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Editorial

Fannish preferences

TWC Editor

[0.1]   *Abstract*—Editorial for *Transformative Works and Cultures,* no. 7 (2011).

[0.2]   *Keywords*—Behavior; Construction; Fan

[1.1]   As TWC has entered its fourth year and established itself as journal, we continue to expand our own understanding of what constitutes fans, fandom, and fannish behavior and what topics and groups are worth studying. Our spring special issues collectively push to explore a specific subdiscipline or theoretical approach (such as the forthcoming remix/fan video and fan activism issues), whereas our general issues showcase the breadth of fan studies. From the historical perspective of medieval literature to current cult favorite *Twilight,* from cosplay to music blogs, from ethnography to literary analysis, this issues addresses a variety of themes, topics, and theoretical approaches.

[1.2]   Even with this range, however, there are certain theoretical advances apparent in this issue, No. 7. One is the emphasis on performance, a central feature since at least Kurt Lancaster's *Interacting with Babylon 5* (2001), but clearly dominating the Theory section of this issue. The other is a merging of two often separate fields: the study of music fans, and fandom studies as it has come to dominate media studies. The two essays focusing on rock bands and their fans demonstrate how different forms of fan studies can profitably interact. These essays foreground the range and variety of fan engagements even if the different case studies analyze particular communities or fan behaviors.

2. Theory and Praxis

[2.1]   Our first two Theory essays use ethnographic methods to explore the performative aspects of fan practices. In "Culturally Mapping Universes: Fan Production as Ethnographic Fragments," Jen Gunnels and Carrie J. Cole read fans as ethnographers studying and interpreting the source texts. Gunnels and Cole coin the term *ethnodramaturg* to acknowledge the fictional performative aspect of fan interpretations and creations; in their essay, they offer an inspiringly new take on fan identities and productions—one that we think will energize the field and spark application studies. Nicolle Lamerichs's "Stranger than Fiction: Fan Identity in Cosplay" uses concepts of performance theory and performativity to describe and analyze the fannish practice of cosplay. Looking at theories of the body and the

boundaries between body and costume, Lamerichs theoretically constructs cosplay as a form of identity-constructing narrative.

[2.2]   Even with their similar setups of human teens in a world of supernatural creatures and vampire love interests, many of our readers and viewers consider *Buffy* and *Twilight* opposing forces in terms of quality and political issues. Whereas the previous two essay read fan productions as ultimately theatrical, Amanda L. Hodges and Laurel P. Richmond's "Taking a Bite out of *Buffy:* Carnivalesque Play and Resistance in Fan Fiction" connects fan fiction's exploration of characters' boundaries within Bakhtin's theories of the carnivalesque. The authors use theories on power, gender, and sexuality to argue for the empowering and ultimately subversive potential of the figure of Faith, especially as she is formed and transformed in *Buffy* femslash. In contrast, Jacqueline Marie Pinkowitz, in "'The rabid fans that take [Twilight] much too seriously': The Construction and Rejection of Excess in Twilight Antifandom," uses the concept of the antifan to analyze the discourses on quality that have sprung up around Twilight fans. She focuses on the rhetorical strategies of the anti-Twilight movement as she explores the feminist and fannish relevance of antifans within a fandom that predominantly attracts teen girls. The juxtaposition of these two essays provides an important reminder of our own notions of qualitative hierarchy and academic and fannish preferences.

[2.3]   The final two essays of the Praxis section look at music fandoms and two bands' online fan communities as a place where political and social values can intersect with fannish affect. Kristine Weglarz's "Lifting the Curse: Pearl Jam's 'Alive' and 'Bushleaguer' and the Marketplace of Meanings" describes Pearl Jam's conscious interpellation of fans as creative consumers. She then looks at fans' reaction to the possibly contradictory political messages of the band's ethos and its political activism, arguing that fans endorsed Pearl Jam's abstract message of democratic ideas yet resisted direct engagement in US political activism and prescriptive politics. Lucy Bennett likewise looks at political ethos in "Delegitimizing Strategic Power: Normative Identity and Governance in Online R.E.M. Fandom." She focuses on the internal power dynamics within a particular R.E.M. fan community and how the band's ethos and community norms created a self-regulating body that overturned and undermined its own power hierarchies.

3. Symposium and Review

[3.1]   By design, Symposium—possibly our most provocative section—offers the widest possible variety of approaches and authors: historical accounts and personal narratives, high school students and medieval scholars. This section has always stood for a meeting of fan and academic, acafan and fan scholar, burgeoning writer and experienced pro. This issue of TWC offers symposia that brings together multiple thought-provoking and enjoyable essays. In "The 'Lover' and Early Modern Fandom," Vera Keller uses the medieval concept of the lover, the *liefhebber* of things, ideas, and practices, to suggest a parallel between this taste culture and contemporary media culture with its emphasis on networks and collaboration. By offering a historical context to what we often tend to conceptualize as a quite recent

phenomenon, Keller offers new ways of intersecting disciplines and approaches. Francesca Musiani, like Keller, takes a broad and theoretical focus as she explores the ethical questions of "Editorial Policies, 'Public Domain,' and Acafandom." Her critical take on TWC's own policies challenges our ethical stance on the role of the fan and the academic as she argues that editorial policies generate ethical imperatives and construct philosophical frameworks.

[3.2]   The next two Symposium essays move from the abstract to the specific: they focus on specific topics, here the genre of hurt/comfort and a specific fan story. Despite these specific focuses, both Symposium pieces situate themselves within a feminist transformative theoretical framework, making their individual experiences and readings relevant to our readers. Judith May Fathallah adopts a personal voice as she explores "H/c and Me: An Autoethnographic Account of a Troubled Love Affair." Fathallah draws on personal experience, acknowledging the crucial role affect plays in fannish reading and writing. She focuses on the role of the body, sex, and gender in her personal fannish journey as it relates to the often maligned, but also much beloved, genre of hurt/comfort. Hui Min Annabeth Leow closes out the Symposium section with "Subverting the Canon in Feminist Fan Fiction: *Concession.*" Focusing on one specific *Iron Man* fan fiction, Leow performs a close reading that connects this particular story both to the original source text and to larger concerns of feminist theories and fan studies.

[3.3]   Elizabeth Ellcessor reviews Nancy K. Baym's *Personal Connections in the Digital Age* (Polity Press, 2010), which gives an introductory overview of online communication and its effects on interpersonal relationships. Sean Duncan reviews Sarah Lynne Bowman's *The Function of Role-Playing Games* (McFarland, 2010), a study of role-playing games, including tabletop, computer, and online games, with a particular focus on issues of identity.

4. Conclusion

[4.1]   The next issue of TWC, No. 8, will appear on November 15, 2011, and is a double guest-edited special issue. It contains essays on race and fandom, coedited by Sarah Gatson and Robin Anne Reid, and essays from the 2010 Textual Echoes conference at Umeå University, Sweden, coedited by the conference organizers, Berit Åström, Katarina Greggersdotter, Malin Isaksson, Maria Lindgren Leavenworth, and Maria Svensson. No. 9 and No. 10, both slated for spring 2012, will also be guest-edited special issues: Henry Jenkins and Sangita Shresthova coedit the special issue on fan activism, and Francesca Coppa and Julie Levin Russo's special issue focuses on remix and fan vids.

[4.2]   TWC No. 11 will be an open, unthemed issue, and we welcome general submissions. We particularly encourage fans to submit Symposium essays. We encourage all potential authors to read the submission guidelines (http://journal.transformativeworks.org/index.php/twc/about/submissions#onlineSubmissions). The close date for receipt of copy for No. 9 is March 15, 2012.

5. Acknowledgments

Theory

Culturally mapping universes: Fan production as ethnographic fragments

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[0.1]   *Abstract*—Ethnography has played a large role in fan studies; thus, any mention of ethnography in conjunction with fan studies is unsurprising. Ethnography's use of performance studies and the subsequent emphasis on embodied practice, however, creates new intersections between ethnography and the fan. Thus far, the fan has been relegated to the position of ethnographic subject. We argue here that the fan can be viewed as an ethnographer proper, mining ethnographic fragments from the source material in order to explore and explain the workings of a fictive culture within a fictive universe. The nature of fan production when viewed in such a manner is highly dramaturgical in nature. To account for this within the ethnographic framework, we use the term *ethnodramaturg* to describe how the fan works within a fictive universe to study and create dramatic story lines based within that world. Performatively, the fan enacts the ethnographer's in-betweenness. Both fan and ethnographer are not of the culture and yet not not of the culture they explore and attempt to explain. In ethnography, this means the subject is simultaneously observed and created through the use of ethnographic objects, or fragments. These fragments are then displayed or dramatically deployed independently of that source. Fan-produced media, having been excised from the source material, can be viewed as ethnographic fragments. Fans, as ethnodramaturgs, carve out discrete objects of the fictive world for study and link them together in a performative story line.

[0.2]   *Keywords*—Boal; Dramaturgy; Ethnography; Fan production

[1]   Ethnography has played a large role in fan studies, as seen in the work of Henry Jenkins and Camille Bacon-Smith, to name but two. Thus, the mention of ethnography in conjunction with fan studies is nothing particularly new. However, ethnography's use of performance studies and the subsequent emphasis on embodied practice creates new intersections between ethnography and the fan, opening potential avenues of inquiry. Rather than view the fan as an ethnographic *subject,* it is possible to examine the fan as an ethnographer *proper,* mining ethnographic fragments from

the source material to explore and explain the workings of a fictive culture within a fictive universe. Further, because of the dramatic nature of fans' ethnographic fragments and their dramaturgical assembly, the fan could be termed an *ethnodramaturg* as she works within a fictive universe to study and create dramatic story lines based within that world.

[2]   Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, in her essay "Objects of Ethnography," examines how "the ethnographic object raises issues of artifactual integrity and autonomy" (1991, 386). It is worthwhile to quote her definition of the ethnographic object at length:

> [3]   Objects become ethnographic by virtue of being defined, segmented, detached, and carried away by ethnographers. Such objects are ethnographic not because they were found…but *by virtue of the manner in which they have been detached, for disciplines make their objects and in the process make themselves.* (387, emphasis added)

[4]   Fans detach pieces from the source material and make them into fan products, running the gamut from characters and situations for works of fan fiction to fetishizing and recreating specific objects. Each new generation of fans adds to the interpretation and reinterpretation of both the source material, by carrying off new fragments, and the fragments of prior generations, in how they reconstitute them. Detaching the material from the source further realizes the fictional culture, as well as marking the activity as fannish. Here, the observation and creation of the subject is challenged by dramaturgical fluidity, based on how the fan, as ethnographer, constructs the dramaturgy of both the media and fictional universe out of the objects and subjects she privileges.

[5]   Fans, as ethnodramaturgs, not only carve out discrete objects of the fictive world for study, but also link them together in a performative story line. Fan media, created using a dramatic structure, reflects and makes sense of ethnographic social drama through the new story lines. The material repeats, reiterates, and reexplores itself as a result of differing foci on the source material as well as cultural changes on the part of the fan. The fan as ethnodramaturg simultaneously functions as a producer and a consumer of the culture and its fragments, without necessarily delineating a difference between those experiences. Ethnographically, this means that the subject is simultaneously observed and created through the use of ethnographic objects, or fragments. These fragments are then displayed or dramatically deployed independently of that source. Fan-produced media, having been excised from the source material, can be viewed as ethnographic fragments. Fans excise characters for use in fan fiction, placing them in imagined scenes, or for cosplay. In addition, vidders

will excerpt frames and scenes from the source material to tell a different story or to set them to a specific song meant to evoke a particular reading of the selected action.

[6]   Fandom's basis in and emphasis on participation allows for the activity marking fannish practice as ethnographic in nature. Bronislaw Malinowski, the father of modern ethnography, recommended full participation as well as the traditional position of observer to fully understand the culture being studied (Conquergood 1991, 180). Following this principle, ethnographer and performance theorist Dwight Conquergood reiterates: "Recognition of the bodily nature of fieldwork privileges the processes of communication that constitute the 'doing' of ethnography: speaking, listening, and acting together" (181). Fan enterprises mirror these activities, as Jenkins (1992, 2008), Fiske (1987), Hellekson and Busse (2006), and others have documented. Further, fan participation can be viewed as ethnographic fieldwork—an immersion in the field for a given period, absorbing the culture through direct participation (180). Fans, like ethnographers, familiarize themselves with the fictional culture through participation, which for the fan would include reading and/or viewing original source material as well as ancillary materials, ranging from other fan-produced media to secondary materials such as spin-off novels and games. This could be extended to include a mastery of a specific element from a franchise, such as the trend for sparring with lightsabers as a form of exercise (Lee 2009) or knowing the rules for, or actually playing, Klingon *wuQ.* Francesca Coppa, in her essay "Writing Bodies in Space: Media Fan Fiction as Theatrical Performance," says, "Readers come to fan fiction with extratextual knowledge, mostly of characters' bodies and voices" (2006, 235). Imbibing of the source material constitutes fieldwork that results in an understanding of the characters' cultures as "natives" of the fictional universe under scrutiny. The fan learns not only about the characters but also about the scope of the fictional world, by watching the material available and reading/observing the material of other fans. In certain forms of fannish interaction, the world is more important than any one character. Harry Potter, Star Wars, and Star Trek offer examples of this. While the main characters are important, they are primarily a means to understand the world the fan wishes to inhabit, understand, explore, and reinterpret (note 1).

[7]   Performance theorist Richard Schechner's oft-cited performance theory on restored behavior contains the well-known phrase "not me not not me" (1985, 110–12). Borrowing from Winnicott's idea of the "transitional object," Schechner bends it to performative use. Specifically, he meshes the ideas of Van Gennep, Turner, and Bateson relating to liminality, or "transitional phenomena," to specifically relate them to what occurs in a performance space. The actor is not himself—he plays a character —and yet the actor does not cease to be his original self. He is both and neither simultaneously. While formulated for performative circumstances, this has applications beyond the liminality of the stage.

[8]   Performatively, the fan enacts the ethnographer's in-betweenness. As Schechner notes of ethnographic fieldwork,

> [9]   The situation precipitated by the fieldworker's presence is a theatrical one: he is there to see, and he is seen…He is not a performer and not not a performer, not a spectator and not not a spectator. He is between two roles just as he is between two cultures…The field worker is always in a "not…not not" situation. (108)

[10]   While the above applies to a physical presence on the part of the ethnographer, this can apply to a virtual presence as well—as shown in ethnographic studies of online communities and groups—in particular, that of fans. This idea can be taken further by viewing the creation of fan products through a fan's participation in the fictional universe of her choice as ethnographic in nature. In doing so, fans, like ethnographers, produce ethnographic objects for study and display. Both fan and ethnographer are not of the culture and yet not not of the culture they explore and attempt to explain. At the same time, the double negative of Schechner's theoretical frame belies the generative nature of the ethnodramaturgical endeavor. The in-betweenness of the fan as ethnodramaturg, the "not not," can also invoke the improvisational *yes and* mode, which accepts the given circumstances of the culture or fictive universe, while reconstructing and redeploying the ethnographic fragments to suit other purposes. This fundamental tenet of improvisation is employed across a number of fields, and its basic charge in any application is "that each player will create a more interesting scene when they reflect each other's ideas rather than force their own" (Leep 2008, 15). In excising specific fragments from the fictive world, the fan as ethnodramaturg in essence improvises an alternate narrative.

[11]   The in-between state of the ethnographer and fan can also be engaged as a representation of the simultaneous dramaturgy of Augusto Boal, in which "the spectator feels that they can intervene in the action" and "all can be changed, and at a moment's notice" (Boal 1985, 134). Boal developed his theatre techniques against the backdrop of social and economic upheaval in Brazil during the 1960s. During his persecution, exile, and eventual return to Brazil, Boal formulated his Theatre of the Oppressed, a technique whereby the spectator is transformed into a participant (or "spect-actor") in the performance to both subvert and reimagine the hegemonic construct of the culture. Feeling that traditional theatre actively oppressed the spectator, Boal believed that encouraging the spectator to participate improvisationally in the decisions and direction of the performance would result in her social liberation.

[12]   Boal's terminology in the above—words like *transformed, witness,* and *encouraging*—fails to provide a sense of agency for the fan. However, these terms may be applicable in discussing the producers of original "official" material, that raw

ingredient of fan production. They acknowledge an intention for the fan to be transformed and encouraged, not on her own terms but on those of the producers of the shows. Examining the fan as an ethnographer proper, as an ethnodramaturg, realigns the terminology, granting agency to the fan. Ethnographers and their practices in the field, as Quetzil Castañeda observed, can be applicable here. The fieldwork, which for the fan would equate with viewing or reading, is not the end result:

[13]   The experience and interaction of fieldwork is a potentiality that corresponds not to the right then and there but to the subsequent re-constitution of information and experience as knowledge in writing, text, and representation that circulates for other audiences of readers and viewers detached from the specific time and space of the fieldwork. (Boal 2006, 82)

[14]   Fans "transform" into ethnodramaturgs. Their ethnographic refashioning of the fieldwork becomes ethnographic artifacts, triggering agency in the act of choosing what to bring back, manipulate, and display.

[15]   Boal's simultaneous dramaturgy focuses on integrating the extratextual information of characters and events with those defined within a culture—but at the point of integration, that very culture/universe is reshaped and redefined— reimmersing the audience-participant in a culture that she not only recognizes but owns. For Boal, Theatre of the Oppressed positions theatre and performance as a central and active mechanism for cultural participation by those who have been marginalized. The ideal audience member within his methodology functions as both an observer of and participant within the drama, as "all must act, all must be protagonists in the necessary transformation of society" (Boal 1985, x). Boal's fundamental premise rests on the notion that as soon as the audience participates, the drama changes and is changed, and the performative event becomes exponentially greater as a result of the simultaneity of the structuring of that event by actors and audience. Viewing fan production and media in this way, especially given the dramatic structure and presentation of the fragments, their constitution and reconstitution over periods of time and between cultures can be seen as both ethnographic activity and dramaturgical content.

[16]   As fragments carried off from the original source material, fan production, ranging from written material to video productions to cosplay, can be viewed either in situ or in context or even, in certain cases, both. In situ objects, typically displayed or arranged as large groupings, reinforce the reality of the subject they represent. "The notion of *in situ* entails metonymy and mimesis: the object is a part that stands in a contiguous relation to an absent whole that may or may not be recreated" (Kirshenblatt-Gimblet 1991, 388). Fan fiction could possibly be viewed as in situ due

to the sheer volume of material, but for the most part, in situ is best represented through fetishized objects, such as light sabers or Doctor Who's sonic screwdriver. This kind of object is not a neutral one because "those who construct the display also constitute the subject" (389). The deployment of the individual objects, meant to stand in for an ethnographic whole, reconstructs the cultural viewpoint of the ethnographer and the way in which she or he envisions the culture in question. Fetishized objects are most prevalent and observable within cosplay. The choice of object, the individual's perception of the object, and its relation to both the individual and the fictional world, all make ethnographic statements about the perception of the source material and sometimes the current state of fannish focus (note 2).

[17]   More often, fan productions tend toward placing ethnographic fragments in context. In-context displays rely on the arrangement and explication of discrete ethnographic objects. This may take the form of museum labels, charts, guided tours, lectures, or even performances. Objects may also be contextualized in reference to other objects, "often in relation to a classification or schematic arrangement of some kind, based on typologies of form or proposed historical relationships" (Kirshenblatt-Gimblet 1991, 390). In this case, the deployment of objects and their categorization and/or focus are under the cognitive control of the ethnographer. Fan fiction serves this purpose when viewed as supplements, as Coppa notes, to the source text and to one another. The "episode fix" and "missing scene" contextualize character behavior, and the repetitive nature of some fan fiction provides further contextualization, or interrogations of other fan interpretations, for the chosen fragment of source material. Contextualization is perhaps best exemplified by Web sites such as Wookiepedia, Gateworld, and BSG Wiki. These three sites contain encyclopedic material fleshing out the history of that universe, specific characters' histories, and flora and fauna, as well as outlining cultural practices and belief systems. This information comes from the source material, plus other "canonical" content from quasiauthorized sources such as spin-off or serial novels. Some material included on these sites receives only a passing mention in the canon. For example, the BSG Wiki has an entry for the First Cylon War. Citing the episodes making peripheral mention of the event, the remaining information contains background on the war's aftermath, which in turn contextualizes these brief mentions within the reimagined series ("Cylon War," 2010).

[18]   Both in situ and in context fan fragments cover a huge variety of media, ranging from written material to video productions to cosplay. The sheer volume of fan material, especially for the more popular universes such as Star Wars, Star Trek, Stargate, and Battlestar Galactica, make it difficult to view all of it (note 3). Even if a researcher broke it down into the examination of one media form and one genre within that form, it would still encompass an ungainly amount of material. Moreover, the differences in media and form make comparison difficult. Oleg Grabar makes an

observation concerning an Islamic art installation at the Metropolitan that is applicable here. He found that many objects within the large collection were "remarkably alike in technique, size, shape, style, and decorative theme…It is as though there are no masterpieces, no monument which emerges as being so superior to others within a comparable series that a qualitative or developmental sequence can easily be built up" (2006, 15). That is not to say all fan material is created equal. Some fans artists have achieved a higher level of status than others. However, exactly how is the reputation achieved? Is it determined via number of hits or by writing style? Is it based on the level of "authenticity" or adherence to canon manifest in the work? Such means of evaluation seem arbitrary at best (note 4). Even with the acknowledgment that some fan material has a higher level of quality, given the sheer volume of fan-produced media in any one franchise, these are better seen as exemplars of a type as opposed to an aesthetic.

[19]   Grabar further noted that any differences were "generally of degree rather than of kind; they almost always involve details of workmanship and composition rather than 'nobility' of subject or power of expression" (15). The differences within fan media can be viewed as ones of degree rather than kind, an ethnographic manifestation of Coppa's observation concerning the prevalence of recurring themes and subjects within fan fiction (236–38). Each fragment acts as a supplement to the whole, creating multiple interdependent dramaturgies of the fictive universe for the fan to enact. In a brief browsing of Gateworld, one Stargate site among many, we found 46 hurt/comfort stories, 316 covering missing scenes, and 915 involving a multitude of various romantic pairings. A number of these were cross-referenced with other subgenres of fan fiction, and several dealt with similar or identical subject matter using the same characters.

[20]   Examining fan production from an ethnodramaturgic standpoint allows for these vast, disparate quantities of media and activities to be grouped together. Playing Boba Fett or a storm trooper or writing about them is a difference of degree rather than kind when examined performatively. A fan still has to know the character and the universe in order to embody them physically or through a written text, as Coppa has elegantly pointed out. Viewed ethnographically, the material has equal weight in the presentation of the "culture" if one ignores the privileging of written text over embodied text. For example, the 501st Legion: Vader's Fist is a charitable organization whose members make appearances as Imperial characters and bounty hunters. According to their charter, there are only three requirements for membership, but one is based on knowledgeable merit and accurate fan production of an object. The potential member must own "a Legion-approved costume representing villainous or malevolent characters from the *Star Wars* films or its expanded universe sources" ("Legion Charter" 2009, Article VIIA). The charter stipulates that a costume

representing a canonical character must be "accurate" and "authentic-looking." They cannot contain any decoration or design not found on the original source material, in this case the costume (Article VIIC).

[21]   The requirements listed above place a premium on a high level of research into both the persona and culture the member wishes to represent. Performance ethnography advocates the same attention to detail. Doing so brings a set of checks and balances to the objectivity, in part by recognizing that the ethnographer does, in fact, interpret what she experiences and that this interpretation is what is communicated. In addition, performance ethnography serves to offer a way to express the bodily knowing/experiencing of a culture, as opposed to the traditional and privileged text of the monograph. Both Anna Deavere Smith and ethnographer/performer Joni Jones/Omi Osun Olomo practice this in their own work. In particular, Smith's work, "documentary theatre," seeks a bodily understanding of the people involved in such complex events as the 1992 LA riots (*Twilight: Los Angeles, 1992* [2003]) and the 1991 Crown Heights Riot (*Fires in the Mirror* [1992]) by utilizing elements of journalism, ethnography, and traditional performance (for an example of her work, see Smith 2007). As in cosplay, the ethnographer wishes to express both a level of authenticity and her ethnographic experience/encounter with the culture/character.

