (Decker 2006). The state elections directly preceding a general election receive a lot of attention as commentators try to predict the results of the general election based on the results of recent state elections.

German general elections follow the voting principle of personalized proportional representation. All parties that are able to gather more than 5 percent of the vote send representatives to parliament. The exact number of these MPs is determined by a
complicated formula based on the percentage of votes a party could gather and the number of districts candidates of a party could win in direct competition (Schmidt 2007, 48ff.). This system leads to a situation in which parties with a simple majority of votes are still not able to form a government but depend on coalitions with one or two parties with smaller vote shares. In Germany this leads to a party system in which five political parties manage to regularly win enough votes in federal and state elections to send representatives to the respective parliaments. More importantly, the 5 percent limit is sufficiently low that new parties regularly form and attempt to gain enough votes to enter parliament. In Germany the dominating parties are the Christian Democrats (CDU), a conservative party that headed a coalition government from 2005 to 2009 under chancellor Angela Merkel; the Social Democrats (SPD), a center-left party that from 2005 to 2009 was the junior partner in a governing coalition with the CDU under vice-chancellor Frank-Walter Steinmeier; the Liberals (FDP), a smaller party that runs largely on a platform of economic liberalism and lower taxes; the Green Party (Bündnis90/Die Grünen), a progressive party running largely on a platform of civil rights and ecological conservation; and the Left (Die Linke), a party running on a socialist platform.

From 2005 to 2009, Germany was governed by a coalition of the Christian and the Social Democrats under the leadership of chancellor Angela Merkel (CDU) and vice-chancellor Frank-Walter Steinmeier (SPD). This construct, the coalition of the two parties with the highest vote share, is called a grand coalition and only arises if none of the big parties (CDU or SPD) is able to form a governing coalition with one of the smaller parties (FDP, Bündnis 90/Die Grünen, or Die Linke). Historically, grand coalitions are very rare. In 2009 this led to an unfamiliar situation for the campaigners. Angela Merkel and Frank-Walter Steinmeier were the leaders of a successful coalition government while at the same time they were directly competing against each other on the campaign trail. This put the SPD in a complicated position. On the one hand they had to argue in favor of a policy change through a change in government, but on the other hand they were not able to attack the work of the preceding government too harshly, since they were actively involved, if only as a junior partner, in the governing coalition. This situation led to a campaign that many commentators saw as lacking in drama and fire. The campaign of 2009 ended with heavy losses in vote share for both coalition partners (CDU and SPD) but offered the possibility for the CDU to form a coalition government with the Liberals (FDP) under the leadership of Angela Merkel without the participation of the SPD (for a more detailed discussion, see Saalfeld 2011).

In late 2008 and early 2009 at least one group was not daunted by the expectations of an uneventful campaign. The advocates of online activism and online campaigning were riding high. The campaign for the 2009 general election was destined to have a strong online component—of this, pundits were certain (BITKOM 2009). The online success of Barack Obama’s recent bid for the US presidency was fresh in the minds of German journalists and politicians. In late 2008 and early 2009, German campaigners and online cognoscenti focused on how the upcoming campaigns could use the Internet and learn from Obama (Bertelsmann Stiftung 2009; Reichart 2009).

It wasn’t only the media and campaigning professionals who were ready for an online campaign. By 2009 the Internet had been widely adopted in Germany. In 2009, the ARD/ZDF Online Study found that 64.7 percent of all Germans 14 years or older had used the Internet within the last 4 weeks. This was up from 56.7 percent in 2005, the year of the last general election (van Eimeren and Frees 2009, 335). This shows that the potential for political content reaching a wide audience online had risen. Also the Allensbacher Computer- und Technik-Analyse (ACTA) found that 55 percent of all Germans aged 14 to 64 years used the Internet to search for political news (Schneller 2009, 7). This shows that the Internet was an important news source for Germans during the campaigns in 2009. Still, when asking about the interest in actively participating through creating and posting content on the Web, Busemann and Gscheidle found that only 31 percent of all German Internet users 14 years or older were heavily or moderately interested (2009, 357). So, while in 2009 the Internet was used by a majority of Germans to gather information about news and politics, only a much smaller group was interested in actively producing content themselves.

The political campaigns of 2009 were at least partially judged by the German media on how well a political party or candidate seemed to be doing online. One criterion of the online performance of a given party was the number of supporters a candidate or party could collect on various social networking sites. Another indicator was the online activities of the supporters of a given party or candidate (Fischer and Voß 2009). This proved a challenge for the big parties, CDU and SPD. German Internet usage statistics are heavily skewed in favor of young users, especially for the use of social networking sites and the willingness to use Web 2.0 services with participatory possibilities (van Eimeren and Frees 2009; Busemann and Gscheidle 2009). The challenge for the CDU and SPD was that the statistics on the age of their party members are also heavily skewed but in favor of older members. In 2009 the average age of members of the CDU and SPD was 58 (Niedermayer 2011, 20).

One of the most intensively covered elements of the campaigns of 2009 was the emergence of the German Pirate Party. The party had originally been founded in 2006 in the wake of the appearance of the Swedish Pirate Party. In the first years the party promoted similar topics as its international counterpart: modernization of copyright laws, leniency towards file sharers, stronger privacy laws, and—specific to the German context—stronger limits for data retention by the state (for the origins of the German Pirate Party, see Bartels 2009; Blumberg 2010). Until early 2009 their success was moderate; in February 2009 the party had 870 paying members. The summer of 2009 brought the party a massive increase in membership. From February 2009 to the end of 2009 the membership stats jumped from 870 to 11,400 (Shinta 2011). What happened?

One important reason for the sudden increase in support for the Pirate Party lay in the strong opposition among online users to the so-called Zugangserschwerungsgesetz. In the spring of 2009 Ursula von der Leyen, minister for family, seniors,
women, and youth introduced a law to allow German authorities to block Web sites that offered child pornographic content. This initiative met with heavy resistance by German Internet users, who objected because of the perceived threat of a censorship infrastructure that in their view was introduced by the proposed law. The activists used online tools to organize their protest. Their activities clustered mainly around the term zensursula, a word combining the German word for censorship (Zensur) and the first name of the minister who originally proposed the law (Ursula). One of the focal points of the campaign against the proposed law was a popular online petition to the German Bundestag that asked to stop the law (for more details on the use of the German e-petition platform, see Jungherr and Jürgens 2010). When even the highly publicized online petition did not stop the ratification of the law by the German governing parties—the Christian Democrats (CDU), and the Social Democrats (SPD)—the activists moved to a small political party supporting their position, the Pirate Party, which in turn experienced a massive membership increase and public attention.

[3.9] The contentious public discussion of the topic did for the German Pirate Party what the discussion of copyright legislation had done for the Swedish Pirate Party. Suddenly a new and highly interconnected group of citizens felt the need to get involved in politics and chose the Pirate Party as their conduit. These new members entered the political arena with high ideals, but, more importantly, they also brought cultural skills learned in years of heavy computer and Internet use. This led to a party structure different than the established parties and also to highly transparent discussion and deliberation practices. The Pirate Party organized their campaign activities through a public wiki (http://wiki.piratenpartei.de/). In this wiki they documented the events of the campaign, organized public rallies, media reactions, and political positions. In addition to this tool they also used a public message board (http://forum.piratenpartei.de/) for the public discussion of issues as divergent as “funding, how to learn from Obama” (forum.piratenpartei 2009a) and “how to use Google without feeding Google” (forum.piratenpartei 2010).

[3.10] This was the backdrop for the campaign of 2009, when the actions of three different sets of political actors illustrated the challenges and possibilities of participatory cultures for traditional political actors and activists.

4. CDU: The challenge of encouraging participation from the top down

[4.1] In early November 2009, Joe Rospars, while publicly reminiscing at the Personal Democracy Forum Europe in Barcelona on his experiences as New Media director for the 2008 Obama presidential campaign, pithily summed up the problems of participation from the political operative’s view: "The bottom up stuff needs to be enforced from the top down" (Campbell 2009). If you replace the word enforced with the word encouraged you find a statement that seems to reflect the experiences of CDU campaigners during the run-up to the general election of 2009.

[4.2] As shown in section three, the CDU faced the challenge of encouraging their members to actively participate in political discussions or events online. The CDU tried actively encouraging supporters to remix selected official campaign materials, thus taking the role of the permissive producer of content, which is a vital element of participatory cultures. The material the CDU operatives deemed the most promising basis for remixes was the official campaign song. This choice proved both optimistic and wrong.

[4.3] The campaign song is a time-honored tradition in German politics. While there is no accounting for taste, the Christian Democrats like their campaign songs custom made. These songs more often than not tend to be objects of ridicule for political opponents, but they are a common feature in CDU campaigns from the state level up to the federal. For the 2009 campaign, the CDU asked Leslie Mandoki, a successful German pop producer, to compose the campaign song (CDUTV 2009). The launch of the campaign song was heavily covered by the press (Steinbach 2009) and the German blogosphere. In the blogs the reactions proved to be mostly critical and usually came with a heavy dose of ridicule (Haeusler 2009a).

[4.4] The campaign published the song in different formats, invited their supporters to use a specifically prepared version of the song as the basis for remixes, and invited them to e-mail these remixes to the campaign (teAM Deutschland 2009a). This invitation was for the most part ignored. Although a few CDU supporters produced user-generated content during the campaign, specific remixes of the campaign song did not prove to be their object of choice. Was this because no CDU supporters were interested in participating in the online campaign? Another episode from the campaign proves this hypothesis wrong.

[4.5] Starting in July 2009, the CDU campaign started to contact its supporters on the campaign Web sites, social networking platforms, and newsletter, asking them to be part of “Germany's Biggest Supporter Poster” (teAM Deutschland 2009b). Supporters were asked to send in profile pictures so they could be included in a massive collage of CDU supporters exhibited in Berlin during the last weeks of the campaign (teAM Deutschland 2009c). Roughly 4,500 supporters reacted to that invitation by uploading their portraits (teAM Deutschland 2009d). This campaign element turned out to be highly successful. This shows that CDU supporters were indeed using online tools to interact with the campaign and were even willing to lend their own faces to the campaign.

[4.6] These two examples illustrate the nature of the CDU online supporter community. On the one hand we have a highly successful call for participation that asked supporters to send in digital portrait-pictures for inclusion in a campaign poster. This form of participation demands the conviction to offer their picture for a political advertisement, but it doesn’t require strong new media skills such as the ability to edit videos, to alter images, or to remix audio tracks. The success of this campaign element
shows that during the campaign of 2009 there was a strong group of CDU supporters online who were willing to support the campaign. On the other hand we have the invitation by the campaign to remix their campaign song, which was largely neglected. This would have been a form of participation that demanded a relatively high level of new media skills, especially in the form of video editing and audio remixing. Clearly these skills were in low supply among the CDU supporters who, only a few days before the remix call, had supported the campaign through uploading their portraits (for a more detailed discussion of the CDU social media campaign, see Jungherr 2012).

[4.7] This episode illustrates two aspects of participatory cultures in political contexts. Even if a political actor chooses to enable the (re)making and co-producing of political content, this does not automatically lead to active participation. This echoes recent articles that show that the mere possibility of participation does not necessary lead to widespread participatory practices (Carpentier 2009; Nielsen 2011). Online participation requires the encouragement of political actors and their permissive stand on the creation of transformative works based on their original materials, the motivation of networked publics to participate in the first place, and the presence of a new media skill set among their members that enables the (re)making and co-producing of content. If political actors want to encourage "the bottom up stuff...from the top down," to paraphrase Rospars again, they have to be very conscious of these factors.

5. SPD: The look and feel of participation

[5.1] Seventeen days before the German general election of 2009, a new campaigner entered the political arena. From September 10 onward, Charles Montgomery Burns, proud owner of the Springfield nuclear power plant and recurring character on the popular TV show The Simpsons, appeared on online campaign posters next to Angela Merkel. Instead of the official CDU campaign slogan "Wir wählen die Kanzlerin" (We elect the chancellor), the slogan read "Wir wählen die Atomkraft" (We elect nuclear power) (Richel 2009a).

[5.2] This poster remix was an obvious riff on the Christian Democrat’s stance on nuclear power, which was a point of contention during the campaign. While the CDU was supporting nuclear power as a bridge technology that would ensure the German energy supply until a time when regenerative energy sources would be able to replace it, the Social Democrats and the Green Party emphasized the necessity for Germany to abandon nuclear power at a fixed date in the near future. This question historically was one of the most emotionally discussed fault lines in German politics. After heavy antinuclear protests in Germany from the late 1970s through the 1990s and a relative lull during the coalition government of Social Democrats and the Green Party, the issue made a sudden reappearance in the last weeks of the campaign for the general election of 2009 (Lee 2009). Three days after a large demonstration of antinuclear protesters in Berlin, Montgomery Burns made an online appearance seemingly in support of the CDU’s stance on nuclear energy.

[5.3] At first glance, one might take the Merkel/Burns remix as an example of "Photoshop for Democracy" as understood by Henry Jenkins (Jenkins 2004, 2008a, 2008b). Jenkins described the potential of reaching an apolitical generation with a mix of political images and pop culture references that would register with people otherwise uninterested in politics: "Citizens are taking media into their own hands, producing new works made up of fragments of political and popular culture. And people are circulating them well beyond their immediate circle of friends as a way to both share a good laugh and exchange thoughts about pressing issues" (Jenkins 2004).

[5.4] Jenkins emphasizes the role of participating citizens in the creation of remixes. This is where the Merkel/Burns remix clearly diverges. The Merkel/Burns remix appeared first on a Twitpic account. Twitpic is an online service that allows users to upload images, which then can easily linked to by the user’s Twitter feeds. The owner of this specific account was Mathias Richel, who during the campaign of 2009 worked for the German advertising agency Butter. Butter was one of the agencies that worked for the campaign of the Social Democrats, the party directly in competition with the CDU and Angela Merkel. Richel himself worked from the party headquarters of the SPD in Berlin. Thus, the appearance of the Merkel/Burns remix was not the product of the lone "communications guerillo" imagined by Umberto Eco, "patrolling" the semiotic wastelands of German campaign communication (Eco 1967, 144). Instead, appearing on the personal account of a well-connected campaign staffer, the Merkel/Burns remix was an attempt at political guerilla marketing. What at first seems like the subversion of the political process is thus simply a case of the mainstreaming of culture jamming by a traditional political actor imitating visual style and communication conventions. In doing this, the political actor either was trying to appeal to the taste of network publics or imply the creation of this communication object by participating activists. What looks like grassroots user-generated content is in fact negative campaigning straight down from the top. This resembles trends in marketing: "Similarly, marketing and advertising, so responsive to each shifting tide in public behavior and whim, sniff out trends and mimic styles from the counterculture even as they seek to reign in [sic] and channel these viral energies in ways that consolidate the corporate bottom line" (Russell et al. 2008, 71).

[5.5] In the words of Mark Dery, "the look and feel of culture jamming, at least, have been appropriated by the mainstream, tirelessly promoted...and hijacked by guerrilla advertisers to ambush unsuspecting consumers" (2010).

[5.6] The Merkel/Burns remix is an example of a traditional political actor trying to adapt to communication conventions of the new online environment by producing objects that mimic styles of participatory cultures. What appears to be the transformative
work of activists comes, in fact, right out of a campaign operative's playbook. The SPD's reference to the TV series *The Simpsons* might echo its politics "of comic criticism" (Gray 2006, 146), in which parody provides a check for political discourses and institutions (ibid., 150). Still, this was not the only pop culture reference in remix materials originating from the party headquarters. There were remixes featuring Darth Vader, a villain from the Star Wars franchise (Richel 2009b), and the '90s rapper Marky Mark (Roter September 2009). The association of Angela Merkel and Montgomery Burns did not represent a conscious association with *The Simpsons*' politics of criticism; rather, it seemed to have originated in something much simpler: the visual similarity of Angela Merkel's characteristic triangular hand position with that of Montgomery Burns. The Merkel/Burns remix hit a nerve and started to spread through the German-speaking Internet. The picture appeared on online message boards and blogs, it was distributed on Twitter, discussed in the media, and even found an offline incarnation in the town of Dortmund as a remix of a real-life CDU campaigning poster upon which the head of the CDU's leading candidate, Angela Merkel, was replaced by the head of the *Simpsons* character (PC Action 2009).

[5.7] A few days after posting the image, Mathias Richel started posting photographs of a printout of the original remix with buttons documenting the accumulated clicks the image received on his Twitpic account (Richel 2009c). The campaign was attempting to document a seemingly viral distribution phenomenon. To demonstrate the cultural awareness of the campaign, it was seemingly not enough to create communication objects in the style of countercultural objects, but the creators also attempted to create a mode of distribution commonly associated with successful user-generated content. This conscious attempt to create buzz around objects produced by the campaign can also be seen in the reactions by campaign staffers to public critique of this approach. A post by Felix Schwenzel on his blog wirres.net led to a highly contentious discussion between him and Mathias Richel on the nature of legitimate viral distribution as opposed to staged viral distribution of campaign content (Schwenzel 2009). This reaction echoes concerns of fan communities who felt exploited when the grassroots marketing techniques of media companies adopted the look and feel of their practices (Pearson 2010; Scott 2009). This shows that political and corporate actors have to tread lightly and avoid the impression of simply manipulating online publics by pandering to their communication practices.

[5.8] In the preceding two sections we have seen two different attempts by political actors to react to the challenges of acting in communication environments associated with participatory cultures. The CDU tried to encourage its supporters to voice their support in forms common to participatory cultures but failed to lay the foundation of necessary cultural skills and participatory practices among its supporters. The SPD campaign chose a different approach. Professional campaigners, conscious of the success of political remixes during US campaigns, chose to adapt the format for the German context. With this approach, the SPD campaign succeeded in creating an iconic image that was widely popular well beyond the campaign of 2009. But how did existing participatory cultures in Germany choose to participate during the campaign of 2009?

6. Yeaahh! Participation from the grassroots

[6.1] On the evening of September 18, 2009, nine days before the federal election, the chancellor and leading candidate for the Christian Democratic Union, Angela Merkel, stopped in Hamburg for a routine campaign event. At this point, the political parties in Germany were headed into the final stretch of an uneventful campaign. An audience of roughly 2,000 had turned up to hear Merkel speak. Among the usual crowd of supporters, interested passersby, and protesters was a small group of roughly 30 people. Some of them were carrying signs on which the word "Yeaahh" was printed or handwritten. They also carried camcorders. These were not members of a political party or part of a specific group of activists. The reason they turned up was a comment to a blog post.

[6.2] A few days previously, the German Twittersphere had been abuzz with a picture posted on the photo-sharing site Flickr. Flickr user Spanier had posted a photograph of a CDU campaign poster advertising the event in Hamburg. On the poster someone had scribbled the words "Und Alle so: Yeaahh," which roughly translates as "And everyone goes: Yeaahh" (Spanier 2009). Soon German bloggers were commenting on the picture and its parody of the campaign (Urban Art Blog 2009; Walter 2009). On his blog Spreeblick, Johnny Haeusler asked his readers (tongue firmly in cheek) to explain why the remix was funny to them. In the following days, over 250 commentators reacted (Haeusler 2009b). Some commenters saw the humor in the juxtaposition of the enthusiastic word "Yeaahh" with the unemotional and highly pragmatic public persona of Angela Merkel (Saripari 2009; Andreas 2009). Others saw the humor in the juxtaposition of the word "Yeaahh" and the ritualized context of a campaign event (Martin 2009). Thus, the reactions on the blog indicate a mixture of motives. On the one hand, there is the personal opposition against Angela Merkel and the CDU, while on the other hand we find a critique of the language of campaigning. These reactions were soon to reach a much wider audience than the readers of Spreeblick. One of the commentators on the blog suggested starting a Yeaahh flash mob at the campaign event (Edgar 2009). The idea caught on and soon people had created a song (Haeusler 2009c), a printable sign (Weltregierung 2009), and the flash mob was on.

[6.3] On September 18, the flash mobbers were not prominently positioned. Between them and the stage stood a large group of Merkel supporters and antinuclear protesters who opposed the CDU's stance on nuclear energy. From the stage, the white Yeaahh signs disappeared among the orange signs of CDU supporters and the red and yellow antinuclear flags. Once Angela Merkel started her stump speech, the 30 people suddenly became active. After every one of Merkel's sentences they loudly shouted "Yeaahh" and shook their signs; however, at the campaign event in Hamburg this had little influence.
The participants in the flash mobs had various reasons. Some said they came to protest against Angela Merkel and the CDU, others said they had come because it was fun, others wanted to comment on offline politics through the use of "Internet humor" (Tagesthemen 2009). Common to most of these explanations was the claim that the meaningless word Yeaaah was the only possible reaction to a campaign dominated by sound bites free of real political discussion.

From the start, the Yeaaah flash mobs were not affiliated with any political party. It was an idea that was clearly motivated out of protest against Angela Merkel; however, if one takes the rhetoric of the protesters seriously, the flash mobs were directed against her in her role as a leading German politician and not against her as the CDU's leading candidate. And although the opposing parties did their best to promote further flash mobs at CDU events, it seems the Yeaaah flash mobs were a phenomenon born outside of traditional party politics. In their coverage, the media connected the flash mobs to the Pirate Party. This might be reasonable, since the flash mobs clearly attracted supporters of the Pirate Party. This is hard to quantify, but discussions on the Pirate's message board dealing with the flash mobs showed strong support among supporters of the Pirate Party for the idea (forum.piratenpartei 2009b). Still, this support was not universal. Critical voices objected to a naive support of the Yeaaah flash mobs since this would endanger the Pirate Party's attempt to be seen as a serious actor in German politics (forum.piratenpartei 2009c).

The story of the Yeaaah flash mobs resembles the Candelight Protests in South Korea in early 2008, although on a much smaller scale. In the spring of 2008, South Korea saw massive protests with over a million participants. Large numbers of the protesters were teenagers, especially teenage girls. One of the sources of the protest was online forums dedicated to the boy group Dong Bang. Just as the Yeaaah flash mobs started in reaction to the discussions in the comment section of the blog Spreeblick, so the Candelight Protests gained their initial momentum in the discussions among the Dong Bang fan community. In discussing the Candelight Protests, Mimi Ito (2009) addresses this dynamic: "The lesson here is that you should never underestimate the power of peer-to-peer social communication and the bonding force of popular culture. Although so much of what kids are doing online may look trivial and frivolous, what they are doing is building the capacity to connect, to communicate, and ultimately, to mobilize."

The peer-to-peer communication among the readership of Spreeblick much more closely resembles the concept of participatory culture as defined by Jenkins and colleagues (2009, 5), than the party structures of CDU and SPD. There were low barriers to participation in expression and engagement, in this case attendance at one of Merkel's campaign stops and the hearty exclamation of the word "Yeaaah." The flash mobbers also supported each other in the distribution of videos and other objects—printable Yeaaah signs (Weltregierung 2009), T-shirts (http://undalleso.spreadshirt.net/de/DE/Shop/Index/), songs (Hauesler 2009c), and blogposts documenting the various flashmobs (Park 2009; Plastikstuhl 2009; Hauesler 2009d). The microblogging service Twitter proved for this community not only an effective distribution channel for these objects but also an easy way to give and receive feedback.

The flash mobbers chose irony as a form of political expression. They were voicing ironic support for a political stump speech they felt did not address issues but only contained hollow rhetoric. Their reception shows the dangers of irony in the political discourse. While the media were quick to report on the flash mobs and even declare them a new form of political activism (Tagesthemen 2009), nearly all reports ended with a critique of the seemingly simplistic and empty formula with which the flash mobbers were reacting to Merkel's speech (König 2009; Bingener, Veser, and Wagner 2009). The CDU's public reaction was probably more hurtful to the flash mobbers. While Angela Merkel started to greet them at the events as "her friends from the Internet" (Sittner 2009), the campaign started to link to Yeaaah videos from the official campaigning blog with the encouraging statement "great, that's what we think" (teAM Deutschland 2009e). For the final public event of the campaign, the CDU even printed Yeaaah posters in the campaign's design and handed them out to supporters. This appears to be a textbook example of Henry Jenkins' cautionary remarks on the use of irony in political discourse:

These citizens have increasingly turned towards parody as a rhetorical practice which allows them to express their scepticism towards "politics as usual," to break out of the exclusionary language through which many discussions
of public policy are conducted, and to find a shared language of borrowed images that mobilize what they know as consumers to reflect on the political process. Such practices blur the lines between consumers and citizens, between the commercial and the amateur, and between education, activism and entertainment, as groups with competing and contradictory motives deploy parody to serve their own ends. (Jenkins 2008, 293)

[6.11] The flash mobs of 2009 clearly illustrate the potential of networked publics whose members share participatory cultures. Add to that a skill set of online tools and a sudden igniting spark, and you get a creative reaction to "politics as usual." Still, there is always the danger that the spark remains just that. After the federal election, the Yeaahh flash mobs disappeared from the political scene as quickly as they had appeared. It remains to be seen if participatory cultures in Germany help activists organize political participation that goes beyond ad hoc protests around short-term issues.

7. Participatory cultures in German politics

[7.1] During the campaign of 2009, political parties in Germany faced for the first time the challenge of adapting their top-down communication strategies to the new Web 2.0 environment. They had to find ways to engage with participatory practices widely associated with this communication environment. But not only traditional political actors had to learn. Newly politicized networked publics also faced the challenge of entering the political arena, starting with the public debate about the Zugangserschwerungsgesetz and a few months later during the campaign for the general election. Their examples illustrate the challenges of adapting top-down communication practices to an environment dominated by participatory cultures, as well as the challenge of channeling bottom-up participatory practices into the traditional political process.

[7.2] Traditional political actors tried to adapt by either encouraging their supporters to participate through the (re)making and co-production of campaign materials or by providing content themselves that mimicked the look and feel of user-generated content. New political actors entered the public sphere because of their ability to spontaneously organize around seemingly marginal topics and manifest their protest in original ways offline. The success of these approaches was mixed at best. This shows that if traditional political actors are serious in encouraging more citizen participation online, they have to move beyond merely imitating or paying lip service to participatory practices online. Instead, they have to adapt to the participatory practices of successful online publics while remaining aware of the cultural skills and communication practices of their supporters. It is necessary to ensure the campaign can interact adequately with its supporters. Sudden calls for participation will probably go unheeded if political actors do not invest the time and resources to establish participatory cultures among their supporters well before a campaign.

[7.3] The Yeaahh flash mobs illustrate the promise and limits of participatory cultures engaging with the traditional political process. The flash mobbers were able to quickly organize and mobilize a large, disparate group of people through the shared use of online tools and shared participatory practices. The flash mobs quickly gained public attention and were widely commented on by the established media. But this attention came at the price of heavy critique of their rhetoric and their incoherent message. Consequently, the Yeaahh flash mobs dropped from view once Election Day had passed. This case shows that it is not enough for online publics to gain short-term public and media attention for their causes. If they want to influence politics in the long run, they have to adapt to the traditional forms of political participation and take them seriously.

[7.4] The German campaigns of 2009 proved to be laboratories of convergence. Traditional political actors tried different approaches to act in a new communication environment while nontraditional actors tried to adapt to the political arena. Like any learning process, this process is ongoing. Time will tell if and how these actors continue this process.

8. Acknowledgments

[8.1] I want to thank Rasmus Kleis Nielsen, Harald Schoen, and Darren Lilleker, who commented on earlier versions of this paper. Their questions, comments, and advice helped me to develop the article to its present form.

[8.2] During the campaign for the state elections in Hessen, January 2009, the author worked for the CDU online campaign webcamp09 in Wiesbaden. During the campaign for Germany's general election in September 2009 the author worked for the CDU online campaign in the party headquarters in Berlin.

9. Works cited


http://www.taz.de/1/zukunft/umwelt/artikel/1/%5Ces-geht-wieder-los-%5C/.


Martin. 2009. "Comment to Johnny Haeusler, Und alle so: WTF?" Spreeblick, September 17.  


http://www.spiegel.de/netzwelt/web/0,1518,650004,00.html.


http://twitpic.com/i5rtl.


Abstract—In this paper, I consider the ways in which the feminist utopian ethos of Wonder Woman, as defined by her creator, William Marston, has been used to actualize real-life social change. Specifically, I examine fan Andy Mangels's creation of Wonder Woman Day, a charity event held annually at a Portland, Oregon, comic book store to raise funds for local domestic violence programs. I look at how an affective bond with Wonder Woman informs and guides an affective attachment to one's local and national communities, actualizing the utopian promise of self, commodity icon, and America. These utopian iterations are primarily defined by a celebration of pluralism, and thus Wonder Woman is used to validate the inherent pluralism of the self in relation to society, an empowering strategy for all consumer-citizens.

Keywords—Consumerism; Feminism; Nostalgia; Utopia


1. Introduction

From 2006 to 2010, Excalibur Comics in Portland, Oregon, hosted Wonder Woman Day, an annual charity event that, in its five years, raised over $100,000 for local nonprofit organizations serving victims of domestic violence. Conceived and organized by Portland-based writer Andy Mangels, Wonder Woman Day confirms the utility of mass culture and of the arena of public consumption for civic engagement. Most importantly, Wonder Woman Day is an ideal vehicle by which fans participate in the circulation of affect as a form of capital, collapsing the boundaries of citizen and consumer. Wonder Woman's ethos of "loving submission" symbolically embodies the conflation of affect and agency determined by participation in a collective utopian fantasy. Wonder Woman Day allows fans to recirculate this affective agency, confirming what Sara Ahmed calls the "very public nature of emotions" and "the emotive nature of publics" (2004, 14). Wonder Woman Day indicates that emotion gains in both emotive and commodity power the more it is circulated; thus this charitable event mirrors the affective power of mass culture texts beloved by fans.
Central to this circulation is the figure of Wonder Woman as a conduit for compassion that critiques hegemony. Fans' compassion for domestic violence victims informs a utopian desire to change social norms that is authorized by Wonder Woman. Affect is thus a guiding agent in the process of moral regeneration, symbolically linking fans to a comparable impulse felt by superheroes. That fans do this through the figure of Wonder Woman, the ideal utopian female superhero, realizes Lauren Berlant's observation that "to feel compassion...is at best to take the first step toward forging a personal relation to a politics of the practice of equality" (2004, 9). Further, Wonder Woman Day confirms Spinoza's assertion (2000, 164) that emotions circulate between bodies and determine what those bodies are capable of. Importantly, then, Wonder Woman Day bonds the consumer-citizen to absent, yet present bodies: those of domestic violence victims and that of Wonder Woman. In doing so, it sustains an affective circuit of reciprocal meaning among all three, cementing the link between public and private, affect and agency.

[1.2] Wonder Woman was the creation of Dr. William Moulton Marston, a Harvard-educated psychiatrist who, under the pen name Charles Moulton, conceived of a female superhero who, in his words, was

[1.3] psychological propaganda for the new type of woman who should, I believe, rule the world. There isn't love enough in the male organism to run this planet peacefully. Woman's body contains twice as many love generating organs and endocrine mechanisms as the male. What woman lacks is the dominance or self assertive power to put over and enforce her love desires. I have given Wonder Woman this dominant force but have kept her loving, tender, maternal and feminine in every other way. (Daniels 2000, 22–23)

[1.4] Debuting in All Star Comics no. 8 (cover dated Dec. 1941–Jan. 1942), Wonder Woman was unique among the nascent army of superheroes in that she was conceived in these expressly politically utopian terms. Like most superheroes of this period, she was recruited for the war effort, and her gendered utopian vision was instantly conflated with a comparable utopian mission for America. While in her first appearance America is described as "the last citadel of democracy, and of equal rights for women," this is clearly a utopian ideal that the nation falls short of fulfilling. This failure is confirmed by the very presence of a Wonder Woman: her essential difference from non-superheroic American women is a reminder of the need for not simply gender parity but, according to Marston, female hegemony. In a November 11, 1937, article in the New York Times, Marston said that "the next one hundred years will see the beginning of an American matriarchy—a nation of Amazons in the psychological rather than physical sense" (Daniels 2000, 19). Yet his own utopian vision is frequently
betrayed by the politics of the time and the conservative nature of World War II mass
culture. For example, the cover of *Wonder Woman* no. 7 (winter 1943) (figure 1)
features the words "For President" below the masthead and shows Wonder Woman
stumping on the campaign trail, accompanied by the text "Wonder Woman 1000 Years
in the Future!" If the readers of *Wonder Woman* were allowed to imagine Marston's
matriarchal utopia, it was a dream circulated through the familiar mechanisms of
democratic politics (conflating essential American institutions with this feminist
fantasy) and safely deferred to a distant future rendered as mythic as Wonder
Woman's Amazonian past.

![Figure 1. Wonder Woman campaigns for a utopian dream.](View larger image.)

[1.5] Importantly, the cover image of Wonder Woman as a presidential candidate
features both men and women in the cheering crowd, confirming Marston's insistence
that his vision of a matriarchal society is aimed at both male and female readers. So is
the governing conceit that Wonder Woman exports from Paradise Island and that
informs Marston's utopian vision. As Wonder Woman's mother, Queen Hyppolyta,
explains in *Wonder Woman* no. 29 (March–April 1948), "The only real happiness for
anybody is to be found in obedience to loving authority." Submission to a loving
matriarch provides the affective structure to Marston's articulation of what he termed
"women's values," which he wished to mobilize against patriarchal power. This defining
political platform has been vital to an understanding of Wonder Woman in the decades
following Marston's tenure as her writer (he died in 1947). While many writers for DC
Comics have drifted far afield from Marston's conception of the character (typically reducing her to standard male superhero fisticuffs or, in one glaring instance, removing her power altogether), others have recognized her primary appeal as a progressive figure. George Perez, a self-described feminist who wrote Wonder Woman from 1987 to 1992, has said that he primarily considered her "a peace character" (Daniels 2000, 169). As Marc Edward DiPaolo notes, "cultural critics...have asserted that Wonder Woman should ideally promote peace over war, feminism over conservatism, and multiculturalism over American Imperialism" (2007, 152). As Mangels puts it, "When I look at Wonder Woman...I'm seeing a woman that's powerful, a woman with a sense of truth and grace to her. Her message was always about accepting everybody as equals and about making the world a better place" ("World of Wonder").

2. Wonder Woman and me: The bond(age) of affect

[2.1] One of the most significant, and controversial, aspects of Marston's Wonder Woman stories was their emphasis on physical bondage as a trope of the social submission he advocated. Wonder Woman is rendered powerless when tied up or chained by a man (much as she once lost her powers at the hands of a male writer). Wonder Woman is defined by her voluntary submission to the will of her mother and, in order for her utopian social vision to be realized, requires the willing submission of the masses. Significantly, Wonder Woman must also submit to the will of the state, an act she performs through the power of affect. That is, she wholly gives herself over to America's fight for freedom against the Axis in her origin story in large part because she falls in love with Steve Trevor. Marston removes the threat that this defining action might have on Wonder Woman's feminist agency by rendering Trevor essentially impotent. Wonder Woman is never compromised by her love of Trevor, only motivated by it, and it never supersedes her pursuit of freedom and equality for all.

[2.2] Wonder Woman's performance of submission is a model for readers, as it reconciles the essential tension of American identity between the individualism celebrated in American culture and the submission to authority required by the state. Further, fans perform this reconciliation in the process of consuming Wonder Woman texts, as well as participating in Wonder Woman Day, for these activities require the consumer-citizen both to submit to the machinations of mass culture and to engage in the public sphere by advocating social change. The affect that defines this participation allows consumer-citizens to confirm their individual subjectivity and retain a sense of agency within these structures. Importantly, comic book writer-artist Phil Jimenez, who worked on Wonder Woman from 2000 to 2003, modeled this response himself during his tenure on the title. Jimenez confesses that his lifelong attraction to strong female superheroes was largely based on his gay identity: "My favorite characters
were almost always women...[such as] Wonder Woman...I believe it's because these women were strong, powerful characters and the objects of desire of men. As a gay teen, that's what I wanted to be" (Kim 2002, 66). Jimenez translated his affective fandom into an affective assertion of his own identity once he was a professional in the comic book industry: "I came out in the back of a comic I wrote and drew as a tribute to my first boyfriend, the man who hired me at DC Comics, Neal Pozner. I got the most incredible response—literally hundreds of pieces of mail from gay readers."

[2.3] This illustrates how fans' utopian desires directly inform their attraction to certain characters and confirms that both Wonder Woman's gender and her antipatriarchal origins make her available for these perpetual progressive readings. According to Cornel Sandvoss, "As fantasies are a simultaneous form of externalization of internal desires and internalization of external texts and images, there is no simple starting or end point of fantasies in a primal scene or in external objects, or in the fan's self" (2005, 79). Since fantasy is produced at the nexus of text and reader, it is not surprising that Mangels turned to Wonder Woman as a means of addressing the issue of domestic violence. Importantly, in doing so, Mangels attempted to duplicate Marston's addressing of both males and females regarding the transcendent power of matriarchal authority. The underlying nostalgia that informs Mangels's use of this character further conflates mass culture with individual subjectivity and experience, for Mangels is inspired not only by Marston's original vision for Wonder Woman but by his own affective childhood memories. In explaining why he decided to launch Wonder Woman Day, Mangels says, "I loved and identified with Wonder Woman since I was a child, both in the comics and the TV show. And I had a strong mother figure who enabled me to be very cognizant of the power of what women could be. I was born in 1966, so this was during the Equal Rights Amendment. This also relates to my gay identity. Wonder Woman represents love and equality for everyone" (pers. comm.). He goes on to note that he chose to use Wonder Woman to promote domestic violence awareness because it is an issue that "affects everyone, but especially women, children, and the disenfranchised," which, he says, allowed him to address the same kinds of social issues that Wonder Woman contends with. He wanted to raise money for domestic violence programs that provide services for both genders, in addition to shelters serving only women, again aligning himself with Marston's utopian vision of gender inclusiveness.

[2.4] Mangels's narrative of his own affective fan and family histories partially mirrors the background of Wonder Woman (who was also strongly influenced by her mother) and explicitly places them within a national historical context of progressive politics. That the Equal Rights Amendment failed to be ratified only confirms the ongoing need to promote a combination of progressive feminist politics and Marston's vision of matriarchal authority for all. Thus Mangels's own utopian expression of
Wonder Woman sees all of us, regardless of gender, race, class, and sexuality, as potential Amazons. Yet, while Mangels's utopian project for Wonder Woman Day is gender-inclusive, like the comic books, he cannot escape the gender politics of the everyday. So the broad perception of domestic violence, in line with Marston's conception of Wonder Woman, is that men are the problem. Like Marston, Mangels positions himself as an antinormative, masculine authorizing agent, mitigating the implicit critique of masculinity but still locating social problems primarily within the domain of patriarchy. Mangels also draws parallels between himself and Marston, noting that, like Marston, he lives a nonheteronormative lifestyles (Marston was in a polygamous relationship through most of his adult life). Through the mass culture fantasy text of Wonder Woman, nonnormative subjectivities of consumer and producer are conflated, suggesting that such synthesis is an ideal strategy for social change.

[2.5] Like Marston's, Mangels's utopian vision of American society can accommodate (and, in fact, requires the accommodation of) lifestyles outside of the heteronormative standard, and such lifestyles are authorized through loving submission to matriarchal authority. This is implicit in Mangels's reflections on his personal background and his attraction to Wonder Woman (performing a kind of submission to the authority of the matriarchal commodity icon). Significantly, his utopian social vision as mediated through Wonder Woman is reinforced by sentiments shared by primary contributors to the metatext, further aligning consumer and producer affect. Lynda Carter has said of the character she played on television, "She was never against men, she was just for women." Commenting on the fact that Wonder Woman was never portrayed as a victim, she observes, "I think that's part of the empowerment, and it's also the secret self, the archetype that appeals to gay and lesbian men and women, that there's a secret self that is waiting to be unveiled, that is powerful and won't ever be a victim... I'm such a champion of civil liberties for the gay and lesbian population, like I am for women and being able to choose... Anything that is trying to take away personal freedom is not a very good thing. It's not what the nation is about" (Carter 2009). Tellingly duplicating the condensation of character and actor so often performed by fans, Carter aligns her own political subjectivity with the Wonder Woman ethos, affirming a sense of self and national identity through the blurring of boundaries between fantasy and reality as mediated by the mass culture text. Mangels confirms Carter's observations regarding gay fans and Wonder Woman in an interview with comic book writer-artist and historian Trina Robbins: "The concept of a secret identity is significant to the appeal of super heroes to gay readers... It hides from the world the best attributes of the characters, the thing that makes them different from the norm, but also better" (Robbins 2008, 89). Robbins concludes that Wonder Woman is threatening to heterosexual men for the same reasons she is attractive to gay men: not only is she physically powerful, but she also chooses to use her powers in nonviolent ways. Thus Wonder Woman herself literally and figuratively contains the
aggression of patriarchal authority, embodying the utopian ideal that gay fans such as Mangels so strongly identify with. By extension, she also reveals the "secret identity" of America itself: the progressive, utopian possibilities hidden in its very origins.

[2.6] Mangels notes that his Mormon upbringing taught him that "if you take care of your community, it will take care of you" (pers. comm.), yet he turns to mass culture, not the church, to actualize this ethos. Implicit in this turn is the Mormon Church's stand against homosexuality, indicating that the ideal way by which Mangels could reconcile his Mormon principles regarding the community and his sexuality is to turn to Wonder Woman as a socially progressive ideal. This underscores the most radical aspect of Marston's conception of Wonder Woman, for if, as DiPaolo notes, "Wonder Woman fights for America because America fights for women's rights around the world" (2007, 155), then one is compelled to admit that the nation has failed to achieve this goal and that patriarchy has to be replaced with matriarchy in order to achieve it. At her essence, then, Wonder Woman is the progressive embodiment of America as a redeemer nation. The early issues of the comic book expressly conflated her World War II narratives with biographies of prominent women in a regular feature titled "Wonder Women of History." This celebration of important women throughout history offers a counternarrative to the prevailing historical record, which emphasizes the accomplishments of men to the near exclusion of women. Therefore, in enacting the role of redeemer nation, fighting for women's rights throughout the world, Wonder Woman also necessarily serves as a redemptive figure for America itself.

[2.7] In November 1977, a National Women's Conference (designed in part to celebrate International Women's Year) was attended by 20,000 delegates in Houston, who came together "to debate and pass resolutions on subjects as varied as day-care financing, abortion and the Equal Rights Amendment" (Stanley 2005). During the conference Texas congresswoman Barbara Jordan, the first Southern African-American woman elected to the House of Representatives, opined, "No one person has the right answer. Wonder Woman is not a delegate here" (ibid.). Her observation in this context confirms that a progressive social vision requires the ideal of Wonder Woman, even and especially when that ideal is not realized. The obverse to Jordan's statement is that an incipient Wonder Woman resides within all of the delegates in attendance, otherwise the very goals of the conference—to advance women's equality—would be impossible daydreams ("A thousand years in the future!"). The event's articulation of a public sphere is validated by the presence of congresswomen and its sponsorship by the federal government. In fact, the conference was the result of President Ford's 1974 executive order to create a National Commission on the Observance of International Women's Year "to promote equality between men and women" (Freeman n.d.). Significantly, the conference as originally proposed by Representative Bella Abzug was to be held during the nation's bicentennial year, timing designed not just to
highlight the compatibility of feminist causes with defining national values, but to insist that those values would remain a utopian dream until women were accorded equal status as citizens. Thus a kind of futurist nostalgia, in which the delegates to the conference referenced the Constitution as a defining text for the nation's future, underscores the mission of the conference and further indicates the resonance of Wonder Woman as a commodity figure suspended in a dynamic, yet static, middle ground between the past and the future.

[2.8] Perhaps the most significant strategy by which the seemingly impossible future ideal of Wonder Woman can be realized is a turn to the past and the affective power of nostalgia, a turn to history's wonder women in order to inspire women in the present. The superhero is a commodity signifier strongly linked to childhood, and while the visual and narrative excesses of the genre speak directly to the affective capacity of childhood play, the superhero also speaks specifically to the transcendent agency of imagining a new social self. This imagining is the most directly useful function of the superhero in adulthood. Feminist icon Gloria Steinem expresses this in her own reflections in the 1970s on her relationship to Wonder Woman and in her response to alterations to the character at that time. In 1968, in an effort to rejuvenate sales of the Wonder Woman comic book, DC Comics took the controversial step of stripping Wonder Woman of her traditional costume (replacing it with contemporary mod fashions) and removing her powers. Writer Denny O'Neil reflects, "I saw it as taking a woman and making her independent, and not dependent on super powers. I saw it as making her thoroughly human and then an achiever on top of that, which, according to my mind, was very much in keeping with the feminist agenda" (Daniels 2000, 126). Not surprisingly, feminists like Steinem strongly disagreed, seeing this corporate maneuver to boost sales as yet another example of masculine authority containing the perceived threat of female agency. In fact, since Marston's death, Wonder Woman had been increasingly altered to conform to a more traditional concept of femininity. Through the 1950s she became more romantically interested in Steve Trevor and even required his rescue on occasion (reversing the dynamic Marston had established between them). Also, during this period the feature "Wonder Women of History" was replaced by "Marriage à la Mode," documenting wedding customs around the world (ibid., 102).

[2.9] All of these containment strategies are directly addressed by the cover of the debut issue of Steinem's Ms. magazine (July 1972), which features a larger-than-life Wonder Woman in her original costume, striding down a street and swatting aside a fighter jet while an army tank fires on her (figure 2). Her stance against obvious symbols of patriarchal military power is reinforced by a billboard that proclaims "Peace and Justice in '72." Under the Ms. masthead a banner reads "Wonder Woman for President," which, linked to the billboard message, asserts (in contrast to the cover of
Wonder Woman no. 7) that the dream of a female president can and should be a reality in the present. The cover is a direct response to the deferral of matriarchal authority for a thousand years and a strong refutation of masculine modes of agency, as well as a direct reclamation of Marston’s Wonder Woman. Tellingly, in the same year that Ms. debuted, Ms. Books published an anthology of 1940s Wonder Woman stories that further exploited the nostalgic power of the original concept of Wonder Woman in order to reclaim the character from her then-current diminution at the hands of DC Comics. Steinem provides introductions for all of the stories in this volume and, like Mangels many years later, she asserts a proprietary claim on what she considers to be the character’s essence by turning to affective childhood memories. In the anthology Steinem recalls her "toe-wriggling pleasure" as a child reading about "a woman who was strong, beautiful, courageous, and a fighter for social justice." Expressing her own wishful thinking, Steinem promises the return in the contemporary comics of "the original Wonder Woman—my Wonder Woman" (Marston 1972, n.p.). This return to the past is presented as the necessary means to achieve social progress in the present as circulated through individual affect and memory. Steinem enacts the primary strategy of returning to a childhood subjectivity in which the child as consumer-citizen has the social agency to imagine a more progressive America.

Figure 2. A Wonder Woman for a new era.[View larger image.]

[2.10] As Sara Ahmed observes, a memory "can be the object of [one's] feelings in both senses: the feeling is shaped by contact with the memory, and also involves an
orientation towards what is remembered" (2004, 7). In the case of Steinem and Wonder Woman, the initial memory (the utopian point of origin of the consumer-citizen's political consciousness) and all subsequent contact with it are mediated by the auratic object, in this case Wonder Woman comics of the 1940s. Of course, that first contact is already disciplined according to ideology: we learn how to react to something before we ever see it. This discipline informs competing notions of American identity: both conservative and progressive readings of the nation are grounded in its imagined (fantasized) origin, which is then used either to valorize this past as an ideal to be returned to or to argue that the ideals of the nation have never been realized but can and should be.

[2.11] When a mass culture sign such as Wonder Woman is so strongly linked to a contested understanding of national ideals, the fluidity of her signification makes her accessible both as a commodity and as a progressive symbol. Thus the consumer-citizen has a "memory" of her before there is a contact event to remember. She is an imagined subject before we ever encounter her; thus the object is always working as part of an imaginary, never separate from it. As an idealized figure defined by visual and narrative excess, the superhero is particularly available for this mediation of internal fantasy. Fans like Steinem have an affective memory of Wonder Woman as a feminist icon, however qualified her feminist agency may be in post-Marston comics. This indicates the significant degree to which superhero texts rely on narratives of emotion. Typically in the genre the primary affective modes are a mixture of fear, anger, and awe at threats posed to society and the superheroic response that society necessarily produces. Marston's Wonder Woman is again unique in that her narratives rely much more on the more accessible affective power of love than on these masculine-oriented emotional tropes. The emotional valence of commodities confirms what Ahmed (2004, 13, 90) calls an object's "stickiness," which is "an effect of the histories of contact between bodies, objects, and signs." This can also be characterized as the superhero's resonance or aura, produced in the history of affective exchange between superhero texts and fans. Therefore, not only are Wonder Woman texts diegetically defined by the affect of love, but so too is the consumer-citizen's relationship to (and memories of) the commodified icon. When it is linked so intimately with childhood (as Steinem and Mangels testify), we see that the loving memory is directed equally at one's childhood self, indicating the utility of the mass culture object as the mediating device between internal subjectivity and exterior social agency, between the private self and public culture, between the past, the present, and the future. This mediation facilitates the creation of Wonder Woman Day as a public response to the private, hidden traumas of domestic violence.

[2.12] The affectivity of the superhero genre serves as a bridge between individual and collective, materializing and asserting emotional ties that bind. We "imagine" (per
Benedict Anderson's concept of the nation as an imagined community) how and why we respond affectively to a text as others do, or as we think they should. Consequently, Mangels's project depends upon a particular orientation to what is remembered that conflates mass culture, civic identity, and personal memory and is substantiated by the affirmation of shared affect in the moment of the event. Wonder Woman Day, then, is equally about domestic violence victims, Wonder Woman, and fans. Wonder Woman Day becomes the latest iteration of a progressive American dream, linking the individual consumer-citizen to the public sphere via the affective commodity object. This redeemer nation myth that so strongly defines American identity is significant, given that Mangels's devotion to the character originates during perhaps the most prominent period of mainstream feminist visibility, the early to mid-1970s. Thus his fan agency is born in an affective moment of political agency (the continued national push for ratification of the ERA in 1976) that also links the consumer-citizen to two other determinant events: the nation's bicentennial and the debut of the Wonder Woman television show. The symbolic rebirth of the nation on its birthday and of Wonder Woman in this fresh television iteration informs the symbolic rebirth and transformation of Mangels into a politically conscious consumer-citizen. As with the unrealized progressive vision of the Equal Rights Amendment, and consistent with the necessarily open textual nature of Wonder Woman as a mass commodity, Mangels must make his own subjectivity available for renegotiation and transformation.

3. Wonder Woman to the rescue

[3.1] Comics speak, without qualm or sophistication, to the innermost ears of the wishful self.

—William Marston (Daniels 2000, 11)

[3.2] *Sensation Comics* no. 15 (March 1943) featured a public service announcement about infantile paralysis from the March of Dimes that was composed as a comic book story. In the one-page narrative, Queen Hyppolyta observes Wonder Woman "in the man ruled world" carrying a sick child to a hospital, where the little girl is placed in an iron lung. Wonder Woman explains to her mother that "Americans celebrate their president's birthday by giving parties to raise money for this tremendous work!" Hyppolyta responds, "That's wonderful! You must help!" Later Wonder Woman receives an urgent message on her "mental radio" from Steve Trevor: "Calling Wonder Woman! My desk is swamped with letters asking for your picture! Do your fans think I'm a photographer? You answer them!" Wonder Woman exclaims, "Mother, an idea! I'll give my picture to every child who sends me a dime for the president's birthday fund!" The PSA offers "every boy and girl in America" an "autographed" picture of
Wonder Woman when they send in a dime that will be donated to the March of Dimes. This PSA articulates and directs the nexus of consumerism, fan affect, and compassionate citizenship through the figure of Wonder Woman. Authorized by her mother and inspired by consumer demand, Wonder Woman intertwines the already conflated events of the president's birthday and the charity drive with her own commodity status. The result is a "personalized" commodity (Wonder Woman's ostensible autograph, an externalization of internal fantasy) that confirms the fan's affective attachment to Wonder Woman and compassionate agency as an American.

[3.3] This very reflexive condensation of consumer-citizen subjectivity via Wonder Woman reflects a trend to reconcile the responsibilities of citizenship with the role of consumer in this relatively new era of mass culture. As Lizabeth Cohen observes, by the late 1930s it was generally held by manufacturers, economists, and the government that the buying power of consumers would not only bring the US out of the Depression but also preserve American democracy (2003, 20). Thus the act of purchasing a Wonder Woman comic would reflect and confirm the rhetorical value of the superheroine as a defender of American values (which this process increasingly defines according to free-market capitalism and consumerism). The New Deal desire to boost consumer demand was equated with "the enhancement of American democracy and equality" (55), and this intersection of consumer and citizen agency was only amplified with the advent of World War II. According to Cohen, "To ensure the speedy arrival of...[a] postwar utopia of abundance, patriotic citizens were urged to save today (preferably through war bonds) so that they might become purchaser consumers tomorrow" (70). Again, citizen-consumer subjectivity coalesces via the figure of the superhero and in the consumption of superhero comic books, which frequently featured characters urging readers to buy war bonds. In Wonder Woman no. 2 (fall 1942), for example, Wonder Woman exhorts a crowd to "buy war bonds and help America banish war forever!" Civic duty is conflated with Wonder Woman's nonviolent rejection of all war, not simply an embrace of victory in the present one, thereby directly refuting the strategies of patriarchy by which recurring war coheres the nation-state. The low-cost purchase of superhero comic books allowed consumers to buy into the fantasy of American exceptionalism and triumphalism over the Axis, the Depression, and the aggressive nature of masculine politics. Wonder Woman thus serves as an indication of the utopian affect that is to follow victory over these elements.

[3.4] While postwar consumption attempted to fulfill "personal desire and civic obligation" (Cohen 2003, 119), the inherent tension between these two positions became progressively apparent. Wartime hegemonic values were increasingly challenged by a rising tide of cultural pluralism that was facilitated by the very machinations of mass culture that had done so much to promote this hegemony. Thus,
as Cohen notes, "It was no accident that the rise of market segmentation corresponded to the historical era of the 1960s and 1970s...where people's affiliation with a particular community defined their cultural consciousness and motivated their collective political action" (308). As is evident on the cover of Ms. no. 1 and in DC's nonsuperheroic Wonder Woman, the identity politics of this period informed the reception of Wonder Woman from the late 1960s through the run of the television show (which aired from 1975 to 1979). From these two examples we can see how commodity culture could be appropriated for overt political agency and that such agency was resisted by the corporate gatekeepers of hegemonic values. The irony here is that the use of Wonder Woman as a feminist icon is thoroughly consistent with Marston's conception of the character, while DC Comics' radical revision of her in 1968 contradicts it.