[22]   Grabar further notes that ethnographic fragments are more meaningful as a large grouping than as single fragments. The larger number ties the objects more closely with a living culture than would a single creation. The active fan bases producing vast quantities of fan material, including but not limited to Star Trek and Star Wars, appear to create more fully realized universes than do less active ones. More fan-produced material creates more detail, which in turn creates a more fully realized ethnographic representation of the fictional universe. The emphasis is not necessarily on the size of the fan base but on the volume and variety of materials produced to provide a more comprehensive picture of an expanded universe. Additionally, fan material makes little sense when removed from the living background of the source material, and only when viewed in larger groupings does it become more meaningful as it provides further details of the fictive universe. The fan fiction work "Waltzing's for Dreamers" (afg 2006) requires knowledge of what happens in *Stargate SG-1* (1997–2007) episode 7.16 "Death Knell" to understand the context and characters for the missing scene being depicted. The majority of this piece of fan fiction is written as dialogue, providing no background material for the situation or the characters involved. Not knowing the characters or the bracketing, an untutored audience is left with little sense of character, situation, or the universe as a whole from this material.

[23]   A large portion of the fan material produced, in particular those dealing with missing or rewritten scenes, can fall ethnographically under the category of social dramas. Ethnographer and anthropologist Victor Turner (1982), in approaching his fieldwork from a performative standpoint, posited that cultures can be read through these moments of heightened emotion, such as litigations, divorce, and marriage, that are either worked out, or not, on the basis of cultural strictures, revealing aspects of the cultural infrastructure. Not only do fans utilize this particular dramatic structure and content, they also *choose* to examine, explicate, and "repair" scenes that are incomplete in terms of social drama. One example, from *Battlestar Galactica* (2004–9), involves a fan fiction story based on 3.17 "Maelstrom." In this episode, Kara "Starbuck" Thrace meets her end, and in doing so comes to terms with elements of her past and, ostensibly, her various current relationships. Referencing the recurring image of her mandala, its occurrence acts as a cue for Starbuck to engage in self-revelation. The open-ended, sometimes vague treatment of Starbuck's relationships with other key characters within the original source episode fails to provide satisfactory reactions to both her life and her death. Fan fiction author PTBvisiongrrl (2007), seeking to reconcile the action within the original episode with known character behavior, wrote several brief scenes to explain the dreams and behavior of Starbuck as well as bring a sense of closure to her relationships with Adama and Apollo (see table 1 for comparisons between the official episode and the fan material). She does this by tying the actions of this episode to those previous, by examining the spaces between the scenes shown in the episode, and by providing an extended ending that takes into account the subtextual social roles of the characters involved.

Table 1. *Differences between 3.17 "Maelstrom" and fan fiction corrected/missing scenes*

Official Episode	Fan Fiction
Begins with Starbuck's dreams and hallucinations	Takes viewer back to previous episodes linked to a sexual encounter with Lee, resulting in pregnancy, as explanation for the dreams.
	Meeting with Adama where she gives him a letter for Lee. Foregrounds the father/daughter relationship.
Discussion on the flight deck concerning Starbuck's reservations about flying. Emotional undercurrents. For comparison with fan fic, see *Battlestar Galactica* 3.17 "Maelstrom."	Same scene, but the emotional undercurrents are foregrounded and we see more of the characters' internal states.
Flight with Apollo back to the planet. Starbuck passes out, and we see her vision with Leoben and her mother.	Follows the episode scene. The fic skips the dream/vision and moves into Starbuck's inner monologue and a more emotional reaction from Apollo.

Cut between Apollo and CIC with reaction shots.	
	Apollo's return to the ship and his report to Adama.
Episode ends with Adama smashing the model ship.	Apollo hears the ship off screen being smashed.
	Adama reveals that he knows about Lee and Kara loving each other. He thinks the marriage to Dee is a mistake. They drink from a special bottle of booze and reminisce. Adama gives the letter to Lee and leaves. Lee reads the letter in which Starbuck explains her feelings and actions concerning him.

[24]   Like the ethnographer in the field inserting herself into the culture, the fan inserts herself into the narrative world of the source material. In an unpublished paper delivered at the International Conference on the Fantastic in the Arts in 2009, Anna Wilson discussed the importance of examining fan fiction for its affect, an affect historically traceable through its "tradition of emotional engagement with texts." She points out how fan fiction's tendency to portray moments of extreme emotion correlates to Karl F. Morrison's "partial identification," a moment of simultaneous empathy between audience and art (Morrison 1998). The simultaneous empathy is dramaturgically necessary in the production of texts, both fictive and ethnographic. Coppa's analysis of Schechner's "not me not not me" reveals that in the dramatic structure of fan fiction, the fan portrays dramatic characters through an understanding of them. She is not Starbuck, but she is not not Starbuck either, mirroring the ethnographer's cultural in-betweenness.

[25]   However, this does not fully address some of the activity involved in fan media. The participatory nature of dramatic structure and the act of creating ethnographic fragments makes the ethnodramaturg similar to what Augusto Boal's Theatre of the Oppressed terms a spect-actor. A spect-actor fills a dual role as both spectator and actor/participant, simultaneously the observer and creator of the performance in progress. For ethnographer Quetzil Castañeda (2006), Boal's performance methodology foregrounds the intersection of the two disciplines (80). As mentioned earlier, the ethnographer, like Boal's spect-actor, is both observer and participant as she "performs" fieldwork. Regardless of discipline, the end result of Theatre of the Oppressed "revolves around creating a provocative and engaging set of interactions with a public in which the different emotions, positions, and ambivalences of the social issue are presented, provoked, revealed, and debated" (77). As in any endeavor, sometimes this happens, and sometimes it doesn't. However, issues—socially relevant or not—are definitely revealed, provoked, and debated within fan works.

[26]   Boal's Theatre of the Oppressed developed in reaction to a specific political and cultural moment in mid-20th-century Brazil but has metamorphosed since then,

finding intersections of praxis in a number of disciplines. At its earliest inception, the concepts undergirding Boal's work were part of an artistic development in Brazil that "sought to reach a segment of the population traditionally excluded from art discourse by tapping familiar frames of reference or by including members of this population in the process" of creation (Barnitz 2001, 235). In Boal's early work, this act of inclusion manifested in a process that employed the arts to, in part, "define a national cultural identity in both form and content" as well as "to demolish boundaries between artist and viewer" (Britton 2006, 11). Boal developed Theatre of the Oppressed to provide a context for reaching those excluded from the conversation, and to engage them in the creation of both art and identity. As he developed his praxis, Boal sought "to create a space in which [the people's desire for change] can be stimulated and experienced, and where future actions arising from it can be rehearsed" (Boal 1998, 20) much in the same way fans have produced their own space for the creation and rehearsal of the ethnographic fragments they deploy.

[27]   As Boal's theoretical and practical work in theatre gained international recognition, it has been adapted and applied to suit a number of socially and politically engaged genres and forms. In general, the object for Theatre of the Oppressed is to transform the audience member into a participant through and as part of the dramatic process, to address local concerns. This is done through four stages: knowing the body, making the body expressive, theatre as language, and theatre as discourse. For the fan, each of these stages is grounded in the collection of ethnographic fragments that are then dramatically structured to add to the understanding of the fictive universe. This process in the creation of fan media appears to be largely unconscious, less distinctly reliant upon specific stages, and much more fluid, thus creating slippage between stages in the methodology.

[28]   In reference to the first two stages—knowing and expressing the body—Coppa has already pointed out how the fan, through extratextual knowledge of the source material, comes to know the bodies of the characters, as well as how those bodies are expressive through space and over time. Boal emphasizes much of what fan fiction in particular already seems to accentuate. Bodily knowledge of the characters includes an understanding of their abilities, limitations, and possibilities, while the act of making the body expressive involves the usual expression of character through the body, but includes and advocates the abandonment of "common and habitual forms of expression" (Boal 1985, 126). Again, as fan fiction demonstrates through unconventional subgenres such as slash, fans do abandon the habitual expression of the characters and how they interact within their specific fictive universe.

[29]   Theatre as a language, the third stage, is a practice—one conducted in the present, "not as a finished product displaying images from the past" (Boal 1985, 126).

Most important here is the notion of simultaneous dramaturgy—and it is at this point the fan transforms into an ethnodramaturg. Performance scholar Elizabeth Bell aptly describes simultaneous dramaturgy as "a technique designed to *involve spectators in a scene without requiring their physical presence onstage*" (Bell 2008, 208). Boal often brought spectators to the stage to participate in the social drama being depicted, hence the term *spect-actor.* More recently, scholars like Bell have emphasized that simultaneous dramaturgy can include virtual participation as well. Fan writing allows for performative expression without physical presence. The fan presence is partially deferred through Schechner's "not me not not me" and placed within the characters utilized in the fan production. In this way, the ethnodramaturg "intervenes directly, 'speaking' through images made with the actors' bodies" (Boal 1985, 126). The fan as an ethnodramaturg, by manipulating the ethnographic objects derived from the source material, actively intervenes in, makes, and acts through the culture of the fictive universe. The final stage in Boal's method, theatre as a discourse, presents the opportunity for the spectator/actor/fan to "discuss certain themes or rehearse certain actions" (Boal 1985, 126). As the Brecht Forum, a Web site dedicated to "working for social justice, equality, and a new culture that puts human needs first," points out, Boal considers the act of dramatizing action as a rehearsal *for* action:

> [30]   Role-playing serves as a vehicle for analyzing power, stimulating public debate and searching for solutions…[Participants] are invited to map out: a) the dynamics of power…b) the experience and the fear of powerlessness…and c) rigid patterns of perception that generate miscommunication and conflict, as well as ways of transforming them. The aim of the forum is not to find an ideal solution, but to invent new ways of confronting problems…The experience has been called a "rehearsal for life." (http://brechtforum.org/aboutforum)

[31]   But what does this perspective gain? Katherine Newman, in "On the Value of Ethnography," expounds on how ethnography's benefits lie "in its capacity to redefine the social landscape, [and] to explode received categories…Ethnography has the capacity to develop different ways of thinking about a social universe" (Becker et al. 2004, 271). Lawrence Grossberg, in "Is There a Fan in the House? The Affective Sensibility of Fandom," echoes these sentiments: "Fans actively constitute places and forms of authority (both for themselves and for others) through the mobilization and organization of affective investments" (1992, 59). Both perspectives coincide with Boal's methodology and end result. "Maybe the theatre in itself is not revolutionary, but these theatrical forms are without a doubt a *rehearsal of revolution.* The truth of the matter is that the spectator-actor practices a real act even though he does it in a fictional manner…Within its fictitious limits, the experience is a concrete one" (Boal 1985, 141). This connects to the nonfixed, nonfinite nature of fan performance and

dramaturgy. What do we gain by thinking of the fan performance as rehearsal instead of production—and therefore fixed and product based—about the object, and not the subject? Simultaneous dramaturgy gives us the room, and flexibility, to acknowledge the subject/object/ethnographer/dramaturg mutability. In particular, it can examine the fluidity of the lines between the productions of fan culture and iterations of source material by official sources.

[32]   Ethnography and simultaneous dramaturgy seek to change attitudes and circumstances, to grant agency to those who may feel they have none. To apply this extreme of sociopolitical advocacy to fan productions is a bit of a stretch and a tad absurd. At the same time, Boal's work has metamorphosed from its original political third world beginnings and been adapted to less extreme understandings of advocacy and identity such as within the classroom or middle-class concerns. Yet fan productions do grant agency in their subversion of narrative for their own purposes. Fans, acting as ethnodramaturgs, do change the world. They change, map, and remap the fictive world in which they play.

[33]   Other theories and discourses position the fan in relation to the text as textual poachers, historians, and scribes. These very useful and valid approaches, however, only reflect certain relationships fans have to a core text. In addition, the individual products of fandom, separated across several types of media in as many different forms, tend to be viewed as discrete genres. Examining fan activity as performative, as a *doing,* and expanding upon this performance in a particular fashion, *doing/performing* as an ethnographer, gives a different understanding of the fan in relation not just to text, but to an ethnographic discourse created via ethnographic fragments (fan productions). Viewed in this way, the fan's relation to the core text is a means and not an end. The focus can be placed on the fragments created from the text, leveling the barriers between these fan-created genres and shifting focus to gain a different perspective on fans.

[34]   As ethnodramaturgs, fans learn the rules of the fictional culture; and when they begin to produce fannish materials, creating ethnographic monographs regardless of their media form, it is done in such a way that it both conforms to and diverges from the fictional culture in which they participate. As the fans participate, they transform it into something that speaks to their own life and experience as well as the human condition—as the best ethnography does. Good ethnography is a synthesis, a "thick description," to borrow Clifford Geertz's term, of multiple points of observation. The fan's position as poacher, historian, and scribe all combine to create an ethnographic perspective through gleaning fragments of the material (Geertz 1973).

[35]   It would be reductive to dismiss the activity of the ethnodramaturg as mere fantasy, escapism, or identification. Again, these have their place in fan studies and

have served to open debate and unpack what, exactly, fans do. Equally, there is a tendency outside the field to misunderstand performance by mistaking it as only encompassing the stage and trained actors. These misperceptions limit potentially useful perceptions in both cases. What and how something is fantasized can often provide insight into the society itself because "dismissing escapism as 'mere fantasy' avoids the vital questions of *what* is escaped from, *why* escape is necessary, and *what* is escaped to" (Fiske 1987, 317). These are questions that can be approached ethnographically. If examined as a question of identification, one would expect fans to gravitate toward a representation in keeping with how they view themselves. This is not necessarily the case. Cosplayers in particular (at both comic cons and Renaissance festivals) may specifically choose to play against their own perceived identities as experimentation (note 5). Viewing identity as performed (Tajfel 1982; Goffman 1959) complicates matters. Performance and acting are not confined to the stage. Everyday cultural interactions and exchanges are performances of culture and self. Taking into account Erving Goffman's "front stage" and "backstage" behaviors, fans may present themselves publicly in one way and privately in another. Performance, in a more formal state, can disrupt this. It does so by offering an element of liminal safety.

[36]   Performance, as may be perceived in fan studies, could be formal (cosplay competitions), immersive (LARPs, Renaissance festivals), or projective (via game avatars or literary characters). In each case, because the performance is bounded in some fashion (stage, environmental area, text/virtual space), it may be perceived as relatively safe, because what happens in this world has no lasting real-world consequences. It may be threatened or harmed as part of the ludic aspects of the situation, but these are not permanent to the real body. Experimentation is more likely to occur, and offense less likely to be taken. Backstage private identity roles may be fronted with the understanding that this is *play.* To that end, the fan carves out a space for play:

> [37]   All play takes place within a "playground," a space marked off beforehand, either physically or mentally, deliberately or as a matter of course. The ancient Greeks' word for such a space is *temenos,* the sacred circle. It is a sacred spot cut off and hedged in from the "ordinary" world, a consecrated and hallowed ground within which special rules obtain. (Izzo 1997, 9)

[38]   The idea of creating a *temenos* becomes extremely important because this construction provides a place of both safety and permission in exploring identity. Within this space, the fan can examine volatile or socially unacceptable circumstances or experiment with cultural perceptions and relationships (between individuals, or between individuals and the culture or circumstance). These may or may not have

lasting impact on the fictional culture. This depends on the ethnographic authenticity. If the material presented is "true," whether to canon, secondary material, or the perceptions of other fans, it is more likely to enter the continuum of the fictional culture. Ethnographic scholarship goes through a similar filtering process.

[39]   All of this brings us back to the ethnodramaturg, Boal, and simultaneous dramaturgy. Ultimately, examining the fan as ethnodramaturg and fan productions as ethnographic fragments can open up a new and different perspective that may add to the "thick description" of past and current fan studies. The field of fan studies, particularly as it relates to performance and performance genres, greatly benefits not only from examining the products and fragments of fan culture, but also from acknowledging the dramaturgical processes in which fans create and produce material. Both contribute to a vital understanding of the fan's engagement with the fictive worlds.

Notes

1. This is not indicative or inherent in all fan practices. Some universes do not necessarily prompt this, focusing instead on a profound attachment to characters, as with Twilight or Supernatural.

2. A partial examination of this is made in Gunnels (2009).

3. Larger franchises do tend to be the ones in which the fans focus more upon the world inhabited than the central characters. Even so, given the breadth of fandom, there will be exceptions to this. Again, in such an instance, the question will be one of how *much* fan media is produced and not how *many* fans there are.

4. This marks an area in need of further inquiry. Here we are more concerned with the possibilities of moving across genres of fan media in ways that do not necessarily privilege one type over another.

5. See Gunnels (2004). The interviews therein suggest that many participants specifically play against their own identities or the identities that are publicly perceived and/or socially accepted.

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Theory

Stranger than fiction: Fan identity in cosplay

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[0.1]   *Abstract*—Academic accounts of fan cultures usually focus on creative practices such as fan fiction, fan videos, and fan art. Through these practices, fans, as an active audience, closely interpret existing texts and rework them with texts of their own. A practice scarcely examined is *cosplay* ("costume play"), in which fans produce their own costumes inspired by fictional characters. Cosplay is a form of appropriation that transforms and actualizes an existing story in close connection to the fan community and the fan's own identity. I provide analytical insights into this fan practice, focusing on how it influences the subject. Cosplay is understood as a performative activity and analyzed through Judith Butler's concept of performativity. I specifically focus on boundaries between the body and dress, and on those between reality and fiction. I aim to show that cosplay emphasizes the personal enactment of a narrative, thereby offering new perspectives on fan identity.

[0.2]   *Keywords*—Crossplay; Fan costumes; Judith Butler; Performativity

1. Introduction

[1.1]   When I was 18 years old, I attended my first fan convention, Animecon 2005, in the Netherlands. I was aware that fans often "cosplayed" at such conventions, meaning they dressed as fictional characters they loved. A friend of mine had made me an Aerith costume; Aerith is a character from *Final Fantasy VII.* She hoped we could enter the costume competition. She had become an avid cosplayer since her first convention and really wanted to participate with a *Final Fantasy* act. Aerith was the most practical choice for me. I could relate to her, and I had long brown hair just like hers. My friend portrayed Ceres (*Final Fantasy VI*), my sister opted for Quistis (*Final Fantasy VIII*), and we had also recruited a Tifa (*Final Fantasy VII*) and a Shadow (*Final Fantasy VI*). Most of us knew each other already, but our Tifa was a fan whom we had met online on a Dutch anime fan community. In the costume competition, all of us participated in a five-minute on-stage beauty contest that we had written months before and had practiced in advance. For Tifa and me, this was our first convention, and we were amazed by the many costumes we saw. When we were out of costume at

the end of the convention, we were at a bit of a loss. Those costumes were tied to our con experience, and even more to our selves.

[1.2]   When cosplaying, fans of popular culture (e.g., television series, games, movies) produce their own costumes inspired by fictional characters. Fan costumes involve four elements: a narrative, a set of clothing, a play or performance before spectators, and a subject or player. Each of these can be used as a starting point for an analysis of cosplay. In this article, I focus mostly on the fourth element, the fan him- or herself. I shall argue that costuming is a form of fan appropriation that transforms, performs, and actualizes an existing story in close connection to the fan's own identity. This article is based largely on the fields of fan and performance studies and my own experience as a cosplayer and researcher who has attended a variety of European conventions in recent years. Fan costumes are just one example of how fans express their affection for existing stories and rework them through various media. Like fan fiction, fan movies, and fan art, cosplay motivates fans to closely interpret existing texts, perform them, and extend them with their own narratives and ideas. I start by describing cosplay as a performance, after which I depict the various contexts and uses of a costume. I analyze cosplay as a specific type of performativity, then discuss how cosplayers identify with the narrative and how this affects their identity.

[1.3]   The fan tradition of dressing up has a long history, dating back to American science fiction conventions in the 1960s and 1970s at which fans wore outfits from series such as *Star Trek* or *Star Wars.* Another subtype of fan costumes in Western culture is inspired by the tradition of Renaissance fairs and historical reenactment, as well as later practices such as live-action role-playing, in which enthusiasts base costumes on certain historical periods or genres and combine them with performances. The term *cosplaying* was coined in the 1980s by the game designer Takahashi Nobuyuki when he encountered the costuming practices of American fans on a visit to the United States (Bruno 2002; Winge 2006, 66–67). In Japan, cosplay has become very prominent. Many Western fans nowadays learn about costuming not through science fiction or fantasy genres, but through Japanese fiction. As a fan practice, cosplay is associated with Japanese fans of anime (cartoons), manga (comics), and games, who are called *otaku* (Hills 2002; Kinsella 1998). Fans usually wear their costumes in specific settings, such as during particular events at conventions (e.g., competitions, fashion shows), or as props for fan videos. In contrast to definitions that argue that cosplay involves outfits inspired by Japanese fiction, I do not exclude the more Western variants that flourish in science fiction and fantasy fan communities.

[1.4]   Though the practice of dressing up at fan conventions is almost as old as the conventions themselves, it has scarcely been examined academically. It is often addressed in fan studies that devote a short chapter to conventions (e.g., Bacon-Smith

1992, 3–43; Taylor 2006, 1–11; Pearce 2009). The scholars who mention costuming in their books often use it as an introduction to fandom and its "strange" and sometimes ritual-like practices (see also Jenkins 2010). The study of other fan practices is more common. Fan fiction in particular has been closely examined (Jenkins 1992; Bacon-Smith 1992; Pugh 2005; Busse and Hellekson 2006). Game studies scholars often analyze such fan products as machinima, user-generated content in games, and fan modifications, although Andrew Burn (2006) has offered a study of *Final Fantasy* fan fiction and fan art, and James Newman (2005) has published an article on the fan practices of gamers, including fan games, fan fiction, and walkthroughs. As I will show, research on cosplay can contribute to the field of fan studies, not only because cosplay is an aesthetic practice, but also because it reveals the personal relationship fans develop with a narrative.

[1.5]   I analyze cosplay here as a form of performance. Examining fan cultures as a performance is not entirely new, though developed theories on this are scarce (for two, see Coppa 2006 and Lancaster 2001). "Performance" is a rather broad concept. A helpful definition is offered by Henry Bial (2004) in *The Performance Studies Reader:* "The term 'performance' most commonly refers to a tangible, bounded event that involves the presentation of rehearsed artistic actions…We can extend this idea of a performance to other events that involve a performer (someone doing something) and a spectator (someone observing something)" (57). In cosplay, the performance may be actualized in stage acts and fashion shows, or it may be a more casual practice in which a fan simply wears the costume and socializes in it.

[1.6]   To an outsider, fan costumes might suggest that fans want to look like, or momentarily *be,* the fictional characters they identify with. Fans' reasons for cosplaying vary, however, and our group at Animecon 2005 was an example of this (figure 1). For instance, I did not love Aerith wholeheartedly. There were things about her I disliked, such as her sweet (maybe even shy) attitude, and I didn't care for the pink in her outfit. Later, as a cosplayer, I chose to play more eccentric or evil characters whom I was more attached to emotionally and whose outfits I liked better (e.g., the Baroness from *G.I. Joe;* Lady Une from *Gundam Wing;* Franziska von Karma from *Ace Attorney*). I chose Aerith at Animecon partly because she fit into the group and partly because her outfit was doable. These practical considerations influence other cosplayers as well. My sister loved wearing her Quistis outfit because she really identified with Quistis; my friend portrayed Ceres partly because of the complex design of the ball gown that Ceres wears in the game. She saw this as a sewing challenge and loved working on it. Similarly, the fan who cosplayed Tifa had invested months in finding the proper gloves for her outfit. Still, she was mostly neutral about the character; she enjoyed talking about her experiences of the game and her passion for the entire cast of *Final Fantasy VII.*

[1.7]   Perhaps most importantly, cosplay is not confined to the fan activity of costuming but is also embedded in fan practices as a whole. Most cosplayers do more with these characters than just cosplay them. If they have a strong preference for certain characters (see Pugh 2005), they may role-play them online on bulletin boards, on LiveJournal, in chat sessions, or elsewhere; write fan fiction about them; draw fan art depicting them; or use them as an avatar during chat sessions. My sister role-played Quistis on LiveJournal, and the fan who cosplayed Tifa with us often used a Tifa avatar when posting on bulletin boards. Discussing cosplay as a fan practice means taking all of these spaces into account.

2. Contextualizing cosplay

[2.1]   Dressing up is a regular activity in most societies. Cosplaying, however, is a fannish subculture and has its own limits and possibilities. It always takes place in a specific social context, usually in discrete spaces such as fan conventions or get-togethers. In Japan, cosplaying is more entwined with the public domain than in the West. For instance, cosplayers gather in the parks of the district of Harajuku in Tokyo. Here, costuming practices are part of consumption culture. Shops sell cosplay articles, such as wigs, and even full costumes. Cosplay restaurants draw fans in by having waiters and waitresses dress up as fictional characters or types (e.g., maids, butlers). Particularly interesting are the Miss Dandy bars, in which women dress up as men to cater to other women (Robertson 1996, 143–46). Even though this is a professional practice rather than one initiated by fans, it is clear that costuming has a more prominent role in Japanese society than in Western society.

[2.2]   The costumes fans wear are usually self-made, though in some cases they are purchased from Japanese stores or commissioned from other fans or professional

tailors. Most cosplaying sites (such as Cosplay.com) design their user profile pages on the assumption that players make their outfits themselves and include options for players to discuss the creation of the costume. Online forums and communities are devoted to mutual help with difficulties such as styling wigs; tutorials made by fellow fans and these discussion boards lead to a culture in which fans help each other out as peers. The community is crucial here to the development of costuming skills. The process of sewing the costume and guaranteeing its authenticity is therefore very important. The costume is a cultural product that can be admired at a convention, and therefore spectators also play a role in guaranteeing authenticity (see also Winge 2006, 69). Fans may evaluate the costume, appreciate the character being portrayed, or take photographs.

[2.3]   Cosplaying at a fan convention is partly institutionalized through, and motivated by, specific events. The most common of these are fashion shows, photography sessions, and cosplay acts. Fashion shows are organized much as they are in mainstream fashion culture and are usually held on a catwalk or stage where cosplayers can show their costumes from various angles. At fashion shows, the costume is central. Because fans make the outfits themselves, they can earn praise for their sewing skills here. Fashion shows are also entwined with the narrative the costume is based on. Through their choice of the music that plays as they present their work and their body language, cosplayers can express their chosen characters.

[2.4]   In photography sessions, which are sometimes held during or after a fashion show, the costume also plays a central role. The fans function as models for the photographers, but they can also use the photographs themselves to promote their costume activities. Fans who specialize in photography usually initiate the shoots, sometimes at specific times that the convention has arranged. Though many of the photographers are fans who want a snapshot of a cosplayer—or rather, a character— they love, some may want to develop their photography skills further. Most cosplayers see getting their picture taken not just as something to be expected, but as a compliment (see Leigh 2007).

[2.5]   Most conventions also organize an event in which cosplayers perform skits onstage. Cosplay acts vary in length and quality. Usually they are less than 5 minutes long, but at the German Animagic convention, for instance, certain groups are allowed to perform for an hour or more. In these performances a new narrative is created, much as in fan fiction. They vary from plays and dance acts to quizzes and martial arts, and they may use music and video, which may be footage taken from the source text or created by the performers themselves (figure 2).

Figure 2. *Diana de Mol as Sakura from Tsubasa Reservoir Chronicle. Photograph courtesy of Furiaa. [View larger image.]*

3. Performativity and dressing up

[3.1]   Even though cosplaying is a prominent activity at conventions, it has received little critical attention, as I remarked earlier. As a fan practice, it creates an intimate and complex relation between the fan and the character. Cosplay is an excellent example of how fans actualize fiction in daily life and identify with it, and thus it helps us understand the constitution of fan identity. Through the acts of constructing and wearing a costume, the fan constructs his or her identity in relation to fiction and enacts it. To clarify this, I shall frame identity here in relation to Butler's concept of performativity, which in turn can also be exemplified and criticized when compared to cosplay.

[3.2]   Judith Butler described performativity in *Gender Trouble* (1990) and also elaborated on it in her other books, such as *Bodies That Matter* (1993). The term stems from the work of Austen ([1962] 1980), but Butler uses it in a different, less linguistic sense. Though Butler's theory is related to gender, it has been picked up by many scholars interested in performance or identity. She argues against older discourses of identity politics that claim gender is fixed in our selves and shapes who we are. To Butler, gender is an expression of what one does, rather than what one is. In her theory Butler emphasizes the "reiterative power of the discourse," the repetition of the signs that constitutes the act and in turn shapes the subject's identity (1993, 2). Re-citation and repetition, not single acts, bring the subject into being (see also Llyodd 1999, 197).

[3.3]   Thus, in Butler's theory, identity is not invented but is the temporary result of imitation. Her notion of performativity shows an uncertain subject without a core, which is shaped by repetition and citation of existing discourses. Surprisingly, Butler's theory does not rely on the autonomy of the subject. The subject can gain agency only through its acts, which are limited because they rely on imitation of the discourse.

Performing one's identity is not a voluntary act here, but rather one that is always confined to discursive practices in a certain society. This is also one of the main points on which her theory is critiqued (Llyodd 1999; Hall 2000). Her theory is deterministic in that it provides little to no space for the intentions of the subject. Still, Butler is often not read as deterministic, because one of her most remarkable case studies, on drag, seems to suggest that playing with one's identity, or even subverting it, is possible. Cosplay seems similar to drag in this way. If we can express ourselves through a multitude of costumes and characters, are we not consciously constructing our identity?

[3.4]   Butler's account of drag is often seen as a prime example of her theory of performativity. It seems to suggest that identities, especially gender identities, are malleable and can be subverted, but that is not what Butler tries to show. She explains this in her interview with Segal and Osborne (1993): "There are restrictions in drag. In fact, I argued toward the end of the book that drag has its own melancholia." This melancholia inheres in the fact that drag is confined to the same gender discourse as other identities. Ultimately, she analyzes drag not as a form of empowerment but as a parody of feminity (Salih and Butler 2004, 111–13; Llyodd 2007, 42–44). Drag is based on gender, which is itself imitative. Rather than showing how cross-dressing can erase existing boundaries of gender identity, Butler emphasizes how it reconfirms heteronormativity: the categories that define man, woman, and heterosexuality as the norm (Butler 1993, 237). Drag exposes all of these notions as constructed, but it is not subversive because it also reconfirms them.

[3.5]   Two minor criticisms of Butler's theory are relevant when relating the subject to cosplay. First, Butler discusses drag as a form of lived expression. Drag, however, happens in other contexts as well. Drag can be performed at a carnival, within the theater, or at political interventions such as protest marches. Here, the context is more playful and less explicitly related to identity politics. Drag and cosplay explicitly come together in the subgenre of crossplay, in which players dress up as characters of the other gender (figure 3). This practice is occasional and, to some degree, ludic. Second, Butler does not take the intentions of the subject doing drag into account. The motivations of crossplayers, for instance, vary. Crossplay can be only an occasional practice, enacted because the player likes a certain character of the opposite gender; it can be part of a parody (e.g., Man-Faye; Sailor Bubba); it can be motivated by a player's preference for a certain outfit despite the gender of the character. Some crossplayers enjoy the challenge of behaving like a member of a different gender, while others see themselves as publicly declaring the fluidity of gender. Additionally, crossplayers choose their characters according to more than merely gender. A number of crossplayers I know lean toward certain character tropes, such as lordly characters or cute girls.

[3.6] Forms of dressing up such as cosplay and drag combine a sense of identity and playfulness with the wearing of an outfit. While Butler limits the acts of the subject to discursive practices, we see that cosplayers in fact play with identity all the time and understand the meaning of what they are doing in various ways. Moreover, cosplay and crossplay give us a different view of drag, which is not confined to gender or political interventions here but involves a range of aesthetic practices. In Stuart Hall's works (e.g., Hall 2000), identity is seen as twofold. It is not only the subject determined by discursive practices, as in Butler's writings, but also the subject him- or herself, and how she or he uses culture. Identity is seen as a meeting point of discourses that affect us as social objects, while it is also a process that subjects themselves produce. The subject invests in his or her position. What Hall calls the "articulation" of one's identity is an important factor in the construction of identity (19). However, in Butler's theory, there is little room for such agency of the subject.

Figure 3. *Crossplayer playing Emil from Tales of Symphonia II at Animagic (http://www.animagic-online.de/), 2010. Photograph courtesy of Nicolle Lamerichs.*
[View larger image.]

4. Dresses and bodies

[4.1] Butler's interpretation of drag as an embodied, theatrical practice is applicable to cosplay as well. Butler says in her interview with Segal and Osborne (1993), "What's interesting is that this voluntarist interpretation, this desire for a kind of

radical theatrical remaking of the body, is obviously out there in the public sphere. There's a desire for a fully phantasmatic transfiguration of the body." Such a remaking is central in both drag and cosplay. The relation the cosplayer has to his or her body is important if we want to analyze cosplay as a form of performativity. In Butler's writings, considerable attention is given to the construction of gender through repetition. *Gender Trouble* (1990) pays little attention to how one's sex plays a role in the construction of identity, an omission that Butler tried to correct in *Bodies That Matter* (1993). Still, the embodiment of one's identity is part of its development. The body plays a role in various ways when we analyze cosplaying and general fan practices.

[4.2]   First of all, we should realize that cosplayers use their bodies explicitly to display their affection for certain narratives. At some conventions, wearing a costume is becoming implicitly expected. Fans in street clothes stand out at conventions where most attendees are in costume. Nonetheless, the difference between those who are dressed up and those who are not is not as clear as it might seem. At most conventions I went to, even the attendees not in costume dressed up for the occasion to some extent. Through T-shirts, buttons, headbands or hats, and jewelry, even fans who do not consider themselves cosplayers use dress as a way to signify their affiliations (see also Hodkinson 2002, 131–51). At anime conventions, it is not uncommon to wear something in a Japanese style, such as a Gothic Lolita outfit or a kimono. Though this is not cosplay in the narrow sense, in that one is not impersonating a fictional character, it shows there is an intimate relation between even uncostumed fans and their clothing.

[4.3]   Nor are fans easily divisible into cosplayers and noncosplayers. Cosplaying can be multilayered. At a convention, cosplayers sometimes change into regular clothes during the day, especially if their costume are not very practical. The cosplayer chooses when to wear a costume and may bring more than one to a convention. Some players change their outfits frequently. This playing with roles and identities can confuse spectators. A common problem (or compliment) at conventions is that cosplayers' friends or acquaintances may not recognize them at first.

[4.4]   Second, cosplay is not only a practice related to bodies and dress, but also an embodied practice. Both the dress and the body and behavior of the player are important in analyzing it. Cosplay allows spectators to encounter fictional characters in a convention setting. As Gunnels (2009) describes, this immediacy of performance is at the heart of cosplay. First impressions are crucial here. As a fan practice, cosplay is centrally concerned with embodying a character accurately. Because of this, cosplayers often develop an increased awareness of their own bodies or choose a character that matches their own posture, identity, or social role. As I explained

earlier, I chose to cosplay Aerith because I felt I could look like her easily. Cosplayers may be criticized for failing to fully reproduce their character's appearance, even when these failures are due to such factors as body size or medical necessity. I wore contact lenses to cosplay Aerith, and at that convention I heard complaints about other cosplayers who kept their glasses on when playing characters who did not wear them. Fans may negatively judge a cosplayer who they feel has not done enough, even though the player has obviously put effort into his or her appearance.

[4.5] Cosplayers are usually judged according to body features and behavior. However, the characters they portray are strongly embedded in a medium (e.g., animation or game) whose design may make doing justice to their appearance impossible (figure 4). Participants on message boards often discuss what fabric could best reproduce the appearance of an outfit, try to understand within the universe of the original narrative how a character might make and wear his or her costume, or compare several versions players have made of one costume. Similarly, cosplaying characters from movies is problematic because characters are connected to their original actors (e.g., Johnny Depp's portrayal of Jack Sparrow), and their appearance is often more detailed than that of animated characters. Still, the goal of most cosplayers is not to create a look-alike, but to express their own identity through a costume. In analyzing the identity of the cosplaying fan, we must take into account both appearance and behavior. They determine the practice and thereby affect the self.

Figure 4. *Roderick Leermakers as the Joker from The Dark Knight. Courtesy of Abunai, 2008. [View larger image.]*

5. Exploring fiction, subverting reality

[5.1]   Is cosplay truly similar to other performative acts Butler describes, such as drag? Perhaps something innovative is happening in these fan communities that should be analyzed differently. Segal and Osborne (1993) summarize Butler's ideas with a remarkable statement: "It's only within critical subcultures that transgressive reinscriptions are going to make a difference." We can wonder whether fandom is the kind of subculture they are looking for, one that does not cite existing patterns but practices something altogether new, and thereby manages to create an effective, subversive parody. In early fan studies research, fandom was often depicted as subversive because it goes against the commercial media industry and offers a more feminist space in which to rework narratives (e.g., Jenkins 1992; Bacon-Smith 1992). My focus is a bit different: I argue that within these communities, a new idea of identity can flourish. Fans show a flexible, multilayered idea of identity—an identity that cannot be pinned down. Still, cosplaying is one example of how fans rework texts, and therefore it is always related to fiction. The activity itself has no clear political agenda. Perhaps cosplaying counterbalances the tendency of fan cultures to analyze and critique the media they engage with. Still, by using Butler's later ideas, I argue there is transformative potential in the way fans identity with narratives. I shall explain briefly how this identification works before I trace it back to performativity again.

[5.2]   Cosplay leans on identification with narrative content. Most importantly, cosplayers have a dynamic relationship with stories and characters. Most cosplayers do not wish to exactly duplicate the character they portray; rather, they want to bring something of their own, such as elements of their own appearance, into the cosplay. In that sense, they can also be compared to cover bands and other forms of impersonation in which performers enact their own versions of existing material. Moreover, characters are used as signifiers of the fan's own identity. On the one hand, a costume shows off a player's attachment to a certain narrative or character, and a player can gain status through high-quality cosplay. On the other hand, the associations connected with a character are transferred to the player. Expression through a costume of a fictional character is actually self-expression. Cosplayers decide what characters and values fit them. These decisions are the very core of this type of play, but they are ones that the audience might be less concerned with. While the audience can judge a costume and behavior, and their resemblance to the source text, they cannot compare the character with the player.

[5.3]   In cosplaying, there is a mutual exchange between the player and fiction. In this sense, the relation between players and characters is similar to that between gamers and their characters. Game theories often stress that the avatar—the main playable character in a game—is not just a protagonist that can be read, but also an enabling character that the player controls. The character-player relationship has been

described by De Mul (2005) as "ludic identity" and by Gee (2007) as "projective identity." Both concepts highlight that a player establishes his or her own identity while interacting with a game and its avatar. This interaction also shapes our interpretation of the fictional material. In cosplay, a similar thing happens. Players identify in multiple ways with the characters they portray. Some relations may be very personal while others more general (perhaps based on the outfit, the trope of character). What we see is that the identity of the fictional character rubs off on the identity of the player. The values or features of a character are projected onto the player by the spectators and player him- or herself. In turn, the interpretation of the narrative changes for the same group because of the cosplay, which can be seen as a performance that enriches the existing story or story world.

[5.4]   Thus, when we speak of identity and identification in cosplay, we speak of two things. On the one hand, players actualize a narrative and its meaning; on the other hand, they actualize their own identities. To put it bluntly, by stating that a narrative or character is related to me—that I can identify with this particular story or person—I make a statement about myself. There is transformative potential in this ability to express who we are through fiction. As Butler says, "I think we need to pursue the moments of degrounding, when we're standing in two different places at once; or we don't know exactly where we're standing; or when we've produced an aesthetic practice that shakes the ground. That's where resistance to recuperation happens. It's like a breaking through to a new set of paradigms" (Segal and Osborne 1993). These moments of degrounding or indeterminacy are exactly what cosplay facilitates for its subjects.

[5.5]   In fandom, a sense of identity is grounded on aesthetic practices, like cosplay. I have already explained that in Butler's theory identity is seen as performative and involuntary. Subversion becomes a slippery process because the subject is always subjected to social forces. However, if we read *Bodies That Matter* (1993) closely, we see that Butler provides a small space for the individual subject. She does this by exploring identification from a psychoanalytical angle, an exploration that relies on imagination and desire. "Identifications belong to the imaginary; they are phantasmatic efforts of alignment, loyalty, ambiguous and cross-corporal cohabitation…Identifications are never fully and finally made; they are incessantly reconstituted and, as such, are subject to the volatile logic of iterability" (1993, 105). Although identification is subjected to "iterability" or citation of existing discourses, it offers more possibilities for envisioning the self and offering resistance to the dominant discourse. This emphasis on the imaginary might also account for Butler's notion that subversion can best be located in aesthetic practices.

[5.6]   Even though Butler's theory is deterministic, she still manages to create a certain space for the subject to act in. Creative practices that can widen the range of our performativity allow us to articulate our identity. Fans explicitly use fiction to do so. Their aesthetic practices support the insight that Segal and Osborne as well as Butler already had: that within the space of imagination, we can constitute a complex identity play. Here, cultural norms are not recited or imitated but rather appropriated in innovative ways through narratives. Cosplay can be seen as an imitation or recitation that is based on fiction that subjects explicitly enact. It is within these spaces between reality and fiction, and among these pluralities of meanings attached to a text, that subjects experiment with who they can be.

6. Conclusion

[6.1]   In the previous sections, we have seen that fan costuming is a highly diverse activity. The essence of the activity lies in showing appreciation for a character and a text, as well as expressing one's self. Cosplay can take place in different contexts, but in all cases, it constitutes a relation between the character and the player. These two aspects are at the heart of cosplay, and they sometimes conflict. After all, cosplayers identify with the material differently. Their motivations to create and wear a certain costume therefore vary as well. For instance, numerous fans choose a character to play on the basis of the character's design rather than personality. Similarly, fans sometimes move toward very creative, individual versions of characters that may no longer be seen as derivative costumes.

[6.2]   Cosplay makes the ambiguous relation between the fictional and actual explicit. It is especially interesting as a fan practice within spaces between the player and the character, the actual and the fictional. Cosplay does not just fictionalize everyday life and give it an aesthetic dimension; it also shows how the fictional shapes the actual. Ultimately, cosplay is a vital example of how identity is constructed. Fans construct their own identity by associating themselves with fictional characters and embodying them. Cosplay emphasizes that the self not only narrates fiction but is partly fictional as well. It is through interaction with stories that we can imagine and perform ourselves.

7. Acknowledgments

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Theory

Taking a bite out of *Buffy:* Carnivalesque play and resistance in fan fiction

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[0.1]   *Abstract*—Popular culture provides a vital point of entry to examine discourses of hegemony and resistance at work within the growing culture of fandom. Drawing from epistemologies of feminism and poststructuralism, we deconstruct how fans read, co-construct, apply, and reenvision texts as they navigate societal notions of gender in their own constructions of subjectivity. We discuss subversive examples of sexuality and gender found in American popular culture, particularly the portrayal of femininity in the character of Faith, the bad girl from *Buffy the Vampire Slayer.* Such examples are important because they impart crucial hegemonic lessons that may then be played out in everyday life. By focusing on the third season of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer,* we examine the discourses of risk at play within the source text, fan sites, and online fan fiction. Bakhtin's ideas of carnival drive much of fan fiction, and Foucault's analysis of power relations as well as Butler's theories of performativity contribute to play that affords dynamic, critical perspectives with which to interrogate social metanarratives and their impact on the subject.

1. Introduction

[1.1]   From its premiere in the 1990s to its spin-off, *Angel* (1999–2004), a myriad of books, countless fan sites, and the recent—and hugely popular—release of season 8 in comic book form, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997–2003) has carved out a special niche in fan culture. It's true: there is nothing new about the epic and age-old battle between good and evil, or even our fascination with vampires, and yes, stories have always been used to establish and promote social values such as heroism and courage. But the ways the series and its fans take up discourses of play and resistance piqued

the interest of fans and scholars alike more than a decade ago, and that interest has not vanished in a puff of dust like the vampires who appear before the opening credits. In fact, the dynamism of the Buffyverse reflects the ways fandom, or the community of devoted fans, has taken on a new vibrancy. Instead of simply absorbing the banter, sexuality, angst, and play of the series, fans produce their own texts, reenvisionings, and interpretations, and their commitment supports both official and fannish continuations of the story line that have extended long past the television finale. Through online sites, fans can make their pleasure or displeasure known instantaneously, and—through sheer numbers and intensity—they can (and do) demand responses from the entertainment industry. In the medium of fan fiction, fans can play with their favorite characters and stories, create or reenvision scenarios, and take ownership of their favorite texts in a new way.

[1.2]   But which texts attract loyal, vocal fans? With their exotic settings, heroic adventures, and magical escapes from mundane life, fantasies like *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* draw and maintain thriving fandoms (Black 2008; Gwenllian Jones 2002; Thomas 2007). Another reason fans deemed this series a "chosen one" lies in its humorous and playful approach to complex issues like heroism, evil, loyalty, corruption, and romance. The series sparkled with a light, witty language of its own: not only does a witty exchange accompany each fight scene, but the slayer chosen to fight the forces of evil and the misfit group of scholars, witches, and friends around her are dubbed the "Scooby Gang" (Adams 2003; Blasingame 2006). Nothing, not even the apocalypse, should be taken too seriously, after all. Between the approachable heroes and their bouncing dialogue and the sweeping, epic scale of the series, which inevitably leads to gaps in the story line, the series invites fans to explore and create in dynamic, dialogic ways. As fans write and reenvision such stories, they simultaneously recognize and refute the hegemonic notions fixed or examined in texts. Fans write out their thinking about issues the series raises: from the premise that a young girl can save humanity to the notion that family is defined by love and loyalty rather than birth, fans engage with these stories purposefully and deeply. The portrayal of gender and sexuality takes a special precedence for fans; decades after the feminist movement began in earnest, fans continue to wrestle with hegemonic and resistant notions of femininity in complex, often contradictory ways. Characters like Buffy, Faith, Drusilla, Tara, and Willow highlight very different notions and aspects of femininity. Society might define a "good girl" in a hegemonic, traditional way, but the lines between fandoms and mainstream social discourses can blur, and these fan spaces often exhibit features of both defiance and hegemony, and online as elsewhere, there is the constant navigation between self and other.

[1.3]   Rather than seeking to concretize the phenomena of fandom or fan fiction, this study explores ways in which the discourses of fan fiction seek to open up spaces to

play, to resist conventional notions, and to foster ever-fleeting glimpses of carnival (Bakhtin 1984). Hence, when *Buffy* fans take up their favorite characters and envision new scenarios and possibilities, they engage in a playful, affectionate creativity. Fan fiction sites are far from intellectual or social utopias, however. Even as some scholars and participants hail virtual communities as free, democratic spaces for exploration (Gwenllian Jones 2002; Isaksson 2010; Jenkins 2006; Thomas 2007), others recognize that these sites can serve hegemonic, domestic purposes as well (Scodari 2003; Bury 2005; Stern 2008). In fact, fan fiction is a complex phenomenon, and, as Hills (2002) pointed out, fans consume, produce, and reinvent texts communally. It is intriguing to consider the motivations, possibilities, tensions, and limitations some fan fiction writers encounter.

2. Fans, texts, and an emerging field

[2.1]   Simply put, fan fiction is fiction written about characters or set in a world previously created by somebody else (Kustritz 2003; Blasingame 2006; Busse and Hellekson 2006; Lawrence and Schraefel 2006; Thomas 2007; Black 2008; Cherland 2008). The relationships between fan fictions and their source texts are anything but simple; they converge, overlap, and contradict one another in vibrant, sometimes contentious ways. Busse and Hellekson (2006) explained in considering pieces of fan fictions, or fan fics, it is helpful to separate elements of "*canon,* the events presented in the media source that provide the universe, setting, and characters, and *fanon,* the events created by the fan community in a particular fandom and repeated pervasively throughout the fantext" (9). In other words, fan communities develop their own alternate universes, which in turn greatly alter the relationships or events as depicted in the original work. For example, some Web communities are built around the notion of a character crossing over from one story to another; so Gandalf the Grey might help train Buffy the Vampire Slayer. While such obvious examples of fanon might be easily identified, there are often questions of what is canon and what is not. Within the Buffyverse, for example, some fans stalwartly insist that Buffy "should" end up with Angel or Spike—the fans' rivalry stems from the show's complex messages; while such fics do build on canonical relationships, they are extended farther than the series ventured.

[2.2]   Within the vibrancy and dynamism of fanon, we find the interplay between fans' connections to source texts and the deployment of both hegemonic and resistant discourses. As Blasingame (2006) acknowledged, fans' perceptions can be insightful: "Even if it is non-canonical, fan fiction could be seen as a way to illuminate the human experience." For example, when fans soften the violent, sexual edges of popular characters such as *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*'s Faith, this demonstrates the influence of hegemonic notions such as the redemption of the "bad girl" that continues to shape

notions of acceptable femininity. Busse (2002) pointed out the complex negotiations at work in fan fics: "Fanfic writers are neither a feminist version of scribbling ladies nor wanton pornographers but women who attempt to negotiate different roles and demands in their lives—both *within* the fiction and in the process of its production" (216). At the same time, many fans seize upon the escape from mundane domesticity that fantasy source texts and their canon offer, and some of these writers alter the original story line in dramatic ways that challenge authorial intent while others write slash or femslash—romances that delve into male or female homosexual relationships, respectively. Such playful, varied interpretations speak to ways in which fans, especially fan fiction writers, resist and trouble conventional mores and discourses.