[3.5] By 1973 DC had brought Wonder Woman somewhat closer to her origins, returning her powers and costume. Following Denny O'Neil's problematic claim that taking away Wonder Woman's powers made her a more powerful feminist icon, her final nonsuperpowered appearance, in issue no. 203 (Nov.–Dec. 1972), bore the cover blurb "Women's Lib Issue," suggesting that, according to DC, feminism and superheroines could not coexist. In 1981, under the guidance of publisher Jenette Kahn (note 1) and with the support of Steinem, DC acknowledged the character's fortieth anniversary by establishing a Wonder Woman Foundation, "dedicated to advancing the principles of equality for women in American society" (Gloria Steinem Papers). Kahn said that the awards granted by the foundation "are unique. They are the only financial awards given to women over forty, the only awards that honor inner growth and richness of character" (Daniels 2000, 151). The creation of this foundation was also integrated into the narrative of Wonder Woman no. 288 (February 1982), where it served as Wonder Woman's motivation for changing her costume (yet again), replacing the gold eagle emblem on her chest with a gold double W (that still resembled an eagle, emphasizing the intimate relationship between commodity and national iconicity). The foundation is thus conceived of as both a variation in the commodity icon and a means of civic engagement, both for Wonder Woman in her diegesis and for fans who are affectively incorporated into the project of the real-life foundation. Again, civic engagement (for the first time aligning fan and Wonder Woman with an expressly feminist cause) overlaps with mass culture production and consumption.

[3.6] While the Wonder Woman Foundation no longer exists in either the comic books or reality, it remains the defining utopian ethos behind the revised costume that is still used today, confirming the power of externalized fantasy. In Wonder Woman no. 5 (May 2007), Wonder Woman assists a shelter for domestic violence victims that was founded by women inspired by her to take control of their lives. The inherent
instability of Wonder Woman, crystallized by her costume changes and mutable relationship to Marston’s concept, indicates not only her function as a commodity that is constantly altered to renew market interest, but her availability for fan appropriation for social critique. The tension between producers and consumers informs Paolo Virno’s concept of the multitude as a political designation separate from state authority. Virno presents the concept of the multitude in response to the concept of "the people," a notion of a national collective cohered by a homogenizing affiliation with the state. Conversely, according to Virno, the multitude "signifies plurality—literally; being many—as a lasting form of social and political existence, as opposed to the cohesive unity of the people. Thus, the multitude consists of a network of individuals; the many are a singularity" (2004, 76). The concept of the multitude calls for the deconstruction of the binaries of public and private and of the collective and the individual that the state is invested in. Turning to Marx, Virno goes on to assert that because it is "difficult to separate public experience from so-called private experience...even the two categories of citizen and of producer fail us" (24). Because mass culture has routinely conflated the roles of citizen and consumer, the division between consumer and producer is equally untenable. Since consumption cannot be articulated effectively as an exclusively private experience, the space in which it occurs or is recirculated is of primary importance. This allows us to understand more completely the significance of holding an event such as Wonder Woman Day at a comic book store, for, as Virno argues, the "'publicly organized space'...mobilizes political attitudes" (63).

[3.7] By choosing to hold Wonder Woman Day at Excalibur Comics, Mangels confirms the retail site as a primary locus of socialization and fantasy. He chose this particular store because it is co-owned by a woman (Debbie Fagnant, a Wonder Woman fan herself) and because, according to Mangels, the event "meant something to the people involved" (pers. comm.). Public affect as a mode of civic engagement is authorized by this structuring context of the comic book store charity event. Wonder Woman Day therefore validates the call in the 1940s and 1950s for a condensation of consumer and citizen identities. Wonder Woman Day becomes an explicitly progressive expression of this condensation, indicating that mass culture and progressivism are compatible when the intersection between production and consumption cultures is negotiated by the utopian expressions of fans. By choosing a retail space as the site for a charity event, and by using a comic art auction as the primary means of raising money, Mangels reifies the progressive redeemer spirit of Wonder Woman, realizing the potential for social agency that is embedded in fandom, a group that has been stereotyped as lacking such agency.

[3.8] This agency is publicly performed as transformation, making visible the secret "super" identity of the self, the comic book store, and the nation. Just as Wonder
Woman assumes the everyday guise of Diana Prince but reveals her true identity at times of crisis, fans confirm their authentic super-citizen selves through their participation in Wonder Woman Day. Diana Prince's transformation into Wonder Woman is a visual embodiment of the moral values that already define the subjectivity of the consumer-citizen. Thus it is not coincidental that cosplay is a central ingredient of Wonder Woman Day. The transformation of the store and the self as a means of affirming the values represented by Wonder Woman reflects Virno's belief that a moral self is central to the political subject's identity. According to Virno, the ultimate place of refuge is "the moral 'I,' since it is...there that one finds something of the non-contingent, or of the realm above the mundane" (2004, 31). Thus, for a day, consumer-citizens are given the opportunity both to retreat symbolically into the discrete public space of the comic book store/charity event and to actualize social agency for the improvement of society. In the same manner that Superman retreats to his Fortress of Solitude and Batman to the Batcave, fans go to Excalibur Comics on this day to reaffirm the values that equally guide their consumption and their citizenship by embedding themselves in a space defined by fantasy and its separation from the everyday. The result is a twofold affirmation of a utopian vision for both society and oneself, for, as Virno says, "The feeling of the sublime...consists of taking the relief I feel for...refuge and transforming it into a search for the unconditional security which only the moral 'I' can guarantee" (ibid.). Tellingly, this process duplicates the dynamic that is at play within the domestic violence shelters the event was designed to support, further aligning both domestic violence victims and their supporters as citizens.

[3.9] Through the politicized physical site of commodity and affect exchange (the Excalibur Comics shop), fans assert the moral I as an extension of the authorizing figure of Wonder Woman, confirming the inherent meaning of both self and commodity figure, as well as the desired meaning of the nation. The moral I is realized by transcending the adult-child binary that typifies superhero fandom, an affirmation of both the morality and play that ideally define a child's subjective relationship to superhero texts (figure 3). The moral condensation of consumerism and state authority (itself a kind of utopian realization) is further confirmed by the fact that, beginning in 2007, Portland mayor Sam Adams officially proclaimed the day of every one of Mangel's events to be Wonder Woman Day for the city. In 2010 he declared, "The City of Portland recognizes that all residents of the State of Oregon should be able to embrace true equality for everyone, truthfulness, strength, safety, dignity, and peace" (http://www.womenofwonderday.com/WWDay5/WWDay5.html). This state project is consistent with the aims of the organizations that Wonder Woman Day supports. For Wonder Woman Day 4 in 2009, Amy Williams, director of development for the domestic violence agency Raphael House of Portland, issued this statement: "One of the most amazing things about Wonder Woman is the way that her appeal and
message cross the traditional lines of generation, gender, race and class. Our vision at Raphael House is to engage this entire community in non-violent living, and being part of this event is an annual step toward realizing that vision (http://prismcomics.org/display.php?id=1804). Thus we see that the shelter, the city, and the comic book store are extensions of the home as the site of both play and moral education, with Wonder Woman and fan subjectivity the governing forces at the heart of this intersection.

**Figure 3. Reifying utopia, Wonder Woman Day 2008.**[View larger image.]

[3.10] As Sandvoss confirms, "Fandom best compares to the emotional significance of the places we have grown to call 'home,' to the form of physical, emotional and ideological space that is best described as *Heimat*" (2005, 64). On Wonder Woman Day, Excalibur Comics emphasizes its capacity as *Heimat*, a morally safe space in which the marginalized qualities of comic book fandom are reconceived as vanguard qualities; the margin that comic book superhero fans occupy is at the forefront of society, not the sidelines. Therefore, if *Heimat* is "an extension of one's self, and the self [is] a reflection of place and community" (65), then Wonder Woman Day not only asserts an ideal utopian self for the fan, but also defines that self as a critique of social failures. Thus, the remediation of the comic book store as a charity gathering is a reconfiguration of Wonder Woman's feminist utopian home, Paradise Island. In the "simultaneously projective and introjective relationship between fan and object" (81)—in dressing as a superhero or purchasing original Wonder Woman art donated for Wonder Woman Day—fans confirm their latent superheroic qualities and productively attach themselves to "dominant social, cultural, economic and technological systems" (82). Such fan activities thus become modes of mastery and control over mass culture, society, and self simultaneously.

[3.11] The basis for this exchange between consumer-citizens and the commodity icon is compassion, which, according to Lauren Berlant, "implies a social relation between spectators and sufferers" and the obligation "on the spectator to become an ameliorative agent" (2004, 1). Berlant recognizes the inherent critical qualities of
compassion, noting that a "national dispute about compassion is as old as the United States and has been organized mainly by the gap between its democratic promise and its historic class hierarchies, racial and sexual penalties, and handling of immigrant populations" (ibid). This gap is what motivates Mangels's desire to make Wonder Woman Day a family-friendly event and to work for a cause that touches victims of both genders and of all races, classes, and sexual orientations. During the Cold War, the rise of group identity politics was regarded as a direct threat to traditional concepts of liberty that saw it as an affirmation of individualism and not, paradoxically, collectivism. The tension between individualism and the nation is mediated by the power of mass consumerism as a means of expressing individual rights and identity within a broader collective framework defined by the shared values of capitalist democracy, values that are necessarily opaquely defined. Importantly, it is affect that both sustains and glosses over the tension between these ideological positions. The exercise of rights is an affective demonstration; we "know" how valuable our rights are (what they affectively "mean") according to how strongly we feel about them. The essential difference between the conservative and progressive ends of this demonstration is the difference between the masculine-inflected affect that so commonly defines the superhero genre (the reactionary affects of fear, anger, and awe) and the feminine-inflected affect of love that Wonder Woman interjects into this milieu.

[3.12] The difference between these two affects is, in other words, the difference between the power of love and the power of aggression. According to Ahmed, "Through love, an ideal self is produced as a self that belongs to a community; the ideal is a proximate 'we'" (2004, 106). We see this love at work in the diegesis Marston created for Wonder Woman: the utopian space of Paradise Island is not simply a refuge from the world of men but an affirmation of the moral I, bonding Amazons according to the affect of love. We further see it in fan devotion to Wonder Woman or a particular artist, so that the love for an original sketch that a fan might bid on on Wonder Woman Day becomes, by extension, an expression of love for people (domestic violence victims, other fans) and spaces (the comic book shop, the city, the nation). As Ahmed says, to love an object is to love oneself, and "such a love is about making future generations in the image I have of myself and the loved other... which can be bestowed on future generations" (129). When the object being loved is Wonder Woman, the inherent pluralism of America is celebrated. As Ahmed points out, from the perspective of multiculturalism, "difference is now what we have in common... you must like us—and be like us—by valuing or even loving differences" (138). Central to this love are the liberating capacities of Wonder Woman as a fantasy expression of a utopian American society defined by submission to loving authority. As Mangels says, "Superheroes can inspire, can raise consciousness, and can offer hope. Comic book fans can change the world" (pers. comm.).
4. Notes

1. Kahn served variously as publisher, president, and editor in chief of the company from 1976 to 2002, the first woman to occupy any of these roles for a major comic book publisher.

5. Works cited


Praxis

Fan activism, cybervigilantism, and Othering mechanisms in K-pop fandom

Sun Jung

National University of Singapore, Singapore

[0.1] Abstract—Korean popular music (K-pop) fandom may serve as a case study to identify both cynical and utopian views of fans’ participatory Net activism by addressing three key aspects: fan activism, cybervigilantism, and Othering mechanisms. Fancom (fan company) in the K-pop scene refers to the way fans systematically manage their own stars. These notions of assertive fancom practices address how fans actively participate in sociocultural events such as fund raising, donating to charity, and volunteering in emergency situations. This management may take another turn, however: antifandom surrounds K-pop star Tablo, signifying cybervigilantism of sinsang teolgi (personal information theft), a term referring to the online activities of a group of netizens who seek to expose the personal details of perceived wrongdoers by publishing them online as a form of punishment. The Tablo case revitalized public concern over privacy and the security of personal information in the digital era. Finally, Othering mechanisms in participatory online K-pop fandom display a strong sense of nationalism and even racism, as demonstrated by responses to anti-Korean rhetoric posted on the MySpace page of K-pop idol Jae-Beom. This highlights the relationship between participatory Net activism and nationalistic sentiment active within K-pop fandom. Some K-pop fan practices may have negative connotations, but by engaging with specific civic issues and social events, participatory fan practices encourage people to interact, discuss, and challenge conventional discourses, which may lead to new forms of social action.

[0.2] Keywords—Antifandom; Fancom; Jae-Beom; JYJ; Korean popular culture; Tablo; TVXQ


1. Introduction

[1.1] On June 10 and 11, 2011, SM Town Live in Paris was held at the Le Zénith de Paris concert hall in France. Five Korean popular music, or K-pop, bands from the SM Entertainment stable—TVXQ, SNSD, Super Junior, f(x), and SHINee—held their first concert in a European city and attracted more than 14,000 fans from across Europe. Initially, SM scheduled only one show on June 10. When the tickets to the first concert sold out in 15 minutes, hundreds of French fans performed a flash mob dance outside the Louvre Museum in protest, and SM soon announced a second concert. New media technologies drove fan-based Net activism via fan pages on Facebook and K-pop channels on YouTube, mobilizing fellow fans and promoting the event. The success of the French fans' protest for the SM Town Live in Paris concerts indicates the power of participatory online fandom in the K-pop realm. This example also demonstrates how new media technologies enable efficient
communications within the Net-activist movements of fans, which can influence industry decision making. As such, participatory fan activism is a visible aspect of K-pop.

[1.2] In the realm of K-pop, Net activism is also evident from the ways in which the fan groups participate in sociocultural events such as fund-raising, donating to charity, volunteering in emergency situations (such as the Tae-an oil spill in 2007 and the Indonesian tsunami in 2004), and protesting media reform laws and media entertainment policies to protect the rights of young artists. This is not a phenomenon specific to K-pop alone, as demonstrated by the fan activism surrounding Western artists such as Lady Gaga and her relationship to gay rights, and U2's role in antipoverty campaigns. However, in the case of K-pop fan activism, the fans, not the stars, initiate fund-raising and charity events; fans donate the money raised under the name of their chosen stars. Fans practice such activities not only for local charities, but also as a way of promoting their stars. Each K-pop fan group thus functions more like an informal promotion company (note 1). Although there are certainly Western instances of music fandom where a similar bottom-up fan activism may be identified (for example, Tori Amos's fan community often mobilizes around issues surrounding sexual violence), in K-pop, this is the norm rather than the exception. K-pop fandom offers an example that uniquely emphasizes the fan groups' initiatives, as well as their active and collective involvement in online activities, the result of the nation's high Internet usage.

[1.3] According to Cisco's annual Visual Networking Index, published on June 1, 2011, in terms of Internet traffic, South Korea consumes 33 gigabytes per month per person, which is three times higher than France (11 gigabytes), which is in second place (Economist 2011). Extremely high rates of Web user participation are the driving force behind Net activism within K-pop fandom. In the case of idol group fandom, the fan base is assertive and devoted; further, it functions as a collective whole, and via these coordinated movements, it supports the current popularity of K-pop in Korea and beyond. Idol music and stars are the most crucial elements of current K-pop, and idol fandom is contradictorily immersed in the chosen stars. Some fans demonstrate hostile attitudes to any deviation from their vision of their favorite stars; they are dedicated solely to "protecting their stars themselves no matter what" (Kim 2011b). Cultural critic Kim Jak-Ga contends that the power structure of idol fandom can be as authoritarian as that of political groups, and that fan community leaders are privileged, wielding certain special powers, such as the ability to communicate with their chosen idol directly (2011b). On the basis of the accumulated rules and customs within a strict power structure, K-pop fans can collectively act in their star's interests. Fans now hold enormous potential to influence the decision-making processes within the entertainment industries, and digital convergence technology explicitly drives this participatory fandom.

[1.4] This emerging phenomenon is best supported by Henry Jenkins's notion of fan activism in the era of digital convergence (1992, 2006). Avid fans often participate in various fan-related activities, contributing to help to keep programs on the air, films at the box office, and celebrities in the news. More active fans have even had an impact on the outcome of television series and film because ultimately they have power as a consumer force (Jenkins 1992). Fans have become more aware of what goes into the decision-making process in cultural productions such as soap operas, and the Internet has greatly affected the way fans
feedback has been managed within soaps (Scardaville 2005, 884). Within the Web 2.0 environment, fan activism is becoming a key method of expressing grievances within popular culture fandom (Earl and Kimport 2009, 220), and fans believe that speaking as a group amplifies their voices (Scardaville 2005, 889).

[1.5] It is important to note, however, that participatory fan activism does not always necessarily have a positive impact. Many complex aspects of fans' collective Net activism are present, as exemplified by online K-pop fandom. Their contradictory participatory activities can influence decision-making processes and create multiple narratives. K-pop fandom represents shifts in Web-based communication paradigms in the global cultural industry regime. Three aspects of participatory K-pop fandom are found online: fan activism, cybervigilantism, and Othering mechanisms.

2. Fancom: Fan activism

[2.1] Online fandom often represents a bottom-up participatory culture, enabling the transition to a more fluid, affective, and democratic media industry environment. Yet it also shows the ways in which fans are not always open-minded about knowledge that the Internet provides about their beloved cult object. As an anonymous mob armored in sometimes willful ignorance, they can be as oppressive as corporate media. Some critics and commentators have coined the term *fancom* to describe this new form of assertive bottom-up fan activity in the K-pop realm. The term, a shortened version of "fan company" (Im 2007; Kim 2010), demonstrates how fans now consider their stars to be subjects whom they keenly manage and systematically guide, which is different from the preexisting notion of fandom that emphasizes the ways in which fans adore and worship their stars. It is now a common practice for fan groups to circulate press releases about their star's recent activities, such as a new album release or movie launch.

[2.2] Fans also often conduct charity activities by using their star's name. A Japanese fan community for U-Know Yunho (a member of the idol boy band TVXQ) donated ₩10 million (US$8,700) under his name to an orphanage in Kwangju, Korea. When U-Know Yunho took a role in the musical *Goong*, his fan groups from various countries also sent rice sack (known as *Dreame*, literally "dream rice") mock-ups to congratulate him on his musical theater debut instead of sending standing wreaths (figure 1). Later, 3.15 tons of rice were sent to various welfare facilities in the country in his name (Choi 2010). It is now a common practice among K-pop fans to send *Dreame* mock-ups to show their support for their stars rather than sending flowers. This activity has become a representative form of fan activism in K-pop fandom; once largely driven by consumer desires, fan culture has become socially aware. Many types of fandom now concentrate on public welfare and social issues in Korea. These newly emerging fancom practices are driven by concerns and needs directly linked to the social welfare realm, and they reflect how some fandom-led campaigns transform Internet cultures, making attempts to bring netiquette and a broader social civility to Internet culture at least partly successful. The fast-growing online fan community environment and its connectedness enhance such fan activism.
Some fan communities are more efficient and well connected than others in regard to practicing fancom activities. For instance, in 2007, K-pop singer and actor Rain's multinational fandom produced a promotional poster for his film, *I'm a Cyborg, but That's OK.* Fans flew to the Berlin International Film Festival, where Rain was a guest, and distributed the posters to the international media as well as to general audiences in Berlin (Im 2007). The dynamic collaboration system behind such promotion is established among fans with professional careers, such as Web designers and magazine editors. Many of these belong to the 30-plus age bracket (often called "aunty [imo] fans"), who are able to shoulder the financial burdens (Im 2007; Kim 2011c). Another driving force is advanced new media technologies, which allow fans to be both consumers and producers, thus fulfilling Alvin Toffler's (1980) prediction about the rise of prosumers and Henry Jenkins's (2006) notion of convergence culture. Rain's international fandoms also often organize charity events. For example, on May 6, 2008, Rain's Singapore fan club held a charity gala premiere of *Speed Racer,* his Hollywood debut film. The fans raised and donated US$2,500 to the Singapore Disability Sports Council in Rain's name, demonstrating fan collective sociocultural awareness.

Participatory fan activism is also visible in the ways in which fans have intervened with the business decisions of their stars' management companies, even influencing the shift of the media environment. The most notable example is the way in which TVXQ fans collectively and professionally reacted to the group's disbandment. On July 31, 2009, three members of TVXQ—Hero Jaejoong, Micky Yoochun, and Xiah Junsu—filed a lawsuit against SM Entertainment, their management company since their debut in 2004 (note 2). The three had applied for provisional disposition of their 13-year contract with SM, saying it was too long and unfair, to which the court ruled in partial favor, stating that SM could not interfere with their individual activities. This led to an immediate halt of their activities as a five-man band in Korea, and a halt a few months later in Japan. The three then formed a new group called JYJ. After giving a series of sold-out concerts in Japan (including a Tokyo Dome concert in June 2010), JYJ made their US debut, produced by prominent US musicians Kanye West and Timbaland. Meanwhile, SM countersued the three singers in mid-April 2010 in a lawsuit worth US$2.2 million in damages for the agency and for the two remaining members (U-Know Yunho and Max Changmin). About 2 years later, the now two-man TVXQ released their new
album Why? (Keep Your Head Down)—a move that implied the official split of TVXQ. Crucially, it was not only TVXQ who split up, but also their fans, who were now divided as well. As outraged fans of both TVXQ and JYJ mobilized, they actively participated in simultaneously protecting and promoting their preferred stars, driven by the rivalry between them.

[2.5] The participatory fan practices of these two fan communities clearly demonstrate how fan activism stimulates the both positive and negative effects of creating balanced Web-based communications in the cultural industry regime. The key function of TVXQ fandom is to maintain the existing fandom by supporting the remaining two members and acknowledging this reformed two-man band as the complete TVXQ. In doing so, the priority has been to protect the two remaining members from rumors about their supposed betrayal of the other three members, as well as from suggestions that they received preferential treatment by SM for doing so. TVXQ fans have argued that the real reason for the split was the greed of the three members who left the band: "JYJ attempted to exploit the fame of TVXQ to promote a questionable-quality cosmetics company which JYJ themselves had invested in" (see http://blog.naver.com/qlajdhqk and http://blog.naver.com/earth7769). Similar quotations appear across numerous Web sites, including DC Inside and Daum. Through in-depth analysis of various documents such as reviews of court hearings and interview clips of the members in the past, TVXQ fandom has tried to prove how JYJ left the band because SM did not authorize a deal they had made with a cosmetics company. Their collective fan activism is evident from the fan blogs and Web community forums, which were filled with archival databases in which fans created massive catalogs of multimedia audiovisual files to document the case. Fans also analyzed court judgments, and they even created a Web dictionary to explain newly coined terms related to the case. The fans' participatory analysis has added an extra dimension to the case.

[2.6] JYJ fandom demonstrates the power of fan activism more explicitly. Emphasizing the significance of "emotional attachments and passions" of fans in fan cultures, Jason Sperb highlights how these attachments become especially crucial "when dealing with politically charged texts" (2010, 29). Because the JYJ fans understand the case through the political framework of unbalanced conflicts between a gigantic media conglomerate and powerless artists, their attachments to and passions for JYJ have become even stronger. According to Earl and Kimport (2009), as fans become more active and outspoken, fan protests are becoming an increasingly common way to express grievances, leading fans to ardently adopt protest tactics when they have concerns that they want to express. By examining how the four institutionalized tactical forms—petitions, boycotts, letter writing, and e-mail campaigns—are used in the realm of fan activism, they argue that these political protest methods cross the boundaries of traditional political discourses and now allow pop culture fans to make claims and to affect decision-making processes (Earl and Kimport 2009). JYJ fandom also used these institutionalized protest methods by, for example, boycotting SM products. JYJ fans engage in three distinctive strategies of activism: online petitions, a bus advertising campaign, and Internet TV.
As soon as the JYJ members filed the lawsuit, many JYJ fandoms, both inside and outside Korea, formed a group called People Who Are Against SM's Unlawful Contract. The group circulated a petition online that addressed how the 13-year contract was unfair and against human rights laws—an argument that other TVXQ fan groups had not adopted. They submitted a petition containing signatures of over 121,000 fans both on- and off-line to various governmental and nongovernmental bodies, including the Seoul Central District Court, the Fair Trade Commission, the National Human Rights Commission, and the Korea Consumer Agency (Kim 2009a, 2009b, 2009c). The petition reignited the ongoing debate over so-called slave contracts in the K-pop industry, which drew huge media attention to the conflict; most media outlets used the term "slave contract" in their headlines (Jeon 2010; Khan 2010; Park 2009; Segye 2009; SBS News 2010; MBC News 2010; VOP 2010). When the Seoul central district court ruled in favor of JYJ on October 27, 2009, with the partial acceptance of the exclusive contract suspension request submitted by the trio, the progressive online newspaper Oh My News reported, "It is a victory for fandom" (Kim 2009c). From the beginning of the lawsuit, SM stressed that public focus on slave contracts or human rights was not the issue; instead, the case centered on a breach of confidence due to JYJ's financial involvement with the cosmetics business. TVXQ fandom expressed disappointment, particularly regarding progressive media reports that portrayed the trio as representatives of the working class. These fans argued that the claims were in fact absurd, as JYJ left TVXQ for no other reason than greed, even though they had already earned a tremendous amount of money. In any case, the JYJ petition has become a significant milestone in the K-pop history as many K-pop entertainment companies, including SM, as a result of the court order, had to modify their exclusive contracts, including long-term contract periods, the penalties for breach of contract, and unilateral decisions on schedules.

Another progressive media outlet, Sisain, reported, "JYJ have struggled since leaving SM Entertainment, as the latter wields enormous power within the industry," questioning whether SM blocked the trio's TV appearances (Ko 2011). Likewise, JYJ fandom accused SM of blocking the trio's ability to pursue their careers in both Korea and Japan, and such beliefs inspired them to wield their collective power. They organized direct mailings to mainstream broadcasting companies, and they circulated countless online petitions to save JYJ. A leading progressive newspaper, the Hankyoreh, reported this as "aunty fans' counterattack against the cruel entertainment authority" (Kim 2011c). In order to promote their stars by themselves, fans planned and carried out a bus advertising campaign from January 27 to February 26, 2011. A total of 120 buses carried a supportive message for JYJ that read, "We Support Your Youth" (figure 2). Over 11 days (January 14–24, 2011) of fund-raising, 9,817 fans collected more than ₩158 million (US$141,000), including international donations. It has been reported that the financially stable aunty fandom at its center enabled such a costly campaign (Kim 2011b). The JYJ bus project, which was followed by a second advertisement campaign in the Seoul subway stations from March 7 to April 6, 2011, opened up the new era of K-pop fancom where fan activism became more assertive, more efficient, and larger in scale.
This fan activism reached its apex with the launch of an Internet broadcasting service wholly dedicated to JYJ. On March 4, 2011, JYJ fans launched the Internet TV site ilovejyj.com (http://ilovejyj.com) to promote JYJ's releases and activities. The site moderators first started an online café (that is, an Internet forum) at Naver, an influential portal Web site in Korea that launched its café service in 2003. There they translated JYJ news into Japanese, Chinese, and English, and uploaded and shared JYJ videos and other media content. They soon launched the first fan-operated Internet broadcasting service in the Korean media industry, which demonstrates how grassroots media and fandom can now wield power as great as that of the mainstream corporate media. Upon its launch, many progressive media outlets, including Sisain and the Hankyoreh, highlighted how fandom had created a direct communication channel between artists and audiences by way of fighting against the so-called tyranny of the corporate power. The second day after its launch, ilovejyj.com broadcast a video clip of many celebrities sending their congratulations. Ironically, this included the right-wing politician Jeon Yeo-Ok, known for her strong stance against social minorities such as women, members of the working class, and those with limited educational backgrounds. Many fans criticized the inclusion of this controversial political figure, and the moderators of the Web site soon posted an apology on their site and then stopped the entire service.

This incident reignited debates surrounding the progressive media's discussion of JYJ's slave contract lawsuit case, in which they created a distinct dichotomy between JYJ as poor artists and SM as a tyrannical entertainment corporation. In an interview with the Hankyoreh, the leader of JYJ Internet TV stated, "This JYJ case reminded me of the 1980s, the era when we were fighting for democracy." She then added that the trio helped her to reconnect to the spirit of seeking freedom, justice, and human rights (quoted in Kim 2011c). Similar articles suggest that vigorous fan activism has, with the help of progressive media outlets, assisted in the creation of JYJ's new image as democratic activists who supposedly represent a neglected and marginalized group. After Jeon's interview aired online, however, Web users on various online forums reinvigorated discussions about the absurdity of promoting JYJ through the politically powerful images of progressive democratic activists (note 3). Some Internet users have suggested that the power of obsessive fandom fabricated false activist identities around JYJ, resulting in a bizarre scenario where fandom itself rerepresented JYJ as a marginalized group. To highlight this point, one user posted two
paradoxical news articles, one containing an interview with a fan saying, "To help JYJ who are suffering from the financial struggle, I often go to Yoochun's mother's ice cream shop to give them some business" (Kim 2011b), and the other describing how Yoochun bought his brother a US$120,000 BMW to congratulate him on his acting debut (Kim 2011a).

[2.11] The continuing lawsuit between SM and JYJ is mirrored by their fans' participatory Net activism, which promotes and protects their stars (both TVXQ and JYJ), and which is becoming increasingly dynamic and innovative. The assertive Net activism of JYJ fandom began a new era of participatory fan culture in Korea and elsewhere. Nevertheless, it also shows an unavoidable limit: blind fan activism, which often focuses on the ostensible phenomenon only, can create a mythical binary of the good "us" and the evil "them" while ignoring the ambiguity that could be derived from the insertion of political and capitalist variables. An important question thus arises: is JYJ fan activism really revolutionary bottom-up Net activism, or is this carefully designed and manipulated top-down training? (note 4).

The rivalry between TVXQ and JYJ fan communities and their interactive fan activism represent the ways that fans' Net activist practices can create multidimensional Web-based communications, which can be contradictory. Yet such interactions can eventually allow heterogeneous perspectives in the realm of Korean popular culture.

3. Sinsang teolgi: Cybervigilantism

[3.1] Fan culture has been criticized for what some media culture critics deem to be the Internet's tendency to encourage obsessive behavior, even paranoia. Such negative connotations of Net activism often manifest through Web users' collective vigilantism. One of the most notable examples is the notorious Ok Taec-Yeon blood letter case. In November 2009, a teenager posted an image of a love letter that she had written in her menstrual blood to a member of idol boy band 2PM on DC Inside. The note reads, "Ok Taec-Yeon, you can't live without me" (Son 2009) (note 5). When netizens expressed doubt about the veracity of her extreme behavior, the girl uploaded another photo as proof: a bloody pair of panties. After the posts appeared, Korea's netizen detectives rushed to expose the identity of this fan. Within a matter of hours, angry Internet users (exhibiting a collective will to discipline this fan's transgressive expression of desire) had located her home page on the social networking site Cyworld, which they publicized, inviting others to add vicious comments. The fan offered a hasty apology, particularly to fellow 2PM fans and the pop idol himself, and stated that she had not meant to garner such controversy: she was not a stalker but rather a self-confessed obsessive fan. Oktaekyeon saengri hyeolseo (Ok Taec-Yeon menstrual blood love letter) became the most searched term for a few days on Naver, a Korean portal Web site. As the deluge of hateful remarks continued, the fan threatened her attackers with a lawsuit.

[3.2] There were several blood-related copycat cases in the following months, and each time, fellow fans and netizens discovered and publicized the posters' personal information online. By using simple clues like e-mail IDs, netizen detectives worked together to expose perceived wrongdoers to publicly punish them on the Web in a practice known as sinsang teolgi (personal information theft). DC Inside (http://www.dcinside.com) in particular has
become a notorious mecca of sinsang teolgi. DC Inside is much like the controversial English-language image board site 4chan (http://www.4chan.org): both have been closely linked to Internet subcultural movements and Net activism, and both have been responsible for the formation and popularization of a number of Internet memes. The controversial hacking group Anonymous finds their roots in 4chan, and many of their activities have received great media attention, including Operation Avenge Assange, where the group took credit for attacks on Visa, MasterCard, and PayPal after these bodies severed business ties with Wikileaks. Anonymous can be understood from a Korean perspective as pyein, and DC Inside members have appropriated the term, whose literal meaning refers to an invalid or to an individual whose failures have left him or her dejected. But in Korean Internet culture more broadly, pyein refers to those who are enthusiastic (sometimes to an obsessive degree) with particular cultural products or phenomena (Lee 2005, 311) (note 6). Some highly skilled pyein can reportedly uncover crucial data about a target within minutes; they are respected as gosu (masters) by their fellow payeins. The connectivity inherent to social networking services such as Facebook and Twitter has made these practices easier than ever before, as Web users can pilfer more detailed and sensitive personal data via advanced search tools. Analyzing the practices of the Korean digital generation within the framework of a society composed of munhwa bujok (cultural tribes), Lee Dong-Yeon emphasizes how DC Inside has emerged as a new cultural phenomenon leading Net activism (2005, 70). As displayed on DC Inside, pyein culture shows the possibility of empowering grassroots media-driven Net activism by encouraging users to participate in various sociopolitical campaigns, such as public protests about the Iraq war and the movement against the impeachment of South Korean president Roh Moo-Hyun in 2004 (Lee 2005). Indeed, although the DC Inside community evinces progressive characteristics, the appropriation of the term pyein highlights ambiguities: media and cultural critics have chastised the DC Inside community for inappropriate and obsessive Internet use, which is often exemplified by collective online vigilantism.

[3.3] Cheong and Gong examine the recent Chinese cybervigilantism phenomenon renrou sousuo (human flesh search) to investigate "how emerging media have been appropriated for online searches to hunt for personal information about social deviants to restore public morality" (2010, 2). Their findings suggest that the identification of corrupt officials and circulation of their private data online amplified attention on their abuse of power and pressured the authorities toward greater accountability. Although they emphasize the ways in which cybervigilantism reinvigorates legal justice or public morality, they ignore how cybervigilantism can also actively violate basic privacy rights. One example is the Kim Bu-Seon sex scandal in Korea. Actress Kim Bu-Seon confessed to having sex with an unidentified married lawyer turned politician who was the same age as her immediately after the 2007 presidential election. In the report, the actress said she decided to come forward about the matter because she felt unduly manipulated by him, alleging that "he was using his power to harass her" (Lee 2010c). On the basis of the information given in the story, netizen detectives on DC Inside were able to identify a politician and posted his personal details on various Web sites, and they requested a public apology from the politician. Kim Bu-Seon soon said that he was not the politician she had had an affair with, but netizen detectives'
vigilantism continued. *Pyein* culture’s vigilantism, inherent in *sinsang teolgi*, has triggered debates concerning new media communication and privacy issues.

[3.4] The case of the K-pop artist Tablo presents a concrete example of how *sinsang teolgi* is used for antifandom. Korean Canadian Daniel Lee, who goes by the stage name Tablo, is the leader of popular hip-hop group Epik High. Tablo has become popular not only because of his musical talent, but also because of his educational background: he received undergraduate and MA degrees with excellent grades in three and a half years at Stanford. Soon, suspicious netizen detectives created debate over the legitimacy of his impressive educational credentials. Netizen detectives claimed to uncover flaws in his story, arguing that the academic transcripts that he released to prove his attendance at an elite university were fabricated, and they responded repeatedly to Tablo’s attempts to confirm the truth with charges of cover-up and conspiracy. In October 2010, a police probe concluded that Tablo’s academic credentials were indeed authentic, and 14 of those who had posted defamatory comments were referred to prosecutors on libel charges.

[3.5] This incident has become a model case of antifandom in the K-pop scene. Antifandom, according to Jonathan Gray, is "the realm not necessarily of those who are against fandom per se, but of those who strongly dislike a given text or genre, considering it inane, stupid, morally bankrupt and/or aesthetic drivel" (2003, 70). Tablo’s antifandom is somewhat different from the usual antifandom in the popular culture realm. Lee Dong-Yeon has stated that Tablo’s antifandom reacts not against his musical talents and tastes, but seeks ethical honesty and justice from both him and society in general (2010a). The antifandom movement originated in several postings on DC Inside’s Epik High *gallery* (community), where the probability of Tablo’s impressive academic achievements was questioned. Responding to those accusations, many *gallery pyeins* began posting audiovisual evidence that appeared to clash with Tablo’s claim. For instance, there are many video clips posted where Tablo says, "I was teaching English for one year in Korea," with some netizens arguing that the period overlaps the time he was supposed to be studying at Stanford. In May 2010, some of those antifans launched an Internet community called We Request the Truth from Tablo (*Tajinyo*). By using every possible channel and tool, *Tajinyo* members practiced thorough *sinsang teolgi* of Tablo. His life was placed under a microscope, and the smallest biographical details faced close public scrutiny. When considering fandom research as studying interactions that occur between text and audience, the antifandom concerning Tablo and the minute details of his life online warrants critical attention because his entire life became the text to be analyzed, from his high school photos to his Twitter comments. As the investigation continued, the initial controversy surrounding his educational background expanded and encompassed equally important issues, such as nationality laundering (a term widely used in Korea to describe the practice of changing nationalities for any unlawful reason), financial corruption, military service evasion, and accusations of plagiarism. Some members even inferred a connection to an international cartel of academic certificate brokers. The official members of *Tajinyo* reached up to 180,000, and some antifans created YouTube channels and promoted their beliefs through various fan-made videos (note 7).
On October 8, 2010, MBC, one of the three major broadcasting services in Korea, broadcast a program called *Tablo Goes to Stanford*. The producer, Jeong Seong-Hoo, stated that they made the program from a neutral position to discover whether Tablo had graduated from Stanford, and to consider why the current online anti-Tablo movement was problematic (quoted in Lee 2010b). Despite her claim, many netizens questioned whether it focused too closely on the negative aspects of Internet culture and Net activism. One netizen wrote, "MBC, from a biased subjective perspective, portrayed the majority of netizens as stupid blind maniacs." Another netizen said, "The program shows no intention to deliver *Tajinyo's* point of view and even from the beginning it started from their pre-established conclusion which is that this bunch of netizens are religious fanatics" (note 8). Son Gyeong-Jae, a professor at Kyung Hee University, stated, "It is not the Internet, but the people who misuse..."
professor at Kyung Hee University, stated, "It is not the Internet, but the people who misuse it that are problematic...Thus we need structural and contextual approaches and interpretations to understand such a social phenomenon" (quoted in Im 2010).

[3.7] What is the particular social context in Korea that drives such a phenomenon? At the core of the Tablo case lies Korea's notorious academic elitism. Chang Si-Gi, a professor at Dongguk University, has stated that Korea's modern education system (which is rooted in the American system) is heavily driven by ranking (of both students and universities), and eventually turns people into slaves of power and capital (2011). Korea's academic elitism hands graduates of prestigious universities the best opportunities, regardless of actual ability. Those from prestigious foreign universities in particular can enjoy special attention, and Tablo has benefited from these biases. At almost every media event, his Stanford master's degree was mentioned in tones of awe and praise. His academic background enabled him to gain more recognition compared to artists who have similar skills and talents. Antifans therefore often argue that "because of his lies, many talented artists have suffered. By emphasizing his prestigious university background, Tablo snatched the potential opportunities of other artists who are more talented than him" (http://cafe.naver.com/tajeenyo). This rationale only highlights the reality of Korean society, where such excessive academic elitism is ardently practiced and broadly encouraged, particularly in the media.

[3.8] Another contextual factor is the widely spread distrust of governmental authorities, including the police and the prosecution as well as media authorities. Unusually for K-pop fandoms, 70 percent of the members of Tajinyo are over 30. As the backbone of society, they are the generation that, on the basis of their established social experiences, attempts to maintain justice when facing social problems (Lee 2010a). Their antifandom thus reflects their desire to uphold social justice, as they do not trust social authorities. According to psychiatrist Lee Hong-Shik, "As we can see from the example of the Cheonanham report, people have a profound mistrust of the government, and the Tablo case suggests that such a lack of faith is a widespread tendency in this society" (quoted in Baek 2010) (note 9). It has also been claimed that some of these celebrity fake-diploma scandals (like the Shin Jeong-Ah case) may have stimulated collective mistrust in the public (Baek 2010).

[3.9] Tablo's antifandom reflects not only the dark side of Net activism, but also the dark side of Korean society itself. Although the original Tajinyo has disappeared, there are various new Web communities where thousands of netizens continue to look for the truth of the Tablo case, and where they also demand clarification on many other sociopolitical issues (note 10). Starting from obsessed cybervigilantism, this antifandom went through a process of clashing and merging with different opinions from many citizens and media, until it finally expanded its concerns to embrace wider sociopolitical issues. This transition should be understood not as an aberration of religious-style fanaticism, but as an ongoing negotiation between social injustice and Net activism. The second and the third Tajinyos signify the ways in which Net activism—whether such activism is considered positively or negatively—continuously creates different opinions and concerns through which citizens can interact directly with sociopolitical representatives. Computer-mediated communications allow these citizens to easily express grievances that may be due to the biased sociopolitical system. Through assertive fan (or antifan) activist movements, fans create new modes of Web communication channels that
4. "Korea is gay": Othering mechanisms

[4.1] Online K-pop fandom often demonstrates Othering mechanisms of online participatory Net activism through displays of a strong sense of nationalism and even racism. The Othering mechanisms refer to the ways that certain online user activities—often represented by some extreme K-pop fan practices—can demonstrate nationalistic sentiments embedded in Korean society more broadly. Such nationalistic activities typify the negative aspects of Net activism within the K-pop realm. For example, in January 2011, a netizen posted a petition to eject all Chinese idol stars currently working in Korea. This act was criticized by a majority of netizens in the same community, and the petition was soon canceled.

[4.2] The Tablo antifandom also pertains to these Othering mechanisms. Along with the education certificate controversy, the nationality-laundering and military service evasion accusations are also significant issues in the Tablo case. Some antifans argue that Tablo laundered his nationality and obtained Canadian citizenship to avoid serving in the Korean military. On March 10, 2011, a news article appeared on Naver entitled "Tablo, After Education Controversy, Now Preparing Comeback?" (Kim 2011d). Within a few hours, the article attracted more than a hundred netizen responses, many of which suggested that "a Canadian should go back to his own country." A netizen remarked, "Even though he hasn't done anything illegal, what he has done and is doing is morally corrupt because he enjoys all the rights making a lot of money in this country and still evades serving the army which is the key national duty that all Korean men should do." According to the conscription policy in Korea, all able-bodied men are required to serve a mandatory 21 months of military service. Because issues related to serving military duty are always sensitive in Korea (especially among young men), those who try to avoid military service are harshly criticized (note 11). Korean-descent celebrities who hold foreign citizenship are often at the center of fierce discussion, and Jae-Beom (former leader of idol boy band 2PM) is one of them. Holding foreign citizenship is a double-edged sword in the Korean entertainment industry; as a result of the exotic image of "the foreigner," it often allows an express path to becoming a star, but it can be turned into a dangerous label that is also "foreign" at any moment.

[4.3] In September 2009, Jae-Beom's MySpace controversy swept Korea, which was triggered by his statement that "Korea is gay...I hate Koreans." The word gay is often used in the United States (primarily by adolescents) to defile and degrade someone, and it has a negative connotation demonstrating a homophobic assumption that "gay is bad." The Korean media and other netizens responded passionately, generating news articles and blog postings that included many criticisms of Jae-Beom's arrogant "American" behaviors. According to PD Note (an influential current affairs program in Korea), more than 760 on- and off-line news articles were produced in the first 4 days, and as a result, only 4 days after the comments were first revealed, Jae-Beom left the group and flew back to his hometown of Seattle in the United States (cited in Hong 2009). Of the 760 articles, 330 were intensively published in the 6 hours between the announcement of his leaving and his actual departure (Hong 2009).
6 hours between the announcement of his leaving and his actual departure (Hong 2009). There were various fan activities on- and off-line asking Jae-Beom to come back. Fans from all over the world made and uploaded a series of flash mob videos on YouTube; they put up a sky banner saying, "J. What Time Is It Now?" above his house in Seattle; and some even placed newspaper ads (figure 3). Consequently, 9 months later, he returned to the K-pop scene. Social media–empowered international fandom enabled his comeback, as cultural critic Kang Myeong-Seok remarked: "YouTube was a bridge between Jae-Beom and his fans" (cited in Ko 2010). Although he has come back, this incident revealed how participatory Net activism can create a fiercely nationalistic sentiment that easily reinforces Othering mechanisms in the K-pop realm. It is ironic that both social media and online participatory Net activism were behind both ousting him from the country and supporting his comeback.

**Video 3.** "For 2PM–1:59 Time Stop Flash Mob" by Malaysia Hottest (2009).

**Figure 3.** Ad that "Missy USA Hottest," 2PM's Korean American fan group, released to Korean American community newspapers requesting Jae-Beom's comeback. [View larger image.]

[4.4] Jae-Beom was strategically included in the group mainly because of his transcultural Korean American identity, which is now a common practice in the Korean entertainment industry to target the global market (Jung 2011, 78). Such practices reflect the transcultural cosmopolitan desires of the industry, which are concerned with the transgression of boundaries and markers between the familiar "I" and strange "Others" (Stevenson 2003, 5). However, instead of transgressing cultural boundaries, the practices are often in the mode of simply Othering, exoticizing, or even fetishizing such transcultural pop products. A clear
simply Othering, exoticizing, or even fetishizing such transcultural pop products. A clear example of this is the way in which the local media highlighted Jae-Beom’s foreignness while repeatedly focusing on his English-language ability and his cultural origin as a B-boy (breakdancer) from Seattle. In many television game shows, the hosts have often randomly asked him to speak English as a sort of parlor trick, while other guests look on admiringly. His speaking English is considered a special skill in the K-pop industry, stemming from Korea’s obsession with English-language education (note 12). Like Tablo’s "Stanford grad" label, his "Seattle B-boy" label and his fluent English-language skills enabled him to gain relatively higher recognition than other idol wannabes. He has addressed this fact himself, noting that "everyone thinks i’m like the illest rapper wen i suck nuts at rappin…so dass pretty dope…haha" (from his MySpace comments, at http://www.myspace.com/parkjaebeom). Despite his rapping ability, which he said "sucked," he could still become a popular idol, maybe because of his extra talent: speaking fluent English. In other words, his ostensibly superior (stemming from his foreignness) yet fetishized transcultural identity has been constructed by Korea's popular industry system within its English-crazed sociocultural contextual environment.

[4.5] The MySpace controversy articulates a different, yet just as deeply embedded, method of Othering as it marginalized him as an arrogant American who mocked the entire Korean nation. This sudden shift shows how a strategically constructed transcultural identity, largely driven by the industry’s globalization desires, can easily be deconstructed by fiercely nationalistic Net activism. This deconstruction demonstrates clear Othering mechanisms. It is significant to note when and how the positive foreignness of Jae-Beom turned to a negative strange Otherness. As soon as he said "Korea is gay," he located himself outside the circle of uri nara saram (literally, "our country's people"). Normally, Koreans like to use the term "our" instead of "my." For example, uri eomma (our mom) is said instead of nae eomma (my mom), even where there are no other siblings. The Korean people’s sense of collectivism is already a well-known national characteristic and is often discussed around a discourse of "we-ness." In this sense, by using the term Korea instead of uri nara (our country), ironically, Jae-Beom has Othered his fellow Koreans first; he has become Othered while he has Othered Korea. From that moment, his American identity overpowered his Korean one, and he became an arrogant American boy who, from the perspective of Korean netizens, was backbiting uri nara and uri nara saram. Ever since the incident occurred, I have often speculated whether Korean netizens would have been as angry if he had said, "Uri nara is gay" instead of "Korea is gay."

[4.6] Jae-Beom is still a target for blunt nationalistic online comments from netizens, such as "serve the army" or "go back to your country." Netizens, especially young men, are disturbed by the ways in which celebrities seem to be exploiting all the benefits of being Koreans (such as earning a lot of money in the K-pop industry) while claiming a foreign identity to avoid fulfilling their national duties. Ironically, the highly praised and strategically promoted transnational attributes of K-pop idols can be shifted to disturbing attributes that represent a hypocritical double standard. The Jae-Beom case demonstrates that rapid shifts can be mobilized by the Othering mechanisms of Net activism, and that this Net activism is largely contradictory. There is also a strong sense of collectivism active within both the nation...
largely contradictory. There is also a strong sense of collectivism active within both the nation and the Net-activist movements themselves that propels such contradictory Net practices.

[4.7] This contradiction can be identified as stemming from the fact that it was the fans' Net-participation-empowered action itself that facilitated Jae-Beom's return. While in Seattle, Jae-Beom posted a video clip of himself performing B.o.B.'s hit American pop song, "Nothing on You," and within a day, the clip attracted over 2 million hits. Various online fan communities from across the world collectively and systematically worked together to boost the hit count to make Jae-Beom popular online. Other clips of Jae-Beom performing B-boy dance moves with his crew have also gained popularity on YouTube. Certainly the effectiveness of the participatory fan activist practices cannot be doubted: it was soon after these videos gained attention on YouTube that many multinational media outlets were able to identify both Jae-Beom's popularity and his commercial potential. Sidus HQ, one of the major entertainment companies in Korea, launched negotiations on the basis of this online fandom, thus marking Jae-Beom's return to the industry. While the Othering mechanisms may indicate a largely negative, even blindly nationalistic, aspect of Net activism, such conflicting participatory fan interactions can influence the decision-making processes and potential outcomes of the cultural industry itself. These can be both positive and negative, and are fundamentally diverse. In K-pop, Net activism can therefore be understood as a continuous negotiation between contradictory views and concerns, where fans' participatory interactions can potentially lead to new forms of social action that can enable contradictory yet more democratic Net communications.

5. Conclusion

[5.1] As a result of the rapidly increasing diffusion of digital technology at a mass level, there have been various modes of planning and coordinating sociopolitical activities at the organizational, institutional, and individual levels. The Internet forms a participatory Web space, "free from centralised control with intrinsically empowering characteristics—costless, space-less, timeless," and such a decentralized mass communication environment reinforces people's participation in decision making (Gibson, Rommele, and Ward 2004, 1). Case studies in K-pop the domain center around fan activism, cybervigilantism, and Othering mechanisms to demonstrate the contradictory characteristics of fan activity that may influence both the positive and negative decision-making processes of consumers and the K-pop industry as a whole. Such contradictions reflect the complex sociocultural contextual circumstances of Korea, in which participatory Net activism enables unique Web-based interactions and communications, and eventually creates diverse voices and opinions around the Korean cultural entertainment realm. Although K-pop fans' online activities often create a nuisance, they also engender meaningful and deliberative conversation across different societal groups and enable the construction of multiple perspectives.

[5.2] This is visible in recent events and K-pop fans' responses to them. A massive 8.9-magnitude earthquake hit the Pacific Ocean near northeastern Japan on March 11, 2011, causing widespread damage to the entire nation. Soon after the earthquake, a TVXQ fan gallery on a major news portal, Daum, started a thread to suggest collecting aid for the
gallery on a major news portal, Daum, started a thread to suggest collecting aid for the earthquake victims in Japan. One fan posted, "They have given so much wonderful support to TVXQ so far. I want us to give the support back to them." This simple thread had the potential to spark a significant social movement. Although some online fan practices may have negative connotations, by engaging with specific civic issues and social events, participatory fan activism encourages people to interact, discuss, and challenge conventional discourses. These interactions may lead to new forms of social action that enable a complex and continuing negotiation between social injustice and Net activism. As is evident from these case studies, digital technology-empowered fan activism has become a key force in producing and circulating not only media content, but also public opinion. Popular culture fandom may have once been in the margins of the media industry and in society's shadows more generally, but the emergence of digital technology has allowed it to rise as a key player in the industry and as a constructive social agent in Korean society and elsewhere.

6. Acknowledgment

[6.1] This work was supported by a postdoctoral research fellowship at the School of Communication and the Arts at Victoria University.

7. Notes

1. There is a Western counterpart to these informal promotion companies. Street teams are a promotional tool often used by entertainment companies and record labels to promote new albums and artists. The street team members often consist of fans of artists. Unlike in K-pop fandom, fans involved in street teams are usually hired and organized by media entertainment companies.

2. Since their 2004 debut, TVXQ (discovered and managed by SM) has arguably been one of the most successful K-pop acts in Asia, with reportedly the largest fan base (over 800,000) in the world. Enjoying great success in the Japanese music industry in particular, they became the first foreign artist to top the Oricon singles charts six times and placed their single and album simultaneously within the top three slots of Oricon's singles and albums chart—the first time a foreign artist had done so in 15 years.

3. See discussions on MLBPARK, a major league baseball community forum (http://mlbpark.donga.com/bbs/view.php?bbs=mpark_bbs_bullpen09&idx=1132486&cpage=1&s_work=search&select=stt&keyword=JYJ); and 82 Cook, a lifestyle community forum (http://www.82cook.com/zb41/zboard.php?id=free2&no=689161).

4. In K-pop fandom in Korea, the word joryeonhada (train) is widely used to refer to the way the stars attract or captivate their fans through certain behaviors and activities.

5. For additional details and the image of the letter, see http://www.allkpop.com/2009/11/2pm_taecyeon_scarlet_letter.

6. Pyein is similar to the Japanese notion of otaku.
7. There were quite a few anti-Tablo channels on YouTube. However, after the police announcement in October 2010 (which ruled in favor of Tablo), most of them disappeared. One of the few channels still operating is TheSurgeryFevers (http://www.youtube.com/user/TheSurgeryFevers).

8. These comments are netizen responses attached to Park (2010).

9. On March 26, 2010, the Cheonanham, a South Korean navy ship carrying 104 personnel, sank off the country's west coast, killing 46 seamen. A South Korean-led investigation carried out by a team of international experts presented a summary of its investigation on May 20, 2010, concluding that a North Korean torpedo fired by a midget submarine had sunk the warship. North Korea denied that it was responsible for the sinking. A survey conducted in September 2010 noted that "only 32% of Korean citizens believe the government's report" (cited in Jo 2010).

10. A few of the main ones are the Republic of Korea We Want (http://cafe.naver.com/whatbecomes2), the Society We Respect (http://cafe.naver.com/dreamcorea.cafe), and the Society Netizens Respect (http://cafe.naver.com/nesoc.cafe).

11. A Korean American singer, Steve Yoo (Yoo Seung-Jun), repeatedly said on Korean television that he would fulfill his military duty as a healthy Korean man. However, in 2002, just before he was to be drafted, he became a naturalized US citizen. As a result, thousands of angry Korean netizens formed a furious antifandom and circulated petitions to deport him. The Korean government considered his action an act of desertion and deported him to the United States, permanently banning him from entering Korea.


8. Works cited


Kim Beom-Tae. 2009a. [120K signatures, request correcting "TVXQ Unfair Contract"] (12만명


Lee Seon-Mi. 2010c. [Kim Bu-Seon's shocking confession: "Slept with a politician." Netizen


Praxis

Being of service: X-Files fans and social engagement

Bethan Jones

Cardiff University, Cardiff, Wales

Abstract—I explore the ways in which celebrity charity and fan activism can lead to civic engagement and social change. Fan studies has moved away from the traditional view of fans as psychologically deficient and has begun to examine resistance within the cultural productions of fandom—fan fiction, for example, addressing gender imbalances in popular TV shows. However, scholarship on celebrity-focused fans still retains much of the stigmatizing language that marks early writing about fans. I examine the relationship between celebrity and fan; examine the role celebrity plays in framing fan charity; assess how fan investment affects celebrity charity work; and argue that fans are active participants in encouraging social awareness and charitable giving.

Keywords—Celebrity; Celebrity activism; Celebrity culture; Civic engagement; Fan activism; Fan charity; Fandom; Gillian Anderson; Participatory culture; The X-Files


1. Introduction

Early academic work on audiences that could be considered the precursors to the contemporary field of fan studies often focused on the deviant side of fan culture: the fan as obsessive, lacking, and vulnerable (Horton and Wohl 1956; Schickel 1985) or the fan who, according to William Shatner, needs to "get a life" (Jenkins 1992, 10). Work on fandom over the last two decades has proved instrumental in moving the field away from this notion of the fan as dysfunctional (Fiske 1989; Jenkins 1992; Hills 2002) and, as Sandvoss points out, is revealing "a more complex relationship between fans as agents and the structural confines of popular culture in which they operate, a relationship which cannot be reduced to one being simply a consequence of the other" (2005, 3). But these texts primarily limit their focus to movie, TV, sports, and music fans (Star Trek, The X-Files [1993–2002], and Madonna, to name but a few), arguing that attitudes toward these groups of fans are changing. Much less work has been done on changing attitudes regarding the celebrity-focused fan, and the language used to describe these fans is often the language of 30 or 40 years ago. Chris Rojek, as recently as 2007, noted that "relationships between fans and celebrities frequently involve unusually high levels of non-reciprocal emotional dependence, in which fans project intensely positive feelings onto the celebrity" (2007, 171) and followed this with a reference to "obsessed" fans, suggesting that for celebrity-focused fans, there is no middle ground. Lynn E. McCutcheon and John Maltby's 2002 examination of stereotypes of the celebrity worshipper further reinforces the belief that celebrity worshippers are "foolish," "irresponsible," and "submissive."
[1.2] As a fan of *The X-Files* (XF), a member of XF fandom, and a participant in several Gillian Anderson–inspired groups working to raise money through engagement in fandom, I question the readings of celebrity-focused fans as obsessive and foolish. Here, I examine how fans' relationships with shows and stars can motivate them to seek change in the real world, and the effect participation in fandom has had on fans' engagement with charity work. I look at case studies of two XF fan groups, heART and Aussie X-Files Fans @ Facebook (AXF), to assess how they encourage charitable giving among fans, examine the ways in which the role of celebrity is used in framing the charitable efforts of fans, and assess how fan investment may affect celebrity charity work.

2. Methodology

[2.1] I analyzed the responses I received to interviews conducted with XF fan groups, focusing on their involvement with XF fandom and fan charity. These interviews took place via e-mail between October 2010 and March 2011. As a member of XF fandom, I was aware of heART and AXF (and, indeed, was a member of their Facebook groups and followed their activities on Twitter), and I contacted the founders of both groups in August 2010. I obtained permission from the founders to contact members of the groups—heART via e-mail and AXF through Facebook's private message and group wall discussion functions—then continued my exchanges individually with those who responded. I also examined heART and AXF's Web sites and Facebook pages, and extracts from these are contained here. Technically, individual posts on Internet message boards and Web site forums are considered to be within the public domain, but James E. Porter (1998) argues that precedents for treating any and all Internet writing with integrity in research situations must be established, and that it is methodologically valuable to treat every post as writing and every poster as a writer. In the course of my research, I treat the use of Web sites, Facebook pages, and Twitter accounts as I would treat the use of a personal e-mail interview. Sandi Hicks, Sophie G, and Roxane B all granted me permission to use their work. Each of the fans whose responses I used in the course of this essay gave informed consent to their answers being used, and institutional review board approval was granted for this research to take place.

3. Defining fan charity and fan activism

[3.1] One of the major problems in understanding fannish social engagement is the absence of commonly agreed-upon or conventionally used definitions of "fan charity" and "fan activism." Both of these terms raise a number of questions about how they can be applied to acts of charity or activism undertaken by fans.

[3.2] *Merriam-Webster* defines *charity* as "generosity and helpfulness especially toward the needy or suffering" ([http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/charity](http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/charity)) and *activism* as "a doctrine or practice that emphasizes direct vigorous action especially in support of or opposition to one side of a controversial issue" ([http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/activism](http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/activism)). But what does the modifier "fan" bring to this definition? Simply adding the word to the sentence and describing fan charity as generosity toward the needy carried out by fans is an oversimplification that fails to answer a variety of important questions. First among these is: what kind of fan is being discussed? Abercrombie and Longhurst define fans as "those people who become particularly attached to certain programmes or stars within the context of relatively heavy mass
media use" (1998, 138), yet further develop their topography to include "cultists" and "enthusiasts." Sandvoss (2005) notes that groups that from the outside appear to be casual viewers identify as fans, while Hills (2002) observes that who or what a fan is seems to be common sense. Further discussion of who or what a fan is falls beyond the scope of this essay, but the term is laden with connotations and, when placed next to "charity," is perhaps not as simple as it first seems. Further questions to consider to understand more fully what we mean when we discuss fan charity and fan activism, and what effect each of these can have on civic engagement, include the following: Does fan charity require a single fan acting fannishly, or a group of fans? Do fan charities need to raise funds for organizations supported by the celebrity they admire, or can they raise funds for any cause? Do community and communal decisions play a part in fan charity? Should fan charity be confined to simply fans raising money, or can it include fans donating to a fund-raising event undertaken by the star they respect? What about charitable organizations that began as fan charities but have since extended their scope and have become registered not-for-profit organizations raising funds for a variety of charities? Fan activism has traditionally been regarded as fans acting together to extend or resurrect a group, film, or TV show in which they have an interest. Star Trek fans' letter-writing campaign of the 1960s, for example, would be considered a case of fan activism, as would XF fans' current campaigning for a third film. But in this case, the modifier "fan" causes more problems, as it appears to change the definition of "activism." To anyone other than a fan of that show, a network canceling a show is unlikely to be considered controversial. Should a broader definition of activism, one that includes any intentional efforts to bring about change, be considered? This would certainly apply to fans' attempts to prevent a beloved TV program being canceled. However, I examine fan activism in the context of celebrity charity, civic engagement, and social change, and these are important differences; there is, arguably, much more political intent in these forms of fan activism than in the more traditional kind. In coming to a definition of fan activism in the context of my argument, it is important to consider the following: the roles that community and communal decisions might take in fan activism; the roles a fictional show and an actor playing a character can have in influencing fans; and the extent to which the text can inform fans and allow them to engage socially and politically. I argue that each term must take into account the far more complex issues surrounding social change, politics, and fan communities than their current definitions do.

[3.3] I define "fan charity" as a concerted effort made by a group of fans to raise money for an organization nominated by or affiliated with their fandom, and "fan activism" as fans actively campaigning for issues nominated by or affiliated with the fandom, either through issues raised in the text or by awareness raised by the star. Both case studies involve fans raising funds for, and raising awareness of, charities supported by Gillian Anderson, the actress playing Special Agent Dana Scully in XF.

4. Case study: AXF

[4.1] AXF was established as a Facebook group on April 2, 2008. Sandi Hicks discovered there was no Australian fan base for XF on Facebook, and although she was a member of several other communities focusing on the show, she decided to create her own. In an e-mail interview, she told me, "I thought that us Australians needed a space to come together and share all our thoughts about the show, its brilliant actors and everything in between." Initially there were no
plans to undertake charitable work when the group was set up. It was intended purely to discuss the second XF film, *I Want To Believe* (2008), and the majority of discussion still taking place on the group is related to the show and its actors, rather than fund-raising. Sandi said the idea to raise money came with the announcement of Gillian Anderson's pregnancy in 2008:

[4.2] The idea came about when we were told that Gillian was expecting her 3rd child, and I thought it would be nice for us to throw together a small fundraiser as a present for her, rather than send her a whole heap of baby goods that she would probably neither want or need—or to send her flowers that would just die. Sending a little over $2000 to [Alinyiikira Junior School] is a pretty good way of saying "Congratulations on the birth of your baby, Gillian"—we thought we'd support her favourite charity.

[4.3] Sandi raised funds by selling AXF T-shirts (figure 1), holding XF episode marathons in which groups of fans met up to watch XF episodes and donate money, and auctioning autographed memorabilia, donated by Anderson, on eBay.

![Figure 1. Aussie XF shirt, 2009 (http://aussiexfilesfans.webs.com/apps/webstore/). [View larger image.]](image-url)

[4.4] The first fund-raiser collected AU$2,036.04 (approximately $1,600). Sandi sent the money to Alinyiikira Junior School and compiled a book for Anderson, containing photographs of fans who had donated, a short biography, and favorite XF quotes and episodes (figure 2). In January 2009, Sandi received a message from Anderson thanking her for the effort put into raising the money for Alinyiikira Junior School:

[4.5] To all the girls and a handful of guys who raised money in honor of Felix's birth—what a fantastic thing you all did putting the event together as well as the book. How nice to be able to see the faces of those involved and to get a hint at your personalities from the quotes you chose and admission of favorite episodes. The time and effort you individually put in has moved me on Felix's behalf of course but on behalf of all the young children at Alinyiikira, you cannot imagine what a difference that accumulative effort will make in their lives. Thank you all so very much. And Felix thanks you. He told me. (http://aussiexfilesfans.webs.com/messagefromgillian.htm)
[4.6] The message from Anderson was a key factor in influencing Sandi to continue her fundraising: "Her message back after it was all said and done was the icing on the cake and made me want to strive harder and raise more money—so I decided that fundraising would become an annual thing." Since the first fund-raiser, AXF has continued to raise money for Alinyikira Junior School. Each year's fund-raiser has seen more names from the XF community, including Chris Carter, Frank Spotnitz, David Duchovny, and William B. Davis, contributing items for eBay auctions. Each fund-raiser has also been more successful than the last, and AXF has now raised close to AU$20,000 (approximately $18,000).

[4.7] AXF is perhaps the example of fan charity closest to the definition I outlined earlier. AXF raised money for charities and organizations supported by Gillian Anderson because of the impact Anderson has had on these fans. Sandi told me she had been aware of Anderson's philanthropy for some time, but it was through the character of Special Agent Dana Scully that she, and the rest of AXF's members, first became aware of Anderson. Grossberg suggests that "people are constantly struggling, not merely to figure out what a text means, but to make it mean something that connects to their own lives, experiences, needs and desires" (1992, 52), and for many XF fans, it was Scully who enabled them to connect to the text. Both critics and fans alike noted Scully's scientific background, her job—as an FBI agent, she was considered a woman in a man's world—and her strength of character, with Rumbaugh noting that "Scully is also someone with whom women can identify as a contemporary woman who faces challenges and doubts and who endeavours to achieve a fulfilling life" (2008, 57). Indeed, in several interviews Anderson noted the impact Scully has had on both fans and herself:

[4.8] There was a time when I started reading the letters and people were saying, "You saved my life," or interviewers would say that Scully was a role model for young women...The more I started to talk about her character traits—how honest she was, how passionate about doing the right thing—the more I took cues from the way she handled herself. (Flaherty 2002, "Success" section)

[4.9] Scully and Anderson are cited as a role models by many of the Australian XF fans. It was through the character of Scully that Sandi, who was bullied as a child, found someone she could aspire to emulate. She says:
Dana Scully to me is the perfect role model. An intelligent woman, working every day in a typically "man's" world—she's worked damned hard to be where she is and she's someone who every young woman should aspire to be like. Strong, determined, faithful, relentless, caring.

The charity work undertaken by members of AXF might be considered a more traditional form of fan charity in that they draw their inspiration from an admired celebrity. As Dyer notes, people are interested in celebrities because of their ability to "speak to us in terms we can understand about things that are important to us" (1986, 16); Scully, and by extension Anderson, has been able to speak to the Australian XF fans about issues that are important to them. Honesty, dedication, strength, and loyalty are attributes given to Scully, and Anderson, by fans. These characteristics are important to fans, and as a result, they model themselves on or undertake work for Scully and Anderson. Anderson notes:

Every thought that they have about Scully or about Gillian to use initially for their own strength is fantastic, if that's how it can be used. But the important, essential next step is for them to find where that resonates in their own bodies, and to draw on that which exists in themselves and not continue to think of me or the character in order to get up out of bed in the morning. If it can be an impetus and a starting point, then that can be incredibly healthy and a great guidelines; but there needs to be a transition. I think that for any fan of a role model, the important thing to learn is that they are responding to those aspects because they exist within oneself already. (Rumbaugh 2008, 84)

Of particular relevance in this remark is the idea that fans are responding to attributes within the celebrity that already exist within themselves. Often, as I discuss later, celebrity-focused fans are maligned in popular discourse, depicted as isolated, foolish, irresponsible, and immature. If, however, they are responding to positive attributes that a celebrity possesses and are able to bring those into their own lives for the benefit of themselves and others, then these popular constructions of celebrity-focused fans become much more problematic and need to be reexamined.

5. Case study: heART

"Do you like art, The X-Files, and Gillian Anderson and want to support a great cause? For two weeks in June 2010 heART will auction X-Files and Gillian Anderson related artworks to benefit Off The Street Kids—a charity aiding the empowerment of marginalised children and young people in South Africa. Thirteen talented artists (and The X-Files fans) from around the world have donated their original artwork for this cause" (http://heART.keyofx.org/). The opening statement on the heART Web site clearly sets out the mission of the organization: to raise money for a Gillian Anderson–sponsored charity by selling XF fan art to fans of the show. Roxane B was inspired to create heART in June 2008 after attending a Scully Marathon in Paris, a fan event held to raise funds for charities by auctioning off rare XF merchandise and other related collectibles to fans of the show. As an art student in France, Roxane recognized the charitable potential of her Gillian Anderson–inspired artwork. A year later, she appealed to like-minded artists—other XF and Gillian Anderson fans exhibiting their artistic talent online—and with the help of a well-connected fandom network, recruited 13 artists from nine countries around the world (Italy, The Netherlands, United States, France, Taiwan, United Kingdom, Poland, Germany, and South
Netherlands, United States, France, Taiwan, United Kingdom, Poland, Germany, and South Korea). Roxane and fellow artist Sophie G developed a name, logo, and Web site, and they spent several months preparing for the auctions and obtaining official clearance from Gillian Anderson and their chosen charity. The crux of the project was 2 weeks of online auctions in June 2010. Using eBay's charity branch, MissionFish, heART auctioned off 14 original artworks and raised £650 (approximately $1,000).

[5.2] Where heART differs from AXF and a number of other fan charities is in the emphasis placed on fan-produced artwork. Sophie, in an e-mail interview, noted:

[5.3] The most important aspect—to me—about this charity project was, that we were going to produce the things we were going to offer up for sale ourselves, that there was a creative process involved...except for getting Gillian Anderson's and OTSK's approval to raise funds this way—we were independent from those celebrities. It was our very own, rather than "just" assembling things and organising events and auctions.

[5.4] This sentiment is echoed by several other artists I interviewed, and by quotes from the artists given on their heART biography pages:

[5.5] **Rose**: I've been drawing all my life but have always seen it as something I did for myself, not something that could help others. Knowing that something I enjoy doing can help others is great incentive to try harder, to make the drawing look better, to improve my techniques. ([http://heart.keyofx.org/rose](http://heart.keyofx.org/rose))

[5.6] **Sarah L. Robinson**: I love art and I love giving back, to be able to combine the two and create some artwork to benefit charity is very fulfilling. ([http://heart.keyofx.org/sarah](http://heart.keyofx.org/sarah))

[5.7] Of less importance was the influence Gillian Anderson had on the artists. While they acknowledged they were both fans of hers and XF, the prime factor in encouraging artists to contribute was the production of fan art. Scooly notes that "I love [Gillian's] acting, but I'm a fan of her show rather than specifically her. I would participate if it was David's, Chris', Frank's or really anyone's, I suppose. I just wanted to draw a nice XF pic and see if someone would buy it to help some kids. That's all, I think." Sophie agreed that Gillian Anderson was "directly linked to the creative aspect, because for me Gillian has always been somewhat of a muse," but also noted that the bulk of previous XF fan charities relied on celebrity involvement, whether it was the stars donating items for auction or their time at Q&A panels. That heART placed fans, as artists, in the driving seat was, for Sophie, "my main motivation to be behind the idea 100%, and I think it's something to be immensely proud of."

[5.8] While fan fiction is the medium through which most academics have discussed fans' resistant reading of texts, fan art can also be considered a resistant reading of the text. Worry's artwork (figure 3), for example, is of a very different style to that of both the show and of other fan artists: described by many fans as cute, Worry's cartoon Mulder and Scully figures are much more light-hearted than their depiction on the show, and Worry places more emphasis on the relationship between the two characters.
Many of the pieces of art auctioned off depicted images of Mulder and Scully together, emphasizing the shipper angle of the series (figure 4), and the artwork that depicted Gillian Anderson illustrated her more sensual, independent side—a very different image from that which she portrays as Scully.

Jenkins notes, "Fans reject the idea of a definitive version produced, authorized, and regulated by some media conglomerate. Instead, fans envision a world where all of us can participate in the creation and circulation of central cultural myths" (2006, 267). The artists involved in heART are part of a group of fans who engage with the show and place their own stamp on the characters and situations expressed within it. Further, they use this "textual poaching" to appeal to other fans and to raise money for charitable causes (note 1). The emphasis here is on fans themselves producing items that express their love of the show, rather than their depending on receiving desirable items from official sources.
6. The role of celebrity in encouraging social engagement and the stigmatization of celebrity-focused fans

[6.1] The title of this essay comes from Gillian Anderson's foreword to *Girl Boss: Running the Show Like the Big Chicks*:

> Be of service. Whether you make yourself available to a friend or co-worker, or you make time every month to do volunteer work, there is nothing that harvests more of a feeling of empowerment than being of service to someone in need. (Kravetz 1999, xi)

[6.3] The quote is one that many Anderson fans have taken to heart in becoming engaged with raising funds for various charities. It exemplifies the impact that Anderson specifically, and celebrities in general, can have on encouraging fans to become involved in charitable activities. John Fiske's work on popular culture has examined the ways in which fans' attitudes to celebrities can lead to social engagement. He argues that personas as texts matter once they are put into circulation, and that once they are put into circulation, others can seize that text/persona as a means to empowerment. Offering the example of the teenage Madonna fan who, "'[fantasizing] her own empowerment[,] can translate this fantasy into behaviour," Fiske suggests that stars lead their fans into social change: "When she meets others who share her fantasies and freedom there is the beginning of a sense of solidarity, of a shared resistance, that can support and encourage progressive action on the microsocial level" (1989, 172). It is not only Madonna who is able to lead fans to social engagement. Craig Garthwaite and Timothy Moore argue that "While there have been no empirical estimates of the effect of celebrity endorsements on political outcomes, it is clear that celebrities have the ability to influence the behaviour of their fans in other arenas" (2008, 5). Celebrities such as Misha Collins and Lady Gaga are well known for using their large networks of fans to promote charities, organizations, and ideas, and to convert awareness into social change. Misha Collins, who plays the angel Castiel on *Supernatural*, used Twitter to ask his followers to make a donation to aid efforts following the 2009 earthquake in Haiti. Within 24 hours, almost $30,000 had been raised. After this, the nonprofit organization Random Acts was created, which is supporting the reconstruction and ongoing funding of three different orphanages in Haiti. Lady Gaga has also used her fame to encourage fans to do good works. She partnered with Virgin Mobile on her Monster Ball tour and offered premium VIP tickets to fans who volunteered their time to homeless youth organizations. In doing so, she and her fans raised more than $80,000 to support homeless youths. More recently, she designed a wristband that she encouraged fans to buy for $5 to raise money for Japan after the March 2011 earthquake there (figure 5).
Fiske's work, in the context of celebrity- and fan-driven activism, raises some interesting questions on the active/passive nature of fan charity. Arguing that fans seize a celebrity as a means to empowerment suggests that the fan is a active respondent to the celebrity, making meaning from the range of texts in which the raw materials of the celebrity appear and considering which qualities the star has that they wish to emulate, and which to ignore. But I would argue that while the fan is active in the sense of changing her lifestyle, attitudes, or behaviors, the celebrity does the work of making qualities and acts such as self-sacrifice, charitable giving, and awareness-raising acceptable; the fan follows this lead, responding to these qualities, once those acts are given societal approval. I would argue that in the case of Misha Collins- and Lady Gaga-driven activism, the fans take on a much more passive role. This isn't to say that they are not involved in raising awareness of the issue; on the contrary, fans can be very vocal: they will post to blogs and Web sites and inform friends and family members of their favorite celebrity's efforts. But the onus is on the celebrity to organize the event and spread the word to his or her fans. It is unlikely that, were it not for his large Twitter following, Misha Collins would have been able to raise that much money for Haiti. It is also a result of his close connections with Random Acts that many fans support the organization. Random Acts is currently raising funds to build a multipurpose community center in Haiti and is offering fans who raise more than $5,000 the possibility of working with Collins on the project. Billed as an "opportunity of a lifetime," the chance to meet Collins or receive a gift from him (figure 6) plays a predominant role in obtaining fan support—more so, I would argue, than the charity work itself.
I see clear differences between the charity work undertaken by celebrities such as Misha Collins and Lady Gaga and that undertaken by the groups I examined here. Both AXF and heART are examples of fan-driven activism, in which fans of a show or celebrity take it upon themselves to raise money or awareness for a specific cause. This charity work might be aided by the celebrity, who provides items that can be auctioned (as is the case with AXF), or it might be purely fan based, with fans producing items (as is the case with heART); but the onus is on the fans themselves to organize, act, produce, and raise awareness. It is the dedicated fan who gains awareness of a particular cause through her interest in the celebrity, and it then lies—at least partly—with that fan to raise awareness within the larger community and galvanize others into action. With more and more fan activities taking place on the Internet, this has become easier. AXF has 293 members, all of whom can see the group's Facebook wall and be notified of upcoming fund-raisers and other points of interest. AXF has also been able to forge links with other fan groups like X-Files News, who are able to spread the word to a wider community of fans. These groups—although distinct entities—have also worked together on several issues including the XF3 Army campaign, and fund-raisers for Help_Haiti and X Philes for Japan. Celebrity input to these fan groups, unlike those of Lady Gaga, is minimal. Other than liaising with Anderson's staff to obtain approval to raise funds in her name and contacting other stars to obtain items to auction, all of the work is done by the fans. Web site maintenance, Twitter links, Facebook updates, calls to donate, and fund-raising events are organized by often-small teams of fans, who dedicate much of their free time to this activism.

It strikes me that a further question arises here: at what point does the "fan" drop out? At what point do Sandi and others like her have a giving relationship to the school that no longer connects directly to their fannishness? Many groups within the XF community undertake work that has no direct connection to their fan activities. Devastating tornadoes resulted in an XF X-Phile Virtual Marathon for Joplin, MO, Tornado Victims, in which fans watched XF episodes and donated $1 for each episode. Similarly, XF fans are currently taking part in a Virtual X-Philes Shopping Spree, in which fans "buy" pieces of XF fandom (such as Scully's groceries from the episode "Duane Barry" or Mulder's alien autopsy video) by donating the relevant amount to help victims of the Japan earthquake. Neither of these communities has arisen as a result of a celebrity's involvement in fund-raising or as a direct result of the fans' engagement with XF fandom. Rather, fandom is used simply as a vehicle to raise more money in an interesting and innovative way. While I do not have the space to discuss this in further detail, it is an important question to raise.

Despite the work being done by both celebrities and fans to raise money for and bring attention to various causes, celebrity-focused fandom is perhaps the area where stigma is the strongest and fandom more maligned. Liesbet van Zoonen argues that "modern political discourse constructs a vast difference between popular culture and politics" (2005, 53) and positions audiences as fans and the public as citizens, each composed of different social formations and identities, separate from the other. This language also highlights the divide between high culture (art, politics) and low culture (television, the tabloid press), suggesting that politics must exist apart from mainstream culture, and maintaining that, as the focus on celebrity falls under the category of low culture, celebrity-focused fans are worth neither time nor study. This is further illustrated in Nick Couldry and Tim Markham's argument that those who follow celebrity culture...
"are the least engaged in politics and least likely to use their social networks to involve
themselves in action or discussion about public-type issues" (2007, 403) (note 2). Recent
research also suggests that fans' tastes are linked to a class system that rewards certain kinds of
media consumption while looking upon others with disdain. In this system, fans of popular
culture, such as soap operas, science fiction, and, I would add, celebrities, are less worthy than
fans of opera or theater (Gray, Sandvoss, and Harrington 2007).

[6.8] Horton and Wohl, in 1956, described fandom as a surrogate relationship and focused on
"para-social interactions": the illusory relationships fans form with celebrities. Joli Jensen noted
that literature on fandom argues that fans "suffer from psychological inadequacy, and [...] seek
contact with famous people in order to compensate for their own inadequate lives" (1992, 18).
Melissa A. Click, Jennifer Stevens Aubrey, and Elizabeth Behm-Morawitz note that public
commentary on Twilight "positions girls and women as unexpected and unwelcome media fans,
and denies the long and rich history of the relationships female fans have had with media texts
and personalities" (2010, 6). That the language of 20, 30, even 60 years ago is still being used to
discuss celebrity-focused fans is worrying and points increasingly to the gendering of fandom.
Indeed, references to Twilight fans as "fevered," "hysterical," and "obsessed" mirror Victorian-era
gendered words like "foolish" and "submissive" used to describe celebrity-focused fans who, in
popular press discourse at least, are overwhelmingly female (note 3). Many studies of fan-star
identification have focused on women's relationships with the celebrities they admire (Tudor
1974; Ehrenreich, Hess, and Jacobs 1992; Stacey 1994), and this can contribute to the
problematic gendering of fandom, charity, and activism (note 4). Jackie Stacey's 1994 study of
the place of movie stars in women's memories of wartime and postwar Britain focuses on three
key processes of spectatorship: escapism, identification, and consumption. While it may be
argued that Stacey uses these terms to rework the concepts they initially embodied (the category
of "extra-cinematic identificatory practices," which argues that feelings of adoration, devotion,
and worship of the star as she appears on screen evolve into fan cultural activity, an area of
research largely ignored in previous studies of film reception, was developed in response to the
main body of work on cinematic identification that drew heavily on Freudian and Lacanian
analysis), their use does reflect previous scholarship on female fans who used fandom as a means
of escaping the confines of their everyday lives as housewives and mothers (Radway 1984), as
well as societal stereotypes of women as shopaholics, unable to stop consuming.

[6.9] Stacey's work, particularly her category of imitation, has been drawn on in more recent
research on fans and how they engage in more active meaning making. Gina Rumbaugh notes,
"Imitation need not be limited to singular self-improvement [but] can move beyond the personal
to include a fan's participation in the preferred social and political activities of the admired star,
as well" (2008, 34). Rumbaugh also draws on Andrew Tudor's work, particularly his notion of
projection, which describes "the point at which the process becomes more than a simple
mimicking" (1974, 80–82). Rumbaugh notes, "Projection is a condition whereby fans take into
account how stars would behave in certain situations, and then attempt to imitate that supposed
behaviour in their own lives" (2008, 33), a point that has implications for the ways in which
fannish behavior in relation to social activism, and the gendering of fandom, can be studied. HK
says:

[6.10] I basically fell so in love with Scully that I wanted to be like her however I
could. Initially, I thought "maybe I should act!" but I realized that it wasn't acting like Scully or even being Gillian that I wanted...but being like Scully, the character herself. [I now] work for the government in humanitarian aid...but it was the initial idea of Scully that snowballed into getting me here. I also can't help but assume that in 12+ years, I've also begun to embody some of the traits/influences of Scully, which could possibly translate into fuelling this "save the world" complex I've got. I'm sure it would still be there, regardless, but who knows what I would be up to without XF. Scully made it ok to feel different from others and I kind of just embraced and ran with it. (interview, March 2011)

[6.11] This could, to some extent, be considered projection. From wanting to be like Scully (and Gillian Anderson), HK progressed to adopting a fundamental aspect of the character's identity. It was through Scully, and imitating the behavior Scully embodied in her own life ("that she was very smart and assertive and didn't try to hide it"), that HK moved into the field in which she now works. However, the question must be raised of whether the notion of projection is related specifically to female fans' adopting specific characteristics, whereas in male fans it would be considered simply drawing on the actor as a role model. This is an important distinction. While the processes that scholars describe do reflect the reality of how fans respond to celebrities, they frame these processes in problematic, gendered ways. Both Stacey's work on fans of female movie stars and Rumbaugh's analysis of Gillian Anderson as role model fail to mention male fans. These and other approaches fail to address problems in the gendering of fandom in two ways: in their continuing use of stigmatizing language, and in their failure to adopt a more empowered conceptual model for why fans respond to celebrities in the ways they do. In suggesting that female fans participate in the preferred social and political activities of the star, their agency is removed—their reasons for participating in certain events and not others (and therefore their opinions on politics, culture, and society) are not questioned. Fan charity, according to these analyses of fan-star relationships, is framed in the larger context of the role of celebrity and its construction as "the 'perfect hero,' where the star's actions serve as exemplary models for a particular community" (Marshall 1997, 187).

7. Fan activism and celebrity charity: Working toward social change

[7.1] The case studies examined thus far clearly fall into the category of fan charity defined earlier. Now I examine the links among fandom, fan activism, and celebrity charity, and question how affective fan investment affects celebrity charity work. As I noted earlier, the term "fan activism" has traditionally been associated with fans writing to save a show such as Firefly (2002–3) from cancellation or resurrecting a show or franchise, and is much less political than the fan activism I examine here. This more well-known kind of fan activism is designed to secure the continuation or resurrection of a show that fans both feel passionately about and have invested time in, since fans who will campaign for a show's renewal are usually—though not always—the fans who have been engaged in fandom, are active members of a community or communities, write fan fic, or create fan videos/fan art (note 5)—in short, they are fans with a vested interest in the show and a desire to see it continued. As a result, it appears to be much less altruistic than the fan charity evidenced through heART and AXF, and thus it should not be described in the same terms. Sandi notes that only roughly 10 percent of the money raised so far by AXF has come from donations alone; the bulk of the proceeds have been raised by auctioning off XF
merchandise. Cathy O'Donnell notes that she does not see buying Gillian Anderson/XF charity items and donating money to a chosen cause as the same thing:

[7.2] I give money to my chosen charities regularly/monthly and they have nothing to do with my fandom, they are personal causes I choose to be involved in. When I purchase items from a charity auction it is primarily because I want the item, the fact the money goes to charity allows me to feel better about spending the money, but I wouldn't be giving that money to the charity otherwise [...] I guess in conclusion, I bid because I want the item, but the charitable aspect allows me to feel better about spending the money and allows me to support the actor/show I am a fan of in a positive way. (interview, March 2011)

[7.3] This attitude is true of many of the fans I interviewed (and my own experience of bidding on XF items at auction), and I would consider this a form of fan charity. From the interviews I have carried out, fan activism, in the sense I define it, is more likely to be undertaken by those involved in the creation or day-to-day running of the fan charity. Sandi has noted that almost all of her free time is occupied with planning fund-raisers for AXF, and plans are currently being made for her to travel to Uganda in 2013 to visit the school. Sandi hopes the trip will spur on the group's fund-raising efforts and enable them to not only raise more money, but also to fund further trips to the school to engage in some hands-on work in the community. This transition from fund-raising to visiting Uganda does, I believe, suggest a transition from fan charity to fan activism. While it may fall short of campaigning for the government to invest more money in education, or educating communities on the importance of education in enabling children to work their way out of poverty, members of AXF traveling to another country and putting manpower into helping a school they have previously only raised funds for is certainly more hands-on than fan charity is. It is unlikely that any members of AXF would have considered traveling to Uganda if they were not involved in raising money for the school, and it cannot be denied that Anderson's social activism has had an effect on the fans. Sandi notes that were it not for Gillian Anderson, she wouldn't have been aware of Alinyiikira Junior School. Because Anderson—a woman Sandi respects and admires—supported the school, Sandi felt it was a worthy cause.

[7.4] It is clear from interviews with many fans that Anderson's influence has been a positive one and has allowed them to make changes to their own attitudes and lifestyles. Jodie Whalan notes that "Gillian Anderson and The X-Files have been a huge part of my life since I was 14 (I'm now 29). Because I love the brilliant work of Ms Anderson on The X-Files and in movies she's appeared in since then, I feel like I'm giving something back by supporting charities that are founded/supported by Gillian Anderson and other stars of The X-Files." Nicole Lynch agrees:

[7.5] Being a part of the XF community and knowing that Gillian Anderson personally endorses various charities is inspiring in itself. Knowing that a celebrity takes so much of her own time to assist with causes she is passionate about is very inspiring. Personally it gives me the belief that everyone should take some time to help those who are less fortunate or are in need. Furthermore, the general message in XF of "not giving up" and "what can be imagined can be achieved" is especially pertinent seeing as these fundraisers are directed towards X-Files fans. It goes to show how applicable the messages in the show are to the causes that the group supports. (interview, March
Specific qualities possessed by Anderson, such as her honesty, dedication, and philanthropy, as well as the ability to think of others while maintaining a busy career and raising a young family, have led fans to adopt similar qualities in themselves. This further allows them to campaign for change elsewhere. More broadly, fan charity has—in the case studies I have examined—led to a great deal of change for the organizations that received the money; they were able to buy equipment, put up buildings, and fund research, all of which will lead to a better quality of life for the people the organizations support.

Turning from the ways in which fannish forms of engagement may lead to social change, I wish to consider the ways in which affective fan investment affects celebrity charity work. The field of fan studies has focused on the cultural productions of fandom and questions of power and resistance visible in fan/star/studio relationships. Jenkins, for example, notes that fans are able to regain power through the production of works such as fan fiction, fan videos, and fan art: "Fan culture stands as an open challenge to the 'naturalness' and desirability of dominant cultural hierarchies, a refusal of authorial authority and a violation of intellectual property" (1992, 18). While Jenkins limits his study to the cultural productions of fans (fan fiction, fan art, etc.) rather than examining broader fan engagement, his study is useful in examining the ways in which fans' knowledge of and engagement with a text can enable them to examine what that text says about mass culture and societal norms. Jenkins also argues, "One way that popular culture can enable a more engaged citizenry is by allowing people to play with power on a microlevel [...] Popular culture may be preparing the way for a more meaningful public culture" (2006, 239). An example of this can be seen in heART's use of fan art to raise money for a charitable cause. The influencing factor here was less Gillian Anderson's philanthropy and more the ability to use their skills as artists and XF fans to raise money.

Allowing fans to play with power by reinterpreting XF—poaching aspects of the show and its stars and representing those in fan art—and selling their productions to raise money for charity provides fans with a means of engaging with social activism while representing less of a challenge to the producers of XF than traditional forms of fan production—endorsed, as it were, by Gillian Anderson. Power can also, however, be expressed in other ways. Liza Tsaliki, Christos Frangonikolopoulos, and Asteris Huliaras note that "audiences of today are aware of the manufactured nature of the celebrity images they consume and of the publicity machine that engulfs these images" (2011, 9). With that awareness comes a shift in the fan-star relationship—the star has to maintain a certain image in order to keep appealing to the fans. Fans are no longer understood to be, as Joli Jensen notes, a "result" of celebrity "brought into (enthralled) existence by the modern celebrity system, via the mass media" (1992, 10). Rather, it is the fan who keeps celebrities in existence through watching their movies, buying their books, and following the magazines and entertainment news that feature them. And in order to keep the fan interested, the celebrity must perform noteworthy acts. Asteris Huliaris and Nikolaos Tzifakis argue that "the image of a star in a war-torn African country, surrounded by under-nourished black children and this making a nice contrast for photographers, attracts immediate attention. Celebrity interest in Africa or in global poverty offers excellent branding opportunities" (2011, 36). Interest in Africa is also a safe bet for the celebrity who wants to retain fan support. While fights against poverty or AIDS are political issues, they are much less controversial than US military campaigns. Most fans would agree that global poverty needs to be eradicated; it may be
much more difficult for a fan whose brother is fighting in Afghanistan to support a celebrity's calls for the US government to withdraw troops. Cathy O'Donnell says,

[7.9] It is important to me that [the money] goes to charity and to a charity I am happy to support. For example when Gillian auctioned a meet and greet last year the auction did not specify which charity the money would go to just that it would be a charity of Gillian's choice. I was not happy to bid in those circumstances because I would not want to risk my money going to a charity I disagreed with, however slim that chance may be.

[7.10] Fans are thus able to exercise some power over the charitable campaigns that celebrities are involved in, if only because no celebrities want to marginalize the people who have allowed them to achieve the star status they have. Graeme Turner (2004) argues that the economy of celebrity culture dictates that celebrities develop a strategy for building and maintaining audience loyalty, and celebrity charity and activism could—to some extent—be considered part of that strategy.

8. Conclusion

[8.1] I have examined how two different fan charities have been inspired to raise money for charities supported by Gillian Anderson, and I have questioned how and why the relationship between celebrities and fans may lead to fan activism and social change. I examined how the relationship fans have with Gillian Anderson and XF has led to social engagement by looking at the role of show itself, the engagement of fans through the use of fan fiction/fan art, and the role of Gillian Anderson in inspiring fans both through her portrayal of Dana Scully and the values she displays in her private life. I also examined some of the problems that arise in scholarship on celebrity-focused fans, the stigma that surrounds this part of fandom, and the gendered language still used to describe these fan practices.

[8.2] That fans can be—and indeed are—influenced by the stars they admire seems evident. That fan charity exists, and has raised considerable amounts of money for worthy causes, can be proven. The question of whether and how fan charity can lead to fan activism, and the effect that activism can have on a wider social scale, is a much broader one, albeit one I have tried to answer here. Through examining the attitudes of XF fans who have founded, contributed to, and engaged with fan charities, I showed that engagement in fandom can lead to more civic engagement. Through analyzing the ways in which celebrities undertake charity work and how affective fan investment affects this charity work, I argued that the fan-star relationship is more complex one than has previously been acknowledged. Far from celebrity-focused fans being passive respondents to the star they admire or deviant obsessives engaged in fictional relationships with their idols, fans themselves become catalysts for change.

9. Acknowledgments

[9.1] I am grateful to the following individuals for their generosity in consenting to be interviewed via e-mail: Sandi Hicks, Sophie G, Roxane B, Rose, Scooly, akachan, Dana, HK, KR, Nicole Lynch, Cathy O'Donnell, and Jodie Whalan. Thanks also to everyone who gave valuable feedback, especially Emily Regan Wills, Lucy Bennett, and Ali Edwards-Dahil.
feedback, especially Emily Kegan Wills, Lucy Bennett, and Nia Edwards-Boen.

10. Notes

1. Also of interest to me, particularly in relation to the heART auctions, are the roles fans and fan politics play in raising awareness. Worry, for example, is a big name fan in XF fandom; therefore, not only is his artwork desirable, but he also brings a certain level of authority to the fan charity. Several of the artists and buyers I interviewed also emphasized the importance of helping out a friend in creating or bidding on pieces of art. Cathy O'Donnell said she "bid on the heART auctions because I liked the pictures, but also because I wanted to support fellow fans I consider friends in their efforts" (interview, March 2011), and Dana noted that she and Roxane had followed each other on Deviant Art (http://www.deviantart.com/) for years. "[We] are admirers of each other's artwork, especially our fanart for The X-Files. Rox is such an awesome artist and sweet friend and I got involved in heART because I wanted to support her in this idea she had" (interview, March 2011).

2. While I acknowledge that I focus my attention on a small group of fans, built up around a show that is recognized for its intelligent audience, I would argue that Couldry and Markham's assertion requires more analysis. Each of the fans interviewed had been involved in charity in some form previously, whether through donations to charitable organizations, volunteering for local organizations, or raising awareness.

3. While it could be argued that Twilight and XF are very different texts that are aimed at very different audiences, and thus a study on fans' relationships to Gillian Anderson might not produce the same results as a study on fans' relationships to Twilight stars, the same language is used to describe both sets of fans; in addition, fans of both are positioned in media discourse as female. A 2011 Australian interview with Gillian Anderson, for example, referred to her "obsessive" and "crazy" fans, mirroring the gendered language used to describe Twilight fans, among others (Breakfast, ABC News, September 7, 2011).

4. I have mentioned elsewhere the gendering of fandom, but I would further argue that activism, particularly fan activism, is also gendered female. Women's involvement in protest has often drawn on their gendered role within families and communities, and historians such as Natalie Zemon Davis, Temma Kaplan, and E. P. Thompson have seen women's participation in these protests as an extension of their role in the sexual division of labor.

5. This relates to the question of how to define the term fan and the levels of fan engagement. I do not have the scope here to analyze what this may mean for fannish engagement and social change, but I believe it is an important point that requires further examination.

11. Works cited


Click, Melissa A., Jennifer Stevens Aubrey, and Elizabeth Behm-Morawitz. 2010. Introduction to Bitten by Twilight, edited by Melissa A. Click, Jennifer Stevens Aubrey, and Elizabeth Behm-Morawitz.


Abstract—The Colbert Report merges the increasingly popular political satire genre with fan activism. The result is that the fan community helps to construct Colbert's malleable character and demonstrates symbolic power through its willingness to act. The fans are usually a nonpartisan force, acting to produce entertainment rather than substantive political change. However, this can be politically meaningful, as the fans' projects promote collective action, parallel political activities like voting and protesting, and encourage critical thinking about political information.

Keywords—Activism; Fan community; Politics; Stephen Colbert; TV

1. Introduction

The Daily Show and its spin-off, The Colbert Report, have become popular sources of entertainment and political commentary for audiences around the world. Each half-hour television program follows the same format of reviewing top news stories and critiquing politicians and members of the media through satire. It is widely acknowledged that these television shows and other news satire programs have become central to American political discourse (Lewis 2006; Waisanen 2009; Day 2011), yet much of the commentary on these programs focuses on their hosts, thereby missing the substantial role of fans. Although Stephen Colbert, the host of The Colbert Report, plays the role of a megalomaniac who only cares about promoting himself and his show, he encourages fans to take action as part of his fan community, the Colbert Nation. Fans participate in the show by helping to create its content and its host. Colbert emphasizes the fans' role not only by calling on them to act on his behalf, but also by providing feedback mechanisms. He reports on the fans' efforts, shows how successful his viewers can be when participating in a common cause, and rewards their creativity by giving fan works airtime.
Although *The Colbert Report* is a highly political show, much of the fan activism it promotes involves comedic projects that may not seem to have any political relevance. Nevertheless, many of the apparently trivial displays of fan activism have direct and indirect political relevance. Many fan campaigns parallel traditional forms of political participation, as they require organization, cooperation to reach a common goal, and perseverance despite setbacks. These demonstrate the power of collective action and empower fans to participate in other events. *The Colbert Report* fits Jenkins's (2006b) claim that popular culture prepares people for public life by allowing them to express their power in small ways. As Jenkins points out, many of the activities fans undertake are similar to forms of political participation, make use of the same kinds of skills, and encourage the kind individual initiative and creativity that is important for democratic participation. Fan action can also extend the scope of political action beyond traditional forms participation in public life. Some of the Colbert Nation's most politically significant campaigns are those in which the fans challenge information provided by political and media authorities. Like other types of audience participation, such as the CNN/YouTube debates, *The Colbert Report* provides a forum for what Jenkins (2009) calls audience negation. This is the challenging of politicians and others in positions of authority—an essential skill in an age when the sources of information about politics can be as controversial as the political issues themselves.

It is important to note at the outset that I will focus on the fan activities that are part of the production logic of the show—those that are official activities of the Colbert Nation and that therefore display cooperation between the host and fans, as well as between different media. This kind of fan action, as opposed to fan action that takes place without support from the show, is worth special attention because the frequency and scale of the Colbert Nation's campaigns set it apart from other televisions shows. Whatever Colbert's motives in promoting this type of fan activism—whether his intent is to empower fans or simply to exploit their labor—the Colbert Nation campaigns encourage fans to take an active role in producing their entertainment. By extension, fans are encouraged to be more engaged and critical citizens.

After a brief overview of Colbert's character, I explain how this character is partly created by fans' participation in the show, and I argue that this encourages fans to take part in Colbert Nation activism. Next, I discuss the technologies and types of interaction that make the Colbert Nation possible. The following sections will explore three of the ways in which the Colbert Nation promotes political participation. First, watching *The Colbert Report* and taking part in its campaigns demand that one interpret Colbert's satire and the extent to which it has a partisan dimension. Second, because many of the fan campaigns involve voting and other forms of mass action, *The Colbert Report* encourages fans to take part in electoral politics. It also provides
feedback mechanisms that build a sense of efficacy, even when fans fail to achieve their goals. Finally, the show promotes critical analysis of information and the consideration of alternative perspectives.

2. The Colbert character

[2.1] Much has been said about the way Stephen Colbert created a character that is pieced together from conservative commentators (Good 2010; Stanley 2007). His similarities to Bill O'Reilly, whom he reverently calls "Papa Bear," are especially clear and have led O'Reilly to claim that Colbert "tries to convince people that he is me" (Gray, Jones, and Thompson 2009, 130). The relationship between Colbert and O'Reilly was strongest during *The Colbert Report*’s early seasons, but over time, Colbert became a composite of several leading conservatives and of the American conservative movement in general. Colbert has increasingly distanced himself from any particular referent, and by doing so, he has become a less internally consistent character. His values are incoherent and often contradictory. For example, he routinely speaks on behalf of the common man, but he adopts an elite status when it suits his purposes. During the segment "Colbert Platinum," he urges poor viewers to change the channel and discusses the latest trends in ultrarich living. At other times, he criticizes elitists on the left and their distance from "mainstream America." This kind of self-contradiction would be a defect for an ordinary news commentator, but it is essential to Colbert's satire, as it allows him to depict the tensions in American conservatism.

[2.2] The neglect for coherence has aided Colbert in representing an entire movement rather than a single individual. By serving as a living example of the contradictory values of American conservatism, Colbert's character is a constant challenge to the American right. At the same time, by making his character an incoherent mix of values, Colbert makes it easy for fans to find something to identify with and opens the possibility that his character may be re-created in multiple ways according to fans' interests. The incoherence of Colbert's character is therefore an important part of facilitating audience participation in the construction of the character. It is further encouraged by the distance Colbert maintains between himself and the character.

[2.3] To make the self-contradictory character seem real, Stephen Colbert is always careful to maintain the ambiguity of whether he is speaking as himself or as his character. Unlike Colbert, Jon Stewart's stance on the events he discusses is usually clear. He does not avoid sharing his feelings about political controversies in a direct, open manner; Stewart usually plays the role of a liberal commentator who relies on common sense rather than a party line to inform his judgments (Young 2008; Baym
Colbert's views, by contrast, are always hidden by the character he plays. Viewers must struggle to distinguish the real person from the satirical composite of American conservatism. The real Colbert reinforces the ambiguity by making it difficult to determine when he is out of character. When he is clearly himself, Colbert usually declines to comment on anything politically sensitive. This leaves a deep uncertainty about the dividing line between the real person and the character, leading Baym to argue that Colbert is a "postmodern simulation; like Ali G or Borat, he is a spectacle created for the screen" (2007, 368).

[2.4] Gray, Jones, and Thompson go further than Baym in describing the openness of Colbert's character, as they argue that Colbert is a figure representing an entire genre. "Colbert embodies satiric parody. He confounds not only presidents, who tend to see things in black or white, but also anyone seeking easy division between real and fake, comedy and criticism, politics and entertainment" (2009, 30). This is an excellent description, as it shifts the character production away from the individual and makes it the embodiment of an entire genre. It also implies that there is a tremendous gap between the real Colbert and the character he plays. Nevertheless, it is important to recognize the role fans play in constructing the character because this is one of the mechanisms of encouraging fan participation. Although Colbert is the one who plays the character and who has authorial control over it, the character is inextricably linked to the thousands of fans who take part in Colbert's campaigns and make Colbert's cultural influence possible. Colbert called the fans to action in the show's very first episode by stating the role he intended to give them in determining his character and the extent to which the character and the fan community would be linked:

[2.5] This show is not about me. No, this program is dedicated to you, the heroes. And who are the heroes? The people who watch this show, average hard-working Americans. You're not the elites. You're not the country club crowd. I know for a fact my country club would never let you in...You're the folks who say something has to be done. And you're doing something. You're watching TV. (quoted in Burwell and Boler 2008)

[2.6] Colbert's joke about watching television counting as "doing something" has turned out to have a degree of truth. Colbert followed his mission statement by giving his fans many ways of contributing to the show's content. He asks them to vote in online polls, to create fan videos for the show, to support politicians, to buy books and CDs released by "friends of the show," to donate money to charities, and to transform the English language.

[2.7] The fan activities demanding the highest levels of technological proficiency and largest commitments of time involve reworking the show's content. Colbert encourages fans to write their own additions to his "Tek Jansen" stories, to make their
own versions of his portrait, and to take scenes shot in front of a green screen and use them to create fan videos. These efforts to mobilize fans to re-create elements of the show's content make *The Colbert Report* conducive to the formation of a strong fan community. Many television programs and mass media products are hostile to fans' attempts to make their own contributions and they challenge the fans' attempts to rework a show's content (Jenkins 1992, 2006b). Some television programs may have fan feedback mechanisms that erode the line between audience and the program (Enli 2009; Jenkins 2006b), but few have content that is so heavily dependent on audience participation. *The Colbert Report* makes participation integral to the show.

[2.8] Although these opportunities for fan participation require technical skill, many other forms of engagement require minimal time commitments and little specialized knowledge. The many small participatory acts are inclusive because they can be performed by almost any viewer with Internet access. Even the limited forms of participation, such as voting in online polls to name things after Colbert, allow users to make a contribution to the show and to see Colbert report on that contribution during subsequent episodes. Barely an episode goes by without Colbert calling on his fans for support or asking them to participate in one of his campaigns. As Burwell and Boler (2008) put it, "It is difficult to think about the program without taking into account fans, for the program has not only assigned its audience the role of the 'Colbert Nation,' but has also generated a flurry of fan activity."

[2.9] Of course, the fan contribution to *The Colbert Report* faces some constraints. As Julie Russo (2009) explains, when television programs encourage fans to make their own contributions, they usually specify the form these contributions can take. Video contests place restrictions on what content can be used or establish subject matter boundaries. This allows television programs to retain control of how fans create new content. When Colbert incites his fans to action, he plays the role of the agenda setter. He rarely, if ever, restricts what fans can borrow from the show, but by setting the goal of a campaign, he at least points fans in a certain direction. For example, responses to his fan video contests must always incorporate certain pieces of footage or fulfill certain functions. This leads them to have a more narrowly defined format than fan videos that are not sanctioned by the television programs (Jenkins 2008). Nevertheless, these contests still leave a great deal of room for fans to take personal initiative and to respond creatively to challenges, as Colbert generally refrains from using his role as agenda setter to predetermine the content of media produced by the fans.

3. Modes of interaction
[3.1] The composition of the Colbert Nation facilitates its activities. Demographic characteristics indicate that the show's fans are likely to participate in political causes and are capable of taking the initiative when called on to take part in a new project. One report found that advertisers specifically targeted the show because of its highly active audience (Bosman 2007). Viewers tend to be educated and to read extensively (Young et al. 2006). They are also technologically adept; this is among their most important traits because most of Colbert's campaigns take place online.

[3.2] Contemporary fan activism often relies heavily on digital media (Van Zoonen 2005; Jenkins 2006a), which have introduced the possibility of political engagement that does not require physical presence (Jones 2006). E-mailing, signing virtual petitions, and joining Facebook groups can supplement or even replace traditional forms of social and political activism. A large body of research suggests that the Internet may provide ways of counteracting the decline of associational life by forming new online places where people can meet and interact (Turkle 1995; Rheingold 2000; Jenkins and Thorburn 2004; Hills 2009; Moyo 2009; Hermes 2006; Blau 2005). For example, Russell et al. find that as a result of the growing use of these media, "the boundaries between producer and consumer, and between public and private, are blurring" (2008, 43). Studies of fan communities often reach the same conclusion, as they show that it is difficult to categorize fans as producers or consumers (Jenkins 2006b, 2007).

[3.3] Russell et al. argue that networked technologies have made a new type of relationship possible: "The top-down, one-to-many relationship between mass media and consumers is being replaced, or at least supplemented, by many-to-many and peer-to-peer relationships" (2008, 43). Colbert fans' activism makes use of new technologies to form this relationship, yet goes beyond this model. It relies on networked technologies, but it takes place through a range of media. It is a product of the same kind of convergence between new media and old media, as Jenkins (2009) notes in events like the CNN/YouTube debates. Colbert fans have a many-to-many interaction with each other, a one-to-many interaction with Colbert when the host provides the background for the fan community, and a many-to-one relationship with Colbert when fans create content for the show and help to produce his character. The Internet is the starting place for the collective and a means of creating a fan identity. Without the Internet, fans would lack many of their avenues of expression, like the forums of the Colbert Nation Web site and the blogs that follow the show. Most actions performed by members of the Colbert Nation also take place online. However, the online activities are usually closely linked to the television program, which performs an agenda-setting function and provides a common experience for fans to identify with.
The fan community's reliance on television and networked media is worth special attention because these media may seem to encourage passivity or minimal involvement in political and social life. Nevertheless, the prevalence of Colbert Nation activism online should not be dismissed as a sign of laziness. Most fan communication is online, but whenever there is the chance to act in the real world, fans show as much enthusiasm as when the demands on their time and energy are lower. Thousands of fans visited his portrait at the National Gallery (Neuman 2008) and attended the Rally to Restore Sanity and/or Fear that Colbert cohosted with Jon Stewart, demonstrating that the fans were willing and able to engage in more traditional forms of activism that require a more significant investment of time than online activism. Although one could argue that much of the fan action on television is constructed or framed by Colbert, the instances of direct action allow fans to express themselves in an unmediated way. For example, the rally served as a forum for articulating many different political positions; the diversity of the claims being made are evidenced by the countless messages expressed on attendees' signs.