3. Power, socialization, and performing the carnivalesque dance

[3.1]   Foucault (1986) sought to illustrate that affinity spaces, places where like-minded enthusiasts gather to share ideas and support communities with similar interests, are not simply utopian, egalitarian spaces. Instead, these spaces mirror mainstream society and engage in its practices and discourses. Just as the language of the justice system creates and sustains material effects like laws, jails, careers, and punishments (Foucault 1990), the discourses that circulate within fan fiction shape its communities. In fan fiction, there are hierarchies and power relations that oversee and control the sorts of interactions community members share, and certain ideologies, discourses, and fictions are rewarded while others are disciplined. In some cases, fans set up sites specifically designed to celebrate specific pairings or content. Laudatory reviews, ongoing suggestions, or derogatory "flames" not only shape the publication and development of individual fan fictions, but also shape writing experience and the norms and expectations of any given virtual community. These complex relationships shape fan fiction communities and the subjects who engage with them in a variety of ways.

[3.2]   As they take on the roles of producers, consumers, and experts, fans challenge many ideas related to power, submission, gender, and sexuality, but they take up such loaded notions with a playful sense of joie de vivre. Bakhtin's (1986) notions of carnival, like Derrida's of play, hinge on the idea of minute spaces of freedom and resistance existing within larger, often restrictive hierarchies and power relations. Existing social structures such as gender roles or a culture of consumerism serve as a springboard: when fools become kings, revelers freely exchange gender and class, and so fan sites can become spaces for a sort of cybercarnival. Such play is not accidental; instead, it consciously interrogates the normal: Derrida (1978) explained play itself as a sort of borderland between what is accepted and normalized and the elements that challenge it. Put another way, to engage in carnival is not to set up any sort of binary but to interrogate and blur those that already exist. This ability to play, the desire to

seek out or create tiny spaces for questioning and resistance, keeps discourses—and people—vital and fluid, always already in motion.

[3.3]   There are numerous ways fan fiction and fan communities channel some of the energy and possibilities inherent in carnivalesque play. The fluid, interactive nature of fan fiction writing exhibits features of Bakhtin's (1986) description of carnival, the festive period when orthodoxy and hierarchy are questioned and inverted. While fan fiction might not initially seem subversive, there are certainly ways in which it challenges authoritarian forces. In this sense, there are ways fan fiction manifests the energy and chaos of Bakhtinian carnival. Through slash pairings, an interweaving of vampirism and sexuality, and innuendo-laden language, fans push against mainstream discourses. For instance, fan fics such as Hayley128's "The Meaning of Dreams" can rewrite key aspects of the original texts and reenvision the characters in provocative ways. This particular fic, based on the third season of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer,* changes the story line by portraying Faith as noble and virtuous rather than as a traitor, and Buffy and Faith are presented as a romantic couple in this sensual passage:

> [3.4]   Kissing led to hands moving as Faith pulled Buffy more on top of her. She knew she should tell her she needed to get ready and start packing but she was too caught up in the moment. Faith knew her body so well, enough that she knew just how to touch her to keep her from stopping what they were doing.

[3.5]   Fan fiction opens a space for play as fans claim ownership and authority over a given fandom. As they simultaneously produce and consume texts, fan fiction writers defy the production/consumption binary; as they (re)envision characters' sexuality or take up societal notions like the "good girl" or "bad girl," fans make it clear that their opinions are of social significance, and when they choose to resist hegemonic ideals surrounding sex or femininity, their play has a serious purpose. Lensmire (2000) explained Bakhtin labeled this "antiofficial current in the Carnival sea" *profanation* because it finds expression in heresies, parodies, and obscenities that "sound in the Carnival square" (11). These discourses of risk, which challenge the status quo, often center on issues surrounding the body, gender, and power. Fan fiction writers use the medium to overturn hierarchical structures such as publishers, studios, or even "right" ways of writing; they also infuse their fics with sexuality and point to ways physicality, sex, and power affect them so that authority figures—be they professionals or industry moguls—begin to wonder just how "safe" such a "playful" medium can be.

[3.6]   As fans perform and write from the relative anonymity of their computers, fan sites can take on the mysterious, evocative air of a masquerade; like dancers behind elegant Venetian masks, fans can assume identities and roles that have little to do

with their workaday lives. But as play replaces order, it is not simply a time for relaxation; it is a time for social critique. Nothing is static, and the only stable variable is the unsettling of texts. While traditional carnivals feature elements such as cross-dressing or the use of spoons and pots for scepters and crowns, fan fiction writers build worlds of alterity and fluidity through language itself (Green and Guinery 2004; Thomas 2006). This process of reenvisioning the world around them allows fans to resist and deconstruct elements of their everyday lives.

[3.7]   The resistance of carnival is intricately and inevitably linked to the restrictive structures of society itself; in this sense, it functions as a sort of pressure release valve. Even though carnival offers glimpses of anarchy and revolution, the temporary relief its celebrants find can enable—or constrain—them to subscribe to the existing order once the holiday has passed. In other words, the bacchanalia of Mardi Gras would be meaningless and impossible apart from the austerity of Lent; but even as Ash Wednesday dawns and official, sanctioned discourses of state and religion once again seem pervasive, the questions and critiques of carnival echo in significant ways. That is why the voices of authority, be they government or religious agents, have sought to restrain and curb carnival's influence throughout the ages. As McWilliam (2000, 168) puts it, "Carnival in the feudal order of things was a temporal space in which it became possible to indulge the appetites and at the same time parody the practices of officialdom." There is always something subversive, critical, and dangerous about carnival, and the frivolity of carnival can lead to very real consequences. The fear about carnival, about play, is that it might get out of hand, that its participants will refuse to quietly adhere to the hegemonic discourses that provide the impetus—and tightly limited space—for carnival's frivolity.

4. Hegemony and resistance

[4.1]   By adding to or changing the story lines of existing texts, fan fiction writers challenge established views of literature permeated in mainstream society. First, they challenge the idea that authors create, own, and control their work exclusively. This notion of authorial omnipotence is a relatively recent phenomenon. Until the 18th century, there were no legal licensures or copyright acknowledgments at all, and the claim an author could, or should, control her intellectual property was simply unheard of (Pugh 2005, 15). Even as authors become increasingly possessive of their work and its use, readers continue to clamor for more of, and more from, the texts they encounter. Instead of allowing authors to control or experts to explain the texts, fan fiction writers join in the conversation directly. They position themselves as writers, not as imitators, and they develop followings and fans of their own (Thomas 2007; Black 2008). In other words, these fans upturn the writer-producer/reader-consumer dichotomy persuasive in much of the current atmosphere surrounding texts.

[4.2]   Even as some fans become increasingly critical of the status quo of consumer culture by publicly challenging producers and story lines (Keft-Kennedy 2008), there can be little doubt that fans likewise partake in and support the commercial franchises that spring from popular novels, television series, and movies. This convergence leads to conflict and uneasy relationships between the entertainment industry and its consumer base: while entertained audiences are fine and profitable, many writers and producers are uncomfortable with fans who are too vocal, too demanding, too critical, and too possessive (Jenkins 2006). In other words, the studios, the industrial Powers That Be might encourage the commercial benefits and free publicity associated with fandom, but they worry this enthusiasm, this play and resulting cybercarnival, might go too far. What if enthusiastic fans were to undermine the industry that first inspired them? In fact, fan culture supports an oddly affectionate critical stance in which they critique the producers and executives who seek to control these stories even as they proclaim loyalty and emotional investment to the characters and stories themselves. And, unlike traditional sites of carnival, fan sites are not bound by the dates of a specific festival. At the same time, even though fans express vocal resistance to attempts among producers or authors to control the discourse completely, their allegiance to source texts means they cannot simply tear themselves away from the industry, so there is an inevitable entrenchment within the hegemonic, commercial discourses.

[4.3]   The discourses of fan fiction writers and communities function in diverse, multifaceted ways. Drawing from Bakhtin's emphasis on the liberation of carnival and Foucault's focus on normalizing discourses that work to control populations, McWilliam (2000) explains that discourses of risk, which interrogate uncomfortable topics such as power, gender, and sexuality, are ways of resisting or subverting normalizing, unitary forces: "Discourses of risk do not arise from appeals to pluralism of the 'let-all-voices-speak' kind, nor from any other appeal to authenticity—or indeed, to popular fiction. They protrude to unsettle and disorder" (170). In other words, when fan fiction writers take up discourses of risk, they express dissatisfaction with mainstream ideologies and conventions and essentially resist the thinkings found in the original text. In thinking about fan fiction based on *Buffy the Vampire Slayer,* these discourses of risk take many forms: while some fans might resist conventional notions of text ownership, others might highlight latent sexual elements within the series, and still others work to (re)define characters like Buffy or Faith in accordance with their own—sometimes conflicted—notions of femininity.

[4.4]   While such resistance is possible, it is far from inevitable. In fact, many fan fiction sites actively promote hegemonic discourses, which support conventional notions of the primacy of authorial intent and reenforce stereotypical notions of gender and power (Scodari 2003; Currie, Kelly, and Pomerantz 2006). In short, if a fan fiction

writer produces a work that offends the sensibilities of the community or its leaders, that piece will not be published, and there will be pressure for the writer to either conform to the community's ideologies or go elsewhere. Since this is the case, one of the most intriguing queries surrounding fan fiction is that of resistance. Even as some fan communities openly challenge widespread societal discourses regarding texts, gender, sexuality, and power, some writers consciously transgress the conventions within more canonical communities. With these issues in mind, it seems that some fans are more willing than others to experiment with ideologically loaded, risky discourses.

5. Embodying discourses of risk

[5.1]   In numerous ways, living in virtual worlds carries with it some of the same complexities and dangers as other realities. Foucault (1990) pointed out multiple discourses can converge within the same discursive system, so competing ideas and ideologies are far from rare. Discourses related to class, sexuality, religion, politics, and gender entwine in countless ways. In examining some of the resistance and hegemony at play within fan fiction, bodies, gender, and power contribute to these discourses of vulnerability and risk. As fan fiction writers tease out these issues, they not only craft stories, but also craft and perform themselves in the process (Bakhtin 1986; Butler 1990; Finders 1997; McWilliam 2000; Thomas 2007). While fan fiction draws from and creates numerous discourses, it incorporates and hones several carnivalesque discourses of risk that trouble the status quo. These include discourses of the body, gender, and power.

[5.2]   These difficult navigations demonstrate Foucault's (1990) notions of power: these various groups are inextricably linked, and while professional authors and industry producers might struggle as to who controls a story, fans also clamor for ownership and influence. Whedon and his writers promoted, and continue to foster, a sense of dialogue and openness to fan interpretations (Adams 2003; Busse 2002). While some argue that Faith's producers vilify and then subjugate Faith along hegemonic notions of femininity, the nature of Whedon's relationship to the fan base sanctions writers to take up her story in a variety of ways (Keft-Kennedy 2008; Isaksson 2010). In this instance, it is clear to see that power ripples along both official and unofficial channels because "where there is power, there is resistance, and yet, or rather consequently, this resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power" (Foucault 1990, 95).

[5.3]   The textured interplays of power relations are not limited to conflicts between fans and the industry. Fandom is anything but monolithic or unified. In thinking about ways in which online communities encourage dialogue among various kinds of fans,

Thomas (2007, 106) pointed out the dynamics of online communities offer "a unique opportunity to reconfigure and transform identities, so much that all the usual markers of identity (age, gender, race class) can be disrupted." Fans can interact with one another without the constraints that manifest themselves in other social environments (Jenkins 2006; Scodari 2003; Gwenllian Jones 2002). Ideally, then, people from diverse socioeconomic groups, races, and ideological affiliations are drawn together because of a common interest, and within this space, "carnival participants take up new relations with the world around them, but also with their world" (Lensmire 2000, 10).

[5.4]   Are such relationships so free and idyllic, though? Because fans are seeking to develop themselves as subjects, they consciously choose which aspects of themselves to reveal; gender, class, and social roles are especially fluid online. One question prompting this study was one of subjectivity. Butler's (1990) notion of performativity takes up the idea we perform different aspects of the self, and these performances, these enactments, are based both on the way individual's wish to see themselves and the ways they wish to be perceived by others. Butler also discussed the idea of parody: *"In imitating gender, drag implicitly reveals the imitative structure of gender itself—as well as its contingency"* (Butler 1990, 187; italics in original). Fans writings about gender can be parodic when they switch gender roles and performances, making the presentation of gender more about performance and politics.

[5.5]   In thinking about fans' writing as performance, Coppa (2006) urged theorists to compare fan fiction with theater: both rely on the audience's extratextual knowledge, and "far from being a sacred text, a play's script is more like a blueprint for a production—a thing used to make another thing" (237). No theatrical experience can be replicated from one performance to the next, and each actor can choose how closely to follow the script or when to improvise. Just as audiences can encourage playwrights to change elements of the drama before the next performance, bloggers can either praise or flame pieces since fan fictions are generally posted in installments. Audience, then, is a crucial aspect of this complex process. As fan fiction writers respond to the discourses around them, they choose to accept, reject, or trouble various ideals of femininity and masculinity, attractiveness, romance and sexuality, class and power. Just as carnival revelers critique and mock the social order without the risk of condemnation or punishment, fan fiction writers can twist and reshape characters, themes, and worlds without completely upturning their normal lives (Scodari 2003). Likewise, fan fiction writing can be envisioned as "an actualization of latent textual elements" (Gwenllian Jones 2002, 82), in which case fans find an outlet for their own explorations and creativity. But while fan fiction writing provides discourses that can help participants gain a new, richer perspective on socially constructed worlds, there are underlying expectations and assumptions within these

fan communities regarding which subject positions and ideologies are embraced and which are rejected. Thus, the fan spaces themselves serve to regulate subjects and discourses; fan fiction writers, like all performers, play for their specific audiences.

[5.6]   In envisioning fan fiction writers as carnivalesque revelers, we find that physicality and sexuality take on numerous dimensions. Chat rooms, Web sites, blogs, and portals have become contested spaces in the long-running Enlightenment notion of the mind/body binary. After all, if any space can be described as purely intellectual, wouldn't it be found online? Bury (2005) pointed out how initially scholars envisioned the Internet as an egalitarian space where gender, class, race, and other markers would be invisible; in other words, it would be a space where thoughts would reign supreme, where people would benefit from a process of "disembodiment" (4). While Descartes would have lauded such a vision as the rational triumph of the intellect, Butler (1990) warned us "the ontological distinction between soul (consciousness, mind) and body invariably supports relations of political and psychic subordination and hierarchy" (12). It can come as no surprise, then, that the lived experience of people online has been far messier, tangled, and complex. Thomas (2007) explained the visual, interactive nature of the Web provides "a site for the cultural production of a new type of body" (3). This "new type of body" encountered in fan fiction, which is largely written and developed by adolescent girls, draws from particular discourses of femininity, "some of which conform to Western ideals of beauty and girlhood; others reflect notions of resistance and rebellion" (Thomas 2007, 3). The fans who gain and wield power online are those who use and manipulate words, images, and technology to create bodies and selves through writing. As fan fiction writers construct themselves and one another, the body is always part of the discourse. While fan fiction allows writers the power to author an identity (Bakhtin 1981) and to examine their own notions of romance, physicality, and sexuality, it does not promise an easy journey; fans might find themselves flamed off a site because of negative reviews, their work might not even be published at all, or they could simply find themselves asking a series of questions with no easy answers.

6. Taking a bite out of *Buffy*

[6.1]   After examining some of the ways in which fan fiction writers engage in discourses of gender and the body in a general way, examining a particular instance of hegemony and risk at work can be especially useful. From its debut in 1997, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* enjoyed enormous fan support and continues to spark discussion and writing online and, increasingly, in the academy (Scholzman 2000; Buttsworth 2002; Isaksson 2010; Tomlinson 2004). While the notion of an adolescent female who is hailed as "the Chosen One" and destined to slay vampires, demons, and other dark, supernatural creatures seems to disrupt many of our society's notions of docile

femininity, the show's protagonist, Buffy Summers, exhibits discipline, restraint, obedience, and selfless devotion to others—even though such dedication actually forces her to make the ultimate sacrifice (Tomlinson 2004). But while Buffy remains a contradiction of sorts, the character of Faith, a fellow slayer who debuts in the third season of the series, is clearly portrayed as the bad girl, as the rough-and-tumble figure who actually enjoys fighting, flaunts her physical strength, and openly places herself outside of society's conventions. While numerous scholars, such as Tjardes (2003), argue that Faith's sensuality adds to the resistant discourses of the series, there are also hegemonic elements that appear as fans juxtapose the two slayers. Buffy, the blonde, middle-class girl who makes her home in Sunnydale, California, is surrounded by friends and allies who encourage her altruistic, heroic nature. But Faith, the working-class, dark-haired daughter of an abusive alcoholic, embodies the swagger, independence, and isolation of a runaway from the cold streets of Boston. As the series unfolds, viewers watch as the rebellious Faith becomes a murderer, betrays Buffy and their shared altruistic calling, and spirals toward decadence and violence. Faith's resentment of Buffy's caring mother, devoted watcher, loyal friends, and loving boyfriend comes to a head when she attempts to torture and kill her; Faith's taunting seethes with bitterness: "You know, I come to Sunnydale. I'm the Slayer. I do my job kicking ass better than anyone. What do I hear about everywhere I go? Buffy. So I slay, I behave, I do the good little girl routine. And who's everybody thank? Buffy" (3.51 "Enemies"). Later, the show's writers bring the fallen slayer back into the fold: through a series of painful, epic events including a coma, exchanging bodies with the idealized Buffy, and serving jail time for her crimes, Faith becomes a redemptive, nuanced figure whose complicated, contradictory nature fascinates fans.

[6.2]   Among the ways fans engage in carnivalesque play is their fascination with overt, explicit sexuality. For all sorts of reasons, Faith, the "bad girl," becomes a site of contestation and fascination. Hero and traitor, savior and seductress, Faith blurs the lines and seems to walk a borderland between darkness and light. The series highlighted her nonnormative, aggressive sensuality; fans are drawn to her rebellious, openly sexual nature. In one particularly memorable episode, as she seduced Xander, a member of Buffy's inner circle, she asked if he wanted "vanilla or kinks" as she pushed him onto the bed (3.15 "Consequences"). She has experienced both worlds, sexually and otherwise, and can navigate them easily, but on the series, her audacious behavior is censured and eventually domesticated. Still, fans are drawn to the ways Faith challenges traditional notions of femininity. Isaksson (2010, 8) explained, "On superficial levels kinky and violent sex is marked as unhealthy in the canon. At the same time, there is an insistence on portraying attire and scenes associated with kinks in visually pleasurable, or at least ambiguous, ways." Within the original series, Faith is a dark antiheroine, both saint and sinner. Fans seize upon this ambiguity, and the

ways they portray and interpret Faith's complexities speak to the tension between hegemonic and resistant discourses of femininity that collide and conflate online.

[6.3]   Upon perusing Faith-centered fan fictions on sites including FanFiction.net, Angelfire.com, BuffynFaith.net, and TTHfanfic.org (Twisting the Hellmouth), it becomes apparent that fans are fascinated by Faith's unhappy childhood and her repentant, restrained manifestation in the show's final season. The specific examples that follow illustrate fans wrestling with discourses of class, sexuality, and femininity as they accept, resist, and produce alternate versions of season 3. While a number of stories on mainstream sites like FanFiction.net feature romantic pairings with Xander, Wesley, Giles, and Buffy, they feature a softer, gentler Faith, and very few stories focus on Faith's wilder, more rebellious phases.

[6.4]   By examining Faith's issue-laden childhood where she grew up in a poor Boston neighborhood with an alcoholic single mother, these fans seem eager to explain or justify Faith's misbehavior as a product of her class and background. After all, a girl who is "raised right" would never use sexuality or violence, and she certainly would not exploit others in order to revel in her own sense of power. When her past is mentioned, it is with regret and grief. In Jinxgirl's fic "Anymore" (2010a), for example, not only are we reminded of Faith's abusive childhood, but we see her reaction to her mother's death:

> [6.5]   In that moment as Faith stared without seeing at her mother's dead form, she could not see her drunken, her lips twisted into a sneer, her eyes glittering with malice. She could not see her upraised fist, swinging in an arch into her face, could not hear her voice raising as she told her that she was worthless, that she wished that she had never been born. What came to her mind was her mother's smile as she reached to gently tuck her hair behind her ear, the genuine tenderness in her voice as she called Faith her Firecracker.

[6.6]   Such poignant speculations about Faith's childhood, including allegations of physical and sexual abuse, abject poverty, and shattering grief, serve a number of purposes. On the one hand, they celebrate Faith's strength and experience and establish her as a survivor. On the other, they seek to justify or excuse her "bad girl" persona: with such a dark history, how could she be the radiant, pure hero that Buffy is? Even amid grief, though, we can see traces of a carnivalesque buoyancy, of hope and of play. Whether as ally or enemy, heroine or antiheroine, Faith proves herself to be anything but worthless; she is always a force to be reckoned with. And anyone with a passing knowledge of the series, much less a die-hard fan, can't help but smile at her mother's endearment—even as a child, Faith was a firecracker. Few monikers could be as apt.

[6.7]   There are also sites like BuffynFaith.net that focus on the wilder, more sexual side of Faith. Many of these fall into the realm of femslash, stories that revolve around a female romantic couple (Gwenllian Jones 2002; Isaksson 2010). Not only do fan fiction writers revel in sexuality through these fics, but they also overturn hegemonic discourses of femininity by pairing two powerful, desirable women. On these sites, we often see Faith take a dominant role as she and Buffy pursue romance; many of these fics depict Buffy as reluctant to engage in a lesbian relationship, while Faith—often aggressively—takes the lead. "The Reckoning," for example, is a fic that opens with Faith throwing out brazen entendres that eventually lead to a sexual relationship:

> [6.8]   "Disappointed that a non-fat yogurt ain't gonna sate those cravings ya got?" Faith winked as she ran a little to get away from Buffy before the punch to her shoulder came. "Just sayin' how it is, B! And you should know by now there's plenty of other ways to get rid of that…" She trailed off and paused for a moment as Buffy glared at her. "Frustration," she finished with a laugh and took off running as Buffy came after her. (Invalid-reality 2011)

[6.9]   Faith, who cares far less what others think than Buffy, the "good girl," has no hesitation in satisfying those cravings that "a non-fat yogurt ain't gonna sate." When Faith crosses into kink, she owns her desires in bold ways, and some fans seem to admire such openness. In a society where slash itself disrupts conventional views of femininity, Faith's frank sexuality invites fans to take part in a kind of carnival where pleasure is anything but taboo.

[6.10]   Even within the racy discourses of slash, which offer an alternative to mainstream notions of domesticity and seem to embrace the fantasy and unconventional content of stories built on magic and myth (Gwenllian Jones 2002), fans seem conflicted about the Faith/Buffy relationship. While these fics seize on latent tension within the original series and celebrate the coming together of two powerful women, there seems to be a need to explain away the relationship and to justify its existence. In Dylan's "The Into Series" (2010), which focuses on the evolution of a romance between Faith and Buffy, we see that the undeniable, even tangible bond between slayers virtually compels the relationship, and Buffy feels the need to rely on such justification: "'I can feel what you're feeling, Faith,' Buffy says, making sure her voice is low and quiet. 'I don't know what I think of it, or exactly what it means, but I feel it.'" This connection, this empathy, provides a kind of safety net to fans who would explore and examine such relationships even as they find themselves uncomfortable or fear others' reactions. In other words, even fans who would resist hegemonic notions of femininity or sexuality can find themselves compelled to defend or soften such a choice.

[6.11]   Just as some fans seek to tone down or explain away Faith's openly sexual nature, many of the angst-ridden and romantic fan fictions that center around Faith tend to portray her as vulnerable, fragile, and desperate for acceptance. Many fans portray her as the outcast who desperately yearns for a father figure, the antiheroine who craves her own destruction, or the girl who desperately wants someone to see beneath the tough facade. The fic "Human Weakness" (Jinxgirl 2010b), for example, traces her descent into murder and betrayal: "She wanted Buffy to hurt, to suffer, to feel the pain and loss that Faith always had harbored in her own heart. She wanted her to finally have to acknowledge her, to have to acknowledge that Faith meant something to her, if only as an object of hatred." This desire to matter, to connect—at any cost—is a character trait that fans seize upon in their writing. But while this is certainly one facet of her story's arc (Tomlinson 2004), pieces that explore possible romantic relationships for this former rebel tend to emphasize her need for love and downplay her strength and courage.

[6.12]   Faith's effort to attain redemption and wholeness resonate with fans, but few of them envision her settling down to life in suburbia. In Apckrfan's 2007 fic "I Need a Minute of Play," we see a pairing between Faith and the antihero Spike, and we see their growing emotional closeness. Spike reflects on her evolution: "No one gave her credit for working as hard as she did. Doing penance was a terrible thing. Or wonderful, depending on how you looked at it." Even as the writer explores Faith's angst over her past, the interplay with sex, violence, and intimacy are omnipresent: after returning from a drag show, Faith suggests that Spike feed as they have sex. After all, if blood and sex are both turn-ons, "put the two together and I bet we'd be in for a wicked good time." This fleshy, steamy, playful writing opens up spaces to fantasize, explore, and disrupt mainstream notions.

[6.13]   Even though fans often focus on Faith's overt sexuality, rebellious attitude, and defiant femininity, they seem to be more comfortable exploring issues that might have contributed to Faith's fall or celebrating her redemption—the notion of a dark slayer who relishes the raw physicality of the fight often proves too murky. As Foucault said, "What I wanted to try to show was how the subject constituted itself, in one specific form or another, as a mad or a healthy subject, as a delinquent subject, through certain practices that were also games of truth, practices of power, and so on" (1997, 290). In this case, the producers originally constituted Faith; then the viewers, in the form of fan fiction writers, took over and reconstituted her in their own stories. As fans engage in the play of carnival, they probe societal notions of femininity and virtue; they even work to push and reshape those boundaries. Yet they refrain from outright rebellion; their irreverence is confined to a particular space. Still, the potential of carnival should not be dismissed: fans exerted their power over the stories they viewed on television and rewrote them to fit into their own truths. In other words,

when Faith is categorized as a psychotic bitch or as a tormented victim of abuse, various strategies of dismissal and of power are deployed.

[6.14]   Just as the show's producers introduce Faith as a complex, tortured figure who revels in bitchiness and transform her into a more docile, responsible caregiver in later seasons, fan fiction writers also reinvent and reenvision her character with each click of the mouse. The agency of the fan fiction writers is demonstrated as they recreate Faith over and over. "That the subject is that which must be constituted again and again implies that it is open to formations that are not fully constrained in advance" (Butler 1995, 135). The producers created Faith as a binary to Buffy, and then the fan fiction writers took over her character in their writings and reconstructed her into their idea of an aggressive, sexualized, predatory, and practically vampirelike femininity.

7. Conclusion

[7.1]   The entertainment garnered by the writing and telling of these new stories reflects Bahktin's thoughts: "Our speech, that is, all our utterances (including creative works), is filled with others' words, varying degrees of otherness or varying degrees of 'our-own-ness,' varying degrees of awareness and detachment. These words of others carry with them their own expression, their own evaluative tone, which we assimilate, rework, and re-accentuate" (1986, 89). Fans respond to original texts, to one another, and to the discourses that normalize and resist social issues such as power, gender, and sexuality. To put it another way, the creative responses fan fiction writers produce to characters like Faith not only reflect an awareness of the show or the official characterization, but also reflect ways in which the discourses of gender identity shape entertainment and culture and thus contribute to the construction of the subject.

[7.2]   Carnival, with its profanation and resistance, simultaneously recognizes and responds to the expectations of The Powers That Be. There is nothing simple about such irreverence, and we have seen ways in which fans perform as both "good" and "bad" girls as they explore, revel, and censure defiant female characters such as Faith. The delicate, complex interplay of hegemonic discourses of power and the discourses that would resist overly simplified notions of consumerism and textual ownership or contested constructs like sexuality and femininity will continue to garner the interest of scholars. After all, there is much to be gleaned about both hegemonic and resistant forces when we examine spaces—like fan fiction sites—where these forces collide and conflate.

8. Acknowledgments

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Praxis

"The rabid fans that take [Twilight] much too seriously": The construction and rejection of excess in Twilight antifandom

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[0.1]   *Abstract*—The group of Twilight antifans known as the Anti-Twilight Movement has constructed themselves as a safe "us" in relation to the threatening and inappropriate Other that they have defined through their characterization of "rabid" Twilight fans and antifans' "them." Fearful of a low ranking on the cultural hierarchy, they have created their own internal fan hierarchy that, according to cultural notions about the superiority of class, education, and the elite over the uneducated and the popular, as well as of the dismissability of girl culture, ensures the dominance and safety of their own affected rationality over the characterized emotional and excessive behavior of rabid Twilight fans and antifans. Part of the performance of such scholarly affectation involves appropriating discourses of academia into their literary criticism of Twilight, so as to overcome any negative connotations of excess or susceptibility to the mass media. Their often feminine-gendered constructions of rabid emotionality and irrationality, while also perhaps revealing some element of self-hatred, showcases a group of antifans attempting to assign the same policing and consequential narratives and discourses that have traditionally been assigned to fanatics by the dominant culture to certain "threatening" fans and antifans within their own community, the ultimate means of identity construction and self-preservation.

[0.2]   *Keywords*—Cultural hierarchy; Fan; Girl; Literary critique; Popular culture; Scholar

1. Introduction

[1.1]   In a 2010 online posting, Dan Haggard commented on the Twilight fan's fascinating place in popular culture: "The Twilight fan is interesting because of reports (however well substantiated) of a degree of extremism that goes beyond what is acceptable, even when considered from a perspective relative to standard fan obsession. The point here is not so much whether Twilight fans are any more extreme than standard fans, but that there is a perception that they are so." Much of the public commentary on the popular series and its intense female fans cyclically hits a high point during the release of the franchise's latest film, when Twilight fan activity is thrust most glaringly into the limelight, and this public commentary seems focused on trying to explain the "crazy" fan phenomenon to "normal" outsiders.

[1.2]   Unfortunately, these explanations generally only consist of describing the series' frenzied and excessive female fans, of reporting the decibel levels of its fangirls' screaming, and the incredibly high number of movie tickets sold. Indeed, until the recent release of the final Harry Potter film, *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows: Part 2,* on July 15, 2011, the Twilight franchise boasted top box office records for both largest opening day gross, with *New Moon* (2009), and greatest midnight ticket sales, with *Eclipse* (2011) (Finke 2011). But despite such success, the series, adapted from Stephenie Meyer's young adult novels about the romance between human

teenager Bella and vampire Edward, and the activities of its mostly female fans are still somehow seen as culturally dismissible and described, as Melissa Click (2009) points out, in terms of belittling "Victorian era gendered words like 'fever,'…'hysteria'" and "rabid." However, the realm of female fandom, and indeed antifandom, whether Twilight related or not, is much more vibrant and complex then these simplistic pop culture accounts of emotional women.

[1.3]   I am concerned here with the specifically articulated identity of one online group of Twilight antifans, the Anti-Twilight Movement (ATM) (note 1), not with Twilight itself. It will examine this group's representations of and responses to the Twilight books, fans, and antifans, as well as the ways in which such articulations interact with the dominant cultural hierarchy. The antifans of ATM have constructed on their Web site, in opposition to themselves, a rabid identity of excess and irrationality that mirrors the characterizations often seen in popular descriptions of Twilight's female fan base and which they apply to both Twilight fans and antifans, both male and female. ATM antifans have created a Web site that allows them to express and perform their main antirabid and anti-Twilight-as-literature positions by criticizing the hostile and emotional antics of rabid Twilight fans and antifans and by carrying out their own literary criticism of the Twilight novels. In so doing, ATM is perpetuating accepted cultural notions about the superiority of the reasoned, the academic, and the elite, as well as of the inferiority of the popular, the emotional, and the feminine; it does so in hopes of rendering its own antifandom safe from similar cultural censures.

2. The Anti-Twilight Movement

[2.1]   The Anti-Twilight Movement's Web site functions like the writings of the fans of cult films that Mark Jancovich (2002) discusses, similarly working to "produce a sense of subcultural identity, but also…seek[ing] to construct identities through the construction of an inauthentic Other" (306). The site also functions as the billboard of their antifan identity and is therefore meant to clearly inform every potential visitor, whether fellow Twilight antifan, devoted Twilight fan, or casual passerby, of exactly what type of antifan ATM is and precisely what type they are not (Grossberg 1992, 57). ATM's site expresses and reinforces the two core positions of its particular antifandom: first, its stance against fans or antifans who act so rabidly that they lose the ability to tolerate opinions that differ from their own or to carry out rational thought (ATM sees this as a problem particularly, though not exclusively, endemic to the popular Twilight franchise and its mostly young female fans); and second, its opposition to the claim that the Twilight saga is good literature, which it feels compelled to voice because of the popularity of the books and the uncritical devotion of its fans.

Figure 1. *Screen capture of the Home page of the Anti-Twilight Movement's Web site, showing the pages of their site and their opening Welcome message that informs any visitor of ATM's specific antifan positions. (http://theantitwilightmovement.webs.com/home.htm, 2010) [View larger image.]*

[2.2]   ATM's Welcome message establishes both of these positions right away: "We don't like Twilight. It's poorly written…and the books just don't appeal to us. But if they appeal to you, that's fine…If you're a rabid fan, you probably won't understand that this site is specifically a *critique* site full of only opinions and observations and a helluvalot of dry humor." This opening welcome to the site lays out ATM's antifan positions and sets the stage for a stance of rational tolerance toward unrabid Twilight fans and a tone of dark, sarcastic humor. The site is composed of pages that either informatively state these two positions or extensively back them up. The Home, About, Links, and FAQ pages describe ATM's specific antifandom positions, and pages like Books and Ragemail contain the group's supporting evidence against Twilight as good literature and against the rabid fans and antifans of the franchise.

[2.3]   Throughout the site, it is clear that the ATM antifans see themselves as having taken some sort of proverbial high road, or as being some of the few people associated with Twilight who are even capable of doing so. The ATM site, with its clearly qualified brand of antifandom, is meant to function as a sort of beacon for other like-minded Twilight antifans, those whom they believe will appreciate their arguments and be similarly capable of taking that high road of rationality and tolerance. ATM's belief in its own superiority permeates the site's critique of the Twilight books and of its rabid followers; this is expressly manifested in ATM antifans' own claimed logical faculties, their declared ability to overcome emotion, and their assessment and performance of appropriate, rather than rabid, behavior. This sense of superiority can specifically be seen in their professing to be performing some sort of social duty, their rejection (and labeling) of so-called immature fans and antifans, their shaming of other Twilight sites and groups that they feel act inappropriately, and their pointing out the spelling and grammatical errors of rabid Twilighters. All of these inferior-asserting descriptions inherently work to elevate ATM's own stated positions and make ATM members seem intrinsically superior to the rabids they are condemning, those who "take Twilight much too seriously" and who "can't react civilly to opposing viewpoints," as the site claims.

[2.4]   The ATM admins rhetorically address these "rabid Twitards" on their site in tones of flippancy and sarcasm, as when they mock the emotional hostility of a hate message they have received or note that the rabid fan in question misspelled "Twilight" in her hurry to insult the ATM admin. This use of deflective humor is meant to show their own mental dexterity and to reinforce their earnest attempts to prove themselves capable of objectivity and of "safely" engaging in their own Twilight antifandom. In a way, the "dark humor" of their site, as they call it, is meant to temper their hate of rabid Twilight fans and the books' popularity, somewhat like Gray's (2005) posters on the Television Without Pity Web site. By using humor, ATM can seem less hostilely emotional and less subjectively hateful than if they had directly attacked every rabid they quote on their site.
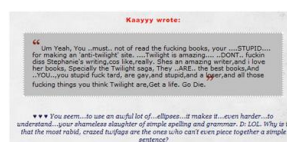

Figure 2. Screen capture of one of the rabid fan messages in ATM's Ragemail, followed by their own commentary that directly addresses the rabid in question and sarcastically critiques her writing

[2.5]   Unlike the Twilight antifans that Catherine Strong (2009) examined in the Cracked discussion forums, ATM does not communicate or function predominantly in chats and discussions, but instead articulates its specific antifan identity through the stable pages of its Web site. ATM also affiliates itself with certain anti-Twilight sites, like Twilight Really Sucks (TRS; http://twilightreallysucks.webs.com/index.shtml), which it sees as commendably similar to itself. ATM posts the list of these sites to their home page in order to facilitate the type of Twilight antifan discussion and expression of which it is a proponent and embodiment.

[2.6]   As briefly mentioned before, ATM includes Ragemail from both rabid Twilight fans and rabid Twilight antifans on its site as apparently empirical proof of what ATM claims to be the aggressive and emotionally rabid behavior of the fans and antifans who engage inappropriately, as ATM sees it, with Twilight. This Ragemail works to prove, and subsequently justifiably vilify, ATM's construction of rabids as hostile, illogical, and emotional. In these sections, ATM administrators post the hostile messages they receive from angry Twilight fans and antifans, out of context, followed by their own disciplinary commentary, retaining and criticizing all spelling and grammatical errors from the original angry texts and e-mails. However, it is important to acknowledge that this is merely ATM's characterization of rabid Twilighters and that these messages do not represent the full range of Twilight fandom, rabid or not. It is entirely possible that ATM receives messages other than this rabid Ragemail that contradict or fail to fit its portrait of the rabid fan, and that therefore ATM does not post.

Figure 3. Screen capture of the Ragemail section on the Anti-Twilight Movement's Web site. (http://theantitwilightmovement.webs.com/mailbag.htm, 2010) [View larger image.]

[2.7]   Beyond its criticism of the rabid mode of fan/antifan engagement, which is most clearly seen in the site's Ragemail sections, the other crucial aspect of ATM's particular antifan identity and Web site is its performed literary critique of the Twilight novels. In the About section of their site, ATM members explain that "our goal is to present an opinion, no matter how unpopular, and inform people that Twilight is *not* the 'best book ever written'—there *are* better books out there. We're here to protect the name of literature." They try to make it clear that they do not reject Twilight unconditionally because it is badly written, though they do quite plainly profess to not personally enjoy the books. What they hate, they claim, is the popular opinion of Twilight's literary quality. So

they have taken on this literary critique as a sort of social duty and as an affected performance of

they have taken on this literary critique as a sort of social duty and as an affected performance of scholarship that they hope will prove themselves more rational and tolerant, more educated and high class, than the emotional, uncritical rabids they condemn elsewhere on their site.

[2.8]   Under a heading marked Our Cause, ATM carefully explains that "the book *Twilight* by Stephenie Meyer has become overwhelmingly popular among the general population, teenagers especially," before offering its own assessment of the books' literary value, or supposed lack thereof. ATM justifies its claim of the Twilight saga's "poor writing" with descriptions of the novels' "shameless purple prose" and the author's "amateur style" and "elementary sentences." It cites specific paragraphs and page numbers to support allegations of Meyer's excessive modifiers and overreliance on a thesaurus. It even quotes popular yet critically acclaimed author Stephen King and one admin's own English teacher to reinforce its opinions and critique of the novels. The literary critique is not concerned with dismissing Twilight entirely or with denying its potential for providing entertainment and enjoyment to its readers. Instead, it is meant to get Twilight "recognized for what it is": a "guilty pleasure," not as the "best books ever written," which is the assessment often made of them by their uncritically rabid fans.

3. The cultural dismissal of female fans and Twilight

[3.1]   ATM is not alone in its characterization of emotional and excessive rabid young female fans and its rejection of the idea that Twilight's value consists of anything more than mere entertainment. The wildly successful Twilight films, which have so far earned more than $1.8 billion worldwide (The Numbers 2010), were adapted from the series of extremely popular novels; Meyer's fantasy romance quartet has sold more than 100 million copies worldwide (Sellers 2010). But financial success has not guaranteed positive reviews, nor has it neutralized disciplining descriptions of its female fans or validated their enjoyment of the franchise (Click 2009; Click and Aubrey 2010). Of the last-released Twilight film, *Eclipse* (2010), Roger Ebert (2010) writes that "the movies are chaste eroticism to fuel adolescent dreams," and Claudia Puig of *USA Today* (2010) remarks that "the huge contingent of girls—and women with girlish fantasies—who like the first two movies will doubtless enjoy *Eclipse.* But this third go-round won't make Twihard converts of the rest of us."

Figure 4. *Image of the hundreds of fans who camped out for the premier of Eclipse in the Nokia Plaza in Los Angeles. (http://www.cbc.ca/arts/film/story/2010/06/23/twilight-eclipse-camp-premiere.html, 2010) [View larger image.]*

[3.2]   The *Los Angeles Times* (Spines 2010) even published an article around the time of *Eclipse*'s release, addressing what it saw to be the worrying problem of Twilight fans' unhealthy "addiction," when hundreds of fans waited days outside for the LA premier and screamed crazily for the film's young stars. Working from the popularized images of fanatic women, both irrational moms and emotional teenage girls, that surround Twilight, the article depicts these female fans as

emotional teenage girls, that surround Twilight, the article depicts these female fans as dangerously out of touch with reality and mentally sick in their fandom: their marriages are falling apart and their children are forgotten as their Twilight obsession takes over their "real" lives. One of the article's quoted self-confessed fans admits that Twilight is "like a drug. I have to read it or I break down crying. It's awful. I don't want to tell anyone about it. But I fear it's unhealthy." Another woman confesses that "'Twilight' was always on my mind, to the point where I couldn't function" (Spines 2010).

[3.3]   Of course, such depictions of fans, especially female fans, as mentally unstable, deviant, and somehow dangerous members of society are nothing new. Such discipliningly trivializing accounts have accompanied not just Twilight, but also Elvis, the Beatles, 'N Sync, and today's Hannah Montana and the Jonas Brothers. There is a long tradition of rendering fandom as pathology and capitalizing on the fanatic potential of the term's origin. Joli Jensen explains that "fandom is seen as excessive, bordering on deranged, behavior" and as such, fans are often depicted as deviant, and therefore dangerous "others" to society (1992, 9). Such representations of fans are, in fact, more a reflection of the authoring group's anxieties and values than they are a necessarily accurate portrayal of the fans in question. Henry Jenkins notes that this "stereotypical conception of the fan, while not without a limited factual basis, amounts to a projection of anxieties about the violation of dominant cultural hierarchies," elucidating fans in terms of modes of behavior and established tastes and classes (1992, 17).

[3.4]   But indeed, as Ann Gray points out, "there has frequently been a gendered element to the pathologication [of the fan]. Behavior perceived as fundamentally irrational, excessively emotional, foolish and passive has made the fan decisively female" (qtd. in Gray 2003). Reactions like these to Twilight fandom, which seek to qualify and police fan engagement, especially female fan engagement, come not only from the dominant culture, but also from within the Twilight community, from both fans and antifans. Indeed, portrayals of female Twilight fans as emotionally unstable and irrational, and therefore threatening in some way, have appeared in both mainstream newspapers like *Los Angeles Times* and on countless anti-Twilight Web sites.

4. The antifan and ATM's antifan positions

[4.1]   There is not much difference between fans and antifans; antifans can face many of the same cultural depictions of and assumptions about their engagement with a text and their place in society. Scholarship has started to emerge on the position of the antifan. Jonathan Gray (2003, 2005), for instance, has shown that antifans are often just as active as fans and share many similarities in terms of identity and behavior. Gray explains that "hate or dislike of a text can be just as powerful as can a strong and admiring, affective relationship with a text, and [antifans] can produce just as much activity, identification, meaning, and 'effects' or serve just as powerfully to unite and sustain a community or subculture" (2005, 841).

[4.2]   Gray defines antifans as those who are not necessarily "against fandom per se…but who strongly dislike a given text or genre, considering it inane, stupid, morally bankrupt or aesthetic drivel" (2003, 70). Many antifans, including the members of ATM, hold a position against the Twilight books themselves, considering them poorly written romantic fluff with problematic messages. However, the antifans of ATM stress they are not opposed to fantasy, vampire, romance, teen, or even massively popular texts and genres, mentioning their own fandom for the

teen-focused vampire TV show *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997–2003) and the vampire romance

teen-focused vampire TV show *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997–2003) and the vampire romance series *Vampire Kisses*, not to mention the phenomenally popular and fan-inspiring Harry Potter franchise. Instead, they strongly dislike the popular belief that the Twilight books are good literature and that they deserve the fanaticism its rabid fans demonstrate.

[4.3]   ATM's position aligns more with the antifan definition that Dan Haggard (2010) has proposed: "They actively hate [the object of their antifandom] and seek to modify other people's perceptions of those texts in a way that more closely resembles their own. They tend to resent [its] success and seek to undermine that success." Although it is true that many of Twilight's antifans hate both it and its success, each of which exacerbates the other, ATM claims to not hate Twilight outright, though it does not personally care for either the books or the movies. Still, ATM members resent the popularity that has made visible the idea, held mostly by rabid fans, that the series is "good literature"; this is an idea they definitely "seek to undermine." They also work to "modify other people's perceptions" of Twilight's literary merit and popularity to "more closely resemble" their own belief that Twilight is worthy of being nothing more than a guilty pleasure and vapid entertainment.

[4.4]   Beyond this hatred of the text itself, and of the text's popularity by extension, general Twilight antifans are also defined by their hatred of the franchise's fans. The closest theoretical explanation or definition of this type of antifan engagement and identification is that of the sports antifans Vivi Theodoropoulou has examined. In describing the phenomenon of competition and identity performance surrounding these antifans, Theodoropoulou explains that "a fan becomes an antifan of the object that 'threatens' his/her own, and of that object's fans" (2007, 317). These sports antifans hate the fans of the team that opposes, is in competition with, or somehow threatens, their own. ATM can see Twilight as threatening because of its popularity and therefore its signification as low-class and mainstream, and also because of its supposed lack of literary quality, not to mention the intensity and propensity for excess of many of its female fans, who become threatening and objectionable in their own right. However, ATM did not begin as a group of fans of some specific object threatened by Twilight, like Theodoropoulou's sport's antifans; nor does the threat of Twilight and its rabid fans extend out of this initial fan position. Instead, it stems more from the accepted values of the dominant cultural hierarchy. In many ways, ATM is opposed to the rabid fans (and antifans) of Twilight and subsequently hates Twilight by extension—more so than the other way around.

[4.5]   General Twilight antifans reject Twilight fans either as extensions of the despised text, symbols of the popularity which they believe the "bad" series doesn't deserve, or as enactors of a hated mode of fan/antifan engagement, in which any hate of the text in question is incidental to the dislike of those fans' behavior. ATM combines both of these positions in its online identity and Web site, though the latter is much more important to ATM. Not only does ATM reject the popularity of Twilight, but it also opposes many of the franchise's fans, not for simply liking Twilight, but for rabidly liking it. This ties back to Haggard's definition, in which ATM hates the fans who rabidly like Twilight because it believes the "elementary" book to be undeserving of such devoted fans and therefore sees the rabid Twilighter as inappropriate. However, this aspect represents only a small part of ATM's anti-Twilight identity.

[4.6]   Mainly, ATM rejects rabid Twilight fans and antifans because they are acting rabidly in general, not because of the text they are connected with. For ATM, the emotion and excess of rabid behavior is much worse than Twilight itself, and even much worse than some fan being too invested in the simple books or movies that ATM thinks are more appropriate as a guilty pleasure

than as an obsession. Still, ATM does see some sort of correlation, or at least some unlucky connection, between rabid fans and the text of Twilight, and so Twilight is frequently included in ATM's main critique of generally rabid modes of engagement, both fan and antifan.

5. The cultural hierarchy and ATM's internal antifan definitions

[5.1]   Joli Jensen explains that in the dominant cultural hierarchy, "the division between worthy and unworthy is based in an assumed dichotomy between reason and emotion…[and] describes a presumed difference between the educated and uneducated, as well as between the upper and lower classes" (1992, 21). ATM uses these same assumptions when it characterizes and defines rabid fans and antifans as excessive, emotional, irrational, overly invested, out of control, and often young and female, all which make them completely dismissible Others according to the cultural hierarchy. By thus subjugatingly constructing bad rabid Twilight fan identities, ATM positions itself as a group of good antifans who reject undesirably excessive modes of fandom and who reinforce the dominant tastes and preserve the dominant cultural hierarchy; this privileges their position and protects them from similar critiques (Strong 2009, 5).

[5.2]   ATM's proposed hierarchy of good and bad fans functions rather like Brunching's pyramid of geekdom, in which legitimate published science fiction authors are ranked higher than those illegitimate fans who post (erotic *Star Trek*) fan fiction online. Rather than differentiating among themselves according to traditional fan distinctions of authenticity, these antifans focus instead on good and bad performances of fandom and reserve their harshest online responses for the bad rabid behavior (Jancovich 2002, 307–8).

[5.3]   Interestingly, though ATM hates rabid fans and antifans much more than they would ever hate a mere Twilight fan, it does see the Twilight books, as well as the movies to some degree, as somehow encouraging, or at least engendering, this type of rabid behavior because of its large base of young female fans and because it is a popular, mainstream, and somewhat low-status text. Notions of popularity and class end up getting incorporated into ATM's objections against these rabids and become extremely important as it moves from denouncing bad fan/antifan behavior to performing its own literary criticism, which functions as the symbol of ATM's own rational and educated high-class superiority.