Given the Colbert Nation's various modes of engagement and activism, it fits well with Jenkins's assessment of the changing nature of consumption and the erosion of the producer/consumer dichotomy: "In the old days, the ideal consumer watched television, bought products, and didn't talk back. Today, the ideal consumer talks up the program and spreads word about the brand. The old ideal might have been the couch potato; the new ideal is almost certainly a fan" (Jenkins 2007, 361). Many Colbert Report viewers are fans in this sense, and, as the following sections will show, this kind of fan action can promote political engagement.

4. The partisan message

To the extent that Colbert tries to influence America politics directly, he lends his support to either party. He plays a megalomaniac who is far more concerned with self-aggrandizement than with partisanship. He tends to support politicians who appear on the show and who are friendly to his character, regardless of their party allegiances. At times, Colbert even betrays his persona's conservative political ideology to celebrate his personal achievements. The 2006 elections marked a turning point in American politics, with the Democrats taking control of congress. As an ultraconservative, Stephen Colbert should have been disappointed at the news, but instead he celebrated. It was a loss for the Republican Party he claims to support, but a victory for him as a commentator because all 27 members of Congress that he had interviewed for "Better Know a District" (a segment of his show dedicated to interviews with each congressional district representative) were reelected, along with one challenger, John Hall, a Democrat who took New York's 19th district (Baym 2007, 359). Colbert celebrated what he claimed was the show's power over elections—the
power of fans to elect politicians who engaged with the show. In other elections, he has followed this pattern of celebrating fans’ influence over elections, regardless of which party the winner is affiliated with.

[4.2] When Colbert mobilizes his fans, he rarely asks them to take up partisan causes. The Rally to Restore Sanity and/or Fear is a prime example of how fans can take part in traditional political activism and of the nonpartisan activities of the Colbert Nation. The rally was held on the National Mall in Washington, DC, on October 30, 2010, shortly after the more partisan rallies held by Glenn Beck and Al Sharpton. Around 215,000 people attended the event, which was hosted jointly by Jon Stewart and Stephen Colbert (Montopoli 2010). The large turnout made the rally a significant event, but neither Stewart nor Colbert attempted to incite the attendees to vote for a particular candidate or to support a specific cause (Day 2010). Stewart presented medals of reasonableness and blamed those on the left and right equally for the rise of extremist rhetoric. His goal for the rally was not to support a partisan agenda but to promote a certain kind of discourse amenable to various positions along the political spectrum. He encouraged suspicion of extremism, the end of the culture war narrative, and more reasonable political debate. Colbert’s satire involved praising irrationality and extremism, but he, like Stewart, avoided any political party. His message of rampant partisanship came without much explicit support for a party, politician, or contentious issue.

[4.3] The hosts portrayed the rally as a call for more rational discourse (Tavernise and Stelter 2010). They even risked upsetting commentators from the left by accusing them of encouraging Americans to adopt polarizing political views. While this is a politically relevant message, it does not in itself support either party. The fact that such a significant gathering did not turn into a partisan event and that Colbert has yet to use his show as a platform for any partisan cause makes it seem unlikely that he will do so in the future. Therefore, when considering the political import of The Colbert Report, it is important to look beyond its support for a party to the subtler ways that fans may be empowered or encouraged to take action.

[4.4] Following from the show’s ambiguity and lack of a clear partisan message, the first form of audience participation in The Colbert Report is audience members’ ability to interpret Colbert’s satire. Although most commentators see Colbert as a liberal satirizing conservatives, fans are free to interpret him in various ways. One study found that viewers had the same perception of whether the show was funny, but that conservatives and liberals had much different impressions of Colbert’s own political opinions (LaMarre, Landreville, and Beam 2009). Conservatives tended to see him as actually being conservative and only using humor to express his true feelings. Liberals had much different reactions; they saw Colbert as he is portrayed in most
commentaries on the show—as a liberal highlighting the absurdities of extremist conservatism. On the basis of these findings, LaMarre et al. conclude that "the ambiguous deadpan satire offered by Stephen Colbert in The Colbert Report is interpreted by audiences in a manner that best fits with their individual political beliefs" (226). This may explain why the show has at times received harsh reactions from those who are ostensibly the beneficiaries of an attack on conservatism. For example, while serving as the Democratic Speaker of the House, Nancy Pelosi discouraged politicians from appearing as guests on the show, and it was the Republicans, not the Democrats, who accepted him as a candidate in the 2007 primaries.

[4.5] Baumgartner and Morris (2008) argue that Colbert's message is likely to lead viewers to become more conservative rather than exposing the hypocrisies of the conservative position. As they explain, "Exposure to Colbert increases support for President Bush, Republicans in Congress, and Republican policies on the economy and War on Terror" (634). The ambiguity of Colbert's humor should come as no surprise for scholars of fandom, as it fits with the assessments of the polysemy of popular texts (Fiske 1989, 1991, 1992; Jenkins 1992; Barker and Brooks 1998; Sandvoss 2005), but the polysemy is a matter of political contestation because of the show's political subject matter. Fans' interpretive task requires that they carefully consider the statements made by Colbert and his guests to determine what their intentions are, what implications they have, and the extent to which they support one party over another.

5. The audience and traditional activism

[5.1] One of the most common activities for Colbert fans is voting in elections to name things after the host. These campaigns usually follow the same pattern: fans use Colbert as a write-in candidate in online polls to name something, then Colbert reports on their efforts and encourages other fans to join in, and finally more fans join the campaign while Colbert continually reports on their success. One of the Colbert Nation's first tasks came on August 1, 2006, with the campaign to have a Hungarian bridge named after him in an online poll. The poll was designed for participation by Hungarians, but Colbert encouraged viewers to break the rules in order to win, saying, "Do this as many times as you can, from multiple computers if you have to. Carpal tunnel is a small price to pay for this gift to the Hungarian people" (quoted in Burwell and Boler 2008). He won the election by a huge margin, and he won the second election, which used stricter rules, as well. The Hungarian government declined to name the bridge after Colbert, but the event demonstrated his fans' power to influence events online, and it set the pattern that subsequent efforts would follow.
A similar campaign took place in 2009, when NASA announced a contest to name Node 3 of its space station. NASA provided four suggestions, but they also allowed write-ins, giving members of the Colbert Nation the opportunity to submit 230,539 votes for Stephen Colbert. The Nation won by a large margin, as the top NASA suggestion, *Serenity*, only received 40,000 votes ("Oops: Colbert Wins Space Station Name Contest" 2009). Again, the effort was unsuccessful: NASA refused to name the node after Colbert. Still, the event provided further evidence of fans' desire to become participants in their own entertainment and their commitment to *The Colbert Report*. The objectives the Colbert Nation sets out to accomplish tend to be relatively unimportant in themselves. The costs of losing and the benefits of winning are usually small. However, these seemingly trivial campaigns may have indirect benefits.

Megan Boler has shown that online political action can have a strong positive influence on a person's willingness to play a role in more traditional forms of political action:

Our survey of 160 producers evidences that 52 percent agree that, "My online political activity has caused me to take action in my local community (e.g., protest, boycott, etc.)." A majority, 59.5 percent, say that "My online participation in political forums has led me to join at least one political gathering or protest." Since becoming active online, 29.3% are "more active in 'offline' political activities," and 63.1% "spend about the same amount of time in 'offline' political activities." (Boler 2007)

This indicates that fans participating in online elections and Colbert's other campaigns are likely to become more involved in traditional forms of political action. The naming contests should therefore be viewed as tools for building a sense of efficacy among the fans who participate in them. Through these contests, fans are able to experience the value of collective action and see that even a relatively small group of people, when acting together, can influence the outcome of an election. Although each person only makes a small investment of time to cast their votes, the collective effort still has an appreciable effect on the outcome of the elections. Individual efforts make the difference between winning or losing in online polls, just as it does in elections for public office. The feedback mechanism of showing the results of the election was itself a kind of victory, as Colbert's coverage of the campaigns provided entertainment and encouragement to members of the Colbert Nation. Even when their efforts are unsuccessful, fans may feel an increased sense of efficacy because their votes are recognized by Colbert and become part of his television program. Colbert's positive coverage of the campaigns helps to reward fans for their
efforts and to offset the discouragement fans may feel when their voices are overruled by the contest organizers.

[5.6] As Amber Day (2011) points out, political satire programs can also promote traditional forms of political action by encouraging audiences to become more politically engaged. Day argues that political humor tends to be either satirical or cynical, noting that these two forms of humor have much different implications. While cynical humor encourages passivity and disengagement from politics, the satire of shows like The Daily Show and The Colbert Report informs and entertains without discouraging. A critical difference is that satirical humor tends to be more issue oriented, as opposed to the ad hominem attacks of cynical humor. Cynical humor is often directed at people; it gives the audience members a chance to feel superior to politicians, but it comes with the high price of also making them feel detached from the world of politics. By focusing on issues, satirical humor encourages viewers to think critically about political issues and to laugh at them without falling into cynical contempt for politics or politicians.

6. Everyday activism

[6.1] In addition to challenging fans to interpret the show's political satire and empowering them to take part in traditional forms of political activity such as voting, petitioning, and direct action, The Colbert Report promotes the expansion of the concept of citizenship to the contestation of information. The show encourages critical appraisal of sources of information, especially information from the experts who have traditionally drawn the line between fact and fiction, and directs fans to take part in determining what information is politically relevant.

[6.2] Jones (2005, 2006, 2011) argues that the nature of citizenship has changed and that television programs like The Colbert Report are both cause and consequence of a shift away from participatory citizenship to a citizenship defined by viewing. Although this shift may seem to undermine democratic governance because of the decline of the participatory element of democracy, the epistemological consequences are highly populist and emancipatory. What Jones calls new political television—a category that includes Politically Incorrect, The Daily Show, and The Colbert Report—plays a role in undermining the privileged positions of experts, thereby empowering ordinary people to formulate their own opinions. On the basis of this new kind of action, Jones concludes that "we must alter our conceptions of political citizenship as being determined solely through traditional means, and look more carefully at the fluid interchange of politics and culture in everyday life" (2011, 209). Similarly, Morreale argues that on television satire programs, "discussion, dialogue, provocation, and questioning are valued for their own sake—not because they lead to truth but because
they foster a community able to discern untruth" (2009, 121). This suggests that the greatest political benefits for members of a fan community may be intangible lessons and improved powers of critical thinking.

[6.3] Fans have engaged in many projects that demonstrate symbolic resistance or questioning of authorities, such as rewriting Wikipedia pages, creating remixes of the show's content, and propagating Colbert's neologisms or helping him to create new ones (Engstrom 2010). The effort to change Wikipedia pages involved modifying pages to make ridiculous false statements. This was to support Colbert's notion of "wikiality," which holds that truth is created by agreement and not by correspondence to fact. Of course, the suggestion that truth is only a matter of agreement is part of Colbert's satire; it is a critique of politicians and pundits who seem to think that their arguments require no evidence. Many fans took up the call to action and carried out the Wikipedia modifications. This campaign had no lasting influence on the pages—they were quickly changed back to their original form—but it did generate media attention for the Colbert Nation and for the concept of wikiality. Just as in the write-in voting, this campaign encouraged fan activism by giving fans a sense of power and celebrating their collective achievements on the show. However, it also went further, as the idea of wikiality that fans called attention to is a politically significant concept, given the extent to which politicians and media figures take popularity as an indicator of truth.

[6.4] By extending the critique of authority and discursive practices to a broad range of media, the Colbert Nation shows that political action can go beyond the narrow confines of what is done by the government and by citizens on election days. In Jenkins's terms, campaigns to contest information or the discursive strategies used for presenting information fall under the audience's power of negation. Old media like television can marginalize dissenting opinions by refusing to give them coverage or directing attention away from them by framing issues in a particular way (Jenkins 2009, 190). New media, by contrast, have the power of negation: they can challenge authorities, either directly or through humor. Jenkins generally describes this power as something deployed by individuals who use online media such as YouTube videos. This has the strength of allowing many oppositional voices to be heard. Although the Colbert Nation is more uniform and follows more structured agendas, its power of negation is felt on a much greater scale, as it comes from a network of fans acting together. The size of the fan community and its organization allow it to have a much stronger voice whenever its campaigns challenge politicians and media elites.

[6.5] John Hartley (2010) provides further support for the possibilities of fan action creating a new form of citizenship. Citizenship is typically seen in terms of the right to political participation, and perhaps also as the right to take part in contractual agreements or the right to benefit from social programs. These conceptions of
citizenship constrain membership in the class of citizens. The borders of these types of citizenship are usually precisely demarcated, and outsiders are excluded from their benefits. The DIY/DIWO citizenship that is promoted by television programs like *The Colbert Report* is far more inclusive, as its audience is not restricted by age, nationality, place of birth, language, or other characteristics. Anyone with access to cable television or an Internet connection can watch the show, communicate with other fans, generate the show's content, and take part in the Colbert Nation's campaigns.

### 7. Conclusion

[7.1] Stephen Colbert is a postmodern character who owes much to the dedicated fan community that helps develop his identity and the content of his show. The fans who take part in Colbert's campaigns show an enormous potential for political action, and the actions they take often parallel political acts, even when they are apparently trivial. Fans vote, challenge the terms of political discourse, attend events, and cooperate to bring each of these about. The show encourages these actions by providing fan activists with positive feedback and encouragement. The Colbert Nation confirms studies that show that fan collectives have enormous potential for mobilizing themselves and taking action (Van Zoonen 1998, 2004, 2005) and shows some of the ways in which contemporary fan activism promotes traditional forms of political engagement and the extension of political action while also providing entertainment.

[7.2] It is important to acknowledge some of the limitations on Colbert fan activism and the challenges these raise for future research. Despite the many promising examples of fan engagement that I have discussed, there are several constraints on how fans can participate in the show. First, Colbert retains the largest share of authorial control over his character. Thus far, he has allowed fans to use his name, videos of him, and other materials related to the character to create their own media. Nevertheless, there is always a chance that he may object to some of his fans' uses of the Colbert character or the show's content. Because Colbert has the greatest claim to his character, any decision he makes to exercise greater authorial control might threaten fan activism. This would disrupt the reciprocal exchange that has characterized Colbert fandom and would require a reexamination of the show and its fans.

[7.3] Second, there is the possibility that fan action could be constrained by Viacom, which owns *The Colbert Report*. Although Viacom has allowed fans to contribute to the show and to create some media based on it, Viacom has also placed restrictions on what media fans are allowed to appropriate. In 2007, Viacom forced YouTube and other video-hosting Web site to remove videos of *The Colbert Report* and *The Daily
It continues to have a strong influence on the ways fans can use content from its programs. The risk is that Viacom may further limit fan opportunities for activism. Future research could examine the extent to which Viacom has shaped the Colbert Nation's opportunities for activism and how fan engagement changes in response to Viacom's ongoing efforts to protect its copyrights.

Finally, there are some signs that Colbert may be unable to respond to his audience's wishes in some circumstances. One of Colbert's most audacious campaigns was the creation of the Colbert super PAC (that is, a political action committee that permits virtually unlimited donations) in 2011. This campaign (still in process as of this writing) presents a challenge for Colbert and his fans. Colbert created the PAC and continually changes its legal status to demonstrate how PACs have circumvented regulations concerning campaign contributions. He encourages fans to make financial contributions to the PAC, which many do, but thus far, he seems unable to decide what to do with the money. At one point he asked fans to tell him what issues they care about, but this only led to an incoherent cloud of keywords (http://www.colbertsuperpac.com/wordclouds/index.php). It failed to provide the Colbert super PAC with much guidance for spending the money. Managing the super PAC may prove to be a significant challenge for Colbert, as misusing the money could alienate fans or lead the Colbert Nation toward a different type of fan activism. Future research should examine this unprecedented campaign once it is finished and determine what lessons it holds for fan activism.

8. Works cited


Praxis

Even a monkey can understand fan activism: Political speech, artistic expression, and a public for the Japanese dōjin community

Alex Leavitt

University of Southern California, Los Angeles, California, United States

Andrea Horbinski

University of California, Berkeley, California, United States

1. Introduction: Monkey politics

[0.1] Abstract—We examine the creation of dōjinshi works critiquing the passage of the metropolitan Tokyo ordinance Bill 156 in December 2010 as a case of fan-driven political activism. Bill 156 aims to limit artistic freedom and is specifically targeted at anime, manga, and other works of visual pop culture. Fans who participate in dōjin production perform both a love for this media and an active form of citizenship that is historically fannish but transformative beyond the mere appropriation and remix of media texts. We argue that dōjin fans and works constitute a recursive public, wherein participants actively create discourse around artistic and ideological issues while engaging in added layers of discourse regarding the maintenance of their existence as a public. We examine fan discourse and dōjin works engaging Bill 156 as an object for political activism, as anime and manga otaku perform their citizenship in the wider society of Japan for their local public and for a global audience of like-minded fans.

[0.2] Keywords—Censorship; Citizenship; Dōjinshi; Japan; Manga; Nonexistent youth; Popular culture; Recursive public; Tokyo


1.1 On December 15, 2010, the Tokyo Metropolitan Assembly approved a bill to amend and update the Youth Healthy Development Ordinance (enacted in and amended since 1964) Bill 156—commonly known as the Nonexistent Crimes Bill. The bill regulates the sale and renting of “harmful publications” to Japanese youth: material that is "sexually stimulating, encourages cruelty, and/or may compel suicide or criminal behavior" in people under the age of 18 (note 1). In addition to other provisions regarding mobile phone content and pornography, the bill especially requires Tokyo's content industry to regulate manga, anime, video games, and related images (except for real-life photography) that "unjustifiably glorify or exaggerate" certain sexual or pseudosexual acts, and it allows the government to regulate these images directly if they are "considered to be excessively disrupting of social order," namely, images depicting violent acts such as rape (http://www.animenewsnetwork.com/news/2010-12-13/tokyo-youth-ordinance-bill-approved-by-committee). The bill does not affect materials already labeled as adult or explicit but rather media marketed to general audiences, and critics have pointed out that the language of the bill is intentionally vague while overly broad, thus allowing the metropolitan government to evaluate these works and to enforce the bill as it sees fit (http://www.animenewsnetwork.com/news/2010-12-15/full-tokyo-assembly-passes-youth-ordinance-bill).

1.2 The draft bill’s clauses concerning artistic expression generated the largest response from the Japanese public. The artistic community—in particular, celebrated manga artists and industry professionals—erupted in protest against the bill and its predicted consequences in the spring of 2010, when the draft bill was framed in terms of depictions of youth characters in creative works (note 2). Although the bill as passed in December 2010 was reframed to restrict depictions of crimes against youth characters in creative works, the creative community’s opposition has not abated. The bill is technically a local ordinance that applies only to the metropolis of Tokyo, but self-regulation on the part of the creative industry, the bulk of which is concentrated in the capital, as well as potential censorship of those companies in its jurisdiction by the metropolitan government, could have a chilling effect on the industry nationwide (http://www.animenewsnetwork.com/editorial/2010-12-28).

1.3 We examine the passage of Bill 156 as an opportunity for political participation and fan activism in Japan. The affective community around Japanese popular visual culture consists of comic artists, animators, and editors, as well as fans of these visual works, who are known primarily as otaku. The fan activism we examine is not reflected in the appreciation and remix of a media property. Rather, the reactions to the Nonexistent Crimes Bill embody engagement with the dōjin medium and illustrate the cultural proximity of Japanese fans to the process of artistic creation (Ingulsrd and Allen 2009). Dōjinshi are a popular form of fan comic in Japan that frequently transform and/or parody professional works produced and distributed by manga and anime companies (Lam 2010, 232–34). Dōjin works, however, are not limited to comic books: they range from dōjin soft (fan-made software) like independent video games to dōjin music and photography CDs. We argue that dōjin works are important because while they transform media artifacts, they reveal cultural and political ideologies underlying the creation and distribution of fan works.
While dōjinshi reflect a fannish impulse to reappropriate and to transform characters and worlds, dōjin works also partake of a specific economic relationship to commercial works: namely, the process of creating for fans, distributing by fans, and selling directly to fans. Stores around the country stock dōjin works alongside professional products, but periodic fan events around Japan form key sites for this secondary, face-to-face market. The most notable of these is Comike, the biannual, three-day Comic Market in Tokyo that, in its 76th iteration in August 2009, attracted what was then a record 35,000 exhibitors and 560,000 attendees. While these events remain popular in Japan, many dōjin works are curated, distributed, and publicized in forums online. Additionally, dōjin creators are not necessarily amateurs. Many professional manga artists sell products—outside of their commercial contracts—in the direct-to-fan market, often with the tacit permission of their publishers. And dōjin artists at Comike, for example, frequently have some professional industry experience (Lam 2010; Ōkawa 2006). Indeed, the easy slippage in the dōjin community between professionals and amateurs, both categories being subsumed into that of fans, calls into question the very salience of the professional-fan or professional-amateur distinction (Healey 2009).

Dōjin production is a key and active praxis within otaku subculture. For decades, otaku have been viewed purely as passive consumers of media properties, swayed mentally and sexually by voluptuous female characters (or, in the case of fujoshi—female fans of boys' love comics—male characters in homoerotic scenarios) in comics, television, and video games, creating a personal space for their consumptive pleasure (Azuma 2009; Saitō 2007; Morikawa 2003; Kinsella 1998). However, as we argue, otaku are active participants in the creation and criticism of culture and politics. Through dōjin practices, otaku perform what Thomas Lamarre describes as a "compulsive intervention into the flow of media" (2009, 148, emphasis in original). Otaku are critical viewers who obsessively deconstruct media through layers of information. Yet in creating dōjin, otaku also construct and reconstruct meaning as a public of artists and media consumers, purposefully doing so outside of the hierarchies and discipline of commercial production. As agents in that public, then, otaku transform dōjin into a form of political activism.

To illustrate the ecosystem of dōjin works, artists, and ideologies, we adopt the concept of the recursive public used by anthropologist Christopher Kelty to describe free software developers and open-source principles. A recursive public is "a public that is vitally concerned with the material and practical maintenance and modification of the technical, legal, practical, and conceptual means of its own existence as a public; it is a collective independent of other forms of constituted power and is capable of speaking to existing forms of power through the production of actually existing alternatives" (2008, 3). Dōjin creators in and around otaku subculture epitomize a recursive public: in the creation of dōjinshi and other fan products, they engage in discussions of the viability of the alternative dōjin market and demonstrations of free expression and copyright issues.

Such dōjin practices not only rewrite popular media texts but challenge and transform state-propounded narratives of national and global politics. These acts constitute what Jennifer Chan identifies as new, postmodern forms of performative citizenship, "which does not end with the deconstruction of the networks of power behind existing metanarratives. It is centered on the production of alternatives, performed in the daily acts of activism" (2008, 14). The engagement of dōjin production with contemporary politics via its own instantiation of a recursive public constitutes a new extension of postmodern, performative citizenship into otaku subculture, specifically in opposition to narratives about youth propagated by all levels of government in Japan.

2. Regulating nonexistent crimes

The Nonexistent Crimes Bill is largely the creation of Tokyo’s conservative governor, Ishihara Shintarō, who has held the office as an independent since 1999. The text of the ordinance was drafted in spring 2010, but in the face of popular and political opposition from the centrist Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ, which currently holds a majority in the Tokyo Metropolitan Assembly), the bill—then popularly called the Nonexistent Youth Bill—was defeated in the assembly in June of that year. Ishihara and his allies eventually secured the bill's passage in December by incorporating many changes initially demanded by DPJ assembly members. Its clauses soliciting voluntary self-regulation by the content industry went into effect on April 1, 2011, and its restrictions on the sale and rental of the materials in question to minors took effect on July 1.

The metropolitan government had already announced in April a list of six titles that it was planning to restrict on the basis of their content, mostly manga containing depictions of incest and rape, under the July provisions. Since the 1960s, decisions handed down by Japanese courts in cases relating to the regulation of the depiction of "sexual expression" have consistently found that "protection of public welfare through censorship of obscenity is not a violation of free expression guarantees" (Trager and Obata 2004, 267). However, lawmakers in Japan have increasingly defined the public welfare to include regulation and prohibition of the exposure and sale of sexually explicit materials to persons under the age of 18, on the grounds that exposure to such depictions constitutes a "harmful influence" that has been conflated with the legal charge of obscenity. Since 2002, both professional and dōjin creators of sexually explicit manga have been arrested and eventually fined on charges of obscenity stemming from the manga's distribution (note 3).

[1.4] [1.5] [1.6] [1.7] [2.1] [2.2]
3. The ecosystem of dōjin production

[3.1] Fans around the globe produce physical—and, increasingly, digital—copies of their transformative works, marketing them to other fans at cost or for minimal profit, but dōjin production has grown to occupy a critical artistic and economic niche within Japanese society. The emergence of a semicommercial mechanism and marketplace for the creation and distribution of dōjinshi within Japan has fostered a large community of artists and consumers, who participate in artistic communities both on- and offline and who frequently attend fan events to sell fan and original works to their peers (indeed, dōjin means "like-minded").

[3.2] Dōjinshi have been the topic of many scholarly analyses, particularly in relation to the singular legal issues and questions about ongoing economic viability surrounding the dōjinshi market (Hatcher 2005; Arai and Kinukawa 2010). Additionally, dōjin seem to provide an unusual opportunity for female agency and artistic expression by fujoshis and consumers within otaku subculture (Kinsella 1998; Noppe 2009). Beyond these viewpoints, we see dōjinshi not only as transformative fan works, but also as a mode of production that allows for artistic and expressive freedom. Whether at fan events or online, dōjin provide fans with the opportunity to produce creative works outside of the commercial production process, thereby providing them a certain amount of agency in their creative expression.

[3.3] The first Comike was held in 1975, and though various other sokubaikai (fan events for buying and selling works) were also popular at the time, over the next few decades Comike grew to become the largest such event in Japan. The organizers of Comike envisioned a space without limitations on content or access; over time, dōjinshi available at Comike expanded beyond fan-made comics to include model kits, music, animation, and video games, while exhibitors increasingly came to be composed of smaller dōjin circles (rather than large groups) and attendance by consumers—who did not themselves produce dōjin works—increased. These smaller dōjin circles are made up of artists collaborating jointly; Nele Noppe notes that while individual artists do produce dōjinshi on their own (kojinshi), collaboration—usually within a university club—remains the norm, and the norm for circles is to market their works to the larger dōjin community (Lam 2010; Noppe 2009).

[3.4] Of course, derivative fan works sold at sokubaikai remain illegal under Japanese copyright law, and fan creators—as well as event coordinators—understand the legal juggling act that occurs between rights holders and artists. While fan works have been generally tolerated by the manga industry, for a circle to be admitted to Comike, members must submit an application form (with personal details and information about the items to be sold), so that a committee may vet each submission to ensure that no copyrighted material is being resold illegally. Also, the Doujinshi Publishers Association puts out guidelines for creators to ensure that the authors will be liable for any issues after the materials are printed (note 4). Yet with the growth of Comike and the popularization of dōjinshi as a form of artistic expression, creators and even consumers have become embroiled in issues of copyright. Some dōjin creators remain conservative on these points, going, as Nele Noppe notes, "to great lengths in order not to draw attention from people who are not involved in dōjinshi culture and might not be understanding of its activities" (2009, 129). Still, awareness of and involvement in copyright issues leads dōjin creators and consumers to engage in discourse about them.

[3.5] While copyright remains a critical factor for creators, concerns about free speech, freedom of artistic expression, and anticapitalist ideologies are also at the forefront of the dōjin community. Comike participants share the sentiment that dōjin works enjoy a distinct status separate from commercial works. Jan Condry (2011), drawing on research by Shichijō Nobushige concerning Comike participants' opinions about dōjinshi, notes that works from the commercial world are seen as "un-dōjin-like" (dōjinte kaa nai) and that there is a logic of the fan art world (dōjinkai no roori) that opposes the economic logic of capitalism.

4. Recursive publics: Drawing dōjin, drawing out politics

[4.1] While otaku subculture has been consciously incorporated into state narratives marketing the concept of "cool Japan" to increase tourism, the ostensibly passive nature of otaku as ultraconsumers conflicts with the active process of political participation (Galbraith 2010). However, the creation of dōjin works within otaku subculture is an active form of participation in this community. Usually otaku themselves, professional creators of anime and manga frequently engage in discursive practices within their works that act as part of a larger conversation about symbolic and ideological meanings within the subculture. A public forms around discussion about otaku identity and consumer behaviors, and particularly around the exchange of information...
(Lamarre 2004). Professional studios—beyond the agency of the ordinary citizen—produce media that become important artifacts within these debates. Yet dōjin production allows for a greater participation in the discourse of otaku subculture.

[4.2] The creation and circulation of dōjin works also fosters its own discourse around the production of fan works, fan identity, and the status of fans within Japanese society at large. Fans who take active roles in this discourse form a public for ideological debate. Drawing on Michael Warner’s work on publics and counterpublics, Chris Kelty argues that the existence of discursive media is “not sufficient for a public to come into existence…it requires also that the public take corresponding action…the circularity is essential to the phenomenon…its reality lies in just this reflexivity by which an addressable object is conjured into being in order to enable the very discourse that gives it existence” (2008, 48). Besides conversations between fans in clubs, dōjin circles, and online forums, the creation of dōjin works, participation at dōjin events, and—as we explain below—political appeals through media demonstrate the active circulation that occurs within this dynamic fan public.

[4.3] The production of dōjin works for and by fan creators constitutes a public in which fans converse with one another, a space that “checks its operation through shared discourse and enlightened discussion” (Kelty 2008, 39). The ecosystem of dōjin works combines practice and ideology into what Kelty terms a recursive public. Studying free software developers, Kelty describes the two faces of a recursive public: it includes “the activities of making, maintaining, and modifying software and networks, as well as the more conventional discourse that is thereby enabled,” as well as “the recursive 'depth' of the public, the series of technical and legal layers…that are the subject of this making, maintaining, and modifying” (2008, 29). The Japanese fan community as a recursive public is involved in the creation of dōjin works, but it also maintains and modifies its existence as a public through the process of creation (methods and technology for art and publication), dōjin events (and the ensuing semicommercial fan economy), and the relationships between creators and copyright holders.

[4.4] Kelty’s concept of the depth of a recursive public is strikingly reminiscent of Thomas Lamarre’s analysis of the superplanar image in Japanese animation, in which intervals between layers of the image are flattened so that the image itself becomes “a distributive field in which movement into depth is replaced by density of information” (2009, 133). For Lamarre, following the cultural critic Okada Toshio, otaku are people who are interested in and capable of navigating these layered images and fields of information successfully. The fan becomes “a producer, assembler, or fabricator, who engineers and navigates his or her path within the manga/anime/game world” and who is a vital part of a culture industry that moves between fan and professional production as easily as it crosses media and goods (Lamarre 2009, 185) (note 5). Such engineering is a counterpart to the ideological layering described by Kelty, and as Sandy Annett (2011) shows, fans of animation are themselves animated by the force of its moving images to perform their love for animation via fandom itself. Beyond consumption of media texts, dōjin practices allow otaku to perform what Lamarre describes as a “compulsive intervention into the flow of media” (2009, 148, emphasis in original), an intervention where fans are continuously altering the norms and terms of dōjin practice by conducting and talking about them.

[4.5] Kelty additionally posits that a recursive public is “a collective independent of other forms of constituted power and is capable of speaking to existing forms of power through the production of actually existing alternatives” (2008, 3). The dōjin community may criticize the limitations of the commercial market by maintaining its own fan-driven economy around its products, as when fan works portray characters in sexual situations that commercial publishers would never condone. But dōjin works often sustain a symbiotic relationship with professionally produced media, occasionally even developing into best-selling franchises and entering into the professional world of editors and publishing companies (such as Hidekazu Himaruya’s Hetalia! Axis Powers). Dōjin works lend credence to alternative—and successful—forms of flexible interaction with copyrighted materials, alternatives that challenge the policies of professionals in the industry. Even companies like Gainax—which founders started out as fans creating their own fan-made, fan-marketed model kits to fund the production of their high-budget, professional animation projects—have attempted to supervise fan works transforming their professionally produced characters and story lines (“Hostile responses not enough in battles with infringers,” Nikkei Weekly [Tokyo], December 17, 2007).

[4.6] Dōjin alternatives that critique existing forms of power are imbued with social value. Anne Allison has argued that immaterial labor, specifically in its affective form—work around information and human connection that utilizes and also produces emotional connections, like dōjinshi—has become the hegemonic form of labor in late capitalist societies, including Japan. In Allison’s assessment, the global popularity of the Japanese contents industry glorifies “youthful” characteristics of immateriality—“flexible sociality, instantaneous communication, information juggling”—in media franchises even as youth themselves are vilified for their inability to follow in their parents’ socioeconomic footsteps as a result of the immobilization of the Japanese economy (Allison 2009, 89). Rather than full-time, lifetime employment, youth today are frequently unable to find employment that pays well enough to enable them to live outside the home, marry, and have families of their own.

[4.7] But because affective labor relies on emotions, the stuff of human connections, affective labor may subvert capitalism’s tendencies toward commodification and dehumanization via the very emotional connections that affective labor creates and relies upon, particularly when, in what Allison terms affective activism, those emotional connections are used to forge a community that can sustain its members, physically as well as emotionally. Dōjin epitomize this subversive connective potential, both in terms of the commercial market and in relation to copyright. Allison asserts that as a result of the global popularity of the multimedia Pokémon franchise, for example, Pokémon, “in being productive of capital and national value, became a brand of and for Japan itself” (2009, 92). Similarly, as youth and young adults support dōjin production, a form of affective labor that generates large
sums of capital both for dōjin creators (at fan events) and for commercial rights holders (through visibility of fan works), as well as simple affective connections among members of the dōjin community, dōjin ideologies become an ideology of Japanese youth itself—values that challenge dominant societal narratives concerning the value of youth as citizens.

5. From *Monkey Business* to miku: Dōjin as political work

[5.1] The dōjin community has a vested interest in the political situation concerning the Nonexistent Crimes Bill, and the public attempts to influence that situation for self-preservation as well as for activism. Bill 156 affects the existence of dōjin works and their creators—to say nothing of the artistic community at large—by regulating the sale and distribution of “harmful books” and potentially encroaching on issues of free expression that are vital to the maintenance of dōjin practice, namely in relation to regulation of the contents industry, which might police its intellectual property more strenuously to avoid repercussions under the ordinance provisions.

[5.2] While opportunities to carry out political agendas are available to dōjin artists at events like Comike, which reach thousands of like-minded individuals, the motivations of participants do not tend to promote political themes. As Ian Condry, citing Shichijō, notes, almost half of the creators polled participate primarily because creating dōjinshi and attending Comike is enjoyable (49.8 percent) or because they wish others to see their artistic work (27.1 percent). Only 8.1 percent of creators stated they participate primarily because they have a message or opinion they wish to convey (Condry 2011): creative satisfaction and expression remain at the heart of Comike.

[5.3] Though the majority of dōjinshi sold at Comike are transformative works, and most explore parodic or erotic themes, dōjin production—and fandom in general—is not always a site of resistance. Participation in fan activities is foremost an act of pleasure and celebration that may lead fans to recapitulate problematic narratives contained within the works being celebrated (Annett 2011). Still, to note that fandom does not necessarily challenge sociopolitical norms is not to reject political action as antithetical to fannish behavior. Political engagement may manifest alongside ordinary fannish participation, or certain works or people may inflect such participation with political motivations and ideologies. For example, Marilyn Ivy examines the contemporary art of Nara Yoshitomo and finds that although Nara’s fans are not a priori political, through their appreciation for his work they are immersed in a parapolitics that emerges from the aesthetics and themes dominating Nara’s art. His art “is based on shared affects and affections and generates forms of association and communality difficult to establish in late capitalist Japan” (Ivy 2010, 23). Nara’s work, which is not limited to Japan, brings together volunteer participants and fans into a parapolitical community; the formation of this community itself is “a form of (para)political action, one that works to produce forms of solidarity resistant to right-wing politics, the justification of war, and neonationalist movements in Japan (and elsewhere)” (Ivy 2010n27).

[5.4] Similarly, certain dōjin creators and works may bring fans together around visible (or subtextual) political issues. Metacommentary within the dōjin public has emerged in various works, most notably the Manga Ronsō Boppatsu (*The Manga Criticism War Erupts*) series, where critics, editors, academics, researchers, journalists, and authors critique issues such as free artistic expression in manga, creators’ rights, copyright, and the globalization of manga to further the constructive discourse around dōjin culture ([http://2chan.us/wordpress/2010/01/22/c77-acquisitions-kind-of-manga-ronso-boppatsu-vol-1/](http://2chan.us/wordpress/2010/01/22/c77-acquisitions-kind-of-manga-ronso-boppatsu-vol-1/)). More recently, in the months leading up to the passage of the Nonexistent Crimes Bill, many artists, creative professionals, critics, and citizens (both Japanese and international) produced information and media summarizing and critiquing the legislation ([http://dankanemitsu.wordpress.com/2010/12/13/bill-156-locked-to-go-prime-minister-expresses-concern-as-final-vote-comes-on-wednesday/](http://dankanemitsu.wordpress.com/2010/12/13/bill-156-locked-to-go-prime-minister-expresses-concern-as-final-vote-comes-on-wednesday/)). Since its passage, various commercial texts critiquing the ordinance have continued to appear (note 6). In particular, the manga publisher Shûeisha has continued to lead opposition to the bill. In a press release, a representative called the metropolitan government’s stated concern for the welfare of actual youth a “pretext” for its acquiring the ability to lawfully obliterate manga that the metropolitan government couldn’t stomach, and he called for readers and publishers to keep a close eye on the metropolitan government so that it does not “run wild” (*Weekly Playboy* magazine Web site, July 1, 2011, the day the bill’s provisions took full effect; [http://wpb.shueisha.co.jp/2011/07/01/5525/](http://wpb.shueisha.co.jp/2011/07/01/5525/)). On the dōjin side, a representative of the executive committee of the Comitia comics exhibition, a quarterly-annual, 1-day dōjin fair in Tokyo, stated the bill forced Comitia staff members to unwillingly participate in a world they hadn’t previously been connected to (i.e., politics), and—after noting their initial success and ultimate failure at making their views heard—concluded that the executive committee has no choice but to observe the government closely in the future and to protest and take concrete actions the next time regulations concerning freedom of expression are up for debate ([http://blog.livedoor.jp/comitiastaff/archives/65936307.html](http://blog.livedoor.jp/comitiastaff/archives/65936307.html)).

[5.5] While authoritative members in the professional and dōjin realms spoke out against the legislation, some dōjin creators purposefully worked to introduce politics to the publics of dōjin events. For Comike 79 (in December 2010), a dōjinshi titled *Saru de mo wakaru tojōretsu taisaku: Monkey business (An idiot's guide to Tokyo's harmful books regulation)* ([A counterpolicy to a metropolitan regulation that even a monkey could understand: (An idiot's guide to Tokyo's harmful books regulation)] appeared in the fan market (figure 1) (note 7). It parodies the political actors involved in the creation of the Nonexistent Crimes Bill in accordance with aesthetic tropes currently popular within otaku subculture, in the form of a bilingual comic that was marketed to an international audience of like-minded fans (including the authors of this article).
Figure 1. Cover of the Monkey Business dōjinshi. [View larger image.]

[5.6] Monkey Business consists of a comic and a few short essays created by three content industry professionals who also regularly produce fan works: Nogami Takeshi (manga artist), Suzuki Takaaki (anime script writer), and Dan Kanemitsu (professional translator). The manga follows the trio as they explain the current state of affairs regarding the Nonexistent Crimes Bill and how fans can become politically engaged to challenge the bill’s provisions and fight its consequences. Monkey Business parodies the popular comedy manga Even a Monkey Can Draw Manga (EAMCDM), written by Koji Aihara and Kentaro Takekuma from 1986 to 1988. EAMCDM follows two manga artists who want to rule Japan by creating popular manga (Aihara and Takekuma 2002, 5) that also parodies manga genres while providing tips for the reader to draw her own. Monkey Business uses the same style: the three male authors are depicted as attractive women, and male politicians are represented as seductive young women in skimpy clothing. In a nod to changing tastes within otaku subculture, the manga parodies boys’ love comics as well as boys’ action manga (i.e., shōnen, stylized with large muscles and bold ink lines). EAMCDM’s political bent transfers cleanly over to Monkey Business—the authors want to rule the world with otaku media—but the dōjinshi creators speak of a political, global reality: Japanese popular media has taken hold of millions of international fans, and visual pop culture has become a norm in contemporary Japanese society. Indeed, the dōjinshi begins with an announcement to the community that recognizes the text’s playful nature yet seriously calls readers to action: “Imagine a world where people can freely enjoy all the works they want to enjoy to their heart’s content. It would be a great privilege if this book provides you some hints as to how we could make such a world a reality. Let’s have fun” (Nogami et al. 2010, 3).

[5.7] Monkey Business epitomizes a discursive work within the dōjin recursive public. First, it illustrates issues relevant to otaku subculture, debating character-related terms like tsundere (sarcastic but fawning) and moé (cute, sexual appeal), and references manga genres that likely would fall under the purview of the Nonexistent Crimes Bill—comics featuring sexualized girls, homoeroticism, and excessive violence (Nogami et al. 2010, 10–13, 15–18, 20–25; Galbraith 2011). Additionally, at the end of the comic, the narrating characters strip to provide “fan service” for the reader—yet instead of being overtly sexually stimulating, these depictions aim to foster commonality among readers as fans who understand manga norms. While otaku subculture is not homogeneous—for instance, fujoshi (literally “rotten women”) are very different fans and consumer-producers than male or female otaku—Monkey Business attempts to cater to all of its readers, even those such as fujoshi, who have kept a low profile until relatively recently (Annett 2011). Even more importantly, the dōjinshi never explains the details of the ordinance: it assumes that dōjin creators and readers, as part of this public, already immerse themselves in debates around these current events. Taken together, these elements constitute artistic trends and foster discourse within the dōjin community, unifying the dōjin public on common cultural ground.

[5.8] Second, Monkey Business deals with political issues of free speech and free artistic expression that directly impact the existence of this recursive public, particularly in response to Bill 156. The dōjinshi exemplifies engagement with the discourse of the public, with a script that deals with political action and an art style that mocks the government’s legislation. In the accompanying essays, Kanemitsu even draws a parallel between the political process in government and the politics of dōjinshi: like-minded individuals coming together to work for a common goal (Nogami et al. 2010, 31). Overall, the dōjinshi frames the experience of political action from the common standpoint of the dōjin public—approaching politicians as an artist continually fails (Nogami et al. 2010, 6)—and only unity as a community, both as artists and as a generation, will bring success. “This latest battle was a case of the old values conflicting with the new values! In the near future, you and I, the younger generation will be standing in the forefront in this battle!” (Nogami et al. 2010, 28). Kanemitsu’s character even calls for international recognition of the situation, heightening Japanese readers’ sense of their duty to participate as citizens and to “stay diligently interested in issues like these” because international otaku are “watching us closely” (Nogami et al. 2010, 29). Ultimately, the call to political
action depends on the dōjin audience as a public, a community that actively participates rather than being mere "passive consumers" (Nogami et al. 2010, 30).

[5.9] Compared to other dōjin, the *Monkey Business* creators undertook an unusual promotion strategy that has greatly affected its status as an important work within the dōjin public, particularly in relation to the modification of that public's future: the creators aimed to distribute the work to the largest possible audience worldwide. Like most fan-made products, the *Monkey Business* dōjinshi was sold at Comike in a limited print run of about 1,000 copies, produced and distributed by Nogami's circle, First Spear, which sold out in less than 2 hours. The team quickly began a second print run of the comic, which they are selling through dōjin stores like Tora no Ana, Nogami's personal online mailing service, and commercial outlets such as Amazon.jp (http://dankanemitsu.wordpress.com/2011/01/18/the-lull-between-the-storms-2011-update/). Although the dōjinshi was not First Spear's most prominent entry in the official Comike catalog, *Monkey Business* was heavily advertised online, via art Web sites like Pixiv (to Japanese-language fans) and via Kanemitsu's blog (to English-language fans). In contrast to dōjin creators of transformative works, who are highly concerned with limiting the distribution of their works in order to avoid direct copyright entanglements, the *Monkey Business* authors were liberated by their dōjinshi's original content to promote their political agenda and to distribute their comic everywhere they can. Kanemitsu notes that they tried to keep the price as low as possible to allow ease of access while still covering printing costs (http://dankanemitsu.wordpress.com/2010/12/26/monkey-business-counterattack-on-bill-156-doujin-style/, comments). And at the end of the comic, the authors append a notice: "Taking into consideration the contents and purpose of this book, the authors of this publication provides expressed [sic] permission for others to reproduce, share, redistribute the contents of this publication...You are free to spread the word, but please don't rip us off" (Nogami et al. 2010, 42).

[5.10] Such freedom to share seems antithetical to the values (and worries) of the dōjin community that inhabits events like Comike. However, *Monkey Business* represents another instance in which dōjin production is reproducing its ideological inclinations as a form of maintenance and modification of its own existence as a recursive public, in this case by demonstrating possibilities for distribution of dōjinshi en masse to the global public of international otaku. As creators embrace the networked potential of the Internet, dōjin production may well begin to adopt such elements of "free culture" into its practice (Lessig 2005).

[5.11] Online spaces have already begun that dōjin artists and fans frequent to share and discuss art and media—spaces that also expand the potential and scope of dōjin publics. Platforms such as Pixiv, a Web site for artists to share pictures, and Nico Nico Douga, a video platform like YouTube, have been adopted by the dōjin community to distribute works to a massive network of users (Lam 2010, 243). Nogami used Pixiv to advertise *Monkey Business* to users who were following the account or looking for related materials via tagging, as a fair number of other dōjin artists do (http://www.pixiv.net/member_illust.php?mode=medium&illust_id=15196677). Additionally, he also advertised the comic on his circle's Web site (http://www.shop-online.jp/nogamiwebshop) and encouraged discourse on blogs and Twitter. Again, the increased potential for visibility seems to contradict the guiding ideology of dōjin community as a public, namely its predilection for concealment; however, most viewers who access these media and engage with artists appear to share ideologies and care for similar issues. In other words, the dōjin public has begun to extend to certain online platforms. Yet these platforms are also used as primary spaces in which dōjin publics evolve.

[5.12] For example, artists are employing Nico Nico Douga to disseminate dōjin work critical of Bill 156. On February 10, 2011, user Koushirou uploaded a video—a piece of dōjin music—to Nico Nico Douga that has been created using Vocaloid, music composition software that pairs coded notes with audio recorded by a voice actor and feature Vocaloid's mascot cum virtual idol, Hatsune Miku (developed by Crypton Future Media Inc.). Koushirou's video, however, recontextualizes Miku as a political activist, herself a dark, unhealthy, nonexistent youth, as she sings a condescending song about the politicians who are passing legislation against the "infamous people who wear glasses" (*megane o kaketa erai hitotachi*)—that is, otaku. The song describes pop culture fans' perception of politicians as people who "can't see the future, they're so befuddled by vagueness" (*mirai ga miemasen ne / aimai subbokete*). However, Miku sings—representing all "nonexistent youth" as well as her otaku creators—"We're waiting for a decision / Beautiful, idealistic / Flawless, ordinary, equal, and such / Please take care of our world, okay? / Take it!" (ketsudan o omachi shiteorimasu / utsukushiku risōtekina / kanzenmuketsu no heiei nado tairana / bokura no seki o yoroshiku ne / sai). And as Miku belts out her final lyric, a viewer's added comment flashes in red on screen: "2012 Citydwellers Rebellion" (2012 toshi kokumin hanpatsu), suggesting an activist rallying cry for subsequent viewers. Conveniently, retailers link to commercial books explaining and criticizing the ordinance at the bottom of the video's Web page.
Video 1. "[Hatsune Miku] Nonexistent Youth Healthy Development Ordinance [Original—PV]," dōjin music video critical of Bill 156.

[5.13] Nico Nico Douga acts as a vital segment of the recursive dōjin public, as thousands of Japanese fans use the platform for the dissemination of fan works via alternative distribution methods. In particular, Vocaloid grew rapidly because thousands of producers paired their songs with videos and uploaded them to the site, letting their peers distribute them freely. And though the Vocaloid software is proprietary, its creator, Crypton Inc., allows fans to appropriate Miku for certain artistic contexts like music videos, in which the Vocaloid characters become part of an "open-source culture" model (Leavitt 2011), where dōjin production using Miku and other Vocaloid idols thrives under lenient copyright allowances. (Crypton has, however, enforced its rights in specific, though rare, circumstances.) Certain limitations within the Vocaloid software's terms of service may restrict the artistic freedom of these musicians, such as using the characters to "transgress public order and morals" (http://piapro.jp/license/pcl), and therefore it is possible that Koushirou's criticism of Bill 156 may be deemed inappropriate and "legally" censored through a takedown procedure. As an amateur dōjin work spread within the dōjin public, Koushirou’s video provides the public with further political awareness.

[5.14] While Koushirou's Vocaloid video epitomizes political action within the dōjin community, like creative production at Comike, not all dōjin works on Nico Nico Douga are inflected politically. However, the dōjin communities that emerge on platforms like Nico Nico Douga or Pixiv act as spatial extensions of the recursive public of dōjin creators and consumers, and the Internet allows for the expansion of the public as more fans discover a space for critical discussion around creative and ideological values. These online spaces—though currently bounded by linguistic divides—further extend global anime and manga fandom and bring people from around the world into the public who are interested in the alternative ideals of the dōjin community.

6. Conclusion: Dōjin ideology and political futures

[6.1] Participation in Japanese dōjin communities epitomizes a recursive public that emphasizes discursive media in addition to action that impacts the maintenance of the public. Additionally, as we have argued, dōjin publics allow for political participation on the part of fans. Yet such participation also affects Japanese identity, because participation in these forms of alternative production and ideologies foster changes in civic engagement as Japanese grow up with these participatory practices.

[6.2] The alternatives of dōjin publics are important markers of cultural transition in postwar Japanese identity and citizenship. Since approximately 1960, when the renewal of the US-Japan Security Treaty (Anpo) brought popular political activism to its knees and inaugurated the so-called economist settlement, postwar Japanese democracy has been routinely characterized as illiberal and undemocratic. The gendered, male ideals of adult participation in Japanese society were centered around the figure of the salaryman, whose romanticized lifetime employment provided for his family, a household headed by the iconic shufu (housewife). Politics, by and large, were left to bureaucrats and career politicians, as Japan got the postwar democracy to which its citizens agreed: limited political input in return for vastly increasing economic output. Writing in 1998, Andrew Gordon termed the postwar sociopolitical order a "gyroscopic hegemony," noting that it was startlingly able to adjust itself to absorb challenges ranging from increased calls for women's right to work in the 1970s to the tribulations of the postbubble 1990s (1998, 212). In the dozen years since Gordon's analysis, the figures of the salaryman and the shufu have been, if not thoroughly discredited, then rendered far beyond the reach of many young people by changing socioeconomic forces, and the business-oriented social values described by Gordon are shifting to the immaterial labor (described by Allison) that has become the dominant form of hegemony within Japan.

[6.3] The immaterial, affective labor of Japanese dōjin practices constitute what Jennifer Chan calls "movement-based knowledge," which in her view "helps to construct new subjectivities about who the Japanese are and how they relate to others—
locally, regionally, and globally" (2008, 344). These dōjin practices resemble what Chan identifies as new, postmodern forms of performative citizenship, “which does not end with the deconstruction of the networks of power behind existing metanarratives. It is centered on the production of alternatives, performed in the daily acts of activism” (2008, 14).

[6.4] But in being an alternative to postwar Japanese social structures and values, the dōjin public inhabits a unique position. In surveying activists in nongovernmental Japanese organizations, Chan concludes that “these new subjectivities...need space in which to be expressed” (2008, 344); otherwise, they cannot emerge as alternatives. While Japanese NGOs must constantly struggle in competition with corporations and the state for adequate physical, fiscal, and ideological space, online and physical sites such as Comike, Pixiv, and Nico Nico Douga represent physical and ideological spaces constructed by Japanese fans of anime and manga, where those fans can constitute their own subjectivities and foster new forms of performative citizenship. These spaces and practices then become a networked platform for activism, and activism in the dōjin public is predicated on the claim that Japanese youth have a capacity for critical judgment about their own lives as well as their society—a capacity, as Bill McLelland notes, the authors of Bill 156 were careful to deny (2011, 8). Through engagement with metropolitan politics via the production of dōjin works critical of the Nonexistent Crimes Bill, fans directly challenge governmental narratives about youth—namely, their purported vulnerability, naïvete, and need for government protection—and indirectly counter state narratives about capitalism as the proper basis for economic exchange.

[6.5] Conscientious participation by the members of the dōjin public in the politics of society at large is transformative, not only in terms of appropriating and reorganizing media texts but in remaking citizen identity at large at a critical moment in Japanese history. Japan—as pundits, politicians, and ordinary people have reiterated for more than a decade—is facing a deep and continuing social and economic crisis. Since the collapse of the bubble economy in 1991, economic indicators have plummeted, along with rates of marriage and childbearing even as society on the whole ages quickly. As Anne Allison points out, state narratives have tended to blame young Japanese people for their failures to find steady jobs, marry, and have children, concealing the role of macroeconomic factors in conjunction with state policies in causing those failures (2009, 90–91). Through the creation and consumption of dōjin works, however, the dōjin public and its emergent fan activism challenge the state's depiction of youth in crisis and provoke its members to take their identity as anime and manga fans into a larger public sphere that they, by constructing and performing a political identity for themselves, will transform in turn to reflect their dreams and desires (Nogami et al. 2010, 34; Kinsella 1998). Whether or not members of the dōjin public succeed in transforming Japanese democracy, they have already rewritten themselves as dōjin—and by extension, Japanese—citizens.

7. Acknowledgments

[7.1] We thank Sandy Annett, Karen Healy, and Nele Noppe for materials and comments, Toko Manabe for translation checking, and Kaichiro Morikawa for research help.

8. Notes

1. See http://ja.wikipedia.org/wiki/%E6%9D%B1%E4%BA%AC%E9%83%BD%E9%9D%92%E5%B0%91%E5%B9%B4%E3%81%99%E6%9D%A1%E4%BE%8B

2. In June 2010, even nonexistent characters protested the bill: a character in the wildly popular Weekly Shonen Jump manga Gin Tama shouted in one chapter, “I object to the Ōedo Youth Healthy Development Ordinance Revision Bill!,” referencing the name of Tokyo in the manga (McLelland 2011, 10).

3. In 2002, a professional creator of eromanga and his publisher were arrested for distributing obscene materials, while in 2007 a dōjinshi creator was arrested on similar charges, having violated guidelines relating to the depiction of sexual acts and genitalia self-imposed by the dōjinshi publishers’ association the month before (http://heiseidemocracy.com/2007/08/28/editors-desk-dojinshi-obscenity-and-japans-imperiled-freedom-of-speech/; http://www.animenewsnetwork.com/news/2007-09-13/obscene-manga-artist-ordered-to-pay-300-000-yen-fine). All three were eventually required to pay hefty fines in lieu of prison sentences.

4. For instance, in 2007, the association issued guidelines pertaining to the censorship of genitalia, warnings about adult content, and inclusion of authors' personal information in sexually explicit dōjinshi. See http://www.doujin.gr.jp/foradult.html.

5. Lamarre’s description of the movement of the otaku subjectile (i.e., a subject in motion) through these fields of information is analogous to the experience of navigating the Comike catalog, or Comike itself: it’s up to the fan to decide what track to take.

6. See "Books Relevant to Tokyo Regulation" (tojyôrei kanren tosho) at http://mitb.bufsiz.jp/ (left column).

7. The full text of Monkey Business is available at http://media.transformativeworks.org/twc/v10/monkeybusiness.pdf. This document may be reproduced, shared, and distributed as long as such activity does not result in financial or material compensation.

9. Works cited


Abstract—For decades, the phrase fan activism has referred almost exclusively to television fans' efforts to save their favorite series. These campaigns—dating at least as far back as the original Star Trek (1966–69) to the more recent Farscape (1999–2003), Firefly (2002–3), Jericho (2006–8), and Veronica Mars (2004–7), among others—appear effective at catalyzing fan involvement, yet are largely ineffective at saving series. In other words, while it may achieve some secondary, albeit significant, victories such as tighter-knit relationships among fans, fan crusading rarely seems to end with the supposed primary goal of activist labors: more installments of the texts devotees admire and love. Recently, however, the phenomenon of fan activism has taken on a new dimension, and scholars are beginning to take note by asking several important questions. As Henry Jenkins asks, how does a fan move from "participatory culture to public participation"? And what does this move mean? As one might expect, there are many reasons for and implications that emerge from this reallocation of such devoted attention. To explore some of those reasons and implications, the author considers some of the devotees of television auteur Joss Whedon, their activist efforts, and the distinct ways Whedon inspires a politically participatory fan following. Ultimately, the author contends that through their activism, many enthusiasts of the Whedonverses extend the worlds of Whedon's stories by consciously constructing a sociopolitical, feminist identity.

Keywords—Captivity; Du'a Khalil Aswad; Equality Now; Fan activism; Joss Whedon; Roland Joffé; WHEDONesque


1. Introduction

April 7, 2007. The street in the Northern Iraqi town of Bashiqa fills with men, hundreds of men on a mission, a 17-year-old woman named Du'a Khalil Aswad in tow. Their mission, they tell themselves, involves honor. The young woman's long, dark hair obscures camera phone images and video from capturing her face in any detail. Even though dozens of phones are flipped open to chronicle this crusade, the cameras never frame her face, find her eyes. One wonders if any of the men circling her and frantically waving their phones in search of a good shot ever actually look into her
face, see her eyes as she is dragged along the street and finally thrown to her knees, shoved to her belly, and kicked to her side. One wonders if these men—in collared shirts and khakis, sweat pants and tennis shoes, brandishing shiny, high-tech communication devices—are more concerned about the quality of the audio than the actual sounds the woman creates, screams curdling at first but quickly fading to whimpers. Feet fly from every direction. Eventually, her army green skirt is ripped away, undone from the force of the kicks. A man lunges forward to cover her again, as if her immodesty were more worrisome than the cinder block that falls from the top of the cell phone video to finish the mob's self-imposed charge. Thirty minutes have passed. The woman finally lays still, the pool of blood spilling from her temple several shades deeper than her bright red sweater.

[1.2] Nothing but red.

[1.3] May 20, 2007. Joss Whedon posts to the fan-run Web log WHEDONesque. The creator of television's *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997–2003), *Angel* (1999–2004; cocreator, David Greenwalt), *Firefly* (2002–3), and *Dollhouse* (2009–10) titles his entry "Let's Watch a Girl Get Beaten To Death" and begins with an explanation for his visit to this particular virtual location: "This is not my blog, but I don't have a blog, or a space, and I'd like to be heard for a bit." The hyperlinked title does not, as it might appear to do, transport users to video footage of Du'a Khalil Aswad's killing, footage which is still available online today; instead, it takes users to, in Whedon's words, "a place of sanity." In fact, the link sends users to the Web site for Equality Now, a nonprofit organization that "advocates for the human rights of women and girls around the world by raising international visibility of individual cases of abuse, mobilizing public support through our global membership, and wielding strategic political pressure to ensure that governments enact or enforce laws and policies that uphold the rights of women and girls" ("Our Work" 2011). More aptly described as persuasion than pressure, Whedon's blog post does its own kind of work to end violence and discrimination. After explaining what happened to Aswad the month before, Whedon launches into a self-described rant in which he unpacks misogyny, aligns the filming and mass sharing of Aswad's death with the release of Roland Joffé's "torture porn" *Captivity* (2007), and ultimately calls fans to arms: "All I ask is this: Do something. Try something. Speaking out, showing up, writing a letter, a check, a strongly worded e-mail. Pick a cause—there are few unworthy ones. And nudge yourself past the brink of tacit support to action" (emphasis added). Within moments, fans spring rather than nudge themselves into action.

[1.4] For decades, the phrase *fan activism* has referred almost exclusively to television fans' efforts to save their favorite series (for examples, see Costello and Moore 2007; Earl and Kimport 2009; Menon 2007; Punathambekar 2007; Scardaville
These campaigns—dating at least as far back as the original *Star Trek* (1966–69) to the more recent *Farscape* (1999–2003), *Firefly* (2002–3), *Jericho* (2006–8), and *Veronica Mars* (2004–7), among others—appear effective at catalyzing fan involvement, yet are largely ineffective at saving series. In other words, while it may achieve some secondary, and significant, victories such as tighter-knit relationships among fans, fan crusading rarely seems to end with the supposed primary goal of activist labors: more installments of the texts devotees admire and love. Recently, however, the phenomenon of fan activism has taken on a new dimension, and scholars are beginning to take note by asking several important questions: What causes the shift from save-my-favorite-show rallies to support-my-favorite-charity sociopolitical campaigns? As Henry Jenkins puts it, how does a fan move from "participatory culture to public participation"? (note 1). And what does this move mean? As one might expect, there are many reasons for and implications that emerge from this reallocation of such devoted attention. To explore some of those reasons and implications, I consider some of Whedon's devotees, their activist efforts, and the distinct ways Whedon inspires a politically participatory fan following. Ultimately, I contend that through their activism, many enthusiasts of the Whedonverses extend the worlds of Whedon's stories by consciously constructing a sociopolitical, feminist identity, one that moves them "past the brink of tacit support" (Whedon 2007).

2. Whedon, feminism, and rhetoric

[2.1] Indeed, Whedon fans are not singular in their activist personality. Every year at the fan convention Dragon*Con in Atlanta, Georgia, Robert Heinlein enthusiasts sponsor a blood drive (in 2011, the event collected just under 9,000 units of blood products from 2,944 donors [Koslow 2012]). The film *Trekkies* (1997) chronicles the many forms of community outreach lovers of Star Trek have engaged in for decades, one being visits to children's hospitals in full Klingon array. Yet the similarities and differences—Browncoats (*Firefly*) are not Ringers (*The Lord of the Rings*) are not Twihards (*Twilight*) are not Potterheads (*Harry Potter*)—among fan communities are significant and, therefore, worthy of examination. Just as the Harry Potter Alliance, a civic-minded fan organization, possesses the spirit of J. K. Rowling's magical universe, so many Whedon fan activists have cultivated a distinctive character: specifically, a feminist one. Considering the strong female characters populating the narrative universes of Joss Whedon's series, such an assertion might not be surprising (note 2). Whedon's creation of these strong female characters has been recognized not only by fans, journalists, and scholars, but also by organizations such as Equality Now. Even more, in many public forums Whedon regularly and frankly reminds his audiences that he considers himself a feminist. The stoning of Du'a Khalil Aswad did not suddenly
prompt Whedon to seize the feminist mantle, though the occasion allowed him to further establish his pro-woman identity. Rather, Whedon's blog post demonstrates his intrinsic understanding of the rhetorical principles *exigence* (felt need) and *kairos* (right timing), an understanding also exhibited in a gala speech Whedon delivered a year before Du'a Khalil Aswad was killed and Roland Joffé's *Captivity* was released.

[2.2] On May 15, 2006, Equality Now honored Whedon at their gala "Men on the Front Lines." In a video recording widely circulated on the Internet, Meryl Streep offers a brief history of Equality Now before introducing Whedon, particularly noting that the organization was cofounded by Jessica Neuwirth, a former high school student of Whedon's mother, Lee Stearns. Streep exclaims that Whedon's mother would be very proud of the man he has become and the powerful, iconic female characters, such as Buffy the Vampire Slayer, he has created during his career. She also alludes to the efforts of Whedon's fans to raise money for the organization (see especially the Web site *Can't Stop the Serenity*). Though some antifans have read Whedon's speech as insincere, Whedon's self-effacing posturing, his humor, and his ability to capitalize on the shared values of Equality Now and women's rights supporters render both his delivery and content rhetorically effective—persuasive and, as a consequence, inspiring and motivating to many audience members.

[2.3] Upon approaching the microphone, Whedon (2006) begins by both acknowledging and deferring to the audience. He comments that he finds himself in a room full of people with "extraordinary courage," something he says he knows a little bit about since he once read of courage in a book. The audience responds with gentle laughter, and Whedon summarizes that he will stick to writing, a far less difficult task. "The most courageous thing I've ever done," he explains, "is something called a press junket, which is actually pretty courageous, believe me, because they ask you the same questions over and over and over and over and over and over and over." One of those questions becomes the central, organizing feature of his speech: "Why do you write these strong women characters?" Whedon begins to role-play, putting himself in the position of imaginary reporters and then moving back into his own skin. His first response is sincere and patient with the question: "I think it's because of my mother," he responds. "She really was an extraordinary, inspirational, tough, cool, sexy, funny woman and that's the kind of woman I've always surrounded myself with...it—it all goes back to my mother."

[2.4] "So why do you write these strong women characters?" queries the next invisible reporter (Whedon 2006). Whedon's strategy reveals itself this early in his speech. He goes on to demonstrate that no answer seems sufficient, so the question continues to be asked, and he continues to answer it. Having a strong mother and other strong women in his life doesn't seem an adequate answer for the press. As a
result, Whedon tries angle after angle: "Because of my father [and stepfather]...they were among the rare men who understood that recognizing somebody else's power does not diminish your own." Same question. With a little more irritation and a little less patience, Whedon replies, "Because these stories give people strength." Not just women. People. Something about a lead female character, argues Whedon, opens up a different kind of symbolic space, one in which women and men can explore emotions, "hopes and desires," that identifying with a male protagonist does not allow. Same question. The audience clearly receives Whedon's message as they audibly respond—with sympathetic laughter—to the repetition of "So why do you write these strong women characters?" Whedon uses his body to signify a change in his demeanor. He slouches a bit, bounces on his feet, smiles, and rubs the inside of his cheek with his tongue as he answers this fourth time: "'Cause they're hot." The audience laughs, but Whedon gives them little time to complete their reaction. Same question.

[2.5] Whedon (2006) erupts, "Why are you even asking me this?!" Being on the press junket, he explains, often involves doing multiple interviews in a day, sometimes as many as fifty or more. So he intends to capture for the audience his frustration. His frustration, however, does not come from the repetition of the question. After all, he knows the junket well enough to expect repeats. Rather, the nature of the question exasperates him:

[2.6] How is it possible that this is even a question? Honestly, seriously, why are you—why did you write that down? Why do you—Why aren't you asking a hundred other guys why they don't write strong women characters? [For the first time during the speech, the audience explodes with claps, whoops, and hollers.] I believe that what I am doing should not be remarked upon, let alone honored, and there are other people doing it. But, seriously, this question is ridiculous and you just gotta stop.

[2.7] In this scenario, though, his outburst is met with ignorant resolve: "So why do you write these strong women characters?" (Whedon 2006).

[2.8] Gone is the good son revering his parents. Gone is the teenage fanboy commenting on the "hotness" of his female characters. Gone is the frustrated, tired, even irate writer-director enduring a press junket. Here Whedon (2006) narrows to the thesis. More than just an idea or some goal to work toward, equality is essential for authentic living: "Equality is like gravity, we need it to stand on this earth as men and women, and the misogyny that is in every culture is not a true part of the human condition. It is life out of balance and that imbalance is sucking something out of the soul of every man and woman who's confronted with it." Consequently, Whedon maintains, we need equality not soon but right now. As he makes a play on words that echoes the name of the organization honoring him, the audience could have easily
read this linguistic flourish as a conclusion. But Whedon is not finished; he must accent his central argument. Same question: "So why do you write these strong female characters?"

[2.9] "Because you're still asking me that question" (Whedon 2006). Now he is finished. Complimented with applause, he thanks the audience again and exits the stage.

[2.10] In "Whedon Takes 'the Scary' Out of Feminism," Meghan Winchell (2010) discusses how she uses the video of Whedon's "Men on the Front Lines" speech in the context of her first-year Liberal Arts Seminar, an undergraduate course themed around Buffy the Vampire Slayer that hones students' critical thinking, oral communication, research, and composition skills (78–9). As Winchell explains, she does not begin the class by dropping the whole of feminism in students' laps (75). Instead, she simply starts by treating Buffy (and teaching students to treat Buffy) as seriously as any other culturally significant text. This self-described "back-door approach" allays the threat many students—both women and men—feel when the topic arises. Only after students have developed their own appreciation for the text, a critical respect and even enjoyment of it, does Winchell broach feminism and Buffy as feminist artifact. When she finally does introduce feminism, Winchell first invites students to share their honest reactions to the word, concept, and philosophy. As she expects, most initial responses are typical, mainstream media-driven characterizations: feminists are bra-burning, man-hating single women who are unattractive. Yet a few students inevitably also mention power, a topic perfectly suitable to the trajectory of the class. A historian, Winchell capitalizes on her strengths and expertise, placing Buffy in the context of both history and classic literature. For instance, students view Buffy in light of primary documents from the Salem Witch Trials, looking closely at cases against Sarah Good and Martha Corey. Winchell pairs these historical texts with episode 3.11 "Gingerbread" (note 3), allowing her to address "women's place and value within Puritan society" (76). She then invites students to engage in discussion and analysis of the real-world and Whedon-world events. As students exercise cross-cultural, cross-temporal, and cross-media comparisons, they sharpen their understanding of a variety of personal and communal women's issues.

[2.11] Only after a series of primary and secondary readings, discussions, and projects, does Winchell share Whedon's speech for the Equality Now event, and she shares it for the express purpose of offering a (re)definition of feminism for the first-year seminar students. For many of them, the approach works. As they watch the speech, they record their impressions as well as words Whedon himself uses to define strong women, terms such as sexy, tough, funny, and smart. Winchell (2010) notes
that students are especially "moved and fascinated by" Whedon's assertion that equality is as necessary as gravity (79). If nothing else, students come away from the speech and the class having been put on a path toward understanding more deeply and even beginning to identify more positively with feminism. What allows them to do so, posits Winchell, is the fidelity or "emotional realism" of Whedon's text, a realism that resonates, often profoundly, with students' own lives (79). Through Buffy, Whedon wins the young scholars over, making his feminist message as well as feminism itself a whole lot less "scary." Unsolicted and years after taking the course, Alex, a male student, reported to his former professor that the Liberal Arts Seminar on Buffy made the tenets of feminism accessible for him. Even more, he clarifies, Buffy "showed me the truth of feminism: how there is significant inequality and that accepting a woman's strength does not make a man weak... [Additionally,] Whedon's speech showed feminism as logical, moral, and sexy. It essentially showed me how backward, wrong, and ignorant it was not to be a feminist" (Winchell 2010, 80).

[2.12] Independently, Winchell and Whedon seem intent on shaping without dominating the ongoing conversation about equality. Both appear to desire, in educational parlance, active and self-actualized learners, a desire aligned with the tenets of critical pedagogy and liberatory education (see especially Freire 2006; Giroux 1997; and Shor 1992) or what some may even argue constitutes "true" education. For instance, Maria Montessori ([1909] 2006) describes auto-education as the process by which a person, deeply curious and invested in the creation of knowledge, teaches herself or himself through trial and error (169–73). In fact, error provides the vital means for genuine learning. As she insists, humans are not what we are because of the teachers we have had but because of what we have done (172). Through his transmedia texts, Whedon articulates his agreement. In Faith and Choice in the Works of Joss Whedon, K. Dale Koontz unwittingly echoes Montessori by asserting, "Whedon reminds us again and again [that] it's not what we carry in our blood that makes us worthwhile. It's what we choose to do" (2008, 189). Who we are, what we do—these themes arrest Whedon's attention and assert themselves in his creative work.

[2.13] Winchell the professor and Whedon the artist inspire independent, critical thinkers—students and viewers—rather than mere receptacles of popular yet logically flawed ideas, faulty notions such as the needlessness of the contemporary feminist movement. I understand this parallel between Winchell and Whedon as embedded feminism. I use embedded to mean lived or embodied feminism—a belief, a value, an ethic that translates into action or activism, however subtle or blatant the form. In biblical terms, "you will know them by their fruits" (Matt. 7:20, NASB). The rhetorical effect or persuasiveness of this kind of feminism occurs ethically and over time in the form of unfolding classroom/television narratives. As much as he attempts to convince his audience in the Equality Now address, however, Whedon is no more a mere writer
than Winchell is a mere professor; both aim at a purpose, fashion rhetorical acts. In fact, since the debut of Buffy on television, Whedon has become more visibly active in and much bolder about politics in general (note 4) and the politics of gender equity in particular.

[2.14] On May 20, 2007, a year and five days after his speech for the Equality Now event, Whedon posted his entry "Let's Watch A Girl Get Beaten To Death" to WHEDONesque. In the post, Whedon addresses two seemingly disparate events: the "honor killing" of Du'a Khalil Aswad in Bashiqa, Iraq, and the advertising for and theatrical release of director Roland Joffé's Captivity, a movie bearing the generic marks of "torture porn," a gratuitous blend of graphic violence and sexual imagery. Whedon's fiery appeal urges fans to intellectually as well as tangibly oppose violence against women and any other form of gendered oppression; boycotting Captivity, is an action Whedon alludes to but does not directly communicate. I suggest that Whedon continues to flesh out his own feminist identity, in part established by the Equality Now speech, by taking advantage of the kairotic moment created by the unsettling yet rhetorically felicitous juxtaposition of the Aswad murder and the Joffé motion picture.

[2.15] After Whedon (2007) explains that he wishes to be heard, he begins his blog post with a summary and critique of the stoning. He notes facts about the young woman and events surrounding her death that can be confirmed from mining newspaper articles published around the globe and archived on many Web sites: Du'a was seventeen years old; a crowd of men, including some family members, were responsible for her stoning; security forces were present but did not intervene; the "honor killing" was related to a perceived religious and cultural infraction. Whedon claims, as do many journalistic reports, that the young woman was of Yazidi descent (note 5) and had either been seen talking to a Muslim young man or had actually planned to run away with or marry him—which has never been confirmed. There exist some reports that she had actually converted to Islam (note 6). "That she was torturously murdered for this [perceived transgression] is not," states Whedon, "a particularly uncommon story." What is uncommon, he acridly stresses, is how the world learned of the story: multiple men filmed her murder with their cell phone cameras "from the front row" of the mob, footage that made its way to the Internet and then to major news outlets such as CNN. As a result of this global distribution, "now you [too] can watch the action up close." Whedon's choice of words—torturously, front row, action—as well as his indictment of the event as voyeuristic spectacle are foundational to what Whedon accomplishes next in the blog post: a thematic linking of real life (Aswad's stoning) to representational life (Joffé's movie).

[2.16] Whedon (2007) prefaces his juxtaposition of the young woman's stoning and the release of Captivity by stating that he bears "no jingoistic cultural agenda," that he
typically believes US citizens have not forgotten what was learned about the bystander effect as a result of the 1964 stabbing death of Kitty Genovese in New York, and that he usually has faith in Americans' adverse response to gendered violence. "We are more evolved [than that]," he hopes. However, just before discovering the video of Aswad, he viewed the trailer for Captivity. Viewing the trailer was not Whedon's first encounter with the summer release, though. In a March 22, 2007, letter to the Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA), Whedon had publicly condemned Captivity's billboard campaign. In "Let's Watch a Girl Get Beaten To Death," Whedon calls the billboard a "concise narrative of the kidnapping, torture and murder of a sexy young woman" because the sequence of four images are labeled "Abduction," "Confinement," "Torture," and "Termination" (figure 1). Attempting to give Roland Joffé, the director of the acclaimed film The Killing Fields (1984), the benefit of the doubt, Whedon sought the trailer in hopes it would predict a "more substantial" movie than the billboard promotions. He found otherwise and contends, "The trailer resembles nothing so much as the CNN story on [Du'a Khalil Aswad]. Pretty much all you learn is that Elisha Cuthbert['s character] is beautiful, then kidnapped, inventively, repeatedly and horrifically tortured, and that the first thing she screams is 'I'm sorry.'" At this point in the blog entry, Whedon turns his attention to a concept and practice he claims to be the concept and practice with which he will always wrestle: misogyny, or the hatred of women.

Figure 1. A Los Angeles billboard advertising Roland Joffé's Captivity (Hall 2007). [View larger image.]

[2.17] "What is wrong with women?" Whedon (2007) queries. Though further explanation reveals his sincerity, one could easily (and some WHEDONesque members do) read his response as glib: "Womb Envy," he answers. Yet before he arrives at that conclusion, he first takes another opportunity to connect American media representations of women with parts of the world typically associated with women's oppression, places known for "sporting burkhas." In fact, he argues that in one way or another every culture adheres to the notion that women are not only subordinate to men but also inherently wicked. The evidence for such an idea, Whedon says, he finds all around him—in film and television, in people's jokes, in advertising. That evidence proposes that "women are weak. Women are manipulative. Women are somehow morally unfinished... And the logical extension of this line of thinking is that women
are, at the very least, expendable." Again, the reason for such beliefs is "Womb Envy." From Whedon's perspective, men require women to procreate, whereas women, once impregnated, do not require men to carry, deliver, raise, or nurture a child. Whedon characterizes men as jealous as well as envious of women's role in the "life cycle" and especially of their ability to "bond in a way no man ever really will." As a reaction to their jealousy, Whedon suggests that men began to consciously or unconsciously devalue women and anything associated with them. He admits that jealousy as a catalyst for misogyny seems too simplistic; nevertheless, he believes it to be true:

[2.18] How else to explain the fact that cultures who would die to eradicate each other have always agreed on one issue? That every popular religion puts restrictions on women's behavior that are practically untenable? That the act of being a free, attractive, self-assertive woman is punishable by torture and death? In the case of this upcoming torture-porn, fictional. In the case of [Du'a Khalil Aswad], mundanely, unthinkably real. And both available for your viewing pleasure.

[2.19] Imperative to note is Whedon's conflation of the fictional and nonfictional as well as his use of the second-person pronoun you. In essence, Whedon positions his readers—an audience that begins as the fan-users of WHEDONesque but quickly becomes Internet users all over the world—as voyeurs. The question is whether or not these voyeurs will stay immured in their passivity.

[2.20] Before Whedon (2007) elaborates on the "you" he has identified, he first returns to self-examination and culpability, a choice that might be read as a form of role-modeling for the audience. He admits that the convergence of the real-world stoning and the fantasy-world kidnapping and torture has triggered for him a sort of breakdown: "It's safe to say that I've snapped." At the same time, he refuses to claim righteousness, and even confesses his familiarity with objectifying women (more on this confession later). Still, "there is the staggering imbalance in the world that we all just take for granted." Moving from the pronoun you to I, from I to we, Whedon places his readers in the crowd of men who stoned Aswad to death, then charges himself, and finally unites himself to his readers—many of them his fans. Now he stands ready to make his rallying cry.

[2.21] Whedon (2007) begins his final appeal with praise and follows with self-deprecation before making suggestions for action and ending, again, with praise. An occasional contributor to the Web site, Whedon interacts with WHEDONesque members by soliciting their questions and answering them, posting updates on his current work, and even stopping by to send holiday greetings. In other words, there exists a certain level of familiarity among the WHEDONesque community and the auteur; therefore, Whedon speaks quite intimately to them, calling them "fairly
evolved" and noting that "you may be way ahead of me" regarding the death of Aswad and its symbolic relationship to *Captivity*. Yet he cannot "contain my despair, for [Aswad], for humanity, for the world we're shaping." Consequently, he explains that the Web site he has hyperlinked to the title of his blog entry does not take a person to the scene of a murder. Rather, the link takes a person to "a place of sanity," to Equality Now. This organization, says Whedon, not only continues to question our damaged world but also attempts to correct the damage (note 7). Before asking his audience to be participants instead of observers in that damage control, he provides them with reasons. For example, just being a decent person and feeling bad for Aswad as well as the condition of women in our world does not solve the problem of gendered violence. Ultimately, "true enlightened activism is the only thing that can save humanity from itself," Whedon insists. He continues, reaching the heart of his entreaty:

[2.22] All I ask is this: Do something. Try something. Speaking out, showing up, writing a letter, a check, a strongly worded e-mail. Pick a cause—there are few unworthy ones. And nudge yourself past the brink of tacit support to action. Once a month, once a year, or just once... Even just learning enough about a subject so you can speak against an opponent eloquently makes you an unusual personage. Start with that. Any one of you would have cried out, would have intervened, had you been in that crowd in Bashiqa. Well thanks to digital technology, you're all in it now.

[2.23] In a shrewd rhetorical move, Whedon (2007) punctuates his plea by simultaneously praising his audience for what they would have done had they been among the Bashiqa mob and pointing out that because of cell phone and Internet technology they actually *are* in the crowd. Accordingly, what they "would have done" can—indeed, *must*—become what they do. In closing, and contradicting a statement earlier in the blog post, Whedon acknowledges that he has "never had any faith in humanity." Even so, humans have a stunning capacity for growth, for creativity, for innovation. According to Whedon, we humans are "technologically magical, culturally diverse and artistically magnificent," ones who have paradoxically managed to convince ourselves that women deserve to be disparaged and despised, sometimes even destroyed. For that feat also, "we're pretty amazing." As a professional and practiced wielder of language, Whedon recognizes the potential for good and evil inherent in discourse. As rhetorician Krista Ratcliffe (2003) explains, "how we use language and how languages uses us" defines the study of rhetoric. That language use—not to tear down but to build up humanity—is what Whedon calls for in conclusion. If we can knit a myth or grand narrative wherein women are villains, we are just as capable of unraveling that myth and knitting a new one, with new moral fibers.
3. Fan response

[3.1] The volume of responses to Whedon's post is substantial: close to 100,000 words of text from over 200 members of WHEDONesque, responses that represent a wide range of ideas related to issues of gender, social justice, and politics, as well as Whedon's representations of or allusions to these same ideas in his television series, particularly *Buffy*. Of course, the discussion itself can be understood as a form of education and activism. It constitutes a rich, productive, and catalyzing dialogue sprinkled with both debate and personal narrative and peppered with strong feelings—some harsh, many hopeful—about Aswad's death, about patriarchy and feminism, about Whedon and his television series, about who humans are and what we can and should do to affect change. The comments represent more than constructive chat, though. A sampling of replies provides evidence of action (usernames appear in bold type):

[3.2] **luvspike**—I know personally how women are made to feel powerless. While I was growing up I was abused regularly by men who were supposed to be my protectors and most of the time I was led to believe it was my own fault... The most important thing I can do is instill a feeling of power in my daughter and make sure she never feels powerless. This is what we have to really thank you for Joss, strong female role models, we need them. I don't know how much I can do to help this cause, but I am giving $25 in the hopes that everyone else will and then maybe we can make a difference, even if it's just a little.

[3.3] **Celina**—My first impulse is to educate myself on this issue...and I'll probably make a zine.

[3.4] **rosebud81**—After reading the post a few times, I felt inspired to translate it [into] Turkish...and printed it out to give to my family... Thank you, Joss, for your amazing post.

[3.5] **Fallen**—If [Aswad's death] matters at all to anyone, at least it inspired me to do something. I'm taking the money that I had budgeted this month to go to the movies and I'm going to donate it and watch *Buffy* instead.

[3.6] **Tonya**—Hello all...there are two very thoughtful links I would like to share with you... I just signed [a petition] made possible by the International Campaign against killings and stoning of women in Kurdistan... You can also go to...StopHonourKillings.com, sign up and help out.
Willowy—I've written a letter to Barack Obama...another to my Congressman, and one to my Senator.

palehorse—I had never heard of Equality Now until I became a member of this community, and I have sent checks to them and proudly wear one of their T-shirts... But, as many have said here, the solution has to do with education, education, education—with showing other possibilities, other possible outcomes... Joss's post is on my office door now, and I hope those students who pause to read it will be inspired to do something, as well, to work toward something better. And it has re-energized me to do more.

In another post, RayHill excitedly promotes MicroPlace, a micro-finance organization. Responding to RayHill, OzLady notes that she has bookmarked the Web site, plans to begin saving toward the cause, and will tell her "far-wealthier-than-I-will-ever-be parents and sibling" about MicroPlace. Joining this thread, Syren shares that she previously "made a loan thru Kiva to a female entrepreneur in Mozambique. When the loan comes back in, I'll put it right back into another entrepreneur's account. For $25, you can make a loan that helps to change a life." This cluster of comments demonstrates how members share ideas with each other and anyone else who might be reading.

Still other WHEDONesque members discuss what they already do, through their jobs or leisure activities, to help end violence against women. In the process, members raise awareness about available resources and creative outlets. For instance, RazorBlade encourages her fellow fans and provides information to help them act:

I just wanted everyone to know there are concrete ways to help women you know who are being abused. I work for the National Domestic Violence Hotline. We are a link to local services such as shelter, counseling and legal assistance. We are open 24/7 and take calls from victims, friends/family and batterers as well. Yes, we even help batterers find appropriate services such as Batterer Intervention. And we also direct people to their local DV agencies when they want to donate or volunteer. Donating clothing or canned goods or some time is a great way to get involved and do something about violence against women. Please give our number out to your friends who need it. It's 1-800-799-7233 or TTY 1-800-787-3224. The website is www.ndvh.org. We also run the National Teen Dating Abuse Helpline at 1-866-331-9474 or TTY 1-866-331-8453. Their website is www.loveisrespect.org... We hear from victims all the time and it is surprising how even the small things like supportive listening do so much for them.
A range of other activities develop out of the discussion. Some members brainstorm and begin to organize local events; others who live nearby offer professional expertise and connections to help with promotion. Many comment that simply reposting Whedon's appeal on their own blogs or Web sites will help "spread the word" and serve the cause.

Others remind the group about "Can't Stop the Serenity"—annual charity screenings of Whedon's film Serenity in honor of his June 23 birthday—and encourage those who haven't been involved in the past to do so now. In the summer of 2006, not long after Whedon's Equality Now gala speech, the first fundraising screening of Serenity occurred in 46 international cities and raised over $65,000. The following year, only a month or so after Whedon's blog post about Aswad, the screenings occurred in 47 international cities and raised approximately $106,000. To date, the fan-led endeavor, begun by The One True B!x, has raised over $550,000 for Equality Now and other charities ("History" 2011).

In addition to comments on WHEDONesque, another tangible and notable response to Whedon's blog post on Aswad's death took the form of an anthology of poetry, short stories, creative nonfiction, and art by dozens of contributors from around the world. Organized and edited by Canadian author Skyla Dawn Cameron and her staff of over twenty volunteers, Nothing But Red takes its title directly from Whedon's blog entry. All profits from the collection go to Equality Now.

In the foreword, Cameron (2008) explains that she grew apathetic over the year or more it took to assemble the collection. Media attention on Aswad faded, then stopped; no word of justice came. Cameron felt paralyzed, overwhelmed by the gravity and scope of the effort required to change the world. Slowly, though, Cameron changed herself: "I can't change Du'a's fate. I can't punish those responsible for her death. I can't change the world. But I can make damn sure that at least I don't slip into apathy—that I keep trying" (4). Then she asks readers to do the same: "make this fight for equality about you... Start with your apathy. Start with what you are capable of doing to help. Start with your capacity to care" (4). In other words, making the world a better place—for women, for everyone—always already begins with making oneself a better person. As Whedon's character Angel declares, "If nothing we do matters, then all that matters is what we do" (Angel, "Epiphany" 2.16).

4. Past the brink of fantastic heroism

As this issue of Transformative Works and Cultures demonstrates, Whedon fan activists are not alone. Rather, they represent a growing population of grassroots media, cultural, and even sociopolitical reformers. Why, and what does this shift
mean? The same questions I pose at the beginning of this article concerning the essence of fan activism can be used to explore Harry Potter enthusiasts. For example, something about J. K. Rowling's Harry Potter series has inspired the Harry Potter Alliance (HPA), a fan community active since 2005 that describes itself in this way:

[4.2] The Harry Potter Alliance (HPA) is a 501c3 nonprofit that takes an outside-of-the-box-approach to civic engagement by using parallels from the Harry Potter books to educate and mobilize young people across the world toward issues of literacy, equality, and human rights. Our mission is to empower our members to act like the heroes that they love by acting for a better world. By bringing together fans of blockbuster books, TV shows, movies, and YouTube celebrities we are harnessing the power of popular culture toward making our world a better place. Our goal is to make civic engagement exciting by channeling the entertainment-saturated facets of our culture toward mobilization for deep and lasting social change. ("What We Do" 2010)

[4.3] Clearly, word choice indicates that the cofounders, Andrew Slack and Paul DeGeorge, planned for action—mobilize, empower, act, harness, channel, change. The emphasis on not just "doing something" but doing something for humanity, I propose, defines the new fan activism across fandoms. Yet the phrase "by using parallels from" suggests distinctions among fandoms as well as distinctions among fans’ favored texts. As part of its Deathly Hallows Campaign, for instance, the HPA set out "to destroy seven real world [H]orcruxes" (note 8). Following Harry's example, the HPA chose as one of its own real-world Horcruxes the unfair, inhumane labor practices in the cocoa industry. On November 1, 2010, HPA founder Andrew Slack (2010) sent a letter to Time Warner requesting that all its Harry Potter chocolate products be produced "true to the spirit of the...franchise." Drawing from Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix (2003), Slack makes the parallel between the wizarding and real world explicit. He notes that when Harry's best friend Hermione Granger discovers that meals at Hogwarts depend on the labor of house elves, whom Slack refers to as "unpaid, indentured servants," she promptly sets out to correct the injustice. Dumbledore supports her efforts, admitting his own wrong: "Indifference and neglect often do much more damage than outright dislike...we wizards have mistreated and abused our fellows for too long" (quoted in Slack 2010). Slack goes on to entreat, "As an organization that prides itself on bringing the message of Harry Potter into our world, the Harry Potter Alliance feels that it is imperative that there is no 'indifference and neglect' employed in the manufacture of chocolate bearing Harry's name." Largely a letter-writing, petition, and boycotting campaign, the Starvation Wages Horcrux was only one of seven real-world evils the HPA planned to target and destroy. As the
slogan of the Deathly Hallows Campaign summarizes, an echo of the HPA's main motto, "We are the weapon" (emphasis added).

[4.4] As the case of Whedon enthusiasts suggests, some fans engage in activism as a way to bring into the real world the ethics of the imaginative texts they love, the ones they engage with in deep and complex ways. As a result of subtle yet significant differences in the nature of those ethics, fans channel their activism differently in the real world. Whereas J. K. Rowling fans may fight for fair labor practices as a real-world extension of Harry and friends' championing of the rights of house elves, Whedon fans may resist forms of gender oppression as a real-world extension of the "strong female characters" Whedon has created (again, usernames appear in bold type):

[4.5] kevingann—I took a Women's Studies class this past semester because of you [Whedon]... Your shows have helped me to accept myself for who I am, to overcome my social problems, and to realize how the culture locks us into gender roles, and that this needs to change...

[4.6] QuoterGal—I will be a feminist until the day I die...a fiercely protective person to anyone and anything abused by power. But surely one must understand that this gender inequity persists in humanity, and that it expresses itself from the subtlest joke to Du'a Khalil's murder... Not coincidentally, one of the things that has given me the greatest hope has been the creation and popularity of Buffy. I know it's fiction—which is, by the way, part of our crucial and defining mythologies—and I know it was limited in its reach—but it was popular culture and it has clearly had an important impact... Nothing has ever hit me quite...the way "Are you ready to be strong?" [Buffy, "Chosen" 7.22] and the young girl [raising] her hand to stop her father hitting her—that was me, thirty-five years ago, actually raising my hand against my own father, and that was the first time I had seen my face on TV.

[4.7] MySerenity—Before I discovered...Joss' work, I was blind to the violence against women... The only thing I was completely convinced of at the age of 14 was that I hated myself because I was a woman. I hated everything about it. As a result of the media-influenced culture I grew up in, I was ashamed of my own sex and desperately wished for a hero to come and save me... And then I found Buffy... And then I found Joss Whedon... And then I found Equality Now... And then I found myself. And I never turned back.

[4.8] Without asking them, I cannot know if kevingann, QuoterGal, and MySerenity consciously extend Whedon's narratives into both personal empowerment and
sociopolitical, feminist action. However, other WHEDONesque members make the connection obvious, even citing Henry Jenkins on the topic. Your librarian explains that after reading the thread about Aswad's death, "I also read this post by Henry Jenkins about the recent [Harry Potter] conference in New Orleans." At the end of that post, Jenkins (2007) writes:

[4.9] Many fans just wanted to have a good time this weekend but others were arguing that they should exploit their skills as media producers and distributors and take advantage of their massive numbers to make a difference in society. One could argue that this vision of fandom as a political movement might reflect the ideological construction of the books themselves, which encourage us to stand up for what we believe in, to question authority, and to take strength in our own communities. It would be interesting, indeed, if the *Harry Potter* books turned out to have shaped the political beliefs of the next generation, much as they have shaped their cultural imaginations. I told the reporter that it was no accident that the success of the *Harry Potter* books has occurred primarily in a Post-9/11 world and that it has paralleled the success of Rick Warren's *The Purpose-Driven Life*. Both books encourage us to see our lives in a larger context, to seek out and pursue a larger purpose than our own self interests.

[4.10] Another member, gossi, agrees that there is a clear connection between *Buffy* and sociopolitical action: "Art can help save the world—or at the very least shape the world... The reason I'm here is some little show called *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, and the international success of that show heartens me." Sunfire joins the refrain, insisting that fan communities absolutely "have a special kind of energy" that, when focused, can effect change for the better. Consequently, Sunfire asks:

[4.11] What specifically can Whedon fans do to fight violence and discrimination against women and girls? The specific mission could continue to be supporting Serenity Now, or it could be a specific mission in support of [Equality Now's] larger mission. A specific mission could focus and energize things we already do as a fandom, in the same vein as Can't Stop the Serenity. Are there other things that can complement it?...[Equality Now] has some interesting ideas about creative ways to support their efforts. A blog could serve as a place to share ideas and find focus, as a start. There's definitely interest here.

[4.12] Those who study narrative confirm that stories powerfully influence us. As psychologists Raymond Mar and Keith Oately (2008) maintain, "Works of imaginative literature—stories [including film and television texts]—are one means by which we make sense of our history and our current life and by which we make predictions and
decisions regarding our future world" (176, emphasis added). Stories help us grow emotionally and particularly develop our empathy for others and Others. In fact, "even if a story depicts social relations that may be unhealthy or not recommended, it is not necessarily the case that all readers will adopt this information thoughtlessly" (186). To some degree, this point speaks to the arguments made by detractors of Dollhouse and Buffy Season 8 (note 9). Thus, do the examples I share represent every person who follows Whedon's work? No. Are there challenges to Whedon's professed feminism and the feminist essence of his texts? Yes. As I argue above, however, Whedon inspires independent, critical thinkers; contentions wrestled with on WHEDONesque alone—only one Web space among many where followers gather—provide plenty of evidence. For this reason, I speculate that Whedon does not expect the very fans he urges to abandon tacit support of gender equality for deliberate action to tacitly support him, or his texts, either (note 10). Though Whedon may be the fanboy and creative director behind the superhero extravaganza The Avengers (2012), it still appears that he desires—and has—admirers who willingly move beyond fantastic or imagined heroism to real-world heroism-in-action. In fact, he directly entreats them to join him on the front lines.

5. Acknowledgments

[5.1] Early versions of this essay were presented under the following titles at the respective conferences: "'That Makes Us Mighty': Joss Whedon, His Fans, and the Rhetoric of Activism," Popular Culture Association and American Culture Association (PCA/ACA) (2008); "'Past the Brink of Tacit Support': Joss Whedon and the Rhetoric of Fan Activism," Popular/American Culture Association in the South (2010); "'Past the Brink of Tacit Support': Fan Activism and the Whedonverses," PCA/ACA (2011).

6. Notes

1. See particularly Jenkins's book Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide (2006) and the Web-based collaborative project From Participatory Culture to Public Participation associated with the University of Southern California's Annenberg School for Communication and Journalism.

2. A plethora of work explores the feminist nature of Buffy Summers and Buffy the Vampire Slayer. See Magoulick (2006) for one of several notable challenges to Whedon's Buffy as a feminist text.

3. On BuffyGuide.com, Fluff (1999) summarizes the episode 3.11 "Gingerbread": "Joyce Summers joins her daughter on a nightly patrol and discovers the bodies of two dead children. After Giles concludes that the children were killed as part of a cult
sacrifice, Joyce organizes a group of parents dedicated to ridding Sunnydale of witches and other evil-doers. Their first act is to tie Buffy, Willow, and Amy to stakes and set them on fire, along with as many of Giles' occult books as they could get their hands on. Giles and Cordelia rescue the girls by revealing that the dead children are actually a demon that feeds on communal fear."

4. In 2004, Whedon sponsored a nationwide fan-centric event called "High Stakes" to raise funding for the John Kerry and John Edwards presidential campaign. It is a matter of public record that Whedon himself contributed $4,000 to Kerry and Edwards as well as a substantially larger amount to the Obama Victory Fund, Obama for America, and the Democratic National Committee in 2008.

5. The Yazidi are a Kurdish-speaking yet ethnically and religiously distinct people who reside predominantly in northern Iraq. Neither Kurd nor Arab, they practice Yazidism, a religion composed of many elements absorbed from a variety of faiths, including Islam and Christianity. According to Sandra Marie Phelps, for example, they "believe in an immortal soul, in reincarnation, [and] that they are the descendants of Adam (not Eve)" (2010, 461).


7. Whedon is a member of Equality Now's Advisory Board ("Board & Staff" 2011).

8. In Rowling's fantastic world, a Horcrux is an object endowed with part of an evil wizard's soul. Hiding these soul-imbued fragments ensures immortality; as long as the Horcruxes exist, the dark wizard lives on. Destroying the objects infused with the soul of archnemesis Valdemort becomes Harry's singular purpose in the final book and film.

9. If Angel—the vampire with a soul—is correct that "all that matters is what we do," the content, the quality of what we do must also matter. Whedon himself insinuates that "tacit support" for gender equality falls short of substantive action to achieve and maintain it. As a result, Whedon opens his texts and himself to the critique of fans, nonfans, and even antifans. Therefore, it seems unbalanced to tell only the story of what many fans, fan-scholars, scholar-fans, and scholars consider Whedon's remarkable rhetorical and narrative accomplishments without also giving voice to thoughtful analyses that find feminist a misnomer for both Whedon and his texts. For instance, to some viewers and critics, Dollhouse and the Buffy Season 8 comics pose considerable challenges to his pro-woman identity. Some of this ire even reveals itself in the WHEDONesque responses to "Let's Watch a Girl Get Beaten To Death" (e.g., see
comments by sansmercy and ScrewtheAlliance). Unfortunately, though I am very aware of such challenges, space does not allow me to flesh them out. As a starting point for further inquiry into Whedon as fanboy auteur and *Dollhouse* as antifeminist spectacle, however, readers may find illuminating the scholarship of Suzanne Scott (2011) and a special issue of *Slayage: The Journal of the Whedon Studies Association* devoted to *Dollhouse*, an issue edited by Cynthea Masson and Rhonda Wilcox (2010). Finally, I believe the following question deserves pursuit: Is a fanboy auteur indivisible from his text?

10. Though for simplicity's sake I consistently refer to "Whedon and his texts" in this article, the texts in question—*Buffy the Vampire Slayer* et al.—obviously represent an artistic team effort rather than the work of one person.

7. Works cited


Hall, Steve. 2007. "Elisha Cuthbert 'Captivity' Billboard Campaign Yanked." 

http://www.cantstoptheserenity.com/about/history-2/.


http://www.heinleinsociety.org/2012/01/dragoncon2011/.


Abstract—Socially and politically controlled teenagers find emancipatory spaces in young adult (YA) literature, spaces where institutions can be challenged and individuals can gain agency and empowerment. Drawing on Foucault's theory of heterotopia, I examine the literary spaces in John Green's YA novel *Paper Towns* and examine how Green's online social networking community Nerdfighters shares an ideological common ground with the novel.

Keywords—Activism; Fandom; Social networking; Young adult literature; YouTube


What belongs to me becomes more interesting, and more awesome, once it also belongs to you.

—John Green, *Interview with John Green*

1. Background

Young adult (YA) literature explores fictional spaces that allow the teenage characters (and by extension teenage readers) to see the world (and each other) differently. Readers who vicariously experience the literary heterotopia's process of transformation and transcendence are compelled to spend more time in the fictional world, to push the characters into new situations. This is the genesis of fan fiction: it is a heterotopic space that is "in relation [to the diegetic text], but in such a way as to suspect, neutralise, or invert the set of relations that [it] happen[s] to designate, mirror or reflect" (Foucault 1986, 25). The fans' desire is to not only extend the diegetic heterotopia, but also to invite others to experience it with them—and it is from this point that online networks of fans are born. Online communities take this extension of the fictional text one step further—laying the diegetic heterotopia over the real world, and creating a new heterotopia in the space between, where teenage
fans can experience the kind of empowerment, agency, and transformation they have vicariously participated in, within the novels they love.

[1.2] I will perform a close reading of John Green's YA novel *Paper Towns* using Foucault's six principles of heterotopia, and examine the connections between the novel and the Nerdfighters ([http://nerdfighters.ning.com](http://nerdfighters.ning.com)), a primarily adolescent online community created by Green and his brother, dedicated to philosophical thought, play, and activism.

[1.3] *Paper Towns* is the story of Q, a graduating high school senior who suffers from an unrequited love for his enigmatic next-door neighbor, Margo Roth Spiegelman. After Margo enlists Q as an accomplice on a dead-of-night revenge escapade that ends up with them breaking into SeaWorld, she disappears. Q is convinced that Margo has left him a trail of clues to find her and embarks on an adrenaline-fuelled road trip with three friends that ends with them finding Margo living in an abandoned barn in Upstate New York. Margo is surprised to see them—she hadn't left clues at all, and Q realizes that the real-life Margo cannot be contained by his fantasies of her, and that it is "treacherous to see a person as more than a person" (Green 2008, 326).

[1.4] The Nerdfighters community began in 2007, when author John Green and his brother Hank, concerned that their relationship had devolved to purely text-based communication, started the Brotherhood 2.0 project, where they each posted a YouTube video on alternate days, every day for a year. The project was instantly popular with viewers (mostly adolescents) who had come across it via Green's novels. These viewers were quickly integrated into the project, and the idea of Nerdfighters was born (note 1).

[1.5] Nerdfighters are not about you and me. Nerdfighters are about a made of awesome book, made by a woman in Australia, going to a made of awesome baby in the United States. Nerdfighters are about raising money and awareness for important causes. Nerdfighters are about building a supportive community of friends...in my pants. Nerdfighters are about stupid beautiful projects and making each other laugh and think with T-shirts and pocket protectors and rants about the situation in Pakistan which sucks right now. In the contemporary world where things fall apart and the center cannot hold you have to imagine a community where there is no center...A lot of life is about doing things that don't suck with people who don't suck. (Green 2007b)

[1.6] The Nerdfighters community is not solely focused on activism. Its creative output is varied, incorporating music, fiction, video, art, education, craft, and many kinds of play, including amusing challenges, punishments, pruning, and games.
Green explains that he and his brother decided early on that the community needed a kind of mission statement or purpose, something that was broad enough that members could take it in whichever direction they chose, but neologistic and therefore specific to their community. They settled on "decreasing WorldSuck" (John Green, pers. comm.).

[1.7] Nerdfighters is not the only online literary community that incorporates activism. Much has already been written about literary/activism/fandom organization The Harry Potter Alliance (HPA, http://thehpalliance.org), and I won't add to that body of writing in this article, except to say that the connections between the fictional events of the Harry Potter novels and the activism of the HPA are explicit—even literal. Members identify real-world parallels to the Dark Arts of the novels, and then look to characters like Dumbledore and Potter as role models, trying to emulate their goodness and heroism through activism (Slack 2010). The connections between a novel like *Paper Towns* and the activities of the Nerdfighters community are more subtle—but no less profound.

[1.8] Unlike the Harry Potter Alliance, the Nerdfighters don't form a bottom-up community—it's created and curated by the Green brothers, and is largely driven by their values and interests. A fan community headed by the subject of fandom is rare, and implies a fundamental conflict between Green's utopian, collaborative vision for the Nerdfighters, and the actual realities of the community. This conflict is worth exploring, as it also reflects a contradiction within literature for young people—namely, in writing for and about children, we are positioning them as other, and by attempting to teach them to be like us, we imply that they are currently less than human. This concept is explored by Perry Nodelman in his seminal article comparing children's literature to Orientalism. Nodelman states: "Our attempting to speak for and about children...will always confirm their difference from, and presumably, inferiority to, ourselves as thinkers and speakers" (1992, 29).

[1.9] *Paper Towns* is not a children's book, and it is important not to apply children's literary theory to YA fiction, as they serve significantly different purposes. In many ways, YA is a reaction against the "impossibility" of children's literature as discussed by Rose and Nodelman (Rose 1984; Nodelman 1992). Most YA fiction is about the journey away from a position of relative innocence (childhood) to a place where one understands one's position within a social and political landscape (note 2). In many ways, *Paper Towns* is making the same argument as Nodelman—that it's dangerous to see people as a fixed and knowable other.

[1.10] Nodelman argues that "in the act of speaking for the other, providing it with a voice, we silence it" (31). I'd like to make the case that the Nerdfighters do the opposite—if Green speaks for and to adolescents in *Paper Towns*, then the
Nerdfighters project is an invitation to reply and participate, to open up a dialogue between self and other, between author and reader. Despite its top-down construction, the technological aspects of the Nerdfighters community allow for genuine collaboration and individuality—the community supports many offshoot projects and groups created solely by teenagers.

[1.1] Some Nerdfighting activities have very strong links to Green's writing. The Positive Pranking Project (in conjunction with fellow YA author Amy Krause Rosenthal) has clear ties to the class pranks played out in both Paper Towns and Green's Printz Award-winning Looking for Alaska (2005). The Positive Pranking Project, however, seeks to subvert the traditional mischievous intent of pranking with gifts and positive messages (Green 2010a) (note 3). To find more connections, though, we must dig a little deeper. Green's books and the Nerdfighters share an ideologically (if not explicitly political) common ground—creating spaces that foster mutual respect, intellectual and philosophical thought, linguistic play, and a fundamental desire to make the world a better place.

2. Literature and reading online

[2.1] The rise of social networking has changed the way we read fiction (Wilkinson 2009). Although book clubs and reading circles existed long before the dawn of new media, reading has traditionally been a primarily solitary activity. New media has enabled the collaborative aspects of reading to expand greatly, transforming it into a creative and community building activity. Green explains, "you read and love a book, and then you get online and find other people who read and loved it, and those connections create communities with surprisingly strong bonds that are capable of accomplishing a lot more than just talking about books" (Green 2011). If a book (especially a YA book) is popular, it's probable there are online activities involving it, whether they be forum-style discussions, fan fiction, fan art, video, or craft. The link between these fan communities and social activism, however, is not guaranteed. Green comments that he hasn't seen any activism-focused fandom surrounding the Twilight novels, commenting that "this may be because of the values in the books or because some lack of momentum within the community, but I don't think it's a universal or even very common phenomenon" (Green 2011). He sees literature as a kind of conduit—a space where people with shared sensibilities can come together to discuss and address the issues they identify as being important (note 4). I employ Foucault's theory of heterotopia to explore this common ground and make explicit these ideological links, and their measurable, real-world impact.

[2.2] A heterotopia is, according to Foucault, "a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are
simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted" (1986, 23). A heterotopia is, unlike a utopia, a real space—although, for the purposes of this article, I will expand the definition of "real" to include physical spaces within fictional worlds, online spaces, and indeed literature itself as a kind of heterotopia. The worlds within YA fiction are often heterotopic—spaces that operate under different rules, existing outside the established order of things. Heterotopic YA ranges from the realistic—such as Cory Doctorow's *Little Brother*, in which the characters step beyond the borders of governmental control to operate a massive online social protest movement, to the fantastic world of Harry Potter, where the characters literally inhabit a world that is outside and invisible to the order of ours—still located in England, but with its own system of government and its own laws of physics and nature.

3. Crisis and deviance

[3.1] Foucault describes six principles of heterotopia. The first is that heterotopias occur in all cultures, throughout history, but they can take varied forms (1986). Foucault divides the heterotopia into two main categories, the first being the *crisis heterotopia*—where individuals in a state of crisis such as adolescents, menstruating women, or the elderly are placed until their situation normalizes (into adulthood, for teenagers, or death for the elderly). Foucault argues however, that the crisis heterotopia is being replaced in our society by the second category, the *heterotopia of deviation*, a space for "individuals whose behaviour is deviant in relation to the required mean or norm" (1986, 24). Foucault suggests that psychiatric hospitals, prisons, and nursing homes are all heterotopias of deviation.

[3.2] Joan Gordon argues in an analysis of China Miéville's novel *Perdido Street Station* that crisis heterotopias and deviance heterotopias are in fact the same space, viewed from different vantage points: "As people are cast off from society, they form a counter-society, a counter-site of their own. To the society that casts its deviants aside, these institutions are deviation heterotopias. To the residents of rest homes and psychiatric hospitals and prisons, their isolation from society links them to others like themselves. No longer deviant in this countersuit, they undergo the transformative experience of the crisis" (Gordon 2003, 466).