6. The danger of Twilight's popularity and excessive fans

[6.1]   Unfortunately for the ATM collective, the mere criticism of rabid Twilight fans and antifans does not insulate them from associations with the popular Twilight or from the feared excess of fans; nor does their affected literary critique. As Joli Jensen explains, according to the cultural hierarchy, "it is normal and therefore safe to be attached to elite, prestige-conferring objects…but it can be abnormal, and therefore dangerous to be attached to popular mass-mediated objects" like Twilight, with their implication of fandom and therefore of excess (2002, 20). And because fans and antifans are similar in terms of their behavior and modes of engagement (Gray 2003, 2005), antifans like those who comprise ATM can also be associated with the popular object of fandom and with connotations of excess because they devote the same amount of time and energy to being antifans as fans do to being fans. This is a bit of a conundrum that jeopardizes ATM's inherent assertion that its own antifandom is acceptable and nonexcessive. ATM is aware of the fact that although it is rejecting Twilight's rabidly devoted fans and antifans and carrying out a scholarly

literary critique that is meant to elevate it above the popular and the mainstream, the fact that it has created an entire Web site and has closely analyzed the Twilight books threatens it with associations of devoted fans and of the rabid-behavior-inspiring Twilight franchise.

[6.2]   Therefore, beyond affecting rational academic elitism to counteract the potential pollution of Twilight's popularity, ATM also tries hard to convince visitors to its site that it is not as interested or invested as it would appear that these creators of an anti-Twilight Web site are—that ATM is reasonable and in no way excessive in its antifandom and its connection to Twilight. Responding to the concocted rabid fan question of "Why do you put 90% of your energy into something you hate?" on the FAQ page, ATM writes, "Ahahaha, 90% of my what? You obviously don't understand how fast (and easy) it is to make a website. We barely put any 'energy' into this."

[6.3]   It is unclear whether the list of questions from which this one comes was actually submitted by rabid fans for ATM to answer. They are more likely critiques that ATM anticipated hearing from rabid Twilight fans and from the people who would consider ATM to be similarly excessive, so ATM added them to the FAQ to preemptively address them. With this question of energy, ATM addresses, and denies, the same accusation of overinvestment that it similarly uses in its argument against Twilight's rabid fans and antifans. This allows ATM to attest to its own safe, rather than rabid, investment: ATM's answer confirms its safely disinterested involvement.

7. The fear and characterization of excess in rabid fans

[7.1]   Because this notion of excess is so threatening, and therefore rejected by society, ATM members work hard to prove that they themselves do not possess it. Similarly, what is most threatening about these rabid fans/antifans, and therefore what comprises ATM's core characterization of them, is their perceived propensity for excess. Although ATM does disapprove of such emotional and excessive behavior as it relates specifically to Twilight, what it really hates is the lack of logic, reason, and common sense that this archetype of rabid fan/antifan embodies, regardless of the text in question. As Jensen explains, being a fan, unlike a culturally acceptable aficionado or academic expert, "involves an ascription of excess and emotional display" that is much less desirable than masculine, educated, or upper-class displays of reason and control (2002, 20). Working from such established cultural distinctions, ATM makes rabid Twilight fans and antifans the ultimate Other to its own affectations of rational literary criticism and sensible observation by defining them in ways that align with traditional depictions of fan pathology and deviancy and that show them to be undesirably excessive.

Figure 5. *Screen capture of the warning message that appears upon entry to the Anti-Twilight*

Movement Web site, showing themselves to be better than intolerant and hostile rabids.
(http://theantitwilightmovement.webs.com/, 2008) [View larger image.]

[7.2]   One of ATM's main arguments against, and characterizations of, rabid Twilighters states that because they are so excessive in their fandom, so emotional and immature, they cannot so much as hear of a person not liking Twilight without defensively lashing out. One of ATM's many pieces of Ragemail proves this characterization of rabids as emotionally intolerant: "You're stupid for making an anti-Twilight site…you, you stupid fuck tard, are gay and stupid and a loser and all the things you think Twilight are. Get a life. Go die." ATM chose this piece of Ragemail to show rabid Twilight fans at their worst, as incapable of accepting the mere existence of an anti-Twilight Web site or responding to such people with anything other than hurtful personal insults, which the Ragemail shows often resemble the petty and unsophisticated invectives often attributed to teenage girls. In sarcastically and dismissively commenting on these Ragemail messages, ATM cites the mangling of the mechanics of the English language and presents what it shows to be uncalled-for personal attacks and harsh name-calling. This enables ATM to reject these femininely gendered rabid fans for their lack of emotional control and their presumed lack of education, as well as for their youth and their hostile intolerance.

[7.3]   Another such characterization of excessive rabid Twilight fans shows them to be so defensive and emotionally hostile that they not only harshly insult anti-Twilighters, but they also resort to actual violence. The Twihard Attack Directory (2008) discussion forum on the Twilight Sucks Web site allows anti-Twilighters to post accounts of being attacked by rabid Twilight fans. In most of the postings, the antifans claim they did nothing to incur the retaliatory action of the rabid Twilighters other than express their simple dislike of the books or movies. The listed assaults include verbal insults, a broken ankle, a cigarette burn, an attempted throat slitting, and a "wished miscarriage," among others.
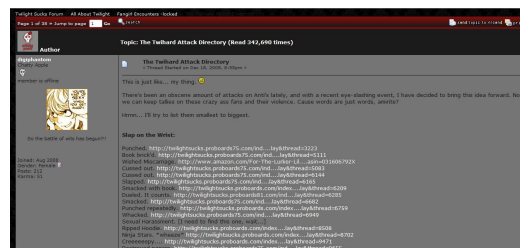

Figure 6. *Screenshot of the Twihard Attack Directory posting in the Twilight Sucks forum showing some of the cited rabid attacks. (http://twilightsucks.proboards.com/index.cgi?board=fangirls&action=display&thread=5175, 2008) [View larger image.]*

[7.4]   Though these Twihard attacks are completely unverifiable and, as Dan Haggard (2010) points out, have never been reported by any reputable news organizations, such depictions of excess fit perfectly within ATM's construction of rabid Twilight fans as a deviant and dangerous counterpoint to its own affected identity of reason and control. As Jensen explains, "Once fans are characterized as deviant, they can be treated as disreputable, even dangerous 'others'" (1992, 9). And while young female fans of the popular Twilight might be seen as somehow generally unsavory, antifans like those who comprise ATM can apparently act on behalf of society at large by justifiably condemning these dangerous fans when they have been shown to commit actual violence, especially unprovoked intolerant violence, in the name of their fandom.

8. Excess continued: Rabid antifans

[8.1]   Even more threatening to ATM than the rabid fans that it so thoroughly rejects are the excessively rabid anti-Twilighters who are said to attack Twilight fans with as little rationality and as much violent emotionality as is attributed to the rabid fans. For although ATM despises the rabid fans of Twilight, the rabid Twilight antifans are a more direct threat to its own position of Twilight antifandom. This group of excessively rabid and violent Twilight antifans is epitomized in the near-militant group called Anonymous, which uses harsh language and violence to ruin the experience of Twilight for its fans. The group posts instructions online (under the names Project Golden Eye and Operation: No Moon), ordering anti-Twilighters to spoil Twilight film premiers with rude and obscene behavior, to post gay porn and gore-filled fan fiction to Twilight fan sites, and to harshly insult Twilight fans at every possible opportunity (accessed December 18, 2009; site now discontinued).

[8.2]   Anonymous's aim is to attack, violently, anyone who expresses even the slightest interest in Twilight, no matter his or her reasoning or degree of fandom. For ATM, Anonymous and other such rabid antifans are just as intolerant and irrational as the rabid fans seen on the Ragemail and the Twihard Attack Directory. Thus, ATM gives these rabid antifans their own Ragemail page where their excessive and violently emotional behavior is denounced for its repulsiveness and because, as ATM writes, "you give us a bad name."

[8.3]   Interestingly, this group of violent rabid anti-Twilighters seems to have intentionally aligned itself with the violence and irrational excess that ATM so thoroughly condemns in others and fears to be associated with itself. The majority of these rabid antifans are male, and their displays of violence and harsh and sexually degrading language are their way of unequivocally rejecting the sentimental femininity attributed to most Twilight fans and to the series as a whole. Though Anonymous uses the same type of ruthless, insulting language that rabid fans were shown to use in ATM's Ragemail, the two groups code their words differently. Where the Twilight fans use femininely gendered terms like *bitch* and *slut* to attack female anti-Twilighters, Anonymous uses homosexual insults and intensely harsh curse words to convey the masculine anger and violence that is part of its antifan identity and performance.

[8.4]   For instance, Anonymous justifies its plan to ruin the premiere of the second Twilight film for its fans by explaining that "we could not possibly let such a piece of shit come to pass without any consequences, as the fans of the fagboat are worse than the book/movie itself." Interestingly, the homophobic term *gay* did appear in the more feminine rabid Twihard Ragemail cited above (see ¶7.2), though it seems to have been used merely as one piece in a string of personal insults, unlike this direct attack by rabid antifans on the perceived gender of the series and its fans. Just as ATM hates rabid Twilight fans/antifans and the popular belief in Twilight's literary worth more than it hates Twilight itself, Anonymous's anger seems to be mainly directed at the fans of the popular series ("the fans are worse…"). Still, Anonymous makes it clear that it hates Twilight almost as much as it hates its fans, and it expresses that hate much differently than ATM. Its use of terms like "fagboat" and "piece of shit" to describe the franchise and threatening violent "consequences" for its existence is almost the polar opposite of ATM's attempt at reasoned literary assessment of the books and its refutation of only excessive fans, not every person connected to Twilight.

[Surrender Me Heartless] wrote:

" Twilight is buttfucking gay.. pretty much the title says it. If you've seen the movie, and still like it, you're a buttfucking fagot.

♥♥♥ *Because god forbid people like something that you hate.*

Figure 7. *Screen capture of one quoted rabid anti-Twilighter message from the Anti-Twilight Movement's antifan Ragemail section of their Web site.*
(http://theantitwilightmovement.webs.com/antimailbag.htm, 2010) [View larger image.]

[8.5]   Such wholesale intolerance can be further seen in a piece of ATM's rabid anti-Twilighter Ragemail: "Twilight is buttfucking gay…If you've seen the movie and still like it, you're a buttfucking faggot." Again, this message contains the same homophobic language and harsh hostility that mark the rabid antifans' masculine expression as well as the intolerance of differing opinion that also characterizes ATM's depiction of rabid Twilighters. Where the rabid fans couldn't accept those who disliked Twilight, here the rabid antifans can't allow anyone to have so much as seen the movies and liked them, even if they do not act rabidly about it. They espouse the total dismissal of Twilight fans, and indeed of the series itself, which ATM is careful never to do, for fear of being accused of irrationality and excess. Therefore, ATM concedes that people will, and may, like the books and movies, even if ATM members themselves do not. On the other hand, rabid anti-Twilighters apparently cannot accept or allow the text on any level, and they attack Twilight outright with emotional insults rather than objective reasoning.

[8.6]   ATM not only cites the angry messages of rabid anti-Twilighters, but also condemns all such violent and intolerant antifans and specifically denounces Anonymous on their Wall of Shame. Here, ATM lists all the rabid anti-Twilight sites that it claims are "appalling and malicious" in that "they're just as violently crazy about Twilight as rabid Twitards, only instead of violently loving it, they violently hate it and anyone who reads it." Discussing internal fan identities, Henry Jenkins explains that "even within the fan community," categories and labels of "other" and "inappropriate" engagement are applied as a "way of policing the ranks and justifying one's own pleasures as less 'perverse' than those of the others" (1992, 19). Haggard (2010), too, has suggested that the entire phenomenon of the Twilight antifan exists as a "reaction designed to signify to others within a group, a person's rejection of an opposing group."

[8.7]   True as this is for the group of Twilight antifans as a whole, it also applies to ATM as a specific faction within Twilight antifandom: ATM needs to differentiate itself from the damning characterizations of other rabids, especially rabid antifans. Through such internal fan (and antifan) definitions and negations and the establishment of an antifan hierarchy, by citing the emotionally excessive behavior of rabid Twilight fans and antifans and by attributing the label of rabid in the first place, ATM seeks to render its own Twilight antifandom acceptable and appropriate in comparison. Through this construction of a safe "us" versus a dangerous "them," ATM is able to reassure itself and any outsiders that it is "not as abnormal" as those other hostile and irrational fans and antifans and is, in fact, much better (Jensen 1992, 24).

9. Good antifans: ATM's self-characterization as superiorly rational and

[9.1]   In contrast to the characterizations of excessive and violent rabids, of the bad fans and antifans, ATM attempts to prove itself as good antifans by displaying the reasoned control and civil discussion that mark the culturally accepted and superior classification of high-class connoisseur, aficionado, or scholar. Joli Jensen reasons that "defining disorderly and emotional fan display as excessive allows the celebration of all that is orderly and unemotional," and therefore ATM constructs itself as superiorly "orderly and unemotional" in relation to their characterizations of rabid excess. Because "self-control is a key aspect of appropriate display" in this definition of a high-class scholar and a good antifan/fan, ATM defines its own attachment to Twilight as comprising "rational evaluation [that is] displayed in more measured ways" than that of the emotional and narrow-minded Twitards that it denounces on its Web site (Jensen 1992, 20, 24).

[9.2]   In performing this apparently superior rationality, ATM not only logically and thoroughly explains its position and arguments against Twilight as literature and against its rabid fans/antifans, but it also strives to never display the same emotional hostility or irrational intolerance that it shows the rabids to do. ATM writes on its site, "You [rabid Twilight fans] don't respect our opinion. That's why you won't let us criticize your favorite book without sending us hate mail, insulting us, and threatening us." Here ATM purports to be carrying out a valuable literary critique of Twilight, a reasoned and civil (and presumably somewhat objective) discussion of the book, rather than an emotional attack on the fans themselves. Beyond stressing ATM's own scholarly position, this message further reminds visitors that rabid fans and antifans lack not only the educated and mature (and masculine) capacity for such rational evaluation of Twilight, but also the same common courtesy of tolerant acceptance. ATM and its affiliated sites try hard to be the opposite of this, to tolerate the existence and position of Twilight fans.

[9.3]   As proof of their proclaimed acceptance of good Twilight fans, of the ones who are tolerant and level-headed like themselves, the antifans that comprise TRS make an effort to differentiate between Twihards and Twitards. Twihards are the devoted yet permissible "die-hard Twilight fans," while Twitards, who are similarly obsessed with Twilight, are unacceptable because they take their fandom to excessive and rabid levels. It is the Twitards, not all Twilight fans, who are seen as threatening and immaturely "incapable of respecting others' opinions." TRS clarifies that "not all Twihards are Twitards. People can like the books without being a Twitard: What separates Twitards from Twihards is their behavior." For these antifans, avid Twilight fandom is not the problem. Instead, it is the loss of control and rational thought that underlies these rabid fans' perceived intolerance and uncritical love of Twilight that upsets them. TRS explains that "mature Twilight fans…understand that not everybody likes the books." This depiction of the good Twilighters ("mature") not only allows TRS to define good fandom in a manner similar to its own tolerantly affected mode of antifandom, but also further denounces the youth and immaturity that marks its construction of emotional and excessive rabid Twilight fans.

[9.4]   Such distinctions between good and bad fans can be seen on ATM's site as well: the Welcome message explains that "the [Twilight] books just don't appeal to us. But if they appeal to you, that's fine. We understand that it's a book, and there's nothing wrong with liking it. However, we also understand the difference between the fans that enjoy the books and the rabid fans that take them much too seriously." Here, upon first entering their site, is ATM's tolerant acceptance of

Twilight fans in general, as well as of the basic enjoyment of the books, an affectation that inherently rejects the rabids whom it claims in "taking Twilight much too seriously," lose this

inherently rejects the rabids whom, it claims, in "taking Twilight much too seriously," lose this rational ability to allow disparate opinions and viewpoints. And, as it showed in the Twihard Attack Directory and Ragemail, when rabids take Twilight so seriously that they literally attack anyone who remotely dislikes the books, it is dangerous for everyone.

[9.5]   ATM members' position seems to propose that, in contrast to those threatening rabid fans, it is much better and much safer to be a fan or antifan like themselves, who accepts that some people like the series (even if they themselves do not) and who won't attack them for it. In other words, they are better for being rational and unemotional enough to not take their Twilight antifandom too seriously, for embodying the cultural hierarchy's privileged attributes of (masculine) reason and educated logic.

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10. Another consequence of excess: Fans depicted as detached from the "real world"

[10.1]   ATM's dismissal of fans that take not only Twilight, but anything, too seriously rejects fans for the excess and emotionality that connotes them to be inferiorly uneducated, lower class, and probably young (and female), but it also rejects them for their inability to properly assess the "real world," one of the other traditional indictments made against fans (Jensen 1992; Jenkins 1992). Joli Jensen explains that "there is a thin line between 'normal' and excessive fandom. This line is crossed if and when the distinctions between reality and fantasy break down. These are the two realms that must remain separated, if the fan is to remain safe and normal" (1992, 18).

[10.2]   ATM characterizes rabid fans and antifans in such a way that they are made to cross the line that divides normal from excessive. Having been shown to cross that important boundary, the rabids then face consequences for their irrationality—consequences that manifest as "cautionary tales of fans who go 'over the edge' into fanaticism, and thus pathology" (Jensen 1992, 18). Such disciplining "cautionary tales" exist in the *Los Angeles Times* article's depiction of "sick" female fans (Spines 2010), as well as in ATM's own unflattering Ragemail excerpts and TRS's Twihard Attack Directory (2008).

[10.3]   However, ATM seems to understand that as long as the fan (or antifan) shows "good common sense" and remains "rational" and "in control," he or she will be spared the condemnatory and pathology-citing discourses of the dominant hierarchy. Thus, ATM matches every one of their site's descriptions of rabid excess with a measured and logical response, hoping to show its own good common sense and prove that it is still in control, that there is no need to be similarly chastised with the label of "rabid" or "fanatic." In embodying and promoting this good commonsense behavior as appropriate in comparison to fanatic irrationality, ATM is not only protecting itself, but also perpetuating that cultural notion about fans' propensity for unreality, and continuing to hold up similar consequences for such pathological behavior.

11. The academic, the elite, and ATM's affected literary criticism

[11.1]   ATM strives to show itself not only as possessing that all-important good common sense, but also as so unemotional and high class that it is capable of carrying out sustained literary criticism, thus providing a logical and rational explanation of Twilight. As previously mentioned,

ATM's position is not wholeheartedly anti-Twilight, but instead is interested in qualifying the hyperbolic statements made by uncritical rabid fans about the books' unmatchable value, an

example of which is the unequivocated rabid assertion that "the Twilight saga, They ARE the best books." TRS explains that "there's nothing wrong with liking a less-than-great…book. We've all got our favorite guilty pleasure or two. But we really hope you see, and enjoy, Twilight for what it is." ATM similarly reaffirms their shouldered responsibility toward literary value and toward debunking the popular notion that Twilight is great literature: "Our goal is to…inform people that Twilight is not the 'best book ever written'—there are better books out there. We're here to protect the name of literature and show you a viewpoint that may oppose your own." With these grandiose claims of protecting the very name of literature, which they proudly boast to have been doing since 2008, ATM differs somewhat from most other Twilight fans and antifans: it claims to be carrying out culturally significant work, rather than simply expressing a dislike of something or creating a hate site.

Figure 8. *Screen capture of two buttons that ATM sells on their site. The first proclaims their affected interest in the sanctity of literature, while the second plays on fan shipping between Bella's two love interests, vampire Edward and werewolf Jacob, to privilege literary quality over fan emotionality. (http://theantitwilightmovement.webs.com/merch.htm, 2010) [View larger image.]*

[11.2]   This performance of "protecting the name of literature" and of critiquing Twilight ensures that antifans like ATM appear educated, high class, and rational enough to evaluate literature, which presumably aligns them with elite academia rather than with popular fandom. The issue of popularity is an important one to consider in ATM's critique, and qualified rejection, of Twilight. Though its popularity is by no means ATM's main reason for dismissing Twilight, it doesn't help. Popularity carries with it connotations of the mainstream and the low class, as well as the potential threat of fan deviancy (Jensen 1992); and at times, ATM pushes its position of rejecting rabid Twilight fans for being attached to a popular text to the forefront of its site and its arguments.

[11.3]   While hoping to avoid any negative stigmas of Twilight's popularity, ATM also uses its literary criticism of the books to align itself with the academic and the elite, thereby privileging its own antifandom, as well as safeguarding itself against the claims and censures of excess and emotionality that traditionally meet fans. Henry Jenkins explains that "from the perspective of dominant taste, fans appear to be frighteningly out of control, undisciplined and unrepentant, rogue readers [who reject] the aesthetic distance" often called for by academics and elites (1992, 18). ATM is all too aware of this perception, and of the disciplining accounts of fans that are circulated by the dominant culture as well as by itself. To avoid such condemning depictions, ATM strives for the aesthetic distance that Jenkins mentions. Such distance relates to the unemotional, the rational, and the masculine, which Jensen previously explained were located at the top of the cultural hierarchy and are attributes traditionally denied to fans. In offering this performed academic critique, ATM is hoping not only to position itself toward the top of that hierarchy, safe

from the polluting influences of popular texts and emotional fandom, but also to show itself to be made up of valuable and elite scholarly people.

[11.4]   But of course, the members of ATM are not actual scholars, nor are they, following Matt Hills's categorizations, scholar-fans or fan-scholars (2007, 40; 2002, 15–17). Instead, they can only take on the affectation of academia and appropriate academic discourses in the hopes of elevating their antifandom above the emotionality often attributed to the fans and the popularity of Twilight. Hills explains academia as not something real and concrete, but as an imagined "system of value" in which the "'good subject' of the 'duly trained and informed' academic is a resolutely rational subject, devoted to argumentation and persuasion," often set up in diametric opposition to constructed characterizations of the fan (2002, 3). Regardless of the illusory quality of such values, ATM members, though not actual academics themselves, still uphold and attempt to embody them and to behave as good academics in order to elevate their antifandom to the culturally privileged realm of academia.

[11.5]   Like Hills's scholar-fans, ATM also maintains this "imagined subjectivity of [the] 'good' rationality" "of academia" to keep their antifan engagement respectable and legitimate in the potential eyes of other scholars (Hills 2002, 4, 11). Where real scholars' academic legitimacy would be potentially threatened by their emotion-based fan associations, ATM sees itself as similarly threatened, even though they are not made up of actual scholars and are denouncing Twilight, not fanatically loving it. They perform the "imagined subjectivity of 'good' rationality" as well as Jenkins's "aesthetic distance" not to maintain the respectability of academia, but in the hopes of obtaining that respectability for their antifandom.

[11.6]   Still, ATM's having constructed an entire antifan identity that co-opts the cultural weight often attributed to literature and its criticism for its affected scholarly critique of a massively popular book is potentially complicating. Originally, neither Twilight nor its fans (or antifans) would have fallen within the scope of literary studies. The popular young adult books are not considered art or good literature by anyone but its devoted fans, and the antifans critiquing them are not actual scholars. It is this last aspect that truly threatens ATM with the cultural admonishments that it had hoped its literary critique would protect it from. Henry Jenkins explains that fans are threatening to dominant society because they disrupt established notions of taste and quality by "treating popular texts as if they merited the same degree of attention and appreciation as canonical texts" (1992, 17). Unfortunately, the "reading practices (close scrutiny, elaborate exegesis, repeated and prolonged reading, etc.) [that are deemed] acceptable in confronting a work of 'serious merit' seem perversely misapplied to the more 'disposable' texts of mass culture" (1992, 17).

[11.7]   ATM's enactment of such a critique of Twilight, as well as its belief that it can be critiqued at all, even though it pronounces Twilight as devoid of literary merit, inherently asserts that the extremely popular series of fantasy young adult novels deserves the same cultural attention as canonical and so-called great works of literature. Although ATM's literary critique was meant to legitimize ATM's mode of antifandom and distance it from connotations of emotional excess, it also potentially aligns ATM with the cultural disapproval that has traditionally met fans as "rogue readers" who give the weight often reserved for elite works to mainstream objects (Jenkins 1992, 18, 24).

12. The rejection of the feminine and female fandoms

[12.1]   It is interesting to point out that ATM uses the jargon and discourses often used by arbiters of dominant taste to police and denigrate not merely fan behavior, but also specifically female behavior and values. However, it does not make the claim that all women necessarily act like the deranged female fans in Spines's *Los Angeles Times* article (2010) or like the girls characterized in ATM's own Ragemail; nor does it find all women and female cultural artifacts inherently dismissible. In her study of the Cracked forums, Catherine Strong found that the female Twilight antifans there essentially believe that "teenage girls' culture is 'bad'" and that Twilight, because aimed at this demographic, is "basically as close to worthless as it can" be (2009, 9). These antifans claim that Twilight "sucks because it was written for teenage girls" and refer to those teenage girls with classically belittling descriptions of screaming and squealing (2009, 9).