[3.3] Cyberspace and feminism scholar Rhiannon Bury concurs, arguing that "defining such spaces in terms of deviance alone fails to accord agency to those thought of in such terms" (2005, 17). She redefines the heterotopic space as not just a site of deviance, but also of "resistance, inversion, subversion or perhaps simply a space in which active consent to normative practices is suspended" (2005, 18).
Adolescence is positioned in our society as a state of crisis and deviation. Children's literature scholar Kimberley Reynolds argues that despite the emergence of the teenager as a major advertising market, the political and social power of teenagers has been considerably diluted since the 1960s. She argues that the cultural and social terrain traditionally assigned to teenagers has become congested—with tweenagers at one end, and liberal parents, aging rockers, "kidults," and "cultural necrophiliacs" at the other (2007, 77). US cultural critic Henry Giroux argues that the cultural impact of teenagers is managed largely by a media trying to sell teenage culture to adults and preteens: "Prohibited from speaking as moral and political agents, youth become an empty category inhabited by the desires, fantasies, and interests of the adult world" (1998, 1).

Media education specialist David Buckingham links adolescent cultural disempowerment with young people's perceived lack of interest in current affairs and politics. He asserts that "young people are not defined by society as political subjects, let alone as political agents," and that even in the areas of political and cultural debate that specifically concern them—such as education—the discussion takes place 'over their heads'' (2000, 218–19).

Green sees this denial of political agency as a major factor in the success of the Nerdfighters community (note 5). He explains that the combination of political disempowerment and financial restriction exclude most teenagers from philanthropic activities. "But we say to them 'Hey, $5 is a big deal,' because we want to introduce them to the idea of philanthropy, the idea that your money goes further when someone other than you spends it" (John Green, pers. comm.). Through various projects, Nerdfighters have helped to get Democrat Daniel Biss elected to the state legislature in Illinois in a formerly Republican district; purchased clean drinking water for villages in rural Bangladesh and Haiti; and loaned tens of thousands of dollars through microfinancing organization kiva.org to mostly female entrepreneurs in the developing world. Engagement in this community of (predominantly) politically disenfranchised teenagers, therefore, enables participants to experience the subversive power of the heterotopia, enabling development and transformation.

These notions of subversion and empowering the disempowered permeate Paper Towns. Q's friend Radar, for example, lives in a house that contains the world's largest collection of black Santas. Green states on his Web site that Paper Towns is a novel about "how we imagine people, places and stories" (2010b), and the dangers in doing so. He argues that the traditional cultural depiction of Santa (or God, or Jesus) as white indicates a lot more about our society than it does about the real-life Saint Nicholas (who was Russian), and that in collecting black Santas, Radar's parents are trying to encourage people to imagine Santa differently—an alternate order of Santas.
Novels about adolescence inevitably visit the high school—a true space of crisis and deviance. *Paper Towns* is set in that strange, liminal period of senior year where college offers have already been made, but students must continue to attend and sit their final exams. On the last day of school, Q finds himself overwhelmed with unexpected emotions. His general ambivalence towards school evaporates: "All the things I'd done here, all the love and pity and compassion and violence and spite, kept welling up inside me. These whitewashed cinder-block walls. My white walls. Margo's white walls. We'd been captive inside them for so long, stuck in their belly like Jonah" (Green 2008, 264).

Q feels like he is drowning in "perverse nostalgia." He is desperate to leave, but cleans out his locker, discarding everything except a photo of him and his two best friends. When he finally leaves he is suddenly liberated, exultant. He realizes that "it is so hard to leave—until you leave. And then it is the easiest goddamned thing in the world" (266). As he runs towards home, he experiences a glimpse of the transformative power of the heterotopia: "I felt myself for the first time becoming Margo" (268). Q experiences a series of these transformations as he moves through the heterotopic spaces of the novel toward an understanding of individuality, imagination, and identity.

4. Changing functions of space

Foucault’s second principle of heterotopia is that the function of an existing heterotopic space can change over time. As *Paper Towns* takes place over the space of only a few weeks, this is arguably the least useful principle in this analysis; however, the heterotopic spaces that Q explores do contain elements of this changing function: the increasing environmental focus at Sea World; the evolution of the minimall from shopping destination, to ruin, to urban exploration site, to exile, to sanctuary; the change in high school before and after graduation; and the slow decay of the abandoned planned subdivisions (or pseudovisions, as Q calls them). It is, however, these transitions of function that facilitate Q’s own evolution, from someone who views Margo as an empty vessel for his own fantasies and desires, to a whole individual person with desires of her own.

The Nerdfighters project, too, is a product of evolution. The shift from Brotherhood 2.0 into Nerdfighters was, according to Green, a natural one. "Internet-based communities," he explains, "can only gaze at their navels for so long before they want to make something out of their improbable connection to one another" (2011). Green claims that activism in the Nerdfighters community is a mix of encouragement from him (and Hank), and organic growth. Many individual Nerdfighters have started projects stemming from their own interests/concerns—such
as Shawn Ahmed, who quit college and used the money he'd been saving for an X-Box 360 to move to Bangladesh and start the Uncultured Project (http://www.uncultured.com), which, with the help of Nerdfighters and other supporters has, over the past 4 years, provided lasting clean water to an entire village, rebuilt a cyclone-ravaged high school, provided emergency relief in multiple disasters, and helped over 10,000 children through a long-term health worker program. How this and other projects merge to form the basis of the Nerdfighters community will be discussed below.

5. Juxtaposing incompatible sites

[5.1] Foucault explains that the third principle of heterotopia is that it is "capable of juxtaposing in a single real space several spaces, several sites that are in themselves incompatible." The Internet, and all the millions of sites it contains, is profoundly heterotopic—it operates under different rules and exists outside the established order of things. Geographic scholar Kevin Hetherington describes the Internet as not "located in one place, but an endless and multiple set of relations between sites constituted through a myriad of ever-changing connections" (1997, 146). Similarly, architectural scholar Kathleen Kern also claims that the Internet is developing "alternative semi-public spaces and realms" and that online spaces are where any and all scenarios and social orders can be suggested and enacted, whether utopic, dystopic, or heterotopic (2008, 114).

[5.2] Literature offers a space outside of the public/political realm, where profound ideological difference can be set aside and a shared understanding of "goodness" can be fostered. Green explains:

[5.3] I really value the idea that Nerdfightaria is a big tent inclusive of conservatives and liberals, atheists and Muslims, Americans and Australians and Egyptians.... All kinds of people like my books: People who think gay marriage is immoral, people who think it is a human right to own assault weapons, etc. I'm grateful to have those people as readers, and I'm grateful that through literature I can have a kind of conversation with them, but we'll never reconcile politically. (John Green, pers. comm.)

[5.4] While literature—particularly YA literature—is not always explicitly political, it is almost always inherently political (see Trites 2000; Lesnik-Oberstein 2004; Mickenberg 2005). YA literature explores the ways in which we are shaped by the institutions surrounding us, whether they be school, family, church, or state (note 6). But YA is not merely political. Nerdfighters have opened up a space between the politics of literature and the linguistic pleasures of narrative, and built a community there, an
interstice of fictional, social, political, and virtual space, where individuals can
communicate their own definitions of "Worldsuck," and promote varied methods of
decreasing it.

[5.5] During Q's nighttime adventure with Margo, she takes him to the top of a
building in Orlando's financial district, where the whole city and its suburbs unfolds
below them. Q finds the view beautiful, impressive. "You can't see the wear on things,
you know? You can't see the rust or the paint cracking. You see the place as someone
once imagined it" (2008, 63).

[5.6] For Margo, however, the city can never be beautiful.

[5.7] It's not even hard enough to be made out of plastic. It's a paper
town. I mean look at it, Q: look at all those cul-de-sacs, those streets that
turn in on themselves, all the houses that were built to fall apart. All those
paper people living in their paper houses, burning the furniture to stay
warm. All the paper kids drinking beer some bum bought for them at the
paper convenience store. Everyone demented with the mania of owning
things. All the things paper thin and paper frail. And all of the people, too.
I've lived here for eighteen years and I have never once in my life come
across anyone who cares about anything that matters. (63–64)

[5.8] Q doesn't know that Margo is planning to leave. He doesn't even imagine the
possibility—he is too busy imagining fantasy scenarios where he and Margo become
romantically entangled. Q's way of imagining the city is incompatible with Margo's—
just as his way of imagining her is incompatible with the real-life Margo. At this point
in the novel, both Q and Margo have not yet experienced the transformation of the
heterotopia, and so they remain isolated, locked into their own imaginings. They
cannot bring their separate ideologies together and find a common ground.

6. Slices in time

[6.1] After Margo disappears, Q follows a trail of clues to a building on the outskirts
of town. After breaking in through a boarded up window, Q finds himself in an
abandoned minimall. "The papers on the floor are pages from an old day-to-day
calendar, the days scattered through the room, all of them yellowing and mouse-bit. I
wonder if this might once have been a little bookstore, although it's been decades
since these shelves held anything but dust" (166).

[6.2] At first he finds no sign of Margo—no sign of anything other than decay. But on
a subsequent visit, small pieces of evidence emerge—thumbtack holes on a wall, a
bottle of nail polish, painted-over graffiti on the walls, a blue blanket that holds
Margo's scent. Q decides to try and truly be Margo, to spend the night in the minimall, holding her blanket. It is the night of Q's senior prom, but he doesn't wish to attend. This is the fourth principle of heterotopia—spaces that are "linked to slices in time" (Foucault, 1986, 25). Foucault argues that the heterotopia begins to "function at full capacity when men arrive at a sort of absolute break with their traditional time" (4). Inside the minimall, time and coming-of-age milestones (school, prom, college) cease to matter: "On each calendar, it is perpetually February of 1986" (169).

[6.3] It is here in that Q experiences the first of his two major transformational realizations. He imagines Margo holed up there: "It all struck me as so lonely and so very unMargo. But all the evidence of the past ten days accumulated toward a surprising conclusion. Margo herself was—at least part of the time—very unMargo" (196).

[6.4] Q realizes that the Margo of his boyhood and adolescent fantasies doesn't match the Margo of reality. He starts to understand that he has mis-seen Margo, and that there are endless ways of imagining her—"an infinite set of Margos." Later that night, Q hides in an empty bathtub with Margo's friend Lacey at an after-party for a prom he didn't attend, and thinks that everyone—himself, Lacey, Margo's mother—have all been "looking at [Margo's] reflection in different fun house mirrors" (214), and that perhaps none of them have seen the real Margo.

[6.5] Q wonders if for Margo, the minimall was a place of comfort because she always felt like she was in an empty, abandoned room with blocked-out windows—even when she was surrounded by her friends and family. Because everyone mis-saw her, and nobody imagined that she was real. And Q understands his mistake: "Margo was not a miracle. She was not an adventure. She was not a fine and precious thing. She was a girl" (231).

[6.6] This fourth aspect of heterotopia has obvious links to the Internet—from YouTube to forum posts to blogs to Twitter—endless slices of time displayed asynchronously. Once a year, the Nerdfighters take advantage of the Internet's flexible relationship with time, and its obsession with metrics, for the Project for Awesome. Green explains that "In 2007, Nerdfighters hijacked YouTube's algorithms to push videos about charities onto the front page of the site, which is usually reserved for, you know, cats on roombas videos. By 2010, the P4A—which had begun with basically hacking YouTube for charity—was sponsored by YouTube" (2011).

[6.7] The project has generated over 5,000 videos, tens of millions of views, and in 2010 raised over $150,000 for charity in 48 hours, mostly, Green reports, from small donations from teenagers. The P4A videos are now used by organizations like Save the Children and Heifer International. It is with projects such as this that the Nerdfighters
community display the true potential of the heterotopia—using a site of exile, crisis, and deviance to hijack time and virtual space, transform disempowerment to empowerment, and gain a genuine global voice.

7. A system of opening and closing

[7.1] Foucault's fifth principle of heterotopia is that it "presuppose[s] a system of opening and closing that both isolates [it] and makes [it] permeable" (26). It is possible to see evidence of this space throughout Paper Towns—when Q and Margo break into Sea World at 3 am; the compulsory attendance then post-graduation exile of high school; the minimall with its locked doors and boarded up windows; the minivan that takes Q and his friends across the country to find Margo. But perhaps the most profound example from the novel is Margo herself. Q's series of transformations is mirrored by the three sections of the novel: The Strings, The Grass, and The Vessel. In the beginning, Margo and Q both see identity as like a musical instrument—and once the strings have broken, they can never be mended again. Later on, Q takes inspiration from Walt Whitman and sees identity as being like grass—that we are all infinitely connected, and can use our common roots to understand one another, and even become one another. But Q's final realization is that a broken identity isn't irreparable, and that we can't become one another or even accurately imagine one another.

[7.2] Each of us starts out as a watertight vessel. And these things happen—these people leave us, or don't love us, or don't get us, or we don't get them, and we lose and fall and hurt one another. And the vessel starts to crack open in places.... But there is all this time between when the cracks start to open and when we finally fall apart. And it's only in that time that we can see one another, because we see out of ourselves through our cracks and into others through theirs... Before that, we were just looking at ideas of each other... But once the vessel cracks, the light gets in. The light can get out. (350)

[7.3] Green respects his teenage readers. He invites them to see the world differently, but not necessarily to see it his way. It is this respect and emphasis on intellectual thought that forms the cornerstone of the Nerdfighters community. Green and his novels were the genesis for this community, but not the ongoing impetus for one. Green doesn't believe that he is making apathetic teens political—more that the Nerdfighters community gives teens a forum to be respectfully heard and a community with which to share ideas.

8. All the space that remains
[8.1] Foucault’s sixth and final principle of heterotopia is that it has a "function in relation to all the space that remains," that it either exposes 'real' space as somehow fake or illusory, or creates a space that is "other, another real space, as perfect, as meticulous, as well arranged as ours is messy, ill-constructed and jumbled" (26).

[8.2] Nathan Rambukkana’s paper on the heterotopic role of slash fiction argues that online fan spaces "offer a potential as zones where other practices, discourses, and consciousnesses can form or circulate with partial autonomy from the constraints upon those practices, discourses and consciousnesses in other societal spheres" (2007, 68). He stresses that the various ideologies that compete for attention within online spaces are not always compatible, forming instead an alternative or radical public sphere where ideology and protest combine with humor and emotion, thereby drawing the attention of the general public (2007, 69).

[8.3] Political change and ideology is discussed on Nerdfighters in a unique, playful-yet-serious way. For example, John has made videos discussing Maoist rebels in Nepal while eating toilet paper (Green 2007a) or discussing the Georgia-Russia war while letting a puppy lick peanut butter from his face (Green 2008). These subversions of typical news reporting are not intended to detract from the seriousness of the issues at hand, but instead to subvert the nature of civic discourse and make it accessible to audiences traditionally excluded from politics. Green is acutely aware of the dangers of politicized, jargon-laden discourse, and finds it condescending. He argues that young people "are tired of seeing black-and-white photographs of sick or poor children, and they're hungry for more complex understandings of what it means to live in poverty. They're tired of hearing dichotomous discourse that denies what I think is the essential fact of human existence, which is that the truth resists simplicity" (2011).

[8.4] The Nerdfighters project exposes the "real world" of politicized discourse, as oversimplified, patronizing, and fundamentally false. Green explains that without the Nerdfighters community, and the social networking potential in YouTube, he wouldn't have been able to meet Bangladeshi villagers over video, and "come to know and care about them as people and not just two-dimensional images of poverty" (2010c). The transformative experience produced by the literary and virtual heterotopia is therefore leaking back into the real world, with concrete, life-changing consequences.

[8.5] There are three kinds of paper town in Green's novel: Margo's view of Orlando as being fake and shallow; the empty, abandoned pseudovisions; and fictional towns inserted into maps as a kind of copyright trap by cartographers. This final kind of paper town is where Q experiences his final transformation—the above understanding of identity as a vessel, the importance of vulnerability, and the danger of "believ[ing] that a person is more than a person." The paper town of Agloe, in upstate New York, has a population of zero. It contains an old barn that has so many holes in the walls
that it is "simultaneously inside and outside." It is a no-place—identified on a map as having meaning and significance, but barely existing in reality. Margo explains that it's how she felt, back in Orlando.

[8.6] It's kind of great, being an idea that everybody likes. But I could never be the idea to myself, not all the way. And Agloe is a place where a paper creation became real. A dot on the map became a real place, more real than the people who created the dot could ever have imagined. I thought maybe the paper cutout of a girl could start becoming real here also. (340)

[8.7] Agloe exposes the illusion of the paper map—Margo travels there to expose herself, to reveal her true identity behind the paper high school girl that everyone—including Q—adores. The novel ends with closure, but no easy answers. We learn from Margo the danger of imagining things, but Q reminds us that if we don't imagine, nothing ever happens at all. Q understands the importance of metaphors—when you define yourself as the strings, the grass, or the vessel, each has different implications. The future must be imagined in order to bring it into being, and by doing so we render ourselves vulnerable, letting others in through our cracks. But we must not impose our imaginings upon other people—they have their own imaginings, and underneath them, their own vulnerable selves. Green's novel is a complex procession of complicated philosophical ideas, yet it doesn't impose any answers upon the reader, except perhaps a plea for mutual respect.

9. Conclusion

[9.1] What is the relationship between Nerdfighters and Paper Towns? Could Nerdfighters exist without the scaffolding of John Green's novels? Probably, although perhaps on a much smaller scale. Being a popular, successful author certainly adds legitimacy to the project, and allows its popularity to grow at a more rapid pace. Although the novel did not cause the community (or vice versa), they clearly inform one another and are connected through the principles of heterotopia. Paper Towns invites its readers to see each other differently and to acknowledge that we can never truly understand one another. The novel fosters a readership that supports and reinforces the values of the Nerdfighters community—respect, playfulness, intellectual thought, and generosity. The participation of author John Green within his own (self-created) fandom calls into question the distinction between self and other, inviting the reader to begin a genuine dialogue with the author. This heterotopic space between fiction and reality, creator and consumer, allows participants to be liberated from their normal social functions, and encourages collaboration, communication, and creativity.
10. Notes

1. There are 60,000 members of the Nerdfighters Ning, and one of Green's videos can receive up to 12 million views.

2. Roberta Seelinger Trites (2000) describes the YA novel as *entwicklungsroman*—a story of development, as opposed to the more romantic *bildungsroman*—a coming-of-age story where adulthood is attained at the novel's conclusion.

3. For example, "Ding Dong Ditching" becomes leaving chocolate Ding Dong cakes on someone's doorstep instead of just ringing the doorbell and running, and "TPing" becomes leaving Tootsie Pops instead of toilet paper.

4. It's important to note that despite its utopian, all-inclusive manifesto, the Nerdfighters community is not embraced by everyone. Some teens report feeling the same kind of isolation and exclusion as they experience in real-life social cliques—see http://28.media.tumblr.com/tumblr_lmtfxlrMoK1qbl0ayo1_500.jpg, http://27.media.tumblr.com/tumblr_ln7ojxCvXT1qbl0ayo1_400.jpg, and http://24.media.tumblr.com/tumblr_ljf3hssckC1qbl0ayo1_500.jpg.

5. Green comments that around 67 percent of his YouTube viewers are under 24, but that adolescent viewers are disproportionately likely to be active participants in the Nerdfighter community.

11. Works cited


Green, John. 2008. "PEANUT BUTTER FACE (while discussing the Georgia-Russia War)." http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v_p3hLtr5Ok.


The absence of fan activism in the queer fandom of Ho Denise Wan See (HOCC) in Hong Kong

Cheuk Yin Li

University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong

Abstract—The queer fandom of female Hong Kong pop singer Ho Denise Wan See (HOCC) from 2009 to mid-2011 is dealt with through the qualitative methodology of in-depth interviews and media ethnography. HOCC, an idiosyncratic cultural producer who dabbles in the politics of ambiguity, creates texts that invite queer interpretations from fans and from queer activists in Hong Kong. Via analyses informed by both queer studies and audience studies, the various creative practices of fans in reshaping their sexual identities via popular culture are explored. These practices are highly political and empowering to a queer audience. However, the intensive rewriting of meanings as queer symbolic creativity and tactics in cultural politics fail to transform into formal institutional politics and more confrontational queer activism. This is so for several reasons. Internally, the hierarchical structure of fan organization, fan proximity to the culture industry, and the top-down encouragement of social charity as the only channel of activism have all reduced the possibility of transforming fans’ queer sensibilities into institutional queer politics. Furthermore, Hong Kong, under the influence of three major discourses that seek to discipline and regulate sexualities—traditional Chinese ethics, the British colonial legacy, and the postcolonial revival of rightist Christianity—has a long social history of heterosexist discrimination and a preference for normalizing when striving for queer citizenship. This empirical study examines relations between cultural specificity and fan agency in a non-Western context.

Keywords—East Asia; Identity; Popular culture; Popular music


1. Interweaving popular culture, fan activism, and the queer

I seek to address a single question here: why isn't there any queer fan activism in Ho Denise Wan See (何韻詩) (HOCC) fandom in Hong Kong? HOCC has been the most salient queer icon in the Hong Kong popular music scene since the late 1990s, and in the literature, queer audiences are widely suggested to be creative and expressive in consuming star texts. In this case study, situated in the context of queer theory and audience studies, I argue that in the queer fandom of HOCC, fans engage in dynamic everyday tactics (de Certeau 1984), such as gossiping, fantasizing, and
engaging in queer symbolic creativity, to rewrite texts and reshape their sexual identities. Even though these cultural practices are political and empowering, both internal features of the fandom and broader sociocultural contexts hinder these small-scale tactics from resulting in political action in the form of institutional queer activism that strives for sexual citizenship for the queer (Richardson 1998, 2000; Bell and Binnie 2000).

[1.2] To address HOCC fandom, we need to rethink what kinds of fan activism we are considering, the meaning of the notion of queer, and whose agency encourages and perpetuates HOCC's queer images. There has been little debate on the nature of audience since the Birmingham School (Hall 1973; Morley 1980). Audiences are now theorized and empirically shown to be active—or, more generally speaking, productive. Even if audience studies, with all of its different modes of focus, cannot prove that all audiences are active, they can at least demonstrate that not all audiences are passive (Jenkins 1992, 287). Jenkins (2006) has argued that fan activism can range from negligible levels to macrolevels. However, this approach to defining activism is not particularly useful because it is too inclusive. From one being active in textual poaching, it does not follow that one necessarily engages in activism. To distinguish between these two, I adhere to Bielby, Harrington, and Bielby's (1999) differentiation between active and activist fans. An active fan participates in fan activities such as fan clubs, soap magazine critiques, and online bulletin boards; an activist fan behaves strategically in specific events and contexts to achieve a specific goal. Fan activism thus differs from fan activities in its mass mobilization and strategic calculations.

[1.3] For the notion of queer fandom, I struggled with the question of whether I should attempt to specify the queerness evident in HOCC fandom. I decided to do so to better capture its important theoretical implications. Butler (1993, 315), in her theory of gender performativity, notes that "there are no direct expressive or causal lines between sex, gender, gender presentation, sexual practice, fantasy and sexuality." If we define queer as nonstraight and nonheteronormative, then we are adopting heterosexuality as the primary normative standard—a stance Butler disagrees with. For Butler, "gender is not a performance that a prior subject elects to do, but gender is performative in the sense that it constitutes as an effect the very subject it appears to express" (314). In this sense, gender, sexuality, and desires are compulsory imitations with no original scripts. Queerness, as a spectrum of potentialities, can therefore be said to exist in all sexual subjects.

[1.4] Parallel to this, in the realm of media reception, Doty (1993, 2–3) proposes that queer marks a flexible space for expressing all aspects of non-, anti-, and contrastraight cultural production and reception, and queerness is intrinsically shared by all agents with varying extents of consistency and intensity. Every audience can
thus be considered as potentially reading in queer positions and proliferating queer discourses. More importantly, he notes that terminology such as "queer positions," "queer readings," and "queer pleasures" is part of this flexible reception space, which "stands simultaneously beside and within that created by heterosexual and straight positions" (15). However, Doty is also aware that the enthusiasm of breaking down rigid concepts of sexuality in popular culture may lead to problematic consequences of celebrating an apolitical utopia united by all straights and all queers. Therefore, he retained the radical and political connotation by using the term *queer* to highlight "a consciously chosen 'site of resistance' and a 'location of rational openness and possibility'" (3). Again, *queer* is always a dynamic, contradictory, and imperfect notion to challenge normative categorization of identities and subjectivities.

2. HOCC as queer icon and the politics of ambiguity

[2.1] Ho Denise Wan See (aka HOCC, pronounced as Ho-C-C, or Goo), was one of the top 10 best-selling local singers in Hong Kong from 2006 to 2010 (IFPI Hong Kong Top Sales Music Award 2010; IFPI Hong Kong Top Sales Music Award Presented [2001–2009]). Winning the Golden Award for female singer in the Ultimate Song Chart Awards Presentations in 2006 proved her popularity. She works in the mainstream market (the nonindie sector), yet she owns her music label, Goomusic, and she often works with independent musicians. She is regarded as idiosyncratic because of her androgynous body, her wide range of topics for cultural expression, and her ambivalent attitudes toward gossips speculating about her sexualities (Li 2011a, 12–17).

[2.2] If texts are polysemic and HOCC, as an idiosyncratic cultural producer, has produced a variety of products ranging from LGBTQ texts to texts dealing with poverty to madness, then why is she still regarded as the most salient and influential queer icon since the late 1990s? Whose agency encourages and even perpetuates these queer images? The answer: HOCC as producer, the media, scholars, queer activists, and her fans.

[2.3] HOCC is the major agent who oscillates between ambiguity and explicitness in evincing the possible interpretations of her star texts. She is the only female singer to repeatedly sing songs about queer sexualities; all of them were big hits, and many of them won awards. These songs include "Rose-mary" (露絲瑪莉; lesbian romance), "Goodbye Rose-mary" (再見露絲瑪莉), a sequel to "Rose-mary," "Rolls.Royce" (勞斯.萊斯, gay romance), and "Coffee in Cola Bottle" (汽水樽裡的咖啡, transgenderism). She overtly interpreted "Rose-mary" as lesbian romance and "Rolls.Royce" as gay romance at the SuperGoo concert at the Hong Kong Coliseum in October 2009. She produced the stage drama *Butterfly Lovers* (梁祝下世傳奇) in 2005, which modified a Chinese
classic romance into a homoerotic romance, and it received positive responses ([HOCC's New "Butterfly Lovers"] 2005). Concerning these cultural products and her androgynous, nonhegemonically feminine appearance, she has adopted a laid-back and ambiguous attitude, which in a sense invites further queer reading and articulation ([Homosexual, HOCC] 2003). Her sexuality and affairs with other female singers are the subject of intense speculation in tabloids and by gossips—allegations she has neither openly rejected nor admitted, even as she remains a queer-friendly figure (in the name of social justice). However, she once came out to the public on a game show in July 2009, although she subsequently denied being a lesbian (Li 2011a, 197–208). If we consider only the game-show revelation and not her subsequent retraction, she is the first queer female star in Hong Kong to come out to the public (note 1).

[2.4] Media discourses and scholars often help to perpetuate the queer reading of HOCC. Tabloids surrounding HOCC's affairs and sexualities tend to adopt heteronormative language, such as calling her the "King of Flirt" (Apple Daily 2002). Time Out Hong Kong (2011) chose her as one of the four artists shaping the future of Canto-pop for her androgynous presentation and unique style in music production. Scholars such as Chan (2006) and Tang et al. (2010) have argued, respectively, that she is a "queer body" and "filling in the gender and sexual gaps in Hong Kong popular music." Kong (2010, 65) also considered her to be the descendant of androgynous superstars of 1980s Hong Kong. Queer activists have also played a part in perpetuating queer reading (or queering of) HOCC's star texts. In 2007, "Illuminati," composed by HOCC with lyrics written by queer lyricist Wyman Wong, was chosen as the theme song of the third International Day Against Homophobia and Transphobia (IDAHO) rally in Hong Kong because of its implication of mass mobilization for revolution. And fans skillfully queer her texts to substantiate such queer images.

3. Methods

[3.1] This study is drawn from data collected during from 2009 to mid-2010 for my master's thesis. I continued to collect data and keep in touch with my informants (both socially and virtually) until mid-2011. With their consent, I have updated the data presented here. The main methodology is media ethnography (Marcus 1998; Bird 2003), which yields the strength of rich and firsthand data. As Bird puts it, "Only ethnography can begin to answer questions about what people really do with media, rather than what we imagine they might do, or what close readings of texts assume they might do" (2003, 191). I have conducted qualitative in-depth interviews with 13 voluntary respondents (aka gootoes in online fan expression, which is derived from Cantonese pronunciation, literally "followers of HOCC") recruited from the HOCC International Fan Club (IFC), the only official fan club. There were 10 female and three male respondents ranging in age from 15 to 35 years. Education level ranged from
junior secondary school to holders of master's degrees. Fields of occupation included student, education, finance, social services, and medicine. Duration of activity in HOCC fandom ranged from 2 to 9 years. Echoing Butler's (1993) and Doty's (1993) arguments, I deliberately did not seek from the respondents any particular rigid sexuality but rather let them self-identify. This resulted in sexualities including lesbian, gay, bisexual, and unknown; some change over time, suggesting a fluidity of sexualities and desires in this sample. Despite the small sample size, the group was a fairly diverse group of informants (Appendix).

[3.2] I also conducted participant observation between early 2009 and mid-2010 at various functions, including the Happiness Is Free concert in February 2009, a fan amateur video production for HOCC's birthday party in April 2009, HOCC's birthday parties in May 2009 and 2010, Jade Solid Gold Recording in July 2009, and the Supergoo concert on October 9–12, 2009. Participant observation is essential to acquiring further understanding of gootoes' everyday lives and social experiences. The primary purpose of participant observation is not to collect data but to obtain a glimpse of fans' activities and to establish rapport with informants by enriching my experiences of engagement and shared experiences with them. In response to the academic myth of keeping a distance from subjects, Jenkins (1992) argues that the more distanced perspective espoused by some researchers does not necessarily secure a better understanding of complexity of the phenomenon; rather, "academic distance has thus allowed scholars either to judge or to instruct but not to converse with the fans community, a process which required greater proximity and the surrender of certain intellectual pretensions and institutional privileges" (6).

4. Gossip, fan detectives, and fantasies

[4.1] HOCC fans are discursively empowered through various forms of queer symbolic creativity, a notion derived from Willis (1990) referring to the everyday creative use of expressions, signs, symbols, and art to establish and negotiate one's identities and meaning. These practices include fan detecting, gossiping, fantasizing, textual poaching, materializing fantasies, and interacting in online forums as heterotopia. Again, fans, without necessarily self-identifying as queer, use their queer reading to reshape, rethink, and rewrite their own changing and challenging sexual identities (Hanmer 2010, 150). The practices of play and creativity are empowering to the queer because they question and explore links between pleasure and power, body and subject, when participating in popular culture (Lipton 2008, 163). They seek to negotiate their life stories and sexual identities in the flexible space offered by popular culture.
The most intensive form of queer symbolic creativity is gossiping and playing with the tabloid curiosity surrounding HOCC's sexuality and her alleged affairs with Joey Yung, another popular female singer in Hong Kong. Fans term their affair the goo/cho relationship, with goo standing for HOCC and cho standing for Joey Yung. While Gamson (1994) has suggested that gossip is a free realm with no repercussions and no accountability, Turner (2004) has argued that gossip as "an important social process through which relationships, identity, and social and cultural norms are debated, evaluated, modified and shared" (24). Importantly, "fantasy" is not binary to "reality" (Ang 1996, 92; Fiske 1989, 124). HOCC fans' fantasies of tabloid stories take place online—either in private chat or, subtly, in the IFC forum—as well as in off-line social life. I consider this process a form of detection, with the fans playing the role of detective as they share clues, find "correct" clues, play hide-and-seek with paparazzi, and appropriate scenarios by drawing on resources from various media texts. They look into what outsiders would consider trivial; for instance, a tiny logo on a piece of tissue at the corner of a restaurant table in Joey Yung's Facebook picture may match with the background of HOCC's newly uploaded picture on Twitter. In this empowering process, complex and unstable pleasure in negotiating a queer world and queer identities also unfolds.

Felicity, a HOCC fan for more than 6 years, claimed that she had loads of insider information about the goo/cho relationship. During our 3-hour interview on September 25, 2009, she kept checking HOCC's blog for updates because that day was believed to be their anniversary. She vividly recalled the moment when she heard that HOCC and Joey Yung were together:

Everybody was so excited at that time...I was so happy that...even happier than me having a date! I feel like...they are finally together despite all the barriers they had previously and then I keep thinking, "Oh my God! What if paparazzi know about it?"

Kaitlin is another believer in goo/cho. She directly asserted, "This is true," thus implying that any validation from fan detection is unnecessary. For her, it is reality, not imaginative engagement—in contrast to Lipton's (2008, 174) findings. She was keen on fan detection for fantasizing and for expanding the information archive on her own blog—for example, photo albums gathering similar clothes worn by both of them, and an album dedicated to pictures in which either of them is wearing the famous "fishing line" bracelet at public functions. The bracelet was so named because it is extremely thin and can only be noticed by enlarging and carefully examining the photos. Kaitlin constantly went online to check the updated schedule of public functions attended by Joey Yung and HOCC. She analyzed HOCC's pattern of updating on Facebook and the Sina miniblog (Weibo, the People's Republic of China's version of
Twitter) to speculate whether they went abroad for holidays together. In February 2009, she was one of the first fans to discover that HOCC went to Rome with Joey Yung. She did so by analyzing the "reliable clue" of their new lovers' rings.

[4.6] Fan detectives are not limited to fans who self-identify as queer or queer-friendly; detectives include those who are homophobic. Sheena is an anti-goo/cho fan who also engages in these daily detection activities, but she seeks to deny their affair by the way she chooses to read the ambiguous space that HOCC creates for her sexuality. Sheena feels that she has to keep up to date with the various clues, but she simultaneously feels distressed when she assesses the evidence collected by others. Within this complex dimension of desires, Sheena struggles between the happiness of HOCC and her personal hatred of lesbianism. She even read the book published by one of HOCC's speculated exes, Theresa Fu, because Fu was said to disclose some information about her relationship with HOCC. She skillfully read between the lines and twisted the words of tabloids reporting HOCC's alleged affairs with male celebrities—for instance, Oriental Daily's January 15, 2010, headline: "HOCC Turns STRAIGHT and Goes Shopping with a Man."

[4.7] To these fan detectives, tiny bits of trivia loom large in their daily lives. They take active pleasure in their role as detectives, scrutinizing tabloids for clues, fantasizing, and discovering and celebrating minute pieces of evidence. This activity constitutes queer symbolic creativity, which empowers fans in negotiating desires and sexual identities, regardless of whether they are queer or nonqueer.

5. Materializing fantasies in The Dreamland

[5.1] The migration of fan communities to the Web is one of the most significant shifts in audience research in recent years (Baym 2000; Soukup 2006; Jones 1997; Booth 2008). For queer subjects, cyberspace has become a site of increasingly intensive engagement through which to live their sexualities (Plummer 2003, 275). Their queer symbolic creativity, together with the materializing of fantasies in the form of making videos and writing slash fan fiction, frequently take place on the Web. Kaitlin set up an underground forum, known as The Dreamland (note 2), parallel with HOCC's official forum, for discussion of gossip and fantasies in mid-2009 because HOCC's sexuality and goo/cho are, according to most informants, taboo topics in the official forum. Fans who dislike Joey Yung personally and who are against homosexuality attacked posts that discussed HOCC's sexuality, accusing fans involved in the discussion of being "dogs" (paparazzi), even traitors. Discussion topics such as "whether HOCC looks handsome in a particular costume" were also attacked, as the word handsome implied that HOCC was a butch lesbian (or "TB" [tomboy], in local lesbian parlance), based on the commonly perceived secondary gender system of the
butch/femme binary (Kam 2003; Martin 2010). The Dreamland as a platform for free articulation of fantasies and fan detection play attracts fans who do not want to be too high profile in their articulation of homoerotic fantasies. The platform also permits circulation and consumption of amateur fan videos and slash fan fiction.

[5.2] Video making is the most common and popular form of materialized fantasies. All of my informants knew about the online goo/cho videos, such as those posted on the Imagination Is Free Production YouTube channel, whose name was appropriated from HOCC's 2009 concert, Happiness Is Free (note 3). Imagination is free in two senses: it is free of price, and it is free of borders. Goochos—fans who subscribe to the goo/cho relationship—play with this name to justify their active imagining and their fantasies. They juxtapose clues that include video clips, pictures, and Twitter status updates to construct the love story between HOCC and Joey Yung. Some of these fan videos are more than 10 minutes long, with editing used to highlight duplicated costumes and personal belongings, complementary interview content provided on separate occasions, and photo hunts, such as identifying a Miffy doll in a corner of HOCC's bedroom. Materializing fantasies via video making is an extension of fan detection as a fan activity. The background music of those videos is usually HOCC's or Yung's songs. Although the channel has been removed, there are still a number of videos made by other fans in favour of the goo/cho relationship, such as "Joey Yung x HOCC Endless Love (10 minutes)" (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GFIGWpmc8Hk) and "(Joey Yung x HOCC) WE Support GOOCHO Forever" (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1zwLEr3XdcA). They enjoy the highest hit rates.

[5.3] Kaitlin defined these goo/cho videos as romantic videos showing the two as a couple. Summer, who identified herself as a straight person, admits that she watched them repeatedly: "I don't know gootoes or goochos who make the videos in person, but I am always touched when watching. They make me believe in true love again. I always search for different goo/cho videos and keep watching them repeatedly" (interview, October 5, 2009). The pleasure is real, and so is the fantasy (Li 2011a). Most of my informants do not watch HOCC's concert DVD repeatedly, but they do watch the goo/cho videos again and again. These materialized fantasies intersect with the most minute aspects of their everyday life. Video making and consumption as fan activities are more than daydreaming; they are potentially empowering, but not necessarily resistant.

[5.4] Slash writing and reading are relatively less popular among fans. Many of my informants did not even know that fan fiction was written about HOCC; only a few had either heard of or read them, in part because the site for slash in The Dreamland is only accessible to senior forum members. Up until mid-2009, there were 50 stories in total, including both complete stories and works in progress, jointly contributed by 22
registered forum accounts. Some are situated in modern everyday life, while others are situated in ancient Chinese royal palace settings. All are romances between characters symbolizing HOCC and Joey Yung. Same-sex romance is more popular than heterosexual romance in terms of readership.

[5.5] There is one major difference between goo/cho fictions and slash studied by Anglo-American scholars. Jenkins (1992, 191) suggested slash as female pornography that may liberate women who have long been regarded as asexual because it allows for female sexual fantasy through creating and consuming explicit homoerotic sex scenes. Goo/cho fictions keep sex, both homosexual and heterosexual, invisible by merely portraying "the night and then the morning of the next day"—that is, they elide any actual intimacy. Stories instead mainly focus on the homosocial bonding and emotional interactions of the leading characters. In fact, the comments to the pieces of fiction often ask for more sex scenes, but Kaitlin, as an administrator and a writer, chose to keep the sex scenes subtle. In most societies, pornography for women in the process of gender socialization is limited (Ybarra and Mitchell 2005). In Hong Kong, female exposure to erotic materials and sex-related issues, as well as scholarship about it, is extremely limited (Ho and Tsang 2004). Lesbianism is also almost invisible in Hong Kong society (Tang 2010). This may confine female homoerotic fantasy and hinder transformation of such activities to activism and fan civil engagement. Yet Jenkins (1988, 99) argues that fans' writing involves a translation of personal experience into social expression, and slash writing is still potentially empowering by allowing LGBT writers a space to creatively explore and experiment with their identities and desires (Berger 2010, 183). Kaitlin, as a self-identified bisexual woman, channels the struggles between straight and queer born of family and religious pressure into slash writing, which partially serves a therapeutic purpose (Hanmer 2010, 150–51). As a result, in late 2009, she wrote a trilogy consisting of a homosexual romance between the two leading female characters in imperial China, and two separate heterosexual romances of the actresses in the life after death.

[5.6] The Dreamland online community can be regarded as a countersite—what Foucault called the heterotopia that contests the "real" site (1986, 24). The Dreamland as a heterotopia can also be understood as simply "a space where active consent to normative practices is suspended" (Hetherington 1997, 46; see also Bury 2005, 17). Therefore, to fans who just want to have fun, The Dreamland is a space that in some ways exists in contrast to the heteronormative official forum. The symbolic creativity is empowering; it reiterates the queer desires, experiences, and identities of fans. Some fans interact with other fans on these sites by transgressing and breaking the codes of the dominant cultural inscription of stereotypical identity (Hanmer 2010, 151). Their sense of agency and lived experiences as sexual beings is also articulated and
negotiated. Real-life experiences plus queer readings, therefore, challenge normative cultural practices and readings.

[5.7] Not every fan I interviewed feels the sense of resistance to HOCC IFC as a symbol of normative control of the queer. The Dreamland can be regarded as a space for expressing alternative fantasies and permitting cultural practices of queer and homoerotic imagination. This is in line with Berger's (2010, 183) observation that online queer fan forums are less subversive: they "often [enact their] transgression and subversion through play, rather than necessarily direct politics." Why do fans' resistant readings, which position and queer cultural sensibilities in the form of vibrant, dynamic, and rich queer symbolic creativity, fail to transform into a more institutional and confrontational queer politics in Hong Kong society?

[5.8] I identify two causes for the absence of organized fan activism, with its components of strategic calculation and mass mobilization: the internal structure of the fandom, and Hong Kong's cultural specificity. I turn to these next.

6. Internal fan structure as limiting fan activism

[6.1] The internal organizational structure of the HOCC fandom may suggest why proactive fan activism for queer sexual citizenship is absent. Fans' proximity to the culture industry is the first internal constraint. Soon after the establishment of the HOCC IFC as an official fan club supervised by HOCC's mother, Ms. Janny Ho (aka Goomo, which literally means "HOCC's mum"), in May 2002, the HOCC forum, which was created in 2005, and the emergence of other international communication tools such as blogs, Facebook, and Twitter, HOCC appeared to be the producer, not her record label or management company. This made HOCC seem to be actively in control of her career and her self-presentation. This is different from the so-called Corn fandom of androgynous female singer Li Yuchun in mainland China; in this case, the "corns" (Li's fans) regard the culture industry as being exploitative of their beloved superstar (Yang 2009, 536). In contrast, HOCC fans thank the music label for granting HOCC autonomy in music production, and HOCC has openly expressed her gratitude to the record label for this freedom ([Homosexual, HOCC], 2003). HOCC's gratitude to the record label and her being her own representative to the culture industry make fan activism almost impossible because any grievances and opinions are absorbed before they can be accumulated. Fans' relationships with the culture industry are therefore carefully mediated and orchestrated. Most informants' attitudes toward their occasional discontent with HOCC's music and themes are best summed up by Sheena's comment: "Everybody knows she's a typical Taurus, very stubborn. Once she has decided, it is decided. She just ignores you, or 'pouts' in her blog or Facebook. But
whatever she does, most *gootoes* endorse, because she is our 'headmaster'" (interview, October 3, 2009).

[6.2] The second internal cause concerns the hierarchical structure of the HOCC IFC as the sole official fan club and the fans' reactions to the power that IFC wields. *Gootoes* join IFC for different purposes. Some seek social networking, as stated in the songs "Illuminati" (光明會), "Diamond Sutra" (金剛經), and "The Last Date" (舊約). Others look for utilitarian benefits from the club. Although many informants acknowledge that their purpose in joining IFC was to support HOCC (their headmaster in the forum, and the one who guides their personal behavior and helps them be good people), they admit that the biggest incentive for continued membership is their access to exclusive concert tickets. Megan said, with a sarcastic smile:

> Goomo supervises IFC. Therefore the way IFC distributes ticket[s] is quite fair...It's very true that unless you know other sources or "big people" that you can get exclusive tickets from, IFC remains the only source for ticket[s] since it's...OFFICIAL. So? You don't dare to antagonize Goomo by talking about [the] goo/cho relation publicly and loudly. (interview, October 1, 2009)

[6.3] As Megan suggests, obtaining exclusive tickets is important to the fans, and thus there is a perceived need to strategically mute the discussion of *goo/cho* affairs in public functions and in the HOCC official forum, or the perk might be withdrawn. The practice of HOCC IFC administrators informally punishing "misbehaving" fans who articulate queer readings is similar to Hollywood's attempt to shut off fans' queer reading of stars (Gregg 2010). As suggested by Gregg (2010), these measures are of little use, but at least internally, it deters fans' public celebration of queer readings and queer symbolic creativity.

[6.4] The third internal cause is related to volunteer opportunities. HOCC set up the HOCC Charity Fund in 2007 to encourage fans to volunteer, although IFC membership is not a prerequisite for joining the volunteer team. Members who pay a membership fee are entitled to join the Volunteer Award Scheme each year; HOCC personally presents certificates to volunteers with outstanding performances. This top-down agenda of social services in a sense channels fan cultural sensibilities in reading HOCC's queer text to other non-queer-related social issues, such as animal rights and poverty of the elderly, as clearly stated in the Charity Fund's mission:

> Without limiting ourselves to any specific target group, the foundation aims to offer help through services and donations to as many people in need as possible, be it small children, youths, or the elderly. With sufficient funding, we will extend further to promoting kindness and prevention of...
cruelty to animals. Under the foundation, we have our own team of over 350 volunteers. From time to time, we also work closely with other charitable organizations...to provide more welfare services to the underprivileged. (Goomo 2008)

[6.7] Many popular singers in Hong Kong have founded their own charitable institutions, including Gigi Leung, Miriam Yeung, and Leo Ku. For supergirl Li Yuchun in China, her fans, the corns, founded the Corn Love Foundation as a way to get positive media coverage for Li (Yang 2009, 535). This became a trend in Hong Kong and China to improve celebrities' images through donating and encouraging volunteering. The effect of gootoes volunteering for the HOCC Charity Fund to represent HOCC's public image positively can be regarded as limited, a reality governed by neoliberal logic under the East Asian welfare model of self-reliance, family unity, and state minimalism (Mok 2011).

[6.8] However, these internal organizational features of HOCC fandom, which use access to the star and perks like free tickets to ensure fan compliance and self-policing, are not sufficient to account for the absence of fan activism in the broader sociocultural context of Hong Kong.

7. Sociocultural specificity as limiting fan activism

[7.1] The second major reason for the failure of fans to transform the vibrant queer cultural sensibilities in HOCC fandom to a more confrontational queer politics is related to the broader historical, social, and cultural context of Hong Kong society. Given the possible diversity of queer audiences, Dyer's (2004, 191) analysis of gay men's reading of Judy Garland in the post-Stonewall era suggests that such audience activities were random but were rooted in the social history of how a particular marginal identity is constructed. I attempt to use Grossberg's (1993, 90) notion of radical contextualism to define and articulate the specific contexts that defines the relationships of power and culture (Hall 1996).

[7.2] Queer politics in Hong Kong is historically different from its European and American versions (Kong 2010). I draw on the work of Ho (2008), Kong (2010), and Li (2011b) to identify three major discourses disciplining and governing sexual cultures and constraining institutional queer politics in Hong Kong as an East Asian locale: residual Chinese ethics, which value social harmony and family unity; the British colonial legacy; and the growing influence of rightist Christian influences and nongovernmental organizations in the emerging civil society. Unlike mainland China, which underwent a socialist revolution and various active interventions in reproduction and sexuality (Ruan 1991), Hong Kong retained traditional Chinese ethics and
ritualistic practices, especially in terms of family unity under noninterventionist colonial rule. One of the best examples is the colonial government's making the Ching Ming Festival, a festival symbolizing respect for ancestors and family lineage, a public holiday; it is not on mainland China (Cheung 2011). British colonial legacies include the overwhelming influence of missionaries and churches on local education and social services organizations (Ho 2008), as well as the criminalization of male homosexuality from the mid-19th century to 1990. It has been argued that the colonial government, rather than traditional Chinese thought, accounts more for the creation of gay stigma and heteronormative society in Hong Kong (Kong 2010). Finally, increasingly influential rightist Christians in Hong Kong find that their discourses fit into the emphasis on family values in traditional Chinese thought and exert their influences through schools and nongovernmental organizations—for instance, in the debate over passing antidiscrimination ordinances based on sexual orientation in 2005 (see Ho 2008). The intertwining of these three discourses suggests that Hong Kong is still a heterosexist and homophobic society. Local LGBT organizations only started blossoming in the late 1980s, and the LGBT (Tongzhi) movement only began two decades ago (Kong 2010). Queer politics is largely channeled into nonconfrontational cultural politics, such as media representation, instead of institutional politics (Kong 2010). These culturally and historically specific contexts serve as backdrops for fans' mixed feelings about queers, their own queer identities, and the politics of ambiguity in HOCC star texts.

[7.3] Even though most of my informants actively rewrite and negotiate their queer identities by engaging in queer symbolic creativity, and some informants, such as Megan, wanted HOCC to be more outspoken on LGBT issues, others who identified themselves as queer held the opposite view. Erin, a self-identified lesbian, regarded the association of HOCC with lesbianism as undesirable, since "being lesbian is...not that good in our society" (interview, October 13, 2009). The division between gootoes and goocho, and the establishment of The Dreamland as a heterotopia and an alternative playground of fantasies illustrate this division. As a result, gootoes who openly participate in civil engagement about queer politics may associate HOCC with queer as well, which may adversely affect HOCC's career.

[7.4] Definitely she will be criticized by religious groups like the Society for Truth and Light and parents will boycott her for "being an immoral figure" to kids. She will probably lose her mainland China market as well, as Chinese government can be conservative as well. (Megan, interview, October 1, 2009)

[7.5] Hence, being intentionally or unintentionally packaged as androgynous (combining qualities of masculine and feminine) or neutrosexual (being neither
masculine nor feminine) guarantees an ambivalence that secures HOCC's marketability. In this sense, gootoes' neither initiating nor participating in queer politics can be regarded as being governed by neoliberal regulations, which restricts "the institutionalization of heteronormative forms of social and cultural life" (Richardson 2001, 163). This rejection of connecting institutional queer politics to subcultural practices in fandom for fear of politicizing one's long-term relationship to the fandom echoes the well-known example of the Gaylaxians' refusal to participate in Star Trek fandom's letter-writing campaign demanding more queer characters in the show (Jenkins 2000, 263). This illustrates that the hindrance of transforming popular culture fandom to institutional and confrontational politics does not solely come from cultural-historical specificity, but also from voices within fandom with marginal and subcultural identities and subjectivities, and both are inseparable from each other.

[7.6] What is equally important is that as a cultural producer and as one of the agents promoting queer readings of her stardom, HOCC (as well as her politics of ambiguity in her star texts) may not necessarily pose a challenge the compulsory heterosexuality inherent in postcolonial Hong Kong. Stein (1995) argues that the rise of female androgynous stars in American in the 1980s did not improve the cultural visibility of the queer as a result of social repression and industrial constraint, noting that "lesbian music appears in the mainstream as a series of floating signifiers, linked to feminist/lesbian sensibilities, but having no real loyalty or commitment to an organized subculture or movement" (421). It was in the 1990s that the industry gradually understood that sexual ambiguity allows for a double appeal of the music to the subculture and to mass audience. The politics of ambiguity in HOCC stardom is similar in this sense, as an example of non-normative gender and sexual representations being neoliberalised in East Asian popular culture in the recent decade. In spite of various agents, including HOCC herself, perpetuating a queer image, there is plenty of room for camouflage, such as arguing that homoerotic songs such as "Rolls.Royce" demonstrate homosocial bonding. Her reaction of shifting attention to the paparazzi's ethics after the public coming-out incident of July 19, 2009, is regarded as chickening out by many informants (Li 2011a). In this sense, her alleged queerness and lesbianism remain largely underground, and her fans remain largely nonsubversive to heteronormativity.

8. Conclusion and implications

[8.1] The reasons for the absence of fan activism in queer fandom of HOCC in queer studies and audience studies are multifocal. Various modes of queer symbolic creativity empower fans who are, in different ways and to different extents, queer sexual beings. Why, then, does the empowerment made possible by queer reading, queer symbolic creativity, and imagination fail to be translated into formal,
institutional, and confrontational queer politics in Hong Kong society? The reasons are twofold. First, the internal organizational structure of the official HOCC IFC has a monopoly on various privileges, and its hierarchical and top-down volunteering structures restrain fans from publicly articulating queer readings. Therefore, fans do it in private and in secret in The Dreamland forum, although even at this fan-run site, they do so with some degree of conscious self-discipline. Second, and broadly speaking, the cultural and historical specificity of Hong Kong society mutes confrontational queer politics and the struggle for queer citizenship beyond mere cultural representation.

[8.2] The political and empowering queer symbolic creativity found in HOCC's fans are circumscribed within the transforming social contours and within a multitude of cultural and institutional constraints, which in turn suggests why there is an absence of voices demanding institutional and confrontational queer politics. These fans' activities as productive, active, and sometimes resistant are important survival tactics in a homophobic atmosphere in which macroinstitutional changes are unlikely to take place. However, in relation to local Tongzhi movements and endeavors to strive for queer sexual citizenship, these practices of queer symbolic creativity are definitely no substitute for other forms of media criticism and social activism (Jenkins 2000, 264).

[8.3] This phenomenon is unlikely to change in the near future, yet it is too early to be pessimistic of fans' queer reading, rewriting, and reappropriating of texts in an attempt to negotiate and articulate queer desires and identities. Considering the productive tactics of audiences, McRobbie (1999, 72) comes to a more optimistic conclusion: "The point is then that far from being merely the commercial low ebb of the subculture, as far removed from resistance as it is possible to imagine, these activities can be seen as central to it. They are also expressions of change and social transformation."

[8.4] The blossoming of seeds sown by the local Tongzhi movements in the 1980s is evidenced by the steadily rising numbers of participants at the IDAHO rally since 2005 (renamed IDAHOT in 2012, with equal attention paid to transphobia) and gay pride parades since 2008; increasing coverage in mainstream media; and a more open discussion of sexuality, at least in the realm of popular culture, even though there is still catching up to do compared with their Western counterparts. At least three questions are worth future study. First, from the perspective in Tongzhi movements in Hong Kong, how can the new generation of queer audiences be mobilized to go to the streets and push for changes to the status quo, let it be normalizing or confrontational, on the street or institutional? Second, concerning queer audiences in East Asian societies, how ought audience activity be theorized and contextualized in relation to various locales with very different historical and cultural backgrounds in LGBT
movements, particularly in terms of the West in the constellation of global cultural flows? And third, how does charity work, as an increasingly popular and organized form of celebrity-initiated activism in (at least) mainland China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan, relate to the developmental path of social welfare, social activism, and civil society in East Asian societies?

[8.5] By probing these and related questions for possible future exploration, we can come to a more thorough understanding of fan activism, agency, and cultural specificity in relation to notions including queerness, power, desire, and pleasure.

9. Acknowledgments

[9.1] I thank the HOCC IFC and Janny Ho for their help in recruiting informants.

10. Notes

1. Leslie Cheung is often considered the first fully out queer star, yet his narrative of coming out was ambivalent.

2. For reasons of ethical concerns of confidentiality, I did not conduct virtual ethnography in The Dreamland. The Dreamland has undergone several server and administrator changes since mid-2010.

3. The Imagination Is Free Production YouTube channel shut down in late 2011 as a result of pressure within the fan community. Videos were removed from YouTube. They are now circulated privately within a small group of fans.

11. Appendix

*Characteristics of the informants*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Biological Sex</th>
<th>Self-claimed Sexual Identity</th>
<th>Education</th>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Duration of HOCC Fan Activity†</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Megan</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Lesbian</td>
<td>Secondary school</td>
<td>Student</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Erin</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Lesbian</td>
<td>Secondary school</td>
<td>Student</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sheena</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Straight</td>
<td>College diploma</td>
<td>Student</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Felicity</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Lesbian</td>
<td>Bachelor's degree</td>
<td>Clerk</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kaitlin</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Lesbian</td>
<td>College</td>
<td>Sales</td>
<td>7.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Age</td>
<td>Sex</td>
<td>Sexual Orientation</td>
<td>Highest Degree</td>
<td>Occupation</td>
<td>Duration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>--------------------</td>
<td>------------------</td>
<td>---------------------</td>
<td>----------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summer</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Straight</td>
<td>Bachelor's degree</td>
<td>Social worker</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lorena</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Straight</td>
<td>Master's degree</td>
<td>Financial planner</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jamie</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Lesbian</td>
<td>Bachelor's degree</td>
<td>Accountant</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kirsten</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Ambivalent</td>
<td>Master's degree</td>
<td>Research assistant</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Felix</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Straight</td>
<td>Bachelor's degree</td>
<td>Banking</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percy</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Gay</td>
<td>Bachelor's degree</td>
<td>Medical doctor</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pete</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Straight</td>
<td>College diploma</td>
<td>Clerk</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Winifred</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Ambivalent</td>
<td>College diploma</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Information was collected at the time of interview (September–October 2009). Sexualities and occupations of interviewees may have changed since the time of data collection. Some information has been slightly altered to protect anonymity.

† This does not necessarily equal the duration of membership in HOCC IFC.

12. Works cited


Kam, Lucetta Yip Lu. 2003. "Negotiating Gender: Masculine Women in Hong Kong." MPhil diss., Chinese University of Hong Kong.


Tang, Denise Tse Shang. 2010. "Tung Lo Wan: A Lesbian Haven or Everyday Life?" In *As Normal as Possible: Negotiating Sexuality and Gender in Mainland China and Hong Kong*, edited by Ching Yau, 51–73. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press.


Praxis

Too fat to fly: A case study of unsuccessful fan mobilization

Tom Phillips

University of East Anglia, Norwich, United Kingdom

[0.1] Abstract—A seemingly invisible aspect of activism scholarship is the failure to act in the face of apparent suitability. Engaging with tropes of activist literature, such as the prevalence of computer-mediated communication and the factors of emotion and extremism, I will perform a case study of a specific fan community that appears to adhere to these conventions, and discuss the potential for activist practices as a result. I examine the reaction of the fan community for filmmaker Kevin Smith following Smith's ejection from a Southwest Airlines flight in 2010. He was removed from the plane for apparently breaching their "passenger of size" policy, but he ardently rebuked the company's justification. Smith's treatment at the hands of the airline would seem to be an ideal rallying point for the subject of a fan activism campaign—using a personal issue to springboard into wider debates of corporate practice, body image, and consumer rights. However, despite this potential, his fan community apparently failed to mobilize into a cohesive force. I will explore why this failure occurred, and discuss why such a failure should be examined within academia.

[0.2] Keywords—Activism; Computer-mediated communication; Emotion; Fan community


1. Introduction

[1.1] In his description of fan activism surrounding Avatar (2009), Henry Jenkins notes, "The event is a reminder of how people around the world are mobilizing icons and myths from popular culture as resources for political speech" (2010). However, in establishing the term for their own use, Jennifer Earl and Katrina Kimport note that fan activism is "not about the mix between political concerns and culture but rather action that looks like political activism but is used toward non-political ends" (2009, 221n1), and in making this distinction Earl and Kimport mark fan activism as a decidedly nonpolitical process. In further contrast, in their study of public opposition to corporate breaches of privacy—again something that Earl and Kimport would categorize as nonpolitical—Laura Gurak and John Logie (2003) note the activist steps taken by
members of the public when their personal issues are at stake. Taking this into account, studies of activism do not necessarily have to be categorized in terms of the political, cultural, or personal, and in fact many activism studies forgo such classification and instead highlight recurring tropes of activist practices.

[1.2] Regardless of whether a particular study highlights the activism processes of fans or a general public, key features are frequently apparent. Firstly, the role and importance of the Internet in activism is made clear, with Kevin Gillan, Jenny Pickerill, and Frank Webster noting that there is a general conception that "it...appear[s] obvious that new media have been nothing but advantageous to today's...activists" (2008, 131). Secondly, the role that emotion and extremism play as a motivational tool for activism is frequently highlighted. Ryan Claassen notes that "extreme attitudes figure prominently in accounts of policy motivated political participation ranging from campaign activism...to protest and issue advocacy" (2007, 370), and here again Earl and Kimport's categorizations can be interrogated, as these same "extreme attitudes" can inform fan investment in particular texts. Jenkins, for example, observes that "the contemporary fan is a modern day minuteman--ready to respond at a moment's notice to information that threatens their community, whether it is a cancellation notice or a cease and desist letter" (2006b).

[1.3] Much as fan studies scholarship covers the apparently exceptional audiences who are able to come together in order to express and articulate their fandom in varying ways, studies of fan activism frequently cover the ways in which those same audiences are able to unite as one to take action against an opposing force. Whether that action is successful, such as in Doctor Who fans' efforts to get the program back on air (Hills 2010), or unsuccessful, such as the Stargate SG-1 fans who were unable to prevent the cancellation of the program (Jenkins 2006b), studies of activism generally focus on instances where the act of mobilization is successful, a process Joss Hands discusses thusly: "The move from demonstration to direct action is perhaps best captured in the process of mobilisation–the move from gathering to acting... [A] necessary element of both mobilisation and direct action is therefore speed–in the context of group mobilisation, speed of communication, decision-making and tactical shifts" (2011, 124).

[1.4] Hands' definition of mobilization is reliant on the two most commonly recurring tropes of activism scholarship identified above, which can lead one to the conclusion that studies of activism highlight processes of successful mobilization as a result of the prevalence of the communicative possibilities of the Internet and the instigative role of emotion. While I do not disagree with this conclusion, what I would like to question in this article is whether this end result of successful mobilization is always the case, irrespective of the success of the activism in question (note 1). Rather, I will critique
the notion that although online fan communities—established due to their shared passion for a particular subject and able to use the Internet to allow "exigencies [to] come together quickly and [to] snowball in a matter of days or even hours," (Gurak and Logie 2003, 30)—can mobilize successfully, they do not always necessarily do so, with reference to the specific case study of the fans of filmmaker Kevin Smith.

[1.5] In February 2010, Smith was ejected from a Southwest Airlines flight for apparently breaching their "passenger of size" policy, which at the time stated that "customers who are unable to lower both armrests and/or who compromise any portion of adjacent seating should proactively book the number of seats needed prior to travel" (note 2). As a result of this incident where he felt unfairly persecuted, Smith led a tirade against Southwest via the social networking tool Twitter (2010a), his blog (2010d; 2010e; 2010f), YouTube (2010b), and podcasts (2010c; Schwalbach Smith and Smith 2010), which prompted particular support from his fans on his official forum, the View Askew Message Board. When discussing his relationship with his fans, Smith notes, "We have a symbiotic relationship, the fan base and I... I'm the tubby kid who made it good, who comes across less like an artist and more like your buddy who suddenly won the lottery of life" (Smith 2009), and it was a semblance of this symbiosis that prompted fans from the Board to register their support for Smith's opposition to and boycott of Southwest Airlines.

[1.6] The Board has been hosted by Smith's own View Askew Productions Web site since 1995, and so many participants in the forum are familiarly acquainted with computer-mediated communication. Furthermore, the passion of their fandom—reflected in the above opinion of Smith—appears founded on a distinctly personal level of emotion, with Board poster TheManWhoLikesSMod noting, "It is...one of the most intimate fandoms I know of. I think that Kevin's close relationship with his fans is one of the key reasons why he stands out among other fandoms" (survey response, May 14, 2010) (note 3). Yet despite this apparent online aptitude, emotional fandom, and activist intentions, the fan community was unable to effectively mobilize in response to Smith's encouragement. Therefore, through the specific case study of the actions of Kevin Smith fans, I place the actions of this fan culture in relation to previous discussions of (fan) activism and the way in which a particular activist movement, despite having the necessary components for mobilization, was unable to successfully formulate into a cohesive tactical whole. As a result, I will question the assumption that online fans will automatically be well versed in activist methods and tactics, and will seek to develop a conceptualization of a fan community that does not necessarily guarantee successful activism.

2. The Kevin Smith fan "community"
[2.1] There are VERY few celebrities who actively engage with their fans on such a regular basis. Twitter has opened up the playing field to some degree, but the number that invite fans to poker games and test screenings are still the minority, in that it's mainly one.

–Untamed Aggression Survey response, May 12, 2010

[2.2] In July 2010 the View Askew Message Board celebrated a web presence of 15 years. The Board has existed in various guises since its inception, providing an official space where fans of Smith can collect and express their fandom of films such as *Clerks* (1994), *Chasing Amy* (1997), *Dogma* (1999), and *Clerks II* (2006), as well as other aspects of Smith's media output, such as his various podcasts, comic books, and live Q&A shows. The Board has undoubtedly been the most visible and tangible interactive portal for Smith fans, as it has allowed more dialogical, communicative, and personal relationships to be formed, largely due to Smith's own participation. Furthermore, the Board is the only of Smith's Web sites that requires a fee to join (a one-time charitable donation of $2) ensuring "the assholes, trolls and flammers who populate the dark corners of the internet, armed to the teeth with bitterness, envy, and a lot of free time" generally have no opportunity to post unconstructive negative feedback, and members' "license to post, quite like [their] license to drive...is a privilege, not a right" (Anon. n.d.).

[2.3] Smith notes that keeping in touch with his fans "has made all the difference in not just my career, but my life as well" (2007, 63), which is a stark contrast to the fan relationships experienced by a producer such as George Lucas, for example, whose fans' "acceptance of the gross imbalance between the individual viewer and corporate producer" (Brooker 2002, 98) demonstrates the way in which "the relationship between fan and producer, then, is not always a happy or comfortable one and is often charged with mutual suspicion, if not open conflict" (Jenkins 1997, 512). I believe this "mutual suspicion" appears to be largely absent from the relationship between Smith and his fans, with one possible reason being his frequent articulation of himself as a fan of his own and others' work (Smith 2007), causing him to be seen as a part of the fan community hierarchy, rather than as a producer part of a cultural institution—in contrast to the opposition symbolized by Alan McKee's fan-producer binary (2004, 171).

[2.4] Smith's view that he and his fans share a close relationship via his mediation of the fan-producer binary is an opinion shared by fans, such as that seen in the above responses of TheManWhoLikesSMod and Untamed Aggression. Furthermore, Hannah notes:
[2.5] I think Kevin spoils [us] by being so available. We have become accustomed to having this man who keeps no secrets from us as far as his life goes. I've been to his house. No other star I am a fan of has ever been so gracious and welcoming to me so it's a lot more intense of a fandom of Kevin. It's more of a borderline friendship. (survey response, May 12, 2010) (note 4)

[2.6] Here Hannah identifies her own relationship with Smith as being a resolutely more personal construct, particularly in opposition to others of whom she is a fan. In contrast to this response, Ruth's Smith fandom is less about a fondness of Smith's texts, and more about the producer behind the texts: "I'm not even a crazy fan of his movies, I'm a fan of the man himself. I think because of his time online, and his open relationship with the fans, there's a bit more of a devotion from the fans, but not in a psychotic way you can see with some other fan groups" (survey response, May 14, 2010).

[2.7] Babydoll forgoes discussion of being a fan of Smith or his texts altogether and instead focuses on what she feels is a distinctive aspect of Kevin Smith fandom—the community that has arisen from the fan culture, by noting that "Kevin Smith fans have created a community based on a mutual love of him and his work. If it weren't for that, many people in this community would have never met or have any reason to be friends" (survey response, May 12, 2010). Although at times ideologically problematic (Bell and Valentine 1997, 93), the notion of community is seemingly accepted and embraced as a method to describe the Kevin Smith fan culture by the fans themselves (note 5), so in opposition to Marc Eaton's conceptualization of community as a "rhetorical construct rather than an experience or a definable population," (2010, 175), here I refer to the Smith fan culture as a definable population of individuals whose experience is integral to understanding the extent of their activist participation. In doing this I believe we can begin to take a step back from the apparent utopian view of online participatory practices, as summarized here by Greg Elmer, Fenwick McKelvey, and Zachary Devereaux:

[2.8] Much hype has surrounded the democratic potential of Web 2.0 platforms as social production tools...to harness collective intelligence, allow users to express themselves bypassing traditional media...and enable access to a wealth of information about public issues. The rise of blogs, wikis, and other user-generated content and collaborative platforms has been seen as fundamentally changing the relationships between citizens, politics, and the media. (2009, 418)

[2.9] The emotions, relationships, and connections that the Smith fan community feel are present between themselves—and also Smith—are important in contextualizing
the supportive structure that Smith could rely on in times of crisis or instability. It is arguably because of these connections that the fans would be more likely to have an emotional investment in Smith's welfare, and why one might assume that the necessary criteria for successful mobilization were available, for as Claassen notes:

[2.10] The extreme preference model of participation posits citizens with more extreme attitudes are more predisposed to emotion-driven expressions of their attitudes than those with more moderate attitudes. The psychological underpinnings of the extreme preference motivation derive from the relationship between attitude salience and attitude extremity. Individuals tend to think more frequently about issues they consider important and frequent, conscious thought about an issue leads to more extreme attitudes. (2007, 373)

[2.11] Because of the visible parameters and implicit hierarchies present in communal structures such as the Board, it is here I look to in order to gauge the extent of mobilization toward the Southwest incident. Jenkins notes that "today, consumption assumes a more public and collective dimension—no longer a matter of individual choices and preferences, consumption becomes a topic of public discussion and collective deliberation; shared interests often lead to shared knowledge, shared vision, and shared actions" (2006a, 233). However, I believe in regards to the Southwest incident, the actions of the Kevin Smith fan community challenge this notion of collective deliberation and apparently shared actions. Although the fans categorize themselves as a community, it does not necessarily mean that their activist actions are communal. Particularly in light of the highly personal nature of the Southwest incident, the reaction of Smith's fans questions the extent to which their community is capable of mobilization. However, in order to establish how successful the mobilization can be considered, it is first necessary to detail Smith's reaction, and the manner in which he broadcast the incident.

3. Too fat to fly?

[3.1] Detailing his recollection of the Southwest incident in a specially recorded podcast later the same day (Schwalbach Smith and Smith 2010), Smith reported that he had booked two tickets for himself for a flight from Oakland to Burbank, an act he claimed was more for his comfort and a step only taken as he was able to afford to do so (Schwalbach Smith and Smith 2010). However, upon arriving at Oakland Airport, Smith opted to take an earlier flight, meaning he was placed as a standby passenger on a flight already heavily crowded, with just one seat available. Upon sitting down, Smith was approached by a member of Southwest staff and was asked to leave the plane, as he was deemed to be too large for a single seat (McNeill 2010; Rutherford
As a result of this incident, Smith led a tirade against Southwest via the social networking tool Twitter, firing a barrage of abuse at the Southwest Twitter account detailing his side of the story. This communication occurred predominantly in the immediate aftermath of the incident, when his anger was clearly on display:

[3.2] I know I'm fat, but was Captain Leysath really justified in throwing me off a flight for which I was already seated?

Dear @SouthwestAir, I flew out in one seat, but right after issuing me a standby ticket, Oakland Southwest attendant Suzanne (wouldn't give...last name) told me Captain Leysath deemed me a "safety risk." Again: I'm way fat... But I'm not THERE just yet. But if I am, why wait til my...bag is up, and I'm seated WITH ARM RESTS DOWN. In front of a packed plane with a bunch of folks who'd already I.d.ed me as "Silent Bob."

So, @SouthwestAir, go fuck yourself. I broke no regulation, offered no "safety risk" (what, was I gonna roll on a fellow passenger?). I was...wrongly ejected from the flight (even Suzanne eventually agreed). And fuck your apologetic $100 voucher, @ SouthwestAir. Thank God I don't...embarrass easily (bless you, JERSEY GIRL training). But I don't sulk off either: so everyday, some new fuck-you Tweets for @SouthwestAir (2010a)

[3.3] Joss Hands defines activism as taking into account dissent, resistance, and rebellion, with the term as he uses it containing "all of these elements in a looser configuration, and highlights the fact that activism...is thus directed against prevailing authority as domination and exploitation, whether in personal relations of micro-power, or in the form of institutional domination" (2011, 5). Even at this early retaliatory stage, one can categorize Smith's reaction in terms of activism: Noting that every day there will be new "fuck-you" tweets for Southwest marks his activist position in relation to a personal slight from Southwest. Following his initial ejection, Smith was then placed on a later flight home, where his Twitter outburst continued:

[3.4] Dear @SouthwestAir, I'm on another one of your planes, safely seated & buckled-in again, waiting to be dragged off in front of the normies... And, hey? @SouthwestAir? I didn't even need a seat belt extender to buckle up. Somehow, that shit fit over my "safety concern"-creating gut.

Hey @SouthwestAir! Look how fat I am on your plane! Quick! Throw me off! http://twitpic.com/1340gw

Hey @SouthwestAir! Sometimes, the arm rests are up because THE PEOPLE SITTING THERE ALREADY PUT THEM UP; NOT BECAUSE THEY "CAN'T GO DOWN." (2010a)
In addition to the outrage expressed here, Smith's activist intentions are again visible, as he explicitly engages with and then downplays the idea that he could establish support for a Southwest backlash, as he noted in response to Twitter user bogo_lode's suggestion of organizing a boycott: "A boycott of one. This is my last Southwest flight. Hopefully by choice" (2010a). At this stage it is notable that Smith's activist intentions are solitary, and that his goal in attacking Southwest is apparently a simple matter of clearing his name—his oft-stated defense stemming from the incident was that "I am fat, yes; but not Too Fat To Fly (yet)" (2010d). Smith's initial response to Southwest does not therefore indicate a desired response or call-to-action of fans on his behalf, instead appearing to be a solitary crusade.

In contrast however, 4 days after the event, a blog post from Smith detailed why he took such a vociferous stance against the airline, highlighting that the issue at hand was not simply poor customer service to a passenger of size:

I'm sorry—I gotta bitch about this Southwest Air thing because it's how I was raised: if someone fucks you, and you don't wanna be fucked, start screaming. So I screamed about getting fucked against my will, and a bunch of people—even an entire [airline]—said "You brought this on yourself!" without realizing they're championing not a fat guy being thrown off a plane, but a big corporation fucking over a customer.... I am both fat and financially comfortable. But I don't care if you're Bill Gates: if ANY sort of customer-service-based business with far more means than you...fucks you over and then lies about it to make themselves look better, as a consumer, you have a right to make noise—REGARDLESS OF THE SIZE OF YOUR BANK ACCOUNT. (2010f, emphasis in original)

In drawing the distinction between consumer and corporation, Smith indicates to his fans that the issue at hand is not regarding personal relations of micropower, but instead concerns an institutional domination applicable to all (Hands 2011, 5). With the observation "you have a right to make noise," Smith—in opposition to his initial response—explicitly demonstrates an indication to his supporters that protest is a viable form of action in response to feelings of persecution or having been wronged, and as such constitutes a direction for fan activism. This attitude of encouraging a similar shared response was echoed later in the same post:

I'll get thinner, but you'll [Southwest] always be an untrustworthy company with zero character and integrity in the personal responsibility department. And while "personal responsibility" may sound really ironic coming from a fat guy, just because I like to eat and not exercise, that doesn't mean I have zero sense of personal responsibility...
It means I'm the average American (2 in 3 Americans are obese/overweight). And as you've repeatedly let me and everyone else know via your blogs, your planes are not made for the average American anymore. (Smith 2010f)

[3.10] By noting that two in three Americans are obese, and linking to a CBS news report which notes "more than 190 million Americans are overweight or obese... Obesity-related diseases are a $147 billion dollar medical burden every year... Childhood obesity has tripled in the last thirty years" (Doane 2010), Smith signals that the Southwest issue should be part of wider cultural concerns for his fans, and that far from being simply a reaction to his treatment as a customer (or because of the fact that he has an established fan community), activism towards Southwest should draw emotional power from its engagement with an issue that should matter to consumers beyond the Kevin Smith fan community (Duncombe, cited in Jenkins 2010).

[3.11] In his study of protest Web site MoveOn.org, Eaton notes that "when combined with personal vilification, categorical vilification allowed MoveOn to claim the moral high ground and helped members clarify their own ideological positions by giving them an enemy against which to react" (2010, 179). Applying this observation to Smith's handling of the Southwest incident, one can see how his attitude to Southwest alters from the personal vilification of poor customer service, to the broader categorical vilification of attitudes towards obesity and body image, to be embraced by a wider supportive group. In making clear that the Southwest issue should be classified beyond just a personal attack, Smith makes clear the ideological positions expected of his fans. Taking this into account, the extent to which fans were willing or able to mobilize should be placed relative to the degree in which Smith encouraged them to do so, regardless of the fact support may be considered expected behavior.

4. Fan reaction and response

[4.1] Anne-Marie Oostveen notes that "scholars...point to [the] rise of alternative or new forms of political action and explain that the public is now more willing to support single issue campaigns and engage in unconventional forms of protest activity" (2010, 794), and as noted earlier, this rise in participatory activism is most commonly attributed to either the utopian properties of the Internet or the role that emotion plays as a motivational tool. Again, I do not believe this conclusion to be entirely false, but I believe it depicts a one-sided view of the ease and success of mobilization, suggesting that even though activism is not always successful, the efforts to create a united force are. If one were to follow the lead of previous fan activism studies, it would be tempting to flatter the Kevin Smith fan community by depicting all participants as "modern day minute[mens]" (Jenkins 2006b). However, because of the
active role Smith himself plays in the fandom, exemplified in this instance by his very vocal self-defensive demeanor, I believe the agency of the fans to mobilize is undermined.

[4.2] However, this is not to suggest that fans did not attempt to engage in a degree of activism, as many individuals did actively support Smith in his dispute with Southwest. For example, Board user Darth Predator notes that:

[4.3] I have continued to [boycott] and will until the day I die. I will also dissuade everyone looking to fly for any reason from using the airlines. It may not make a difference on the bottom line as far as Southwest is concerned, but I do sleep better at night knowing I did all I could do to keep Southwest from treating other passengers as they did Kevin Smith. If I can dissuade one person, that is one less seat, that is one less chance they have to humiliate someone. (e-mail interview, March 15, 2011)

[4.4] Here Darth Predator feels that even if ultimately his contribution is ineffective to affect Southwest's economic state, ultimately his conscience could be clear in knowing that he had participated in some manner. He is therefore making a significant moral decision in choosing whether or not to engage in activism. Similarly, Dianae compares her activist practices to recent political events, remarking, "I've decided not to take them ever again. I rarely fly so probably no big difference made but I think grass roots actions CAN be effective. Just look what happened in Egypt!" (e-mail interview, March 16, 2011). Furthermore, Ruth notes, "I'm not in the US, but do fly there fairly regularly...and will not ever fly [Southwest]" (e-mail interview, March 21, 2011). What is perhaps most notable about these responses is that they define their action in terms of "I," rather than "we." In opposition to the strong sense of community previously articulated by fans, here activism becomes an isolated and individual activity devoid of a communal direction that can lead to mobilization: there is no noticeable "move from gathering to acting" (Hands 2011, 124, my emphasis).

[4.5] However, similar to Dianae and Darth Predator's observation that their activism would have little impact, others within the fan community made the tactical decision that any action would be a fruitless task. In opposition to Smith's rallying cry against institutional domination—that "if ANY sort of customer-service-based business with far more means than you...fucks you over...you have a right to make noise" (2010f)–the respondents here believe that their efforts would largely have little to no effect on Southwest's practices. For example, Customer4352 notes, "In regards to the entire...incident...I have never [boycotted] the airline. Nor do I intend to. I followed up on the entire thing by reading anything that came across my path. I did not feel that any action I take would bear any notice from the airline, being as I fly so little" (e-mail interview, March 15, 2011).
Similarly, babydoll opted out of any activist participation, noting that "if I have a problem with a company I am more likely to get a response and potential compensation by contacting customer service. Large corporations aren't going to notice the boycotts of one person" (e-mail interview, March 15, 2011). Again, it is noticeable here that even those fans who opted out of anti-Southwest action conceive of activism as an individual process, despite babydoll's earlier lauding of the fan community and Customer4352's observation that "the website and [the] fans helped me through a dark period in my life" (survey response, June 27, 2010). Oostveen would categorize this response as weak support, comprised of a "group of supporters who endorse the campaign goals and objectives, but who do not participate in its behalf or give only minimal support" (2010, 795).

This notion problematizes the view that "a social movement is more than just an interest group and will be comprised of more than a single organisation: it incorporates a whole range of networks into a specific social dynamic" (Pickerill 2003, 16). The specific social dynamic of the Board–previously thought to embody community and togetherness–now takes on a different form in light of the failure to mobilize around an issue that the object of their fandom believes should be part of fans' wider cultural concerns. Instead (and in opposition to Darth Predator) babydoll believes that other cultural concerns can supersede moral decisions: "I know many boardies who dislike Southwest and think what they did to Kevin was horrible but will still fly them because they are the cheapest and for many people saving money trumps principles. That's no surprise in this economy" (e-mail interview, March 15, 2011).

The response of the fans here demonstrates that the consumption of Kevin Smith in this instance does not conform to the assumption of "collective deliberation" and shared actions (Jenkins 2006a, 233), and instead relies on individual circumstance regardless of moral (and emotional) position. As Eaton notes, there is a presumption that "participants will have member-to-member, non-hierarchical communication channels through which to negotiate the meaning of their communities" (2010, 176). However, this is clearly not the case in this instance.

In relation to the (in)action of his fan community, Smith's own action against Southwest seemingly constitutes a one-man crusade against the airline, with the fan response–although supportive and emulative–unable to mobilize into an organized collective because of Smith's role as spokesperson and figurehead for his own fan culture. Smith's provocation of Southwest through various media outlets warranted multiple replies from the airline's Twitter account:

@ThatKevinSmith hey Kevin! I'm so sorry for your experience tonight! Hopefully we can make things right, please follow so we may DM!
@ThatKevinSmith Again, I'm very sorry for the experience you had tonight. Please let me know if there is anything else I can do.

I've read the tweets all night from @thatkevinsmith–He'll be getting a call at home from our Customer Relations VP tonight. (2010)

[4.11] So, there is perhaps a sense that because of Smith's hierarchal status—not just within his own fan community, but in cultural terms as well—he was afforded special treatment (note 6). Although the author of the Southwest Twitter feed claimed "I read every single tweet that comes into this account, and take every tweet seriously. We'll handle @thatkevinsmith issue asap" (2010), a personal phone call from the Vice-President of Customer Relations to resolve a simple issue of an "average American" being "fucked over" by a large corporation (Smith 2010f) would arguably not be a privilege afforded to all. In contrast, Ruth notes that she "wrote [Southwest] a formal letter, sent an email and twittered them that I felt their policy was discriminatory and unfair and that myself and my 'fat' boyfriend would not fly their airline, nor would any of our friends or family. I didn't get a reply in any format" (email interview, March 21, 2011).

[4.12] By not responding to Ruth's activism, yet directly engaging with Smith, Southwest demonstrates that Smith's encouragement of activism was ultimately not warranted, because of the cultural capital afforded to him as a producer of texts with not only an established fan base, but also multiple media outlets. Because Smith is the apparent wronged party in the incident—not just the figurehead for a movement—the Southwest response is directed at their disgruntled customer, rather than a wider (im)mobilized force. So despite Smith's claims that the issue should be pertinent to the average American, it is precisely his public presence and very vocal self-defensive demeanor that prevented fan mobilization: Rather than acting as a single fan organization, the Kevin Smith community in this instance largely let economics reign over emotion, and conceded participation to a more vocal and influential orator. In this instance, Smith's attempt to "engage with and draw opinion from a body of citizens" (Hands 2011, 5) appears to have been unsuccessful.

5. "I am fat, yes..."

[5.1] However, despite this apparent unsuccessful mobilization on a more widely recognizable scale, the Kevin Smith fan community did respond in a manner that could be considered appropriate to the discourses of producer-fan relations experienced prior to the Southwest incident. As previously noted, Smith's frequent defensive statement in regards to the incident was "I am fat, yes; but not Too Fat To Fly (yet)" (2010d), and an acknowledgement and awareness of his size has been part of his comedic
discourse for many years; the DVD sleeve for *Sold Out: A Threevening with Kevin Smith* (2008), for example, describes Smith as "a big, fat, pop culture geek," and Smith's positioning of himself in this persona does appear to have had a marked effect on fan response to the Southwest incident.

[5.2] Across his media output, Smith has frequently made comedic reference to his size, from sharing his medical diagnosis of morbid obesity (Smith 2002) to detailing his dieting habits (Smith 2007). Following this lead, a tangible aspect of response from both Smith's fan community and Smith himself was that of a collective comedic reaction, and an apparent use of humor to own the situation in lieu of a victory against Southwest. Avner Ziv has noted that people frequently use humor as a means to cope with difficult situations in life (1988, 109), and Smith himself noted the role that humor played in his own perceived ownership of the situation (Schwalbach Smith and Smith 2010).

[5.3] Thus far this article has attempted to demonstrate an absence of action with regards to fan mobilization against Southwest. However, this is not to suggest that there was no response from the Smith fan community whatsoever. Rather, it is possible to examine the way in which fans *did* react, using comedy as a unifying response, demonstrating that although there was a failure of mobilization in traditional activist terms, a community-appropriate reaction did occur. Gary Alan Fine and Michaela De Soucey have explored the way a joking culture can emerge within social groups, noting that a collective's "comic discourse comes to characterize the group to its members and can subsequently be used to identify the group," (2005, 2) and it is the comic discourse between Smith and his fans that I believe signals the fans' most successful (indirect) response to Southwest, instead of an explicit activist approach.

[5.4] Fine and De Soucey note that "joking is embedded; it occurs within the context of an on-going relationship," (2005, 2) and in mapping Smith's comedic, rather than vitriolic, response to Southwest, it is important to note the context of the media he used to communicate information to his fans. For instance, the reactionary podcast recorded (Schwalbach Smith and Smith 2010) was produced as an episode of Smith's ongoing *SModcast* series, and was titled *#106: Go Fuck Yourself, Southwest Airlines*. However, despite Smith's apparent anger, humiliation, and embarrassment displayed during the episode, the comedic nature of *SModcast* places Smith's rant within a similar context by association, and thus becomes part of Smith's produced comedic discourse.

[5.5] Via its presentation on the *SModcast* Web site ([http://smodcast.com/main.html](http://smodcast.com/main.html)), the podcast was embedded within a comedic context. When listed, all episodes feature a descriptive tagline of the subject matter being discussed by Smith and his co-presenter; *SModcast* #71 (Mosier and Smith
2009), for example, is followed by "In which our heroes take it easy and forget to be funny." In comparison, *SModcast #106* featured the tagline "In which, surely, our hero is Too Fat To Fly. And don't call me Shirley." Further explicit references to comedy disaster film *Airplane!* (1980) continued with a liberal use of the film's soundtrack embedded throughout the episode—the appearance of romantic and tense themes adding humor to Smith's contrasting words. The use of *Airplane!* references help to mark this episode as a similarly humorous addition to the *SModcast* catalogue, making it part of the ongoing *SModcast/Smith*-audience relationship, and implicitly adding a joking context to the material.

[5.6] This *SModcast/Smith*-audience relationship—the aforementioned perceived "borderline friendship and "symbiotic relationship" that Smith and his fans share—fits further into Fine and De Soucey's categorization, for they note that "joking is interactive; it is part of on-going interaction, and demands a response from other group members" (2005, 2). The two-way nature of the producer-fan relationship allows Smith's fans to similarly joke about his size in an inclusive manner, taking their direction from the comedic context of *SModcast*. For example, previous episodes have inspired fan art, labeled "SMart," which has been posted on the Board, as well as being part of a dedicated art show in 2009. In a familiar practice of tribute and textual poaching (Jenkins 1992), fans take their favorite moments from the podcast and recreate them via artistic depictions—an act Smith publically appreciated during *SModcast #89* (Mosier and Smith 2009), where he and co-host Scott Mosier browsed and discussed the online art during recording.

[5.7] As such, demonstrating the comedic context of Smith's reaction in *SModcast #106*, fans were quick to follow Smith's comedic lead, and began posting art that dealt with Smith's ejection from the Southwest plane—feeling comfortable enough to use imagery that highlighted Smith's weight. For example, in a parody of *Passenger 57* (1992), malicore produced a mock film poster ("Passenger 37") featuring Smith's image and the tagline "Always Bet on FAT." Similarly, JonathanCoit featured an image of a grotesquely large Smith eyeing his co-passengers suspiciously, with the caption "Did you fucking bitches sell me out?"

[5.8] In addition to the art taking obvious comedic barbs at Smith, at times the art produced also demonstrated the way in which the relationship between Smith and his fans (and references specific to that relationship) became prevalent in the shared comedic reaction to the incident. For example, art from poster alienmastermind depicted an orangutan in a flight attendant uniform—a reference to Smith's films *Mallrats* (1995) and *Jay and Silent Bob Strike Back* (2001), which both featured an orangutan named Suzanne; this is also the name of the Southwest employee who ejected Smith from the flight, as noted in Smith's Twitter feed above (2010a). This
piece of art would therefore only make sense to those aware of Smith's work as a filmmaker—that is, his pre-existing fan base—meaning that those only aware of Smith because of the Southwest incident would be unaware of the significance of the art to Smith's joking culture. (In a similar manner, the number for "Passenger 37" was chosen because of the frequent recurrence of the number in Smith's work, beginning with *Clerks*.) It is not insignificant that the Board—usually a forum open for nonregistered users to read—became a private space at the time of the media storm, closed off to those without a username and password. In this instance, the Board became a symbolic refuge for Smith and his fans, representing a core space of Kevin Smith fandom, apparently welcoming of Smith's position as spokesperson and figurehead for his own fan culture.

[5.9] In addition to his previous comedic discourse, Smith's position as a celebrity, with access to a mass audience, seems to be important to understanding his use of humor to deal with the situation. John Nezlek and Peter Derks note that "one might expect that popularity (and by implication amount of social contact) is positively related to the use of humor as a means of coping. Individuals who deal with adversity by trying to make light of it or by cheering people up might be more popular than those who do not" (2001, 397).

[5.10] When applied to the Southwest incident, Nezlek and Derks' research suggests that Smith possibly used humor as an *expected* response—a reaction required of Smith because of the discourse of his celebrity persona, and the contact he has with a fan group trained to engage with a consistently maintained joking culture. The reaction to the event could be described as particularly **Smithian** because of the manner in which it fits with Smith's pre-established celebrity discourse—allowing him the right to joke about his size in order to preempt others doing so. This Smithian reaction has persisted in the shape of the Southwest incident being fully integrated into his comedic discourse: His Q&A show celebrating his birthday in August 2010, for example, was titled *Kevin Smith: Too Fat for Forty*. Although fan support may be expected in other scenarios, the specificities of the Southwest incident—pertaining to Smith's size and body image—would seem to suggest that the reaction of the fans was wholly appropriate to this particular culture (**note 7**).

[5.11] In forgoing the gathering process of activism and instead embracing comedy, Smith's fans demonstrate their response via a method more familiar to their fan experience, despite an apparent suitability for mobilization agency. The relationship between Smith and his fans, touted by both as somewhat closer than other fandoms, would appear to be apt for a defensive, retaliatory activist campaign. However, the fact that Smith seemingly addressed the situation himself apparently led the community's demonstration of identification to be informed by the preexisting
discourses in the relationship between producer and fan, resulting in a comedic fan reaction more appropriate to the fandom, rather than a more readily recognizable form of activism.

6. Conclusion

[6.1] At the beginning of this article, I noted the recurring tropes of activism scholarship: the role and importance of the Internet, and the role that emotion and extremism play as a motivational tool. What is clear from the Smith fan response to the Southwest incident is that while these two factors are important and pertinent in discussions of fan mobilization, their presence does not always guarantee success. Despite a fan community that is quick to reference the strong emotional ties that bind it together, there are instances when the apparent interests of the fandom fall second to personal experience—whether that involves political, cultural, or economic factors.

[6.2] This prevalence of personal over fan experience is further highlighted by the later emergence of a successfully mobilized activist cause originated by the Smith fan community—the UnfollowCharlie campaign. Founded in March 2011, UnfollowCharlie is a drive to raise awareness regarding domestic violence against women, and grew from a concern surrounding "the media coverage around Charlie Sheen, and his growing fanbase, despite the fact that he has a history of violence towards women" (Anon. 2011). (Due to the spreading interests of the activists involved in UnfollowCharlie, the cause will soon be changing its name to reflect concerns other than those regarding Charlie Sheen.) Arising from connections made on the Board (where an UnfollowCharlie thread has remained active since February 2011), UnfollowCharlie has spawned a dedicated blog that strives to keep followers informed of the activist efforts such as educational events, related campaigns, charitable merchandise, and news reports. What is perhaps most notable, however, is that while activism in the face of the personal affront to Smith may have been anticipated (and was ultimately unsuccessful), UnfollowCharlie—despite having its roots on the Board—has nothing explicitly to do with Kevin Smith, demonstrating that although the Internet, emotion, and extremism have all played a part in its inception, the success of the activists' mobilization is not founded within the overriding fandom.

[6.3] In contrast, the Southwest case study of unsuccessful mobilization demonstrates the invisible facets of scholarship. While many fascinating studies cover newsworthy activism, or particularly esoteric fan cultures, I presented an exception to these apparent rules, although another iteration of this article could have covered UnfollowCharlie. While researchers are quick to demonstrate their subjects as particularly special, I charted a fan community in terms of its relative normality (note
and suggest that although one can attempt to repeatedly assert instances of exceptional behavior, this cannot always be the case.

7. Acknowledgments

[7.1] This article would not have been possible without the continued help and support of members of the View Askew Message Board. I would also like to thank Keith Johnston and Brett Mills for their comments and feedback on earlier drafts.

8. Notes

1. Henry Jenkins and John Tulloch, for example, note how the activist efforts of Gaylaxians--Star Trek fans seeking equality in representation of homosexuals--did not succeed, yet the success of mobilization is never an issue (1995, 250).

2. The wording has since been slightly changed, now highlighting encroachment on neighboring seats, with the armrest "considered to be" the definitive boundary between seats (Southwest Airlines n.d.).

3. The qualitative data from fan responses in this article are taken from a questionnaire completed in May 2010 and e-mail correspondence in early 2011. Taken from my wider doctoral project examining the Smith fan culture and the boundaries and nature of community, my chosen methodological practice of qualitative participation and autoethnography closely follows Robert Kozinets' model of netnography, at the core of which he notes "is a participative approach to the study of online culture and communities" (2010, 74). Following this, I have placed myself as a scholar-fan within the Kevin Smith fan community, and my thesis derives its conclusions from qualitative data collected from the initial questionnaire, e-mail interviews, and face-to-face interviews conducted in July-August 2010. Ethical approval for research derived for the PhD and associated projects has been granted by the School of Film and Television Studies at the University of East Anglia.

4. All respondents were given the opportunity to provide an alternate username for my research. "Hannah" is the only name that has been changed.

5. The fandom was described in these terms via survey responses by Board users yzzie (May 12, 2010), frick (June 27, 2010), Ruth (May 12, 2010), and slithybill (May 12, 2010).

6. Diane Negra and Su Holmes have noted the manner in which "dignity and privacy are increasingly gendered in the context of celebrity representation" (2008, [2]), and I think it is worth questioning here the extent to which Smith's treatment by Southwest
was a gendered motivation. In considering whether the airline would have been less accommodating–or Smith less vocal–had he been a woman in a similar situation is an interesting prospect, particularly when one considers that on his second Southwest flight a woman was marginalized because of her size (an incident witnessed by Smith). Smith later reached out to the woman and provided her a platform (SModcast #107) to air her views on Southwest and female body image (Smith 2010c).

7. The fan culture's familiarity with Smith's attitude toward his size was noted when Smith acknowledged Southwest's apprehension in using the term fat, noting they "were so fucking scared when I brought up [the word] 'fat'...'fat,' 'black,' 'the n-word,' 'Jew'...you can tell there are buzz words like, 'We didn't say that!'" (Schwalbach Smith and Smith 2010). One can question here the extent to which fat can now be considered an offensive label, and whether Smith (and his fans') use of the word is an act of reclamation.

8. That's not to say I do not think the Kevin Smith fan community is special–I am an active participant in the fandom myself (Phillips 2010).

9. Works cited


baked,29171/. No longer available.


1. The battle on Hoth

[1.1] On Friday, February 11, 2011, Wisconsin Governor Scott Walker introduced the Budget Repair Bill, a measure supposedly designed "to balance the state budget and give government the tools to manage during economic crisis" (http://www.wisgov.state.wi.us/journal_media_detail.asp?locid=177&prid=5622), but that proposed to do so by forcing state workers to pay for a greater percentage of their benefits, and by virtually eliminating public unions. The latter would be allowed to bargain for wages, tied to inflation rates, but otherwise would be rendered ineffective. In a state that has often modeled labor law for the rest of the nation, with a strong union history, this union-busting bill incensed many. The next few weeks therefore saw protests day after day at the Wisconsin State Capitol Building in Madison, with crowds peaking at almost 100,000, and with many coming out in the snow, rain, and cold while Democratic senators camped out in Illinois to deny the Wisconsin Republicans the necessary numbers to establish a quorum to vote on the bill.

[1.2] As I joined one of these protests and filed into the Capitol, whose rotunda and other public areas had been peacefully occupied, a young man stood by the entrance holding an iPad above his head. The screen played a looped sequence from The Empire Strikes Back in which a Rebel Alliance snowspeeder attaches a cable to a huge lumbering AT-AT (All Terrain Armored Transport) Imperial Walker on the snow planet of Hoth. The speeder then winds the cable around the walker until the doglike machine
is crippled, unable to walk, and collapses. The man in the Capitol chanted, "The Rebels brought down Walkers. So can we!" As hundreds of protesters filed past him, many chuckled, applauded him, shook his hand, and/or joined in his chant before joining the protesters demanding that state representatives locked behind closed doors listen to them.

[1.3] The young man's creative use of an iPad was impressive, but his act of seeing the events of the week through popular culture glasses was by no means unique. "Imperial Walker" references became commonplace, with two protesters even dressing up as an AT-AT (figure 1). Other Star Wars protest signs saw Admiral Akbar warning "It's a Trap!", depicted Han Solo worrying, "I've got a bad feeling about this" (figure 2), and pleaded to the governor that "There's still good in you (Sky)Walker." Shifting franchises to *The Lord of the Rings*, several posters invoked Gandalf's enraged words to the Balrog, saying "This bill shall not pass!" (figure 3). Harry Potter–inspired signs suggested that Walker was Voldemort and that school librarians were Harry (figure 4). *The Big Lebowski's* The Dude cried out from signs that "This aggression will not stand, man!" (figure 5), *South Park's* Eric Cartman instructed Walker to "Respect Our Authoritah" (figure 6), a "Jersey Shore for Union Rights" sign announced that "Scott Walker is a grenade," slightly doctored *Kill Bill* posters now noted "Kill the Bill," protesters dressed as Batman and Captain America urged that we purge the GOP and Walker from the country, a sign with *The Simpsons'* Montgomery Burns congratulated Walker for his evil brilliance, Walker was compared to the Sheriff of Nottingham on yet another sign, and folksy *It's a Wonderful Life* was invoked to suggest that the bill was "Turning Bedford Falls into Pottersville." Such signs were by no means the only signs, as indeed a vibrant collection of sentiments from many walks of life could be seen. Nor were they the most common. But, as with the young man with the iPad, they and their creators often elicited friendly chatter, laughs, cheers, and compliments.
2. Fannish knowledge, play, and politics

[2.1] Here I want to examine the role that fandom and popular culture played in the Wisconsin protests. In particular, I want to argue for these signs, and for the uses of fandom within the realm of the political, as morale and community builders of an impressive order. While critics might see the signs as a failure to take the events seriously, as yet another instance of entertainment getting in the way of Important Work To Be Done, I saw ample evidence of the above signs and invocations of popular culture as contributing to said Important Work.

[2.2] I start with the observation that these signs aided camaraderie. Protesters came from a wide range of backgrounds, as Madison's Capitol Square filled with local teachers, graduate students, senior citizens, firefighters, snowplow drivers, high school students, professors, undergraduates from around the state and country, steelworkers, and many, many more, including a wide swath of concerned citizens of Madison. But how do such individuals and such distinct communities come together and work together toward a common goal? How do they create a communal understanding of what is going on and of their role in this? On the one hand, such questions point to the brilliant organization and marshaling performed by the Teaching Assistants' Association that played such a key role in the protests. We can also look to patterned group behaviors—many people carried similar signs, handed out by unions...
(including, for instance, "Stop the Attack on Wisconsin Families"), thereby signaling something in common. Standard protest chants ("Hey hey, ho ho, Scott Walker has got to go," "Show me what democracy looks like," etc.) similarly brought protesters together. Civic and state pride was instrumental, too, as many showed up in their Wisconsin red and/or sported signs asking "What would Bucky [the university mascot] do?" But on top of this, the fannish signs played their part in strengthening connections. Many signs only required a passing knowledge of the texts in question, but they also invited a deeper connection between fans. In a crowd of people, many of whom are unknown, and when the news media has proven so invested in portraying protests anywhere as "riots" in a way that might cause many protesters to be on edge and slightly fearful of their fellow protesters, the fannish connection allowed for a dispelling of such fear.

[2.3] The Imperial Walker signs and invocations are especially evocative. Such signs were being wielded, after all, in the middle of a characteristically long Wisconsin winter; when the Capitol Square was covered in snow, it seemed distinctly Hothlike. Because AT-ATs are notable for looking like grotesque, oversized mechanical dogs, likening one to Walker conveyed him as being a robot for special interests. The Walkers are shown to be destructible, and they appear in the Star Wars trilogy when the Empire is in control and the Rebels are on the run; yet fans know that the Rebels will ultimately win out, that the Empire is doomed to failure. Even Admiral Akbar's warning, "It's a trap!," is similarly framed by fannish knowledge: the Rebels still destroy the Death Star and the Empire along with it. Meanwhile, Han may have "a bad feeling about this," but we know him to survive and to be ready for all comers. The Star Wars signs thereby offered a shared frame for understanding the events and the protesters' place in them, one that was all the more necessary given the national news media's early inept reporting on the protests. Granted, this understanding involved no small measure of hyberbole, but the signs nevertheless used a fannish bond and knowledge to help give purpose to some.

[2.4] That hyperbole, however, also helped steel protesters for the long haul. With weather often hostile to protesters, the Republicans closing ranks and making it hard to see a path of victory ahead, and protests seeming like they would need to continue for a long time, investment strategies were required to make protesters feel the need to return and to keep up the fight. To this end, all of the Star Wars signs framed the protests in larger cosmological terms, calling for the protesters to stick around for Episode VI and the celebratory ending. So too did the Harry Potter and Lord of the Rings signs invoke grand and grueling battles of good versus evil. They referenced a battle that would be neither quick nor easy, but would reward continued investment, and that was absolutely vital. In doing so, they aimed to build morale for the long term rather than peg it to short-term, quick-fix goals. I am under no deluded
misunderstanding that the protesters honestly believed they were Dumbledore's Army, the Fellowship of the Ring, or the Red Team in the Death Star trenches, but even a small, heavily discounted portion of the emotion summoned by a call to arms by Harry, Gandalf, or Mon Mothma might have been the gentle push many needed to come out the next day or next weekend.

[2.5] Moreover, the signs were amusing. They often inspired laughs and cheers. They were not alone in this respect, as other comic signs abounded (as, for example, with one sign that implored "Walker, be more like Palin: Quit"), but they contributed to making the protests as friendly as they were driven. Protesters were angry, after all, and many were facing poverty, a loss of benefits, and the theft of their rights. Fox News' reports of "riots" and "union hate rallies" by "union thugs" (http://nation.foxnews.com/politics/2011/02/17/union-hate-rally-wisconsin-protests-rife-hitler-gun-targets-death-threats) were nonsense and shameless lies; they did rely, though, on images of actual signs and on audio of actual chants by a radical minority of extremely angry protesters. As the protests continued and as they drew national media attention, for many protesters, and for the organizers especially, it became important to ensure that the protests remained peaceful and upbeat, countering Fox News' images. The fannish signs aided this mission, offering reasons to smile and laugh amidst the anger and angst, and often inspiring discussions between fellow fans.

3. Conclusion: Rallying around the rebels

[3.1] "Fan activism" may usually bring to mind images of the Harry Potter Alliance and of other fan communities that come together through their fandom and then enter the realm of politics as a close-knit community. However, at the Wisconsin protests, we saw another type of fan activism, in which fandom was performed and announced as a way to foster community among both fans and a broader public when politics was already on the scene. The political utility of this second form of fan activism stems from the fact that many of the utopian messages and scripts on offer by fan objects (the democratic, liberatory zeal of the Rebel Alliance, Harry Potter's embrace of difference, Lord of the Rings's bold objection to tyranny) reach a significantly wider community of those who may regard themselves as fans of a sort, even if fan studies literature has often required a greater level of participation in the fan object to count as a full-fledged member of "fandom." If a fan activist's task is to use fandom and its shared commitments to such utopian visions to affect change in the political world, in some cases this task may be achieved by sharing the fan object with that broader community of fanlike individuals. In Wisconsin, while fans may have been the ones wearing the costumes and holding the signs, they offered those around them who were in the know a virtual costume to wear over their actions, as well as a fleeting moment of shared ground and togetherness in the anonymity of a large protest.
I do not wish to overstate the importance of these signs here, as other forces and individuals deserve far more credit for crowd mobilization and organization at the protests in Wisconsin. The fans were hardly the Jedi masters in this battle, and should the protesters have succeeded in their cause, I would be no more inclined to credit the victory to fans than I am inclined to blame them for the eventual passage of Governor Scott Walker's bill. But just because Star Wars was not the horse pulling the political cart here, we would be wise not to underestimate the importance of morale and community building within any political project. As much as journalists often fetishize elections, polls, and events as sites for politics, what gets us to elections and events in the first place, what keeps us there, what allows us to make sense of them, and what encourages us to keep coming back—those are what truly make politics happen. Fannish signs and play can build that morale and strengthen those communities, and in that respect, they may occasionally prove as useful for bringing down Imperial Walkers as a well-placed light saber or snowspeeder cable.
1. Introduction

[1.1] The suggestion that there is a strong relationship between participatory culture and civic/political engagement would not come as news to anyone in India. Indeed, when one raises the topic of participatory culture in the Indian context, the standard response is to point to Tamil and Telugu film cultures, where fan associations continue to play pivotal roles in many film stars' political careers (M. G. Ramachandran and N. T. Rama Rao being the most well-known cases). In fact, this narrative of cine-politics has been so dominant that other sites, modes, and dimensions of participation have not been considered, let alone studied in a systematic fashion, for no apparent reason other than their seemingly nonpolitical character. In sharp contrast to academic debates in the United States—where media and cultural studies scholars struggle against mainstream political science, which approaches the issue of participation in a narrow sense of purportedly rational, information-based engagement with civic and political affairs—the problem in the Indian context is the struggle to highlight the profound ordinariness of participatory culture.

[1.2] To be sure, the past few years have witnessed some astonishing instances of popular participation intersecting with and reshaping a wider political field. The third season of *Indian Idol*, which saw fan mobilization for the two finalists influencing broader political movements in Northeast India, and the *Pink Chaddi* campaign designed to protest attacks on women pub-goers by a conservative, right-wing Hindu
group come to mind right away as two key cases that have attracted considerable attention. However, even as we have established the importance of examining participatory culture as a site where popular culture, politics, and daily life intersect in new and unpredictable ways, we have, far too hastily, cast aside the sociable dimensions of participation in favor of mapping links to the realm of politics proper. My main argument is this: We need to develop accounts of participatory culture that take the sociable and everyday dimensions of participation in and around popular culture more seriously while remaining attuned to the possibility that such participation might, in rare instances, intersect with broader civic and political issues and movements. Using *Indian Idol 3* as a case, I want to suggest that sociability should be as fundamental to our analyses of participatory culture as civic/political engagement.

2. After *Indian Idol*

[2.1] Let me begin with a brief account of the events surrounding *Indian Idol 3*. In the summer of 2007, media coverage of *Indian Idol* focused on how people in the northeast Indian state of Meghalaya had cast aside decades-old separatist identities to mobilize support for Amit Paul, one of the finalists. While some fans set up Web sites and blogs to generate interest and support from the rest of the country and abroad, others formed a fan club and facilitated efforts by a range of groups and organizations to sponsor and manage public call offices in different parts of Meghalaya, distribute prepaid mobile phone cards, and set up landline voting booths. Recognizing the ways in which these activities were beginning to transcend longstanding ethnic, religious, linguistic, and spatial boundaries, state legislators and other politicians soon joined the effort to garner votes for Amit Paul, with the chief minister D. D. Lapang declaring Amit Paul to be Meghalaya's "brand Ambassador for peace, communal harmony and excellence" (*Shillong Times*, 2007). It seemed that this campaign around a reality television program could set the stage for a remarkable refashioning of the sociocultural and political terrain in Meghalaya. As one commentator remarked:

[2.2] When Meghalaya's history is written, it could well be divided into two distinct phases—one before the third *Indian Idol* contest and one after it. A deep tribal-nontribal divide, punctuated by killings, riots, and attempts at ethnic cleansing, would mark the first phase. A return to harmony and to the cosmopolitan ethos of the past would signify the second. The agent of change: Amit Paul, the finalist of the musical talent hunt on a TV channel. (Mazumdar 2007)

[2.3] While news organizations from New Delhi and Mumbai looked upon these events with incredulity, commentators in Shillong began debating how Amit Paul—a middle-class, Bengali, non-Khasi—had emerged as a catalyst for changing relations in
Meghalaya. To begin with, the situation in Meghalaya had begun to change over the previous 4 to 5 years, with tentative moves on the part of different groups to reach out and work toward peaceful resolutions of longstanding issues. Secondly, Amit Paul’s background—a high-school dropout who had to struggle in a marginalized state and region of the country—resonated deeply with youth across the region, with questions of ethnicity receding into the background. As Manas Chaudhuri, editor of the *Shillong Times*, remarked: "In a place where there's nothing much to celebrate, Amit came as a godsend. He's talented, and has won all our hearts by singing Khasi, Nepali, Hindi and English songs on the show. It reminded people of the cosmopolitan culture that once prevailed in the state, and they have been overcome by the desire to restore the happy, multi-ethnic character of this state" (Mazumdar 2007).