[12.2]   This is a far cry from the sophisticated judgments and logical assertions that ATM hopes to make about Twilight and its fans, as well as about its own antifandom. ATM never comes right out and says that Twilight is worthless (tempted though it seems to be). ATM has a long and detailed literary critique of the book that condemns it as badly written and thematically problematic, but it does not blame what it sees as its lack of literary quality on the supposition that it was "written for teenage girls." ATM does use some of the same descriptions of generally female rabid fans as screaming and as having bad taste in their uncritical love of the popular, but it uses these descriptions to negatively characterize rabid modes of fan engagement, not to condemn all girls or all fans in general. Though ATM does use some of the same femininely gendered attributes in a criticizing manner and dismisses such behavior because of where it falls on the cultural hierarchy, it tries hard to never comprehensively reject texts with predominantly female fandoms, nor all female fans in general (even if it does believe them to be more prone to such rabidly excessive behavior).

[12.3]   Despite this effort toward qualified rejection, ATM perpetuates the placing of the feminine at the bottom of the dominant cultural hierarchy; and it still participates in the cultural assumption that fans, especially female fans, are threatening because they flout and undermine established societal ideals and moral standards. This is comparable to Beatlemania, where what was labeled inappropriate and fanatic in these teenage girls—the loss of control, the screaming, the fainting, the mobs—was defined thus because it challenged the then-prevailing ethos of teenage purity (Ehrenreich, Hess, and Jacobs 1992, 181). Arguably, analogous threats to the dominant culture's asserted moral and social values of female behavior might underlie most of the major manias of female fandom: the mobs of girls screaming for Elvis's hips, the teenagers crying over 'N Sync and the Backstreet Boys, and even the recent explosion of "BieberFever" for the young singer Justin Bieber that has infected predominantly preteen girls.

[12.4]   Furthermore, the label of "mania" and the largely disciplining discourses that surround these principally female explosions of fan expression reveal a potential societal fear of the articulation of a collective female desire. Indeed, in descriptions of the pathology and threat of fandom, "the eroticized fan is almost always [depicted as] female" rather than male (Jenkins 1992, 15). Think of the stereotypical image of the woman obsessively swooning over a male celebrity versus the nerdy man who frequents comic book conventions.

[12.5]   Twilight poses a threat to society because of its potential for the expression of female desire, and thus it faces similarly policing descriptions of its fans as susceptible to mania,

emotional, and irrational. This romance franchise contains archetypically seductive vampire characters and attractive young male stars, while the "femininely" melodramatic narratives

promote the "express[ion] of 'intense' emotional states" (Williamson 2005, 64). These aspects have traditionally meant that objects of female fandom, such as soap operas, were dismissed and downplayed by the dominant masculine culture, and the investment and pleasure of its female fans were regarded as unimportant and not valuable. It is these aspects that can make Twilight, and its mass of loyal female fans, seem so threatening to the dominant culture. Not only does Twilight foster intense emotional states and the expression of desire in its female fans, but also its fans are now in a position to really make themselves heard and to loudly articulate their desire for the series and for its male characters and the actors who play them.

[12.6]   The teenager and mom-aged female fans of Twilight have at their disposal the information and wealth of images from the Internet to feed their obsessions, as well as a plethora of online communities and discussion forums where they can share and encourage their fandom and desires with like-minded women. This is not a comforting fact to everyone, as can be seen in Spines's *Los Angeles Times* article (2010). Continuing her accusations of unhealthy female fan addiction, Spines writes that "for some [female Twilight fans], the romance, intrigue and celebrity gossip that's always just a mouse click away is too hard to resist…Instead of watching soap operas all day, they're online following 'Twilight,'…seek[ing] solace in the company of fellow online lonely hearts," undermining both the value of female connections and the authoring potential of the Internet for female fans.

[12.7]   In a way, ATM works as a valuable counterexample to this idea of the undesirability of female fan articulation, authorship, and collective online communication. Though it seems to hold some of the same negative views of female fans and indeed uses the dominant culture's terms to dismiss certain feminine fan behavior and therefore elevate themselves, ATM is proof that female fandom (in this case, antifandom) is more than lonely women seeking "fellow lonely hearts" to commiserate with.

[12.8]   ATM is evidence that the coming together of female antifans can be smart and productive and valuable in terms of society's own gendered definitions. ATM rejects the same threatening notions of feminine emotionality and irrational excess that the dominant culture does, and it reaffirms the hierarchy that privileges the elite, the academic, the rational, and the masculine over such feminine traits. In addition, in crafting a Web site to publish its antifan identity, which ATM claims was an "easy" task, it attests to its members' own abilities to be active engagers with texts and media, as well as authors in their own right. This is an interesting counterpoint to what Click (2009) points out to be the "persistent cultural notion" that "men and boys are active users of media while girls are passive consumers."

13. Female fans as dangerously passive and vulnerable

[13.1]   Though perhaps inherently countering accepted tropes of fan passivity, ATM still attributes that cultural supposition to some of the rabid Twilighters it responds to in its antifandom. It sees rabid fans as "gullible," "conformist," and easily "seduced" by Twilight's massive popularity, as well as vulnerable to any dangerous messages hidden within the text (Jancovich 2002, 312). This fits with the traditional characterizations of fans that have labeled them uncritical "dupes," "blind

receptors to corporate propaganda and establishment ideology," and easily seduced by Hollywood celebrities—descriptions that carry gendered connotations of feminine passivity (Gray 2005, 67).

[13.2]   ATM utilizes these same assumptions, condemning rabid Twilight fans for their uncritical acceptance of the books and their infatuation with the series' popularity, as well as for their unthinking echoing of claims of its literary merit, which we have seen characterized throughout ATM's Web site. Of course, such depictions privilege ATM's own critical and astute antifandom, and in perpetuating cultural notions of fan passivity, especially in female fans, it works to prove that it poses no such threat to dominant society.

[13.3]   This potential threat that uncritical fans pose to society increases when they unite into groups and their individual passivity becomes compounded (Jensen 1992). Picture an out-of-control rock concert crowd, or the brainwashed audience of a cult like the Peoples Temple, or the lines of screaming young female fans waiting for the midnight release of the latest Twilight movie. In this manifestation of fandom, "the frenzied crowd member invokes the image of the vulnerable, irrational victim of mass persuasion" (Gray 2003, 67). ATM also uses this depiction of the vulnerability of groups of fans to reject rabid involvement with Twilight as dangerous and to show itself to be safe in comparison. It positions itself as better than the emotional girls who greedily and unquestioningly consume the popular series, those whose uncritical and rabid engagement leaves them susceptible to mass manipulation.

[13.4]   Like many subcultures that have positioned themselves against a construction of an "inauthentic Other," often embodied in the "image of mass culture" and most especially in the consumer of that mass culture (Jancovich 2002, 312), ATM has constructed itself as a superior subculture within Twilight fandom. Additionally, in its construction of these rabid teen girls as passive consumers of mass culture, ATM plays up their disapproval of fans of low-status, mainstream objects to show the vulnerability of a crowd of inundated fans and the dangers potentially inherent in mass-produced entities. In contrast to this, ATM appears as the shrewd consumer of mass culture, capable of discerning any of the text's potentially troubling messages that frenzied fans would passively and unknowingly internalize, and even of warning others about them.

14. ATM's moral objection to Twilight

[14.1]   Not only does ATM claim to be capable of identifying Twilight's underlying mass-circulated messages that seduced young rabids have no idea exist, but it also uses these exposed messages to express its moral objection to the book series, citing the problematic ideas that might be instilled in its young female readers. This moral objection is perhaps an extension of ATM's fear of the mob mentality and uncritical susceptibility of Twilight's screaming young female fans (or the traditional belief in such), or simply another way of strengthening its construction of a bad Other fan in relation to its own proposed antifandom. In his examination of Television Without Pity, Jonathan Gray discusses the moral objections antifans can have to different media texts and explains that their desire to post a response to the text based on a moral objection "suggests a desire to warn others and, hence, to spread their reading of the moral text" (2005, 848). One of ATM's readings of Twilight defines the "correct" form of investment with the popular and "poorly written" books, and reveals their participation in the dominant cultural hierarchy's values and perceived threats. For

ATM, fans read Twilight incorrectly when they become rabid about it—when they become inappropriately emotional, irrational, and hostile. ATM warns against such behavior.

[14.2]   But ATM's main reading of Twilight as a moral text exposes what it sees as the social reality beneath the fantasy romance narrative: the dangerous ideas that threaten the series' passive female fans. It is not my intention to explicitly examine any of Twilight's inner messages, problematic or not, only to discuss the ways in which ATM views and responds to them (for a more detailed examination of the specific potentially problematic themes in Twilight, see Click, Aubrey, and Behm-Morawitz 2010). ATM claims that "Edward and Bella have a disturbingly abusive relationship," explaining that Twilight "is indicative of a pattern in our society to idealize unhealthy and abusive relationships. This book teaches our generation that abusive relationships are okay—no, ROMANTIC, even. Not only is this book a moral threat to our youth, but an assault on literature itself." Henry Jenkins has explained that "materials viewed as undesirable"—here, rabid and uncritical fan investment in the popular Twilight—"are often accused of harmful social effects or negative influences upon their consumers" (1992, 16–17). The series that attracts hordes of young female fans and in some way facilitates their rabidly emotional and uncritical behavior is here labeled as a viable social threat for idealizing, and even encouraging, abusive relationships.

[14.3]   The claim that Twilight represents a "moral threat to our youth" is a particularly compelling example of ATM's attempt to protect dominant aesthetic preferences and societal values from the undesirable effects of Twilight and its excessively emotional and irrational female fans, who would be unable to assess the reality beneath the fiction. Whether this underlying social message of sexism and abuse truly exists, or whether it is even one of the real causes of ATM's objection to Twilight, is irrelevant. ATM's performed concern for young and female readers of the Twilight texts, and for society in general, serves to protect them from the feared connotation of rabid gullibility, and its moral objection provides it with a compelling point of opposition that cannot be dismissed as merely emotional hate, or even as simply literary.

15. Conclusion

[15.1]   Antifans like those comprising ATM have responded not only to a massively popular book and movie series, but also to an entire culture of fans and antifans. They have participated in and reinforced many of the values of the dominant cultural hierarchy, describing rabids in such low-ranking and often feminine-gendered ways as illogical, emotional, excessive, uneducated, young, and passive. However, ATM's rejection of rabid modes of fandom not only represents a reaffirmation of dominant cultural values, but also an attempt by ATM to construct its own identity by contrasting itself with such Others. ATM represents only one specifically articulated antifan identity; it by no means showcases the full spectrum of fan/antifan response, Twilight related or not. We should continue to explore all the various fans and antifans out there, and investigate the popular as well as the elite, the low class as well as the high, not because we can then neatly explain them or provide clean-cut answers to some of culture's phenomena, but because their voices are valuable and should be included within the big picture.

16. Note

1. The Anti-Twilight Movement site (http://www.theantitwilightmovement.webs.com), which I accessed on September 2010, is no longer available; the link goes to an unrelated placeholder site.

A version of the site without graphics from March 9, 2009, is available via the Internet Archive Wayback Machine
(http://web.archive.org/web/20090309135129/http://theantitwilightmovement.webs.com/home.htm)

(http://web.archive.org/web/20090307135129/http://theantitwilightmovement.webs.com/home.htm).

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Praxis

Lifting the curse: Pearl Jam's "Alive" and "Bushleaguer" and the marketplace of meanings

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[0.1]   *Abstract*—In tracing how Pearl Jam consciously and unconsciously create their fans by their actions, I argue that work and fandom of the band are synonymous for fans who wish to become producers in a metaphorical marketplace of fandom. I use theories of fandom to examine and explain two important (and related) phenomena: first, the relationship between fans and musicians and the creation, adoption, and promotion of a sphere in which fans themselves can becomes producers as well as consumers; and second, the backlash of fans against musicians endorsing a particular political orientation through their compositions and performances. In particular, I focus on that group of Pearl Jam fans who took issue with the band's public disapproval of George W. Bush during their 2003 tour, but whose opposition to the band's position cannot be explained by ideological differences or a belief that music and politics are spheres that should not overlap. Instead, these fans oppose a shift they perceive in the band's attitude toward a democratic exchange of meanings, an important way for Pearl Jam fans to become producers rather than just consumers. As a result, the backlash from these fans, while sparked by Pearl Jam's anti-Bush live performance of "Bushleaguer," is due more to a disjunction between the band's long-term endorsement of democratic and participatory politics and what the fans saw a shift toward counterdemocratic prescriptive politics.

1. Pearl Jam: The Denver incident and *Riot Act*

[1.1]   Pearl Jam's summer 2003 tour began shortly after the commencement of the Iraq war. The band's previous tour, in 2000, had been fiercely political, and in 2003 they were on the road promoting an equally political album; the context of war provided an opportunity for the band to speak out against the attacks on Iraq, while precariously balancing their desire to speak out with the need to offer an entertaining show to their fans. Immediately after the tour's first stop in Denver and the premiere of the costumed, masked theatrics of the song "Bushleaguer," a damning lyrical

commentary on George W. Bush from their 2002 release *Riot Act,* newspapers reported an unusually critical fan reaction to the performance:

> [1.2] [Fan] Kim Mueller…told Denver's Rocky Mountain News: "I wasn't sure if it was really happening…We looked at each other and realized he really did have George Bush's head on a stick and was waving it in the air, then slammed it to the ground and stepped on it." Fan Keith Zimmerman added: "It was like he decapitated someone in a primal ritual and stuck their head on a stick." (Brown 2003)

[1.3] In this article, I argue, through an examination of fan culture and the VH1 show *Storytellers,* that being a Pearl Jam fan necessitates working to determine the meanings of songs, rather than other ways in which consumers might become producers. This is a (perhaps unintended) consequence of the band's deliberate decision to avoid most promotional venues and to illustrate their discontent with the ticketing options available to touring artists and their fans by shunning Ticketmaster, in addition to their larger and underlying opposition to the corporate structures currently shaping the music industry. Given this matrix, fans of the band have found ways, albeit limited, to become both consumers and producers of the Pearl Jam mediapheme, those summaries or shorthand versions of the visual and audio elements of the band produced for the explicit purpose of being disseminated and consumed by the media (note 1). Further, Pearl Jam's democratic approach to meanings conflicts with their ventures into party politics; in particular, they conflict with the live performance of "Bushleaguer," and this conflict over the democratic give-and-take of meanings is at the root of the fan backlash.

[1.4] My project uses the transformation of Pearl Jam's "Alive" to rebut the passive-audience model and explore the encoding/decoding model outlined by Stuart Hall (1980), in terms of the affective potential of oppositional and negotiated readings and interpretations of texts by both audiences and performers in a musical context. In particular, I link Hall's model to the fan and media backlash against Pearl Jam's performance of "Bushleaguer," in that the band radically rejected both the dialectical relationship they had established with their fan base and their fans' deliberate efforts to engage the band, which are demonstrated by the renegotiation of the meaning of "Alive" (which I will address later) and the common activity of requesting particular songs at shows. I further argue that the band invites Hall's oppositional and negotiated meanings by refusing to make music videos, and that those videos that do exist allow for a multiplicity of interpretations by their audience. This multiplicity is in direct contrast with "Bushleaguer" and its performance, which strongly asserts a preferred reading, presenting a problem for fans who are used to actively negotiating meanings and being encouraged by the band to do so.

2. *VH1 Storytellers* and *MTV Unplugged:* Constructing authenticity

[2.1]   *Storytellers* is a series on the MTV-affiliated network VH1. Bearing some pronounced similarities to MTV's long-standing and commercially successful series *Unplugged, Storytellers* provides artists with a venue for video performances that go beyond the standard music videos on MTV and other VH1 shows. Such videos are short and often feature lip-synched lyrics and a staged drama or narrative that may or may not include the artists as characters. *Storytellers,* however, presents live performances and allows artists to discuss both the writing and composing of songs and the meanings the songs had for them as they were composing them.

[2.2]   MTV's *Unplugged,* like VH1's *Storytellers,* spotlights live performances. Pearl Jam appeared on *Unplugged* in 1992 and on *Storytellers* in 2006, making these shows important to my argument.

[2.3]   As the *Storytellers* title suggests, the artists are not there merely to perform their songs. They are expected to use the program as a means to give their audience and fans the "real story" behind the creation and recording of particularly poignant and memorable songs. Pearl Jam's longevity as a band might make them seem to fit comfortably with the artists who had appeared on previous *Storytellers* episodes, but their appearance on the show contrasts with their ethos-driven choice, for years prior, to avoid appearing on either MTV or VH1.

3. An unhappy marriage: Pearl Jam and MTV/VH1

[3.1]   Pearl Jam's relationship with each network has been at best ambivalent and at worst antagonistic. They did record a session of *Unplugged* in 1992, after the release of their debut album, *Ten,* but since then they have largely eschewed both music videos and music award shows for a variety of reasons. Their 2006 *Storytellers* appearance, in this context, is much more an anomaly than the rule for the band. It reflects a new openness to the networks as a means of distributing their material, particularly when seen in light of their effort to return to the music video format after 8 years.

[3.2]   One of Pearl Jam's best-known songs, "Alive," was featured in their 2006 *Storytellers* appearance. The show allowed a telling and introspective look at "Alive," their initial commercial success, and at their decision to continue to play the song throughout their touring years. During the broadcast, Eddie Vedder relayed to the audience what I will call the curse narrative:

[3.3]   The song "Alive" has been transformed through the years and it's not so much how we play it, or the arrangement, but more the interpretation. So, the original story being told in the song is that of a young man being made aware of some shocking truths. One was that the guy he believed to be his father, while growing up, was not. And the hard truth number two was that the real father had passed away a few years before…I mean, the guy was me but I barely knew me then…so he takes all this news as a curse…the "I'm still alive." So, cut to years later and we're playing to larger and larger audiences and they're responding to this chorus in a way that you never thought…The audience changed the meaning of these words, and when they sing "I'm still alive" it's like they're celebrating…when they changed the meaning of those words, they lifted the curse. (Pearl Jam 2006)

[3.4]   By "the curse," both Vedder and I mean the original motivation for his writing of the song: the burden of having to continue to live after a series of life-shattering events. Vedder had discussed this narrative publicly prior to his *Storytellers* appearance, as early as 1993 in a *Rolling Stone* interview:

[3.5]   Everybody writes about it like it's a life-affirmation thing—I'm really glad about that […] It's a great interpretation. But "Alive" is…it's torture […] The story of the song is that a mother is with a father and the father dies. It's an intense thing because the son looks just like the father. The son grows up to be the father, the person that she lost […] He's still dealing with love, he's still dealing with the death of his father. All he knows is "I'm still alive"—those three words, that's totally out of burden […] But I'm still alive. (Pearl Jam 1993) (note 2)

[3.6]   While the song originated as a catharsis, on *Storytellers* Vedder describes how audiences have lifted the curse for him, turning "I'm still alive" from a lament into a celebration of life and the ability to survive the traumas that life throws at us. He suggests that it is not the repeated playing of the song that has led to this narrative shift, but the audience's reaction to it. The audience's oppositional or negotiated reading of the song served to change its meaning not just for them, but for its author as well.

[3.7]   Stuart Hall's (1980) model of encoding/decoding provides insight into the process by which viewers and fans make meaningful their reception of music videos. The linear transmission model of communication suggests that if barriers to communication could be eliminated, the message inherent in a text would be received as its producers and broadcasters intended. In direct contrast, Hall's encoding/decoding model suggests that audience members decode texts (in this case, audiovisual ones) and create three kinds of readings or interpretations: oppositional,

negotiated, and dominant. Hall suggests that when audience members read a media text (whether literally, in the case of written text, or by viewing a visual text) and interpret it against the grain or contrary to how television broadcasters, producers, and the majority of other audience members do, they are creating a negotiated or even oppositional reading in lieu of the dominant. Thus, the linear transmission model categorically understands negotiated and oppositional readings as misunderstandings, whereas Hall sees many (but certainly not all) variant readings as the products not of a failed linear communication but of the audience's decoding the text to uncover meanings that differ from the encoded or dominant reading. John Fiske (1985) has successfully applied a Hall-like approach to television.

[3.8]   Hall's model assumes an audience that is active, not passive. The situation becomes a bit more complex when dealing with music videos as an encoded and decoded text. Within any particular music video, there are at least two texts to be read by an audience, and often three: the visual, the melodic or aural, and the lyrical if the song has words. Further, the concurrence of melody, visuals, and lyrics itself creates a synergistic text that is also open to interpretation. Thus, producers encode a music video with a dominant or preferred meaning using several individual texts that work in tandem to reinforce each other. For instance, many music videos feature a narrative that parallels a dominant reading and acts out the lyrics of a song, while others make less direct or sustained visual references to the lyrics. Still others may feature a live visual recording of the band performing the song. Some videos combine all of these elements. In all cases, music videos offer viewers a new form of text to decode, beyond that offered by the music alone. Further complicating this model is Jonathan Gray's (2003) assertion that the attitudes of the decoders of media texts are relevant. Gray's work on antifans and nonfans highlights both the failure to consider how encoding and decoding function outside of the context of fandom and the necessity of doing so. While I focus here on fans and the processes of fandom, Gray's work illustrates the importance of affective investments by the nonfan, a point I will return to later in discussing responses to "Bushleaguer."

[3.9]   Music videos, texts composed of other texts, can have multiple domains of meaning, corresponding to their visual, aural, and lyrical elements and the synergy between them. In essence, as Straw (1993) suggests, viewers can read a music video text according to a preferred meaning that considers all of the video's textual elements. Alternatively, they can, for example, negotiate a preferred or dominant reading of the visual elements alone, yet simultaneously read the lyrical and melodic components of the video against the grain, resulting in negotiated or oppositional readings.

[3.10]   Scholars and critics must not assume that such simultaneous but different readings are easy or without boundaries. The problem is that part of that sociocultural matrix that audiences bring to the table when decoding music videos includes a privileging of the visual over the aural (Straw 1993, 3). In the case of music videos, this suggests that viewers will be more likely to take for granted the images and narratives visually presented to them than the narratives and meanings that they themselves create through their decoding of the lyrical and melodic elements of the video. According to Will Straw, early scholarship on music videos suggested that music video itself served to reinforce the visual over the aural and the experience of music (1993, 3). In the same way that body language serves to contradict or reinforce what we are saying, the receiver or decoder tends to trust the visual over the aural, particularly when a discrepancy between visual and aural is detected.

[3.11]   This belief has led some acts, including Pearl Jam, to give up making videos either permanently or for extended periods. Pearl Jam did not release videos between 1993 and 1998, and only sparingly after that, despite releasing two of their best-selling albums during this hiatus, *Vs.* and *Vitalogy.* One of their reasons for not making videos after *Ten* (among many publicly stated) has been their belief, in line with Straw's argument, that they tend to overdetermine fans' interpretation of songs. Pearl Jam bassist Jeff Ament said, "Ten years from now…I don't want people to remember our songs as videos" (Pearl Jam 1993). Eddie Vedder reiterated Ament's concerns and stated,

> [3.12]   Before music videos first came out, you'd listen to a song with headphones on, sitting in a beanbag chair with your eyes closed, and you'd come up with your own visions, these things that came from within. Then all of a sudden, sometimes even the very first time you heard a song, it was with these visual images attached, and it robbed you of any form of self-expression. (Neely 1998, 113)

[3.13]   They are not alone in launching this critique; as Will Straw noted, this debate proliferated during the early years of scholarship on music videos. In Stuart Hall's language, the video portion of a music video functions as part of that sociocultural matrix through which a viewer reads and negotiates meanings, rather than being itself a text to be negotiated. The video then overdetermines the lyrical elements of a music video, making it difficult to read in a negotiated or oppositional way. Similarly, John Fiske's (1987) idea of semiotic democracy works to explain the potential for multiple and parallel readings of texts. Thus, the refusal to make videos because they overdetermine meanings for an audience may suggest an adherence to the linear transmission model: the creators assume that the lyrics to a particular song have an

evident meaning and that adding a visual element may merely confuse or cloud this meaning.

[3.14]   Pearl Jam does not believe that their lyrics, on the whole, contain some sort of self-evident meaning that may be misinterpreted by their audience. Instead, their refusal to release music videos is an enactment of their desire for fans to generate their own meanings and interpretations of songs, untainted by any visual element. This refusal has allowed Pearl Jam to constitute their fan base in a very particular and specific way that shapes the nature of fans' interaction with the band. In attempting to shape their audience through limiting access, Pearl Jam attempted to shape their audience and manage their image by limiting their production of music videos. In contrast, U2, in their *Zoo TV* phase, attempted to use the same mass media, in excess, to simultaneously overdetermine and undermine their image such that it became difficult for fans and critics to label the band in any sustainable way (Johnson 2004). By avoiding music videos, Pearl Jam attempted to avoid overdetermined interpretations of songs. At the same time, however, their decision to not make music videos suggests they may be uncomfortable with the idea of multiple interpretations of songs altogether. This creates a tension between the democratic aspirations of Pearl Jam and their desire for control.