[2.4] Finally, Amit Paul's participation in a national contest like *Indian Idol* was seen as a unique opportunity for Meghalaya and other states in the Northeast to assert their presence in the nation and claim their place in the "national family." Without a doubt, there were several schisms that threatened to disrupt the momentum generated by hundreds of fans across Northeast India, with groups like the Shillong Arts and Music Lovers Forum complaining that politicians were leveraging this moment for narrow reasons. And activist-writers like Patricia Mukhim did pose critical questions, asking readers why recognition from the rest of the country was so important and if it was because people in Meghalaya were unsure about their belonging in the nation (Mukhim 2008). For the most part, however, this reality television phenomenon was seen to have set the stage for a gradual reconfiguration of sociocultural and political relationships in Meghalaya.

[2.5] Indeed, the most striking aspect of the fan following that developed around Amit Paul was the sheer range and number of organizations and groups involved: the Shillong Arts and Music Lovers Forum, Civil Society Women's Organization, Society for Performing Arts Development, Bihari Youth Welfare Association, Frontier Chamber of Commerce, Marwari Ekta Manch (Marwari Unity Platform), and several smaller clubs in different localities of Shillong that drew in people from different ethnic, caste, linguistic, and religious backgrounds, with the Amit Paul fan club serving as an umbrella organization. In addition to organizing rallies throughout the city to raise awareness and drum up support for Amit Paul, these groups worked hard to ensure that their contestant received enough votes to stay in the competition. Working closely with local businessmen, including influential figures like Dwarka Singhania, treasurer of the Meghalaya Chamber of Commerce and Industry, fans ensured that public call offices in residential areas and several prominent locations in Shillong remained open all night for people to come forward and cast their vote. And as Amit Paul progressed through the competition, attracting attention in Meghalaya and other northeastern states, fan activity intensified and funds were raised to create publicity materials
(posters and banners placed throughout Shillong, for example) and even distribute prepaid mobile phone cards for free (note 1). Over a period of 3 months, it became clear that the mobilization around Amit Paul had created a neutral space for a range of people to work together, and the many public activities had dramatically changed the way different groups inhabited the city of Shillong. In a city where areas are clearly demarcated along ethnic and linguistic lines—for instance, Bengali-speaking denizens tended not to wander into Mawlai, described as the "cradle of Khasi sub-nationalism"—the tumultuous reception that Amit Paul received when he visited Mawlai as part of his first visit to Shillong after competing in Indian Idol seemed remarkable even to the most jaded observers in Meghalaya (Mazumdar 2007).

[2.6] Without exception, every news report focused attention on the political dimensions of the participatory culture this contestant had sparked. Of course, this focus on the political was understandable given the intensity and seemingly intractable nature of ethnic conflicts in Meghalaya and other parts of Northeast India (note 2). But as the contest on television and among fans came to an end and media attention gradually drifted away from Indian Idol 3, no one asked what remain the most crucial questions: Given the sociohistorical context of Northeast India and the complex politics of ethnic strife, what happens when such phases of participation that emerge around a reality television program fade away? What are the cultural and political implications of a zone of participation that lasts a few weeks or months at best? The answers, I would argue, are more likely to be found in the terrain of daily life, which, in turn, forces us to rethink our understanding of public and public life in ways that are not beholden to Habermasian ideals.

3. Public life and the struggle for the ordinary

[3.1] It is worth reminding ourselves that the world of public life is not limited to questions of citizenship or civic engagement. As Jeff Weintraub suggests, "the key to this alternative version of the public realm is not solidarity or obligation, but sociability" (1997, 21). Weintraub's argument, that the vision of public life celebrated by writers such as Jane Jacobs "lies not in self-determination or collective action, but in the multi-stranded liveliness and spontaneity arising from the ongoing intercourse of heterogeneous individuals and groups that can maintain a civilized co-existence," is pertinent in the context of a city like Shillong as well (1997, 21–22). Spaces of everyday interaction such as the street corner, balconies and verandahs, the public phone booth, and the cybercafé are, as Kumar points out, "spaces of sociability that are neither public nor private in the liberal-economic sense of state versus market forces, or in the civic sense of communitarian responsibilities and citizenship, but constitute the heart of public life in colonial and postcolonial India" (2010, 23). In Shillong, the idea of people from different linguistic, ethnic, or religious backgrounds
coming together in spaces such as tea shops, telephone booths, and so on has been unimaginable for several decades now. *Indian Idol 3* was a crucial media phenomenon precisely because the public that cohered around Amit Paul created the possibility and the space for the renewal of everyday forms of interaction across ethnic, religious, spatial, and linguistic boundaries that had been subdued and rendered difficult, if not impossible, over the decades. In other words, the participatory culture surrounding *Indian Idol 3* created spaces in which people had to acknowledge their differences and set them aside, if only for a brief period of time, as they stood in lines at telephone booths, shared mobile SIM cards, chatted with each other in front of teashops, and took part in rallies to support their idol. In doing so, they were afforded a glimpse of the everyday that was not shot through with suspicion and the threat of violence.

[3.2] Was this renewal of public life tied to the time and space of the television event? Yes, without a doubt. Texting, going online to participate in a fan community, and creating a blog are all activities that remain bound by the temporal and spatial constraints as well as the mandates of commercial television. We also know that such phases of participation are never entirely autonomous from the larger political field—the interests of the government, various politicians, and civil society organizations with their own vested interests. What the *Indian Idol* case suggests is the potential for such moments of participation to move beyond the time and space of the media event into other times and spaces to generate, in the process, alternative imaginations of public life that, in turn, are tied to the experience of everyday life. As Veena Das, focusing on the violence of Partition in the Indian subcontinent in 1947 as well as the Sikh pogrom in 1984, writes: "Life was recovered not through some grand gesture in the realm of the transcendent but through a descent into the ordinary...just as I think of the event as attached to the everyday, I think of the everyday itself as eventful" (2006, 7). Das' account of the lives of people and communities caught up in these events encourages us to explore how the "event attaches itself with its tentacles into everyday life and folds itself into the recesses of the ordinary" (2006, 1).

[3.3] Following Das, I would argue that the struggle in places like Shillong is not, in the first instance, about the political. Moments of participation such as the one surrounding *Indian Idol* need to be understood, then, by first asking questions about sociability and everyday life. We can then ponder, given that neither the state nor various political movements have seemed able to imagine viable solutions to a range of problems in this part of India, if and how such spaces and moments of sociability might generate new and sustainable ideas for social and political change. In other words, it is only when we fully comprehend how public participation and everyday life are braided together that we can meaningfully pose questions about political impact: What traces has this zone of participation left behind? In the near future, how and in what contexts will memories of *Indian Idol 3* and Amit Paul be invoked? Will the
fleeting renewal of interaction and engagement across existing fault lines sustain itself over time? Progressive ideals and expectations about participatory cultures encouraging and informing civic/political engagement in conflict-ridden situations are well and good, but only if they are grounded in an understanding of and deep appreciation for the immense challenge of creating and sustaining spaces of sociability.

4. Notes

1. It is useful to note here that unlike American Idol, where viewers are allowed to vote for a period of 2 hours after the show's broadcast, Indian Idol viewers are permitted 11 hours (from 9 PM until 8 AM next day). Viewers could cast their vote by sending an SMS via mobile phone or "televote" through a landline telephone, use an interactive voice service available for mobile phones and landline phones, or vote online through http://www.indianidol.sify.com. Further, voting for Indian Idol was open not only to viewers residing in India but also in the U.K. and the Middle East (U.A.E., Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Qatar, Oman, and Bahrain). For further details, see http://sify.com/indianidol/images/jun2007/voting_terms.html.


5. Works cited


Abstract—The mix of ideals and absurdity in alternative futures and fantasy realms prompts fans to imagine their own alternatives.

Keywords—Activism; Fan; Science fiction; Utopia


Scratch an activist and you're apt to find a fan. It's no mystery why: fandom provides a space to explore fabricated worlds that operate according to different norms, laws, and structures than those we experience in our "real" lives. Fandom also necessitates relationships with others: fellow fans with whom to share interests, develop networks and institutions, and create a common culture. This ability to imagine alternatives and build community, not coincidentally, is a basic prerequisite for political activism.

Science fiction, for instance, has long provided fertile ground for political germination, attracting writers like the socialist H. G. Wells, the libertarian Robert Heinlein, and the feminist Ursula K. Le Guin, to name just a few of the most prominent politically minded authors. This attraction to alternative models for organizing society is felt by fans as well. The Futurians, an early New York City–based SF fan club that spawned many famous authors and editors—including Isaac Asimov, Virginia Kidd, Damon Knight, Frederik Pohl, and Donald A. Wollheim—shared its meeting space, and some of its members, with the Flatbush Young Communist league, and published its first fanzine on the same mimeograph machine used to put out the Young Communist Flatbush YC Yell.

In a society like the United States, where politics is something usually left up to the professionals, fandom can offer a familiar, first, cultural step (albeit one not always taken) toward the more unfamiliar political work of activism. The paths from imagination to action, and from cultural networks to political organization, are not
straight, and the obstacles are large and legion, yet imagining an alternative someplace like a faraway planet or a future society can, and sometimes does, act as a stimulus to action in order to bring an alternative into being. Fine and good, but also, at this point, pretty well understood: exploring the connections and disconnections between imagined cultural spaces and practical political action guided the early work of scholars like Stuart Hall, Tony Jefferson, Dick Hebdige, John Clarke, and others associated with the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies at the University of Birmingham as far back as the mid-1970s (Hall and Jefferson 1976; Hebdige 1979).

What I want to offer here is a slightly different suggestion: that the political power of fandom may reside not just in the opportunity to vicariously experience an alternative someplace, but also in the capacity to navigate and play with a vivid no-place.

[4] Youthful dalliances with Robert Heinlein notwithstanding, my first immersion in SF came through the original Star Trek series, which aired while I was in college. Every weeknight, at 11 PM, I would gather with my friends, many of whom were also my activist comrades, around the TV set to lose ourselves in the adventures of the USS Enterprise. To be sure, we were captivated by the foreign places and strange societies that Kirk and his crew visited, and longed for a similar world where money had no meaning and racism and sexism had been (sort of) left behind, but what held our interest and kept us coming back night after night was something else entirely. We reveled in the melodramatic dialogue, the blocky staging, and William Shatner's overacting. We looked for the seams in the sets and snickered at the low-rent costumes of the aliens. And we all knew that once a crew member donned a red shirt for a landing party their days were numbered. We loved Star Trek, but we also loved laughing at it.

[5] The relationship between fandom and activism is usually understood as linear, but my hunch is that it is dialectical, and that it was exactly this dialectical engagement that opened up a fruitful space for politics within our fandom. That is, we didn't become activists because we wanted to actualize the Great Society liberalism that guided the Enterprise's mission or bring about the postcapitalist world that the crew appeared to enjoy; we were activists because we couldn't take the televised depictions of such a utopia seriously. Our political imagination was inspired by the presentation of Roddenberry and company's SF scenarios, and Star Trek took us on a voyage light-years from the unsatisfactory present we knew too well, yet the sheer campiness of the series kept us from accepting the future it presented as a real possibility, or, rather, a valid fantasy. Refused satisfaction in the alternative futures provided by Star Trek, we were forced to imagine and act upon our own ideas and ideals of an alternative.
Let me explain how this process works through another text, one that actually names the alternative society: Thomas More's 1516 classic *Utopia*. The island of Utopia, as it is depicted by Raphael Hythloday, the traveler who discovers the island and describes it to More, is, well, utopian: there is no money, private property, or privately held wealth; the government and priesthood are democratically elected, and women can attain positions of power; living and labor are rationally planned for the good of all; there are public health and education systems, and Utopians are guaranteed freedom of speech and religion; and, perhaps most utopian of all, lawyers are nowhere to be found. *Utopia* was everything More's 16th-century European home was not.

"Utopia" has become a common word and "utopian" is an oft-used term, but as a generative text *Utopia* is an exceedingly curious book, full of contradictions, riddles, and paradoxes. The grandest—and best known—of these is the title itself. "Utopia," coined by More from the Greek *ou*, "not," and *topos*, "place," means a place that is, literally, *no-place*. In addition, the person who describes this magical land is called Raphael Hythloday; his surname derives from the Greek word *huthlos*, "nonsense." So here we are being told a story of a place that is named out of existence, by a narrator who is named as unreliable. And so begins the scholarly debate: Is the entirety of More's *Utopia* a satire, an exercise demonstrating the absurdity of social alternatives? Or is it an earnest effort to suggest and promote such radical ideals?

There's evidence for each side. First the case for the satirical interpretation: In addition to giving problematic names to the place and the narrator, More, in his description of the island of Utopia, mixes plausible political proposals like publicly held property and freedom of speech and religion with such absurdities as the Utopians' gold and silver chamber pots. By combining the conceivable and the ludicrous, one might argue, More effectively dismisses all alternatives as ridiculous. On the other hand, our narrator, Raphael Hythloday, is named after the Archangel Raphael, who gives sight to the blind and guides the lost. Furthermore, it is well known that More modeled his Utopian society—in part, at least—on the egalitarian community of Jesus and his disciples, and it stretches credulity to believe that More, a devout Christian who would later give his life for his faith, would satirize Christ.

But I think this traditional debate about whether More was satirical or sincere obfuscates rather than clarifies, and actually misses the point entirely. The genius of More's *Utopia* is that it is both absurd and earnest, simultaneously. And it is through the combination of these seemingly opposite ways of presenting social ideals that a more fruitful way of thinking about alternative scenarios can be glimpsed. For it is the presentation of Utopia as no-place, and its narrator as nonsense, that opens up a
space for the reader's imagination to wonder what an alternative someplace and a radically different sensibility might be like.

[10] Reading *Utopia*, we experience a sense of radical alterity: what is foreign becomes familiar and what is unnatural is naturalized. More provides us with a vision of another, better world...and then destabilizes it. This destabilization is the key. By positing his fantasy someplace as a no-place, More escapes the problems that typically haunt alternative futures. Most propositions insist upon their possibility: positing an imagined future or alternative as the future or the alternative. This assurance leads to a closing off of imagination. You either buy into what is being presented or you don't, and in either case the act of imagination begins and ends with the architect of that presentation.

[11] What More proposes is something entirely different: he imagines an alternative that is openly proclaimed to be a work of imagination. It cannot be realized, simply because it is unrealistic. It is, after all, no place. But readers have been influenced; they have been shown another option. Because the naturalness of their world has been disrupted, they can't safely return to the surety of their own present. Once an alternative has been imagined, the question of whether to stay where one is or to try something else demands attention; a choice must be made. Yet, as no-place, Utopia makes a simple choice impossible. More resists the short-circuiting of this imaginative moment by refusing to provide a valid alternative. We have to generate our own plans, because the plan we've been provided is untenable. More creates an opening to ask, "What if?" without closing down this free space by seriously answering, "This is what." In sum: *Utopia* is not a serious plan, nor, however, is it a prank. It is a prompt to further imagination.

[12] I have no doubt that many, and perhaps most, fans take the imaginary worlds that make up the kernel of fandom seriously. These phantasmagoric places enable fans to escape the tyranny of reality and picture something different, something better. Along with the solidarity, organizational ability, and communication skills built within fan communities, it is this capacity to imagine an alternative way to organize social life that gives fans such potential as political organizers. And...I have a hunch that many, perhaps most, fans also have a complicated relationship to the alternative worlds they hold so dear. They love them and laugh at them. They are utterly sincere in their desire to manifest such ideals, and they also engage with them humorously, satirically, and critically. This productive tension between belief and disbelief is easy to spot in fans' approach to such SF camp classics as *Star Trek* and *Doctor Who*, but I would argue that the relationship is present, to a greater or lesser degree, in other arenas. Joshua Gamson, for instance, insists that "celebrity watchers continually ride the belief/disbelief and fiction/reality axes" (Gamson 1994, 178). And in my own work
on fanzines and punk rock I've argued that irony, camp, and other complicated and seemingly contradictory forms of reception, articulation, and communication are an essential part of punk fandom (Duncombe 1997). Fans believe in the alternatives that organize their fandom, but they disbelieve as well.

[13] It is this dialectical relationship with their root fantasies that keeps fans from being mere spectators, enthralled by another's blueprint of the ideal society. Fans enter into fantasy knowing full well it is a fantasy. The story, settings, costumes, and characters are always, at some level, absurd. This absurdity, whether built into the text by its producer or brought to it by the fans through their perception, keeps us from fully losing ourselves in the prepackaged imagination of another. We are continually cast out of the Garden. But it is this very failure of the imaginary spaces and places of fandom that can prompt fans to imagine their own alternatives and then, perhaps, act to bring them about. As Thomas More reminds us, Utopia is no-place, and therefore it is left up to all of us to imagine it.

Works cited


1. Introduction

In an effort to foster rapid and widespread engagement with activism, it is now a common occurrence for advocacy groups to use the Internet to promote their cause and communicate with mass audiences (Bimber 2003; Thrall et al. 2008). In a similar fashion, the recent rise and widespread use of social media has resulted in celebrities also now using this medium, incorporating Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube to mobilize their fans in various philanthropic and activist projects. For example, Lady Gaga with, at the time of writing, the highest number of followers, or fans, on Facebook, at over 33 million, and the highest number of followers on Twitter, at over 9 million, has skillfully and successfully used social media to mobilize her fans around various activist efforts (Bennett, forthcoming), most notably the repeal of the Don't Ask, Don't Tell policy. Other users of social media as a platform to engage their fans in activism include The Vampire Diaries actor Ian Somerhalder, who promotes environmental activism and animal rights through Twitter, urging over 750,000 fans and followers to join him in signing and distributing petitions demanding change and raising funds. This is also supported by his foundation (http://www.isfoundation.com/), which uses social media to send updates and calls for action to fans, encouraging them to use this avenue further: "Connect with other change makers! Partner up, create teams and begin projects" (http://www.isfoundation.com/get-involved). Supernatural actor Misha Collins similarly engages fans in this manner (Stein 2011), inspiring them through Twitter to engage with Random Acts, a charity group dedicated to performing random
acts of kindness within communities (http://www.therandomact.org/wordpress/). Civic engagement of fans was also targeted by musician Donnie Wahlberg, who drew on his Twitter following to find a kidney donor for a fan, urging others to help. After reading his tweet, many fans contacted the hospital, and a suitable donor was quickly found (Graceley 2011).

[1.2] Fans around the world are currently being increasingly reached and targeted through these online tools. In this article, I critically review the academic literature in this area. In doing so, I explore the processes and key themes surrounding this practice in terms of the complex relationship between celebrity and fans, and the community it can foster.

2. A direct connection? Celebrity and perceptions of proximity

[2.1] The use of social media by celebrities as a platform with which to communicate with fans and instigate activism raises considerations surrounding the seemingly direct connection this practice allows. Although an artist can have millions of followers reading their messages posted to these social platforms, a sense of intimacy is created whereby fans feel an exposure to, and possible interaction with, the authentic self of the star (Beer 2008; Muntean and Peterson 2009; Burns 2009; Ellcessor 2009). However, it has been argued that the practice of celebrity tweeting, instead of allowing fans to reach the "real" personality of the artist, involves a "performed intimacy" (Marwick and boyd 2011), where a star purposely and strategically uses their online presence to cultivate and maintain a fan base (Bennett 2010), through "creating the illusion of first-person glimpses into their lives" (Marwick and boyd 2011, 148). This "aura of 'realness,'" then, results in the star becoming, for some, "more accessible, more likable—[their] 'ordinary' traits...emphasized and juxtaposed with...[their] 'extraordinary' talent, beauty, or skill" (Peterson 2009).

[2.2] Kate Crawford, exploring the development of intimate connection through social and mobile media, describes how it is the "sharing of everyday actions, habits and experiences—everyday 'trivia'" through these platforms that "forges connections between individuals who are physically remote from each other" (2009, 252). She suggests that the "confidences relayed in these spaces create relationships with an audience of friends and strangers, irrespective of their veracity. They build camaraderie over distance through the dynamic and ongoing practice of disclosing the everyday" (2009, 254; see also Jenkins 2009a). Thus, celebrities can divulge to fans their everyday activities and experiences, post personal photos, reveal exclusive news, and express their opinions directly, forgoing the filters of news media. From Oprah Winfrey tweeting for advice about her dog (Johnson 2009) to Danny DeVito confessing his apparent inability to use the medium (Muntean and Peterson 2009), fans who
choose to follow their favorite stars are being exposed to elements of their personality that may have previously seemed out of reach. James Bennett uses the examples of Stephen Fry and Ashton Kutcher to show how some celebrities do interact with fans through social media so that they are "no longer...separated in the media world, but as an everyday, ordinary and familiar persona" (2010, 174). It is this sense of closeness offered by social media, even if a simple illusion, that enables artists who use this tool to mobilize their fans so effectively. It is a glaring paradox that any fan is only one of potential millions of followers being spoken to through this platform, but the directness and dialogic nature of the communication can create a situation whereby fans feel spoken to personally, consequently instigating a powerful and active response when calls to action are generated by a celebrity to their fan base.

3. Mobilization through fan networks

[3.1] Whereas some fan groups receive guidance and instigation from the objects of fandom, other fans are also using these social tools, without direct prompting or input from the celebrity, to organize and mobilize themselves in these acts. For example, fans of U2 lead singer and activist Bono formed their own street team, which posts calls for action on Twitter and Facebook, describing themselves as "advocates that support the work that Bono does for Africa. We bring exposure & actively promote the causes close to Bono's heart & ours" (http://twitter.com/#!/bonostreetteam). The Harry Potter Alliance, "an army of fans, activists, nerdfighters, teenagers, wizards and muggles dedicated to fighting for social justice" also uses social media in this way, declaring how its collective "harnesses the power of new media to communicate with more than 100,000 people, including 60 HPA chapters across the world" (http://www.thehpalliance.org). For this collective, social media has been a vital tool in its development and coordination. As organizer Andrew Slack confesses, "without new media...I don't think we would exist... We would be a club at one or two high schools...we probably would have a hard time being an organization that has 50 clubs that are really active" (Jenkins 2009b). X-Files fans use a similar strategy in their charity endeavors (Jones 2012), as do Joss Whedon fans in their Can't Stop the Serenity fund-raising campaigns (http://www.cantstoptheserenity.com/). Thus, these groups are using the potentially worldwide and instantaneous reach of social media to foster their own organized civic engagement around relevant issues.

[3.2] Liesbet van Zoonen argues that these issues of activism and organization work so well within fandom because "fans have an intense individual investment in the text, they participate in strong communal discussions and deliberations about the qualities of the text, they propose and discuss alternatives which would be implemented as well if only the fans could have their way." As she observes, these are all specific "customs that have been laid out as essential for democratic politics: information, discussion and
activism" (2004, 46). Building on this, Burwell and Bowler, in their study of online activism relating to The Colbert Report, conclude that these fan practices not only overlap with political action, but also "demonstrate a convergence of imaginative performance, cultural consumption and collective engagement that blurs the boundaries between affect and activism" (2008)—which, I would argue, starts to illustrate why the adoption of social media for fan activism is increasing.

Earl and Kimport's study of online fan activism discovered that within this behavioral practice, highly organized e-mail and online letter-writing campaigns, and online petitions and boycotts in particular, were very much prevalent (2009, 16). Fans are using social media to publicize their campaigns, reaching extended networks—most significantly through hashtags and retweets, whereby one tweet is posted again by another user, in order to reach a larger audience. Facebook pages for campaigns are also frequently created, with fans "liking" a page and consequently alerting individuals within their larger networks that may share the same values and goals. Lady Gaga's instigation of fan activism toward repealing the Don't Ask, Don't Tell policy is an example of how social media is used to distribute messages through interlinked networks. Fans were requested to call their senators, asking them to vote against the policy then post videos of themselves on YouTube undertaking the act (Bennett, forthcoming) in an effort to encourage and mobilize others. In this instance, Gaga's call for action functioned as an instigator, relying on fans to draw upon their own networks to spread the message further to create a larger collective. As Henry Jenkins argues, "as a fan community disbands, its members may move in many different directions, seeking out new spaces to apply their skills and new openings for their speculations and in the process, those skills spread to new communities and get applied to new tasks" (2006, 57). As I have shown, despite this disparity, it is through the platform of social media that a fan culture, in all its interconnected networks and communities, can quite rapidly be drawn together, working to achieve a shared goal.

4. Conclusion

In sum, the importance and increasing use of social media for fan activism raises some quite pressing areas for consideration. First, how do fans reconcile themselves to their placement as one individual within potentially millions of followers, yet at the same time continue to maintain perceptions of intimacy with a star? It may be argued that the directness with which celebrities appear to be speaking to their fans online and their engagement in acts of intimacy creates a novel platform for fostering engagement with activism. Second, are these relationships based on a one-way communication and an illusion of interaction, or does the platform of social media offer true personal interaction between fan and celebrity, thereby seeming to erode traditional forms of distance between the two parties? As advocacy facilitated by social
media is being increasingly adopted within fan cultures and as more celebrities log on to connect with their audience through these platforms, the perception of the dynamics surrounding the traditional relationship between fan and object of fandom may need to be reexamined and reconfigured.

5. Acknowledgments

[5.1] I would like to thank Will Brooker for his very helpful comments on this article.

6. Works cited


Bennett, Lucy. Forthcoming. "If We Stick Together We Can Do Anything': Lady Gaga Fans in Philanthropic and Activist Engagement through Social Media."


Symposium

Flash activism: How a Bollywood film catalyzed civic justice toward a murder trial

Ritesh Mehta

University of Southern California, Los Angeles, California, United States

[0.1] Abstract—Rang De Basanti’s box office success served as a catalyst for flash activism surrounding the Jessica Lall murder trials.

[0.2] Keywords—Civic protest; Civil society; Flash fandom; Jessica Lall; Mobile publics; Rang De Basanti


1. Introduction

[1.1] Rang De Basanti (Paint It Saffron) was a patriotism- and social change-themed Bollywood film that was strategically released in India and other countries on January 26, 2006, India's Republic Day (which commemorates the day when the Indian Constitution came into effect). It was a significant commercial and critical success, earned numerous awards, and was nominated for the British Academy of Film and Television Arts (BAFTA) award for best foreign-language film. Despite these accolades, Rang De Basanti’s greatest legacy might be its role (unusual for a Bollywood film) in helping generate civic activism among urban Indian youth aimed at securing justice in a high-profile murder case.
Figure 1. Aamir Khan, pictured in the center, has been one of Bollywood's most popular actors and icons for more than two decades. Rang De Basanti featured Khan playing a 20-something college student. [View larger image.]

[1.2] Here I present flash activism, a model of fan activism based on the sociocivic protests, emulating the film, that occurred in the wake of its release and the coinciding, controversial court verdict. After chronicling the events, I elucidate flash activism, compare it to Punathambekar's (2010) mobile publics, and consider its critical function in sustaining the fabric of civil society, a term that I interpret differently from the literature.

2. The case
Figure 2. Rang De Basanti's promotional posters had a striking visual aesthetic that appealed to young people's aspirations to break societal boundaries by reaching for higher levels of freedom of self-expression and camaraderie.

2.1 Rang De Basanti (hereafter RDB) narrates the gradual transformation of five college friends from happy-go-lucky, politically apathetic youngsters to antigovernment rebels. The death of a close friend, a fighter jet pilot, is a catalyst, when the Aviation Minister falsely blames the pilot's foolhardiness for the crash instead of admitting the plane was a model long known to be defective, which the Minister had been bribed to procure. To protest, the friends organize a peaceful candlelight vigil at India Gate, a prominent landmark in the capital, New Delhi. The vigil is violently disrupted by the police, and the last third of the film shows the dramatic repercussions of this violence. The film's provocation is best captured in one line of dialogue: "No country is perfect. You've got to make it perfect."

Figure 3. The candlelight vigil at India Gate in Rang De Basanti.
RDB had a momentous impact on audiences, especially youth, who were drawn to theaters by its visually attractive ad campaign, upbeat score, and the star power of cast member Aamir Khan. Meghana Dilip observes there was a "significant" postrelease increase in the discussion of political issues on Indian blogs (2008, 30). The frustration evident on some blogs—"[RDB] is an emergency-wake up call for the youth in India to take the cause of freedom seriously" (37); "The society will be ruined by these evil politicians. Its time to have a Rang De Basanti type resurgence" (32)—reflected the frustrations showcased in the film's final moments. Dilip opines that Hindi cinema can be surprisingly "ideology-filled...Its raw material is the society of today," and that this motivates audiences "to act in certain ways" (7). Indeed, in the weeks following the film's release, it did seem that change was in the air, since many were unexpectedly moved by the film's story and ideology.

Still, several commentators, including Dilip, agree that RDB's most prominent impact was on the ongoing real-life trial of Manu Sharma and a number of others for the murder of Jessica Lall. On the night of April 29, 1999, Lall, a 34-year-old fashion model, was doubling as a waitress as part of a publicity campaign for a newly opened fancy New Delhi restaurant. At around 2 AM, Sharma, the young son of a high-ranking politician and member of the city's elite brat pack, entered with his friends and demanded that Jessica serve them drinks. It was past closing time, so she refused. He then pulled out his gun and fatally shot her point-blank, in the presence of 300 of the city's glitterati.

As is common in India, the case dragged on in the courts for several years, over which period many witnesses recanted (having been bribed or threatened) and the murder weapon went missing. Then, on February 21, 2006, four weeks after the release of RDB, a Delhi trial court acquitted Manu Sharma and his friends on the grounds of insufficient evidence.

This appalling verdict unleashed an unusually vehement public outcry. A day after the acquittal, a Times of India headline screamed, "No One Killed Jessica." The Week expressed its disgust with a cover story titled "How the Rich Get Away with Murder." NDTV, a 24-hour news channel, submitted to the president of India the more than 200,000 cell phone text messages it collected in response to its "SMS Jessica to 3636" campaign. And the blogosphere continued to galvanize people's frustration and anger.

However, the response that received the most media attention was, in fact, directly inspired by Rang De Basanti. A few days after the verdict, Tehelka, an Indian weekly, sent an anonymous text message: "If the Jessica case has upset you, show you care. There is a protest gathering at India Gate next Saturday, March 4 at
5.30pm. Be there. Help keep up the pressure. Demand justice." It is not clear whether Tehelka deliberately chose India Gate to draw a parallel to RDB.

[2.7] That evening about 2,500 people, many of them students, gathered for a candlelight rally at India Gate. This is noteworthy for many reasons. In Shoma Chaudhury’s words, "Delhi's middle class is infamously apathetic and insular," and it was far from clear that it would "take its outrage to the street" (2006). Evidently, many who received the text message were moved enough not only to pass it on but also show up. Yet what is most remarkable is that the protest was a replication of the crucial scene of a candlelight vigil at India Gate in Rang De Basanti, which had been released six weeks prior and was firmly alive in public memory and blogosphere discourse. In fact, candlelight vigils were a fairly unusual form of protest in 2006; the Times of India called them "a novel idea" (Lamchane 2006a).

[2.8] What unified the assembled group was a "quiet rage" at the injustice of the verdict, their demand for the case to be reopened and Manu Sharma hanged, and their "yearning for something purer." Chaudhury reports,

[2.9] A curious undercurrent of theatricality underran the entire evening. Several people who took the mike that day referred to Rang De Basanti: at times it seemed more than the injustice itself, the film was their inspiration. It had not just intuited a latent public mood; in a curious twist, it had become the mood itself. (Chaudhury 2006)

[2.10] Moreover, a survey conducted shortly thereafter by the influential Bombay Times revealed that a significant number of people attributed the recent upsurge in social movements to RDB (Lamchane 2006b). Clearly, RDB had become a force to reckon with and had had a direct impact on civic engagement.
Figure 4. Protesters, largely middle-class residents of Delhi and many of them students, hold a real-life candlelight rally at India Gate after the acquittals.

Crucially, this rally, along with the concomitant intense media scrutiny, resulted in the reopening of the trial and a stunning outcome in December 2006: Manu Sharma was found guilty of murder and sentenced to life imprisonment. Justice was meted out in a country with a long history of powerful criminals (many of them politicians) going scot-free, and of a conditioned apathy about it among the public.

3. Flash activism and flash fandom

The "RDB Syndrome" (Saxena 2007) manifested in the India Gate protest is a case of what I call flash activism. Flash activism is a temporary social mobilization around a particular civic issue; it may or may not have clear-cut goals, and may or may not achieve these goals. At least two factors are responsible for this mobilization: (1) an existing group of people (specifically, a fandom; more below) already sensitive to and wishing to foster a civic ethos, and (2) external triggers, which may be cultural media artifacts like film, music, theater, and television.

In particular, when media artifacts mobilize flash activism, we may speak of flash fandoms catalyzing flash activism. RDB's plot, score, marketing, and underlying ideology successfully predisposed its audiences to action. People became fans of the movie, but the full extent of their fandom remained latent until an external event could release their passion, their reasons for being moved. A flash fandom, then, is a latent admiration of a cultural artifact that is deep enough to mobilize and transform the
central values driving people's lives. An external event or issue may allow for the manifestation of a flash fandom in the form of flash activism.

[3.3] I use the word *flash* to emphasize the suddenness and the self-organization of the activism, as well as the suddenness of the self-organization. In this sense, flash activism can be superficially yet productively compared to Steven Johnson's (2001) principle of bottom-up emergence, a paradigm he believes defines this age. Johnson's emergent systems are adaptive and they self-organize, and even though his examples do not include civic protest, he stresses the importance of a "critical mass" of agents, a productive "ignorance" in individual agents, and attention to the activities of neighboring agents (78–79). Thus he defines emergence as "the movement from these low-level rules to higher-level sophistication" (18), a movement that could not have been predicted only by observing the rules being played out.

[3.4] In the case of the India Gate protest, the participants—as RDB fans, Jessica sympathizers, or simply middle-class people tired of injustice—were ordinary citizens, individually relatively powerless, who, operating in an environment awash in RDB-induced civic pride and Jessica-induced civic disgust, felt compelled to "listen to their neighbors," tap into their "agency," and pass on the text message. *Tehelka*, recognizing the ripening of people's restlessness in the wake of RDB, appropriated the simplicity and iconicity of the film's turning-point scene at India Gate; both of those qualities probably helped the text message reach a "critical mass." In the end, what emerged was a passionate voice that was unprecedented, unexpected, and unpredictable (Johnson 2001).

[3.5] One characteristic, then, that distinguishes flash activism from superficially similar social protests is its tie to flash fandoms; the concepts go together. A latent fandom tied to a media or cultural artifact is necessary for that fandom to manifest in flash activism, but it is not sufficient. An external catalyst is also key. Flash fandom, then, isn't like ordinary fandom. It is in essence contingent: its catalysis (i.e., its manifestation) occurs at exactly the same moment that its members express it as flash activism.

[3.6] To further understand flash activism, it might be helpful to compare it to Aswin Punathambekar's (2010) notion of mobile publics. Punathambekar conceived of mobile publics in response to another recent Indian media phenomenon: the passionate cheering and voting—via mobile media such as cell phones—by the people of the state of Meghalaya for the native Amit Paul, a finalist on the third season of *Indian Idol*, a franchise of the popular British *Pop Idol* reality TV format. Punathambekar conceives of mobile publics "as a way to draw attention to the centrality of mobile media technologies to the formation of publics, highlight the fluid and ephemeral nature of these publics, and suggest that the transient nature of mobile publics allows for the
articulation of new cultural and political possibilities" (251). Meghalaya is a remote state in northeastern India, where deep historical, ethnic, political, spatial, and linguistic divides have long existed between indigenous ("tribal") and nonindigenous people. The mobile publics that emerged around Paul realized a previously "unimaginable" possibility: they enabled vastly different and divided people to "come together in spaces such as tea shops and telephone booths" (252).

[3.7] The mobile publics (hereafter MP) that formed around Paul and the flash activism (FA) that centered on Jessica Lall were both ephemeral, transient phenomena, "tied to the time and space of the television event" (Punathambekar 2010, 252) and the film-inspired protest, respectively. This transience is common to the meanings of mobile and flash. Yet both phenomena had lasting, important real-world consequences: Jessica's murderer was imprisoned for life, and Amit Paul, despite finishing second in the Indian Idol competition, helped temporarily overcome social divides in his state. Further, both MP and FA were quasi-spontaneous, relying in differing ways on mobile media technologies, and both brought together people with differing backgrounds who would ordinarily remain separate, and some of whom were "not normally given to acts of citizenship" (Chaudhury 2006). There are, however, also important differences between MP and FA. With MP, deep but latent sociopolitical differences were temporarily set aside in an overt fandom, whereas with FA, a relatively latent fandom was urged to overt sociocivic action (note 1). Besides, Punathambekar introduces MP as building on the notion of split publics, which understand people as divided "along linguistic and caste lines, for example" (2010, 250), whereas FA is not about a public per se; even though it is a phenomenon embodied by human participants, it is also formally substantiated by the abstract purposes of social justice and civic rights.

4. Commentary

[4.1] Flash activism and flash fandom fascinatingly imply the possibility of individual-level transformation and social-level sustenance. At the individual level, their investments in popular culture and their consumption of popular media help people become conscious of and channel their civic voices. However, people need not be members of a formal fan community, with well-articulated norms or ongoing interaction, to do so. In fact, the surprise element of the flash is explained by its members' weaker social ties and less sustained relationship to the text. This differentiates flash fandoms from fandoms and, by extension, from fan activism, as displayed by, say, members of the Harry Potter Alliance (see Kligler-Vilenchik et al. and Jenkins, this issue). The India Gate protest is an instance of fan activism that was not in principle meant to be sustainable. It was not planned or guaranteed to occur. Tehelka may have relied on its guess about the deep admiration people felt for RDB
and the film's inherent transformative power, which sentiment and quality only the transpiring of the protest revealed.

[4.2] Yet I do posit that what instances of flash activism help sustain—i.e., repair, rejuvenate, remind us of—is the sociocivic fabric and individual social identities within what Chaudhury (2007) calls civil society, which is "marked by a collective of ordinary citizens who come together to protect the rules of justice and fair play whenever they are violated by the instruments of State." She claims that "the beauty of such victories is that it enters the bloodstream and irreversibly alters the fabric of a society. Once you engage and win..., you feel empowered. Even as you return to the ordinary course of your life, the shadow of a nobler you lurks beneath. It will call you to action again."

[4.3] I concur with Chaudhury's endorsement of the importance of such protests for the sustenance of a social fabric. Moreover, I would like to point out how this relationship departs from that depicted in the literature on civil society. Edwards provides a metareview of the "huge range of entities" that are included as organizations in civil society, listing "grassroots associations, social movements, labor unions, professional groups, advocacy and development NGOs, formally registered non-profits, social enterprises, and many others" (2011, 7). However, none of these—not even social movements, which are increasingly the "outcome[s] of a lengthy process of...intensifying solidarities...[with] earlier progressive movements" (Della Porta and Diani 2011, 76)—is akin to my conception of flash activism. The best way to explain its uniqueness is that flash activism is by definition not organizational but temporal in scope. It is, quite literally, a flash in time. The Jessica activists were a group of strangers who serendipitously congregated, united for but a moment in their identity as Indians and members of civil society, in their desire to no longer remain apathetic, in their source of inspiration (RDB), and in their demand for a legal remedy to senseless injustice. Civil society, in this view, is sustained to an underappreciated degree by such participation, which is more likely to occasion short-term ripples than long-term effects.

[4.4] A caution, then: flash activism-type protests cannot be deliberately and repeatedly engineered and still be effective. The societies—collectives too often misleadingly labeled as nations—in which they occur are too complex and multidimensional to be responsive to this kind of manipulation. Their members' civic participation, through which they enact their multifaceted identities and multifarious investments, is embedded in a deeply historicized, highly mediated flux of symbolic and collective memories, meanings, and actions. Social change, or pressure toward it, is temporal, unpredictable, and organic, flashing like the occasional high wave from an ancient ocean of values and traditions: from the rooted complexity that is society. The Jessica flash activism, while it may allude to a particular film-inspired mood of a time,
is thus better viewed as a spike in a long-drawn-out civic heartbeat, an eruption from a sometimes-dormant batholith, a participatory action tacitly conscious of contributing to only a moment in a singular yet relentlessly unfurling sociohistoricity.

5. Conclusion and epilogue

[5.1] Returning to the present-ness of this historicity, it is indeed remarkable that Bollywood, self-proclaimedly and proudly churning out escapist fare, could help effect such impressive social justice. In this article, I have conceptualized flash activism from a single case, and because of this, my essay offers less a theoretical model than a generalized description of an individual event. Flash activism may resemble other types of citizen-led protests around the globe, but such similarity cannot be claimed without in-depth comparisons.

[5.2] Even so, with regard to the Jessica Lall case, it is heartening to note that the murderer remains in jail (note 2). It is also interesting to witness art imitating life imitating art: in 2011, five years after the release of RDB, another Bollywood film was released chronicling Jessica's murder, the trial, the RDB intervention, and the candlelight protest. This film was also a critical and commercial success, and while it didn't engender any flash activism (and wasn't expected to), two months after its release the trials of witnesses in the Lall case who were accused of perjury for withdrawing their testimony during the 2006 trial were reopened. The film was named after the headline on the Times of India's report of Manu Sharma's initial acquittal: No One Killed Jessica.

6. Acknowledgments

[6.1] I would like to thank Professor Henry Jenkins and Sangita Shresthova for their valuable feedback, support, and guidance throughout the writing of this article, from conception to submission. I am also grateful to Sangeeta Marwah and Neta Kligler-Vilenchik for their feedback and support. Parts of this paper are directly adapted from a brief writeup on this case study for my research group's Google site (https://sites.google.com/site/participatorydemocracyproject/case-studies/rang-debasanti-and-flash-activism).

7. Notes

1. In this sense, the incisive, one-day phenomenon that was the flash activism around Jessica Lall was much closer to being activism, even though it was surreptitiously
initiated by *Tehelka*, than were the mobile publics around Paul, which were more obviously orchestrated (and for a longer period) by vested interests in Meghalaya.

2. In 2010, the Supreme Court denied Manu Sharma parole and upheld his life sentence.

8. Works cited


Mehta, Ritesh. 2010b. "'Mobile Publics' and 'Flash Activism': Comparing Explanations for the Socio-civic Movements in the Wake of *Indian Idol 3* and *Rang De Basanti*." http://civicpaths.uscannenberg.org/2010/06/mobile-publics-vs-flash-activism-


**Book review**

*Fan fiction and copyright: Outside works and intellectual property protection*, by Aaron Schwabach

Stacey M. Lantagne

*Loyola University New Orleans College of Law, New Orleans, Louisiana, United States*

[0.1] **Keywords**—Derivative works; Fair use; Litigation


[1] In law, there are few easy answers. The answer to almost any legal question you might wish to ask is frequently a carefully reasoned and hedgingly delivered "it depends." So, too, in Aaron Schwabach's impressively thorough new book, *Fan Fiction and Copyright: Outside Works and Intellectual Property Protection*, which sets out to answer the question "Do fan-created works—fan fiction as well as fan vids and fan art—infringe on the copyright of the works on which they are based?" Eminently readable and engaging, bringing a depth of analysis that has so far been lacking in other shorter treatments of this issue, and littered with helpful examples and illustrations, the book reaches a typically legal conclusion: fan works probably don't infringe copyright, but, well, it depends. The value in this book, as with most legal analysis, isn't in the answer so much as in the reasoning that gets you there. This book's value in that respect is considerable.

[2] Schwabach is a professor of law at Thomas Jefferson School of Law. He has published on a wide variety of topics, including intellectual property law. His list of publications include several articles about Harry Potter (Hall et al. 2006; Schwabach 2010). As Schwabach writes, "We all have our fandoms" (3), and Harry Potter appears to be one of his. This is important to keep this in mind while reading this book. Schwabach strives admirably for—and mostly achieves—objectivity and a balanced analysis, but he also writes with a knowing affinity for the fan creators. This is not a
criticism. The book benefits from its deeper and more detailed understanding of fandom's interests, motivations, and mores. Copyright holders, usually possessing more money and more lawyers than fans, can often shout loudly enough to drown out opposing positions. This book's sympathy for the fan creators' side of the argument actually increases its instructiveness, gathering in one place disparate arguments that are otherwise scattered all over the Internet in cozy fandom pockets. The insider tone to the book also adds an authoritative gloss to the apocryphal legends of fandom history related in the book.

[3] While fan works' copyright implications have been examined in a number of law review articles (Tushnet 1997; Chander and Sunder 2007), they have not yet been treated to many book-length analyses. This book ably fills that gap. The full complexities of the central question flourish in the longer medium, presenting a much clearer picture of the many moving parts of the analysis, all in one neat package for ease for the curious fan—or copyright holder. This is a book aiming beyond merely fellow intellectual property professors, with appendices containing excerpts of relevant US statutes and Web site resources for fan creators. It never drags into an overly long, esoteric discussion but does an excellent job relaying the nuances of complicated copyright law in such a way as to make the topic seem less intimidating. At the same time, the book is academically sound, dotted with helpful (and sometimes snarky) footnotes, and it never loses sight of the fact that the question it is seeking to answer is complicated.

[4] The book is divided into five chapters of decent length—long enough not to feel rushed or shortchanged, but short enough not to feel heavy or overwhelming. Schwabach walks well the careful tightrope of being informative without being condescending, useful for an outsider and nonetheless interesting for an insider. For those with no familiarity with fandom, intellectual property law, or both, the book goes into enough detail to provide context. For those familiar with these topics, the book manages not to get mired in definitions. Its pace is brisk, but not brusque.

[5] The opening chapter is a crash course in both fandom and intellectual property law that provides just enough background. Those comfortable with the topic could probably skip the first chapter, but it is lively enough to be enjoyed even by experts, and it serves as a nice introduction to the friendly and appealing authorial voice of the book.

[6] The meat of the book is contained in its second and third chapters, where Schwabach steps through the legal analysis that must be applied to all fan works. First, he focuses on the copyrightability of the underlying works upon which fan works are based. This is a topic that some disputes ignore altogether. Few people would argue about whether Harry Potter is copyrighted. Indeed, most content owners take
this fact for granted. When they attack fan works, they make broad statements regarding their ability to control their characters and worlds. However, there are no easy answers in law. Characters—normally the link between the original work and the fan work—are only copyrightable if they fulfill one of two tests that courts have developed: first, they must either constitute the "story being told," or second, they must be "sufficiently delineated." Not all characters pass these tests. For instance, courts have found the character of Tarzan to be copyrightable, but not the character of Sam Spade. The fact that some characters aren't copyrightable and some are immediately introduces unpredictability into the infringing nature of any given fan work. Is fan fiction about Sam Spade's early life okay, but not fan fiction about Tarzan's last days? Schwabach agrees that Harry Potter is probably copyrighted, but what about the myriad minor characters in the Harry Potter series? Severus Snape? Lily Potter? Stan Shunpike? How minor does a character have to be not to be copyrighted? What about setting? Can you use all your own characters but just stick them in Hogwarts? What about Sam Spade in Hogwarts? All of these valid questions are difficult to answer succinctly. Schwabach does an admirable job of examining them without simplifying them.

[7] If the fan work in question is about a copyrighted character or place, the inquiry has not yet ended. Under US copyright law, copyright holders control the right to "derivative works," which are works "based upon one or more preexisting works" (59–60). Therefore, a fan work, even about a copyrighted character or place, would have to be a derivative work to be infringing. After a brief discussion, Schwabach concludes that most fan fiction probably would be considered derivative—but again, as always, it depends.

[8] However, even if a derivative fan work about a copyrighted character exists, the question remains whether that work is infringing, because that fan work is noninfringing if it qualifies as a fair use. Fair use is a complicated and fact-intensive inquiry, requiring an examination of at least four factors: "(1) the purpose and character of the [fan work]...; (2) the nature of the [original] work; (3) the amount and substantiality of the portion [of the original work] used in relation to the [original] work as a whole; and (4) the effect of the [fan work] upon the potential market for or value of the [original] work" (63). The outcome of a fair use analysis is almost impossible to predict in the best of circumstances (note 1). Rendering the predictive nature even more challenging in the fan work context is the fact that a dearth of precedent exists. There has been little litigation and even fewer published decisions. In reaction, Schwabach skillfully incorporates British court cases as well as disputes that never even reached the courts into his analysis, and he thoroughly mines them for all the information they can give. This is a tricky proposition: the rest of the world often views copyright very differently than American law does, and disputes that have never
become public record suffer from mainly being gossip. However, Schwabach does a commendable job, extracting what's useful while acknowledging its shortcomings.

[9] The fourth chapter of the book is devoted to the space where the interests of the original authors conflict with the interest of their fans. It is, debatably, a curious place to put this chapter. Having established what fandom is in the first chapter, it might have made more sense to explain there how fandom has come to be an area of such great debate before going on to analyze whether that debate is deserved. However, this is a minor quibble. The chapter also works where it's placed: having just determined through his analysis that most fan works are not infringing, it does make sense to look at why copyright holders might not like to hear that. Schwabach identifies and discusses three reasons why: (1) the copyright holder may not like the way fan works portray the original material; (2) the fan work may be too similar to a work the copyright holder intended to publish in the future, preventing the copyright holder from publishing said work; and (3) the fan work "borrows too extensively" from the original work (93). As he does throughout the book, he illustrates the copyright holders' interests with helpful, real-life examples from fandom disputes.

[10] Schwabach's final chapter is a sort of catchall for topics that didn't quite fit in the previous chapters. For instance, Schwabach examines the copyrightability of the fan works themselves and whether there might be future litigation around infringement of them. He concludes that some fan works may themselves have copyrightable elements, but that litigation is probably unlikely as a result of the lack of money involved. However, in stark contrast to the thoroughness characterizing the analysis in the rest of the book, Schwabach's discussion here feels brief and perfunctory, merely skimming the surface of the question. The book's focus is on the legal relationship between fan works and the original works. A discussion of the copyrightability of fan works themselves (a different question than whether they are infringing) deserves its own more in-depth analysis and feels out of place and shoehorned here.

[11] The book does have some weak points. For instance, Schwabach spends a great deal of time on the Harry Potter Lexicon case, in which Warner Bros. sued a Harry Potter fan who was planning to publish an encyclopedic guide to the Harry Potter books. Schwabach's focus on the case is understandable: It is one of very few existing court precedents in which a copyright holder directly attacked a fan work. However, the case is actually of little value when it comes to the more common fan works of fan fiction, fan vids, or fan art, which are otherwise the main focus of this book. The Harry Potter Lexicon was a fact-based guide to a fictional work, and as such, precedent existed to guide the analysis (note 2). It is a very different beast from, for instance, a piece of fan fiction about Harry Potter's future marriage to Draco Malfoy. A preliminary
examination of the fair use factors illustrates this: The purpose and character of the fan fiction is quite different from the informative encyclopedia. The amount of the original work used in a fan fiction is also different from the amount used in an exhaustive guide. Fan fiction has a different impact on the market and value of the Harry Potter books. Perhaps most importantly, the Harry Potter Lexicon was about to be published and sold for profit, unlike the vast majority of fan fiction about Harry and Draco. Therefore, although the Harry Potter Lexicon case is interesting, it is probably easily distinguishable—a fact that Schwabach does not adequately address.

Schwabach also glosses over some other difficulties impacting the analysis. For instance, he barely mentions the havoc that the widespread misunderstanding of copyright law has already wrought in fandom, limiting references to it to brief, undeveloped asides. But fan creators' common belief that only profitable works can infringe copyright spurs resentment for copyright holders who may be defending legitimate rights, just as copyright holders' assertions that they unquestionably own their characters and can prevent all use of them spurs resentment for fan creators who may be engaged in legitimate transformative uses. The misperceptions of the law lead to emotional showdows that do nothing more than cloud the law even further. Maybe Schwabach is attempting to keep his book's focus on the knowable legal aspects of the problem rather than hot-tempered and uncertain accusations, but the effect of legal misunderstanding on the feeble precedents that exist should be considered. In addition, Schwabach dismisses the extension of copyright terms as irrelevant. While this may be true, the continuing expansion of copyright holders' rights in this way at least suggests an attitude toward copyright that is at odds with Schwabach's conclusion that fans can legally create vast numbers of derivative works.

Schwabach's final plea in the book is for marketplace acceptance of fan works. He makes a good case for it. After all, a flourishing fandom, complete with the fan works it brings, makes the copyright holders money: "Fans who might have spent a few dollars on books—or taken the books out of the library—became fans who spent thousands of dollars on books, movie tickets, DVDs, and merchandise" (16). Lawrence Lessig (2008) has also tried to promote marketplace acceptance of fan works under his theory of the hybrid economy, in which he posits that the Internet has created an interplay between a sharing economy (such as fan creators) and a more traditional commercial economy (such as copyright holders) that should be encouraged as profitable for both. As a practical way to support such abstract acceptance, Lessig has set forth the concrete idea of Creative Commons licenses—a proposal that is curiously never mentioned in Schwabach's book (note 3). Nonetheless, this marketplace acceptance will doubtless be slow to come. Schwabach himself relates several stories about previously fandom-friendly authors whose relationships with fandom broke down spectacularly.
The point of this book, however, is not to arrive at a solution. Schwabach's great achievement is to finally gather together in one place the many precedents—both court cases and out-of-court disputes—that scholars can use to make their own arguments and draw their own conclusions. The book is stripped of the hysterical emotion that often permeates this topic on Internet forums. It sets forth, as logically and simply as possible, the implications of the question of whether fan works infringe copyrights. This is a book that should serve as a valuable resource for fan creators and copyright holders alike, even if they may not like its main lesson: There are no easy answers.

Notes


2. See, e.g., Castle Rock Entm't, Inc. v. Carol Publ'g Group, Inc., 150 F.3d 132 (2nd Cir. 1998) (concerning a trivia book); Twin Peaks Prods., Inc. v. Publ'ns Int'l, Ltd., 996 F.2d 1366 (2nd Cir. 1993) (concerning a fan guide to a television series).

3. The Creative Commons licenses (http://creativecommons.org/) permit copyright owners to keep their copyright while allowing people to copy, distribute, and modify the work, so long as proper credit is given. The licenses can be personalized, so each copyright owner can choose the conditions under which copying, distribution, and/or modification will be permitted, if at all.

Works cited