4. Developing fan culture and fan bases through "work"

[4.1]   Instead of suggesting that the actual musical content of albums declined with each album release, I want to suggest that Pearl Jam increasingly and deliberately limited what it meant to be a consuming fan, in order to manage both their public persona and the manner in which they derive their income. In short, it became harder to be a fan of Pearl Jam for reasons unrelated to the musical content of their work. Since there were no promotional videos and few interviews, potential fans found it hard to discover the band other than through radio play. Current but passive or occasional fans encountered the same frustrations. If you wanted to visually connect with the band, you had to see them live, rather than enjoying 3- to 4-minute videos of their current releases rotating on music television. It is within the context of these shifts that the "Bushleaguer" narrative can and should be read as distinct from that of "Alive."

[4.2]   As previously stated, Pearl Jam chose to not release videos for their second album, *Vs.,* despite the multiplatinum sales of their first album. *Vs.,* while not promoted through music videos, went on to set long-held records for the most copies sold during the first week after release (Boelert 1994). *Vitalogy,* their third album, also sold well, but the numbers suggest a declining trend from *Ten* onward. Pearl Jam's fan base was declining.

[4.3]   Even their lyrics were not always readily available to potential fans, particularly of songs on albums released after their debut, *Ten.* Pearl Jam included liner notes with lyrics for most of their albums, but these lyrics are often radically different from the ones recorded on the album, or are for songs not included on it. Sometimes Pearl Jam omitted lyrics entirely. For example, the liner notecards included in Pearl Jam's 1996 release *No Code* feature cards for "In My Tree," "Present Tense," and "I'm Open" that give the titles of the tracks but contain no lyrics.

[4.4]   The official Pearl Jam fan club, the Ten Club, includes lyrics in a list of things not available through the fan club, stating that the "only available" lyrics are those "already published in the albums…For more detailed lyrics, headphones are recommended" (Ten Club 1999). Further, Vedder has a penchant for mumbled and unenunciated singing. It is thus nearly impossible to figure out what the lyrics to several songs actually are.

[4.5]   On top of Pearl Jam's dearth of self-promotion and deliberate ambiguity about lyrics, it became increasingly difficult to see them live. Live performance is one of the few ways fans can gain a visual image to correlate with the music. Not only does the high demand make it difficult to buy tickets for a commercially successful act such as Pearl Jam, but the band's widely publicized battle with Ticketmaster made it almost impossible for some fans to see the band live (note 3). Some were unable to travel to venues unaffiliated with Ticketmaster, and Pearl Jam's parallel system of ticket distribution had problems of its own. Its infrastructure could not handle the demand, leading to complaints from fans about tickets lost in the mail, never arriving, or arriving late. In 1994, Pearl Jam canceled their summer tour, allegedly because of the difficulty of distributing tickets.

[4.6]   The lack of videos and promotional interviews, the deliberate lyrical ambiguity, and the difficulty of seeing the band live: these factors shaped Pearl Jam's fan base radically over the band's career. Pearl Jam created conditions that required fans to be devoted, active, and engaged, working at their fannishness, rather than remaining passive, occasional fans. The audience that was cultivated by Pearl Jam's demands and the fans' willingness to respond is, in fact, a taste culture: an "interpretive community with shared preferences, dislikes and criteria for good and bad taste" (Kuipers 2006, 360).

[4.7]   I contrast this fan work with the type described by Constance Penley (1992) in her essay "Feminism, Psychoanalysis and Popular Culture." Penley's essay examines the genre of slash (homoerotic) literature involving Star Trek characters, produced by a group of Star Trek fans. While superficially the groups of fans share many similarities, a few crucial differences change the status and meaning of the work done by each group to remain a part of fandom. Among Star Trek fans, the work (or leisure)

involved in remaining a fan is primarily knowledge of the Star Trek canon. Conventions also serve as a means to meet and mingle with other Star Trek fans. Like Pearl Jam fandom, Star Trek fandom generally invites polarities of pleasure, so many fans fall into the very productive and active category Penley describes while few casually watch any of the Star Trek series. Both Pearl Jam and Star Trek create and invite polarities of consumers: on the one hand, those who generate the sort of fandom Penley described, and on the other, nonfans, with few who fall in between these extremes.

[4.8]   The difference I want to address is fans' ability to not participate in these actions and still remain fans. Penley reports consumers and producers of Star Trek slash as saying that finding slash was like finding a piece that had been missing from their fannishness. Slash fiction, for them, fills a void left unaddressed by other forms of fan activity, such as Star Trek conventions. While these slash fans described the literature they produced as addressing a need, Star Trek fandom and what it means to be a Trekkie, even a female Trekkie, does not in any way depend on involvement with the production or reading of slash literature. Although many Trek fans feel that a lack of slash literature leaves the feminine voice unaddressed, slash still represents a small proportion of the means available for consumers to, in turn, produce objects and meanings by decoding (and then reencoding) texts of their own.

[4.9]   The corresponding case is less true for Pearl Jam fans. As I have discussed, Pearl Jam's efforts to radically redefine themselves and reconstitute their fan base drastically limit the ways that fans can produce texts that can in turn be decoded. Up until Pearl Jam's summer 2000 tour, fans shared and traded bootleg recordings of Pearl Jam's performances in the form of cassettes and, later on, CDs. This was a practice both tolerated and endorsed by Pearl Jam when many artists were cracking down on unauthorized duplications of their performances and recordings. As long as the bootlegs were being traded rather than sold, Pearl Jam even facilitated their production. Small personal recording devices were permitted into shows, and fans were instructed, through Pearl Jam's official Web site and the Ten Club newsletter, in what to do if the security at venues did not want to allow them. Beginning with the tour of 2000, Pearl Jam has sold soundboard recordings of their live shows, killing the market for homemade bootlegs (whether intended to be legitimately traded or sold for profit) without changing their long-standing policies on the recording of live shows.

[4.10]   Largely because of the work involved in maintaining fan status, which may be too much for many music aficionados, Pearl Jam fans' productive capacities are limited to creating meanings themselves and having those meanings taken up by other fans, or even (as happened with "Alive") taken up and redistributed by the band. The VH1 *Storytellers* appearance demonstrates that fan work includes the creation of negotiated and oppositional readings. Pearl Jam endorse a more democratic and

participatory element in the cycle of production, one that involves fans in ways that make their productive elements matter. Thus, the audience can alter a song's meaning even for its author. Vedder's discussion of "Alive" on *Storytellers* illustrates that both Pearl Jam and this crafted persona of an audience have a role in the production and consumption of meanings. I parallel this notion of the democratic use and creation of meanings with Fiske's (1987) notion of a semiotic democracy, in which fans' ability to negotiate the meanings of texts (and the band's encouragement of their doing so) in ways that both give fans a voice and make the musical texts personally meaningful is a good in itself. For this reason, fandom says more to, and does more for, the audience than the object of fans' affection: as Henry Jenkins suggests, "fandom celebrates not exceptional texts but rather exceptional readings" (qtd. in Sandvoss 2005, 829).

[4.11]   Because Pearl Jam limits access to the band, this negotiation of meaning takes place in the live performance setting rather than though music videos. Genealogies of new media suggest that interactivity, the blurring of lines between audience and author and the creation of a push-pull relationship with the text by the audience and author, was highly privileged by the ancient Greeks through the medium of live theater (Shefrin 2004). The live performance, and attendance at that live performance, is crucial. While it is possible for mix tapes and CDs to be produced by fans using the official bootlegs, such production removes the crucial element. Under the traditional bootleg arrangement, someone had to have attended the show as an audience member, rather than a member of the sound crew, for the initial recording to be created. The nature of recordings now is very different from what it was when soundboard recordings were not commercially available. The main abstract commodity produced and taken up by Pearl Jam is meanings, as demonstrated by the VH1 *Storytellers* discussion of "Alive." This relationship between audience, text, and author, embodied in fandom, reworks Daniel Cavicchi's idea that "fans always have the feeling that Bruce [Springsteen] is reading their minds because 'their minds' are active elements in constructing and interpreting the music" (qtd. in Sandvoss 2005, 832–33).

[4.12]   Pearl Jam fans must produce meanings rather than tangible objects, not just to remain fans and propagate fan culture, but also to contribute to a more democratic distribution of meanings in this limited context. In light of this, both "Bushleaguer" and the band's appearance on *Storytellers* may pose a paradox. On the one hand, *Storytellers* serves to make explicit to fans both the value and the necessity of their meaning-making activities. On the other hand, the show is premised on the idea that the "true" meaning or context of a song or album can be communicated to both the immediate and the mediated audience, which is precisely the point at which the "Bushleaguer" incident comes into focus.

5. The political paradox

[5.1]   What I am highlighting here is the creation of a problematic paradox for both Pearl Jam and their fans, the consequences of which extend to Pearl Jam's involvement in party politics and the band's use of the live performance venue to heighten awareness of the importance of political participation and of the band's (in particular, Vedder's) partisan stance. The paradox here is that Pearl Jam both endorses and acknowledges audience participation in the creation of meanings and make an effort not to stifle it. Yet at the same time, their political endorsements and the means they use to deliver them violate the implicit pact between band and audience and restrict the ownership of meaning, in a context in which fans have fewer and fewer avenues for creating a participatory fandom outside of this exchange of meanings over lyrics. An example of this is the live performance of "Bushleaguer," a track from their 2002 release *Riot Act* and a pointed, overt criticism of George W. Bush. This example is particularly poignant because of the backlash the band faced from the very fan culture they endorsed and made possible, in addition to backlashes from those uninvolved in this fan culture. It is tempting to conclude that the band was punished by fans for their political beliefs alone, but I argue instead that the background of this backlash was a very prominent clash between the existing relationship between band and audience over meanings and the relationship between them that was endorsed by "Bushleaguer" (video 1).

Video 1. *Pearl Jam, video clip of live performance of "Bushleaguer" (Arnhem, the Netherlands, August 29, 2006).*

[5.2]   I began this essay with a description of some fans' reaction to the "Bushleaguer" performance. While I will attempt to describe the performance accurately and colorfully, no account will substitute for actually witnessing it. The music commences, and before Vedder begins to speak or sing, he emerges from backstage in an ill-fitting blazer, carrying a bottle of wine and wearing a kitschy rubber George W. Bush mask. While masked, Vedder alternates between Michael Jackson's and Madonna's signature dances, the Moonwalk and Vogue, and then starts into the lyrics. When the mask comes off and is placed on the microphone stand, the real show begins. Vedder uses the mask in various ways during performances of "Bushleaguer," using it as a makeshift cigarette holder, forcing it to drink wine, and occasionally simulating foreplay with the mask and microphone stand. One way or another, the performance ends with the mask on the stage floor.

[5.3]   I propose that "Bushleaguer" posed a challenge to Pearl Jam's democratic approach to meanings because it was not open to the democratic understanding and negotiation of meaning that other songs in their catalog were permitted. In the band's view, the backlash against "Bushleaguer" was due to a "misunderstanding," and hence a failure of the transmission model of communication, which did not function as they had intended. Ultimately, the larger Pearl Jam narrative of the democratic negotiation of meanings, which is linked to democratic politics, is in conflict with the prescriptive, antidemocratic narrative of "Bushleaguer." This is underscored, as Jonathan Gray (2003) illustrates, by the strong affective investments these antifans, who were formerly fans, still possess, which they express when viewing or listening to the song. The fact that the performance was something of a deal breaker, causing many fans to abandon their fandom, did not result in their quiet literal or metaphorical departure from the discussion; rather, it incited discussion.

[5.4]   First, we must recognize that visual theatrics are more powerfully prescriptive of meaning than aural ones. In rejecting music videos containing narratives and opting to either make videos featuring live performances, such as were shown on *Storytellers,* or not make them at all, Pearl Jam attempted both to reconstitute their fan base (essentially, by reducing its size) as a means to reassert some control over their mediated image and to communicate openness to a dialectical construction of meaning. "Bushleaguer" might have been more at home in U2's *Zoo TV* tour, and considerable parallels are visible between Vedder's Bush alter ego and the multiple personae Bono employed; both singers used them to restructure their media presence and simultaneously parody their status as media(ted) icons (Johnson 2004). The sharp contrast "Bushleaguer" presents with the rest of the show increases its spectacle and makes it more comparable to a music video than an element of live performance. It is its function as a haphazard stand-in for music videos that gives "Bushleaguer" its

antidemocratic and prescriptive status so out of step with the usual collective negotiation of meaning.

[5.5]   Second, when "Bushleaguer" received a particularly scornful response at a Uniondale, New York, show, the band discussed the reaction on a Buffalo, New York, radio station (Pearl Jam 2003). Mike McCready, the lead guitarist, said that because of this negative response, the band would not play "Bushleaguer" live again. In their defense, he said that he hoped fans would not "misunderstand the meaning behind the song." However, the band resumed playing "Bushleaguer" only a month or so after McCready said this. Reacting to "Bushleaguer" is one way for fans and consumers to become producers despite the many barriers in their way. Since "Bushleaguer" contains a rare but discordant prescriptive political element, its rejection by fans serves as a surrogate for the more familiar (and democratic) dialogue over meanings.

6. Conclusion

[6.1]   In sum, the problem is not that fans necessarily disagree with Pearl Jam and Vedder's anti-Bush stance; it is that the theatrical "Bushleaguer" presumes that the band has authority over the meanings and interpretations of the song, particularly its political thrust. This lack of narrative coherence and fidelity to the larger constitutive narrative evolving and involving Pearl Jam fans suggested their last course of action to restore the democratic dialectic of meanings between performers and audience: rejection of both the prescriptive narrative and "Bushleaguer," the means to this end.

[6.2]   As I have argued, to be a Pearl Jam fan is to carry out a particular kind of work involving the negotiation of meanings. To engage as a fan with the notoriously media-unfriendly band is to participate in this semiotic democracy, as happened in the evolution of "Alive." The relationship between fans and Pearl Jam became strained, and the band became less willing to welcome fans as collaborators in meaning making, with the introduction of "Bushleaguer" and its prescriptive performance. Thus, we can see the fan backlash against "Bushleaguer" as more than just political protest: these are fans unhappy with the loss of their role as participants.

7. Notes

1. "The mediapheme is the most common unit of communication in mass-mediated iconographic modes of remembering…Mediaphemes are quick encapsulations; once a story, person, or event is translated into mediapheme form, it ricochets through the channels of mass mediation with ease. Mediaphemes may become icons, but they rarely do; they tend to last as long as a story, issue, or person is 'hot'" (Baty 1995, 60).

2. In this quotation, ellipses in square brackets indicate editorial elisions; ellipses outside them are original.

3. In 1994, Pearl Jam asked the Department of Justice to investigate what they deemed monopolistic practices by Ticketmaster that prevented Pearl Jam from keeping ticket prices below $20. These practices were reinforced by exclusivity contracts with venues and promoters who, under penalty of litigation, had to honor Ticketmaster's refusal to comply with Pearl Jam's request to limit service charges to no more than 10 percent. The Department of Justice ruled in favor of Ticketmaster, and consequently Pearl Jam's 1994 tour had to be canceled. The band resumed their relationship with Ticketmaster in 1998 after several largely unsuccessful attempts to tour without using its services.

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Praxis

Delegitimizing strategic power: Normative identity and governance in online R.E.M. fandom

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[0.1]   *Abstract*—How can strategies of governance in an online fan community be resisted by fans? By drawing on Henry Jenkins's application of de Certeau's concepts of strategy and tactics to fandom, I examine the regulation of normative behavior and show how fans can collectively devise tactics to delegitimize and reject strategies applied by the hierarchy, consequently becoming self-steering. To articulate these tensions that can arise within a fan community, I draw on a case study of normative fan identity within Murmurs, an online community for fans of left-leaning liberal American rock band R.E.M. I show how norms in the community are constructed through values of liberalism such as tolerance, equality, and goodwill. Focusing on how normative behavior in a community is not a given but is governed through strategies of power employed by the hierarchy, I explore how two strategies were successfully resisted by members on the basis that they subverted these values of liberalism. My argument demonstrates how the strategies worked to explicitly expose governmentality (Foucault's concept) within the community, with fans becoming aware that they were instrumental in a process of self-governance, collectively devising tactics, and steering themselves to reject the strategies. This has broad implications for understanding and predicting the power dynamics of other online fan communities, and in particular for formulating responses to implementation of strategies of surveillance and governance.

[0.2]   *Keywords*—Fan community; Governance; Internet; Music; Normativity

1. Introduction

[1.1]   By drawing from an ethnographic study, I will explore how strategies of governance in an online fan community can be resisted by members. To illustrate this, I will draw on a case study of Murmurs, an online community for fans of the American rock band R.E.M. This band has promoted strong political involvement throughout their career, releasing their 1988 album *Green* on the same day as that year's US presidential elections, expressing their left-leaning liberal politics through such actions as becoming part of the 2004 Vote for Change tour, and placing advertisements urging Americans to vote for the latest Democratic candidate (note 1). As observed by Liesbet

Van Zoonen in her study of the connections between politics and popular culture, "Fan groups and political constituencies resemble each other when it comes to the endeavors that make one part of the community" (2005, 53).

[1.2]   In this sense, I demonstrate how normative behavior in the community is constructed through the values of liberalism such as tolerance, equality, and goodwill (Kernohan 1998). Drawing on Henry Jenkins's (1992) application of de Certeau's notions of strategy and tactics to fandom, I will show how normative behavior in an online community is not a given but is governed through strategies employed by the community's hierarchy. In this sense, strategies used by the hierarchy are actions of dominance, whereas tactics used by the rest of the community work as tools of opposition to these actions. Thus, the maintenance and governance of normative behavior in online fandom can be fraught with power dynamics between site managers and community members.

[1.3]   I argue that the introduction of an Ignore User strategy—an application that allows members to block others so that their posts are not visible to them—highlights contradictions within the values of liberalism aspired to by Murmurs, such as the tensions between equality and freedom of speech, and the difficulty of protecting these values while seeking to encourage normativity in the community. This philosophy of liberalism is here defined then as involving the maintenance of "intellectual and political freedom, of reason and conscience" (Rayner 1998, 18) and "a commitment both to the equal moral worth of persons and to the tolerance of diverse points of view on how lives should be lived" (Kernohan 1998, 1). Kant identified three values that citizens should rightly access: "lawful freedom to obey no law other than that to which he has given his consent…civil equality in recognizing no-one among the people as superior to himself…and civil independence which allows him to owe his existence and sustenance…purely to his own rights and powers" (Kant [1797] 1991, 139). As I will show, this commitment to goodwill and freedom of expression demands that "political decisions about what citizens should be forced to do or prevented from doing must be made on grounds that are neutral among the competing convictions about good and bad lives that different members of the community might hold" (Dworkin 1990, 13).

[1.4]   Continuing to explore the use of strategic power to encourage normative behavior, I show how two strategies, Reputations and User Notes, introduced into the community to help maintain intellectual standards in posts were successfully delegitimized through tactical resistance by community members because they subverted values of liberalism. My argument demonstrates how the strategies worked to explicitly expose governmentality (Foucault 1978) within the community, with fans becoming aware that they were instrumental in a process of self-governance, collectively devising tactics, and steering themselves to reject the strategies.

Governmentality describes a form of power that arises when the state endeavors "to improve the wealth of the nation and the happiness of its citizens by means of the systematic identification of individual needs and characteristics whilst at the same time regulating and policing their actions in ways which act to strengthen the role of the state" (Loader 1997, 12). The government's role within this regulation is not all-encompassing, but rather "one of coordination…that gathers together disparate technologies of governing inhabiting many sites" (Bratich, Packer, and McCarthy 2003, 5). This population management is exercised through "one instrument or another, never directly" (Sterne 2003, 112). Thus, coordinated within the "more apparent forms of external government [such as] policing, surveillance and regulatory activities" (Lupton 1995, 9) is the instrument of self-governance, or what Foucault termed "technologies of the self" (1988) and "conduct of conduct" (1982, 220–21), which involves "considered and calculated ways of thinking and acting that propose to shape, regulate, or manage the conduct of individuals or groups" (Inda 2005, 6). This is to say, that "while individuals internalize the state's systems of control and surveillance, the state in its turn appropriates the various 'technologies of the self' as its means of government" (Gilleard and Higgs 2000, 102). Therefore, governmentality incorporates "not just the ordering of activities and processes [but also] operates through subjects…to the extent that authoritative norms, calculative technologies, and forms of evaluation can be translated into the values, decisions and judgments of citizens…[in order that] they can function as part of the 'self-steering' mechanisms of individuals" (Miller and Rose 1990, 18). In this sense, the concept has also been associated with neoliberal government rationalities, where "individuals are compelled to assume market-based values in all of their judgments and practices in order to amass sufficient quantities of 'human capital' and thereby become 'entrepreneurs of themselves'" (Hamann 2009, 38). Social control is increased "while encouraging self-regulation" (Nadesan 2008, 29). I will then provide insight into fan behavior by demonstrating that when fans become aware that they are instrumental in a process of surveillance and self-governance, introduced by the hierarchy, that contradicts the stated ethos of the fan base, they can collectively devise tactics to delegitimize and reject the strategy, consequently becoming "self-steering" (Miller and Rose 1990, 18).

[1.5]   Murmurs (http://www.murmurs.com) is the largest and most productive online community for R.E.M. fans. The band was formed in Athens, Georgia, in April 1980 and has frequently been acknowledged as a politically and environmentally aware intellectual or "thinking" band (Fricke 1985; Gray 1992), a notion complemented by their early success on American college radio (Greer 1992). R.E.M. maintained a distinctly artistic approach in the early half of their career, producing music videos that were more avant-garde than the slick commercial products most record labels wanted and refusing to compromise their beliefs to secure a chart hit (Sullivan 1995, xxi), an ideology that has been deemed a strong characteristic of 1980s indie guitar rock genre

(Bannister 2006). For instance, Robert Sloane views the band as continually and currently being "artist-intellectual, offering meaningful texts that reflect thoughtfully on the context of their production and reception alike" (2003, 88). Murmurs has been frequently acknowledged by fans and the band itself as the definitive dwelling place for those interested in R.E.M.-related news and discussion of these "meaningful texts." The Web site, which took its name from the first full-length R.E.M. album, entitled *Murmur,* began life in April 1996 as a basic R.E.M. news page and soon developed into an online forum. Since then, the community has steadily grown; by January 2011, it had achieved almost 18,000 members who have created over 2 million posts.

[1.6]   The data for this study were collected through a cyberethnography of Murmurs, of which I have been a participating member since 2000. Therefore, as a fan of R.E.M., I have conducted this research from the position of a scholar fan (Hills 2002; Phillips 2010). During this time, I was also appointed part of the Murmurs Crew, a group of members assisting with the day-to-day running of the Web site. After alerting the community to my researcher status, I observed Murmurs over a 4-year period (between 2004 and 2007) and monitored all discussions within the general community discussions forum (the Community Center), where conversations surrounding the introduction of User Notes and Reputations took place. I also performed an additional search in the community archives for these terms. To maintain the anonymity of members, I have refrained providing user names.

2. Normative fan identity in Murmurs

[2.1]   Normative fan identity within Murmurs is closely reliant on a liberal intelligentsia, encompassing political and cultural awareness, humanitarian and environmental concern, and an expressive appreciation of art, music, and literature (Jovanovic 2006, 9). It can be argued that these values originated from and are maintained by R.E.M. in both their professional lives and musical style. As Matthew Bannister argues, "The lyrical concerns of indie can be viewed as an inversion of pop values: anti-romantic, pessimistic, ironic, intellectual and often serious (not dissimilar to high culture values)" (2006, 77). For example, the band has been described as "liberal, laconic and oozing emotional intelligence" (Crampton 1998; Kannberg 2001) (note 2). R.E.M. is also "concerned with conservation, the environment [and] general humanitarian causes" (Gray 1992, 198) (note 3), consistently supporting organizations such as Amnesty International, Oxfam, and Greenpeace, and becoming involved in many local projects within the Athens area (Gill 1991; Branson 1999, 9). They have also been perceived as avoiding "the traps of celebrity, [and maintaining] their freedom of speech, presenting themselves as defenders of common sense and morality" (Bowler and Dray 1995, 3), a prospect that has led to them being described as one of America's "most liberal…rock groups" (Phillips 1996). In this sense, they

have also been regarded as "confident and high-profile liberal activists" (Marino 2004), "die-hard liberals" (Stern and Smith 2001, 5), and "a liberal, democratising voice within the music business" (Buckley 2002, 196). Their fans have also been viewed in the same light, as a "kind of liberal, free-thinking audience" (Flynn 2001). As posted on Murmurs by one member, "There are certain aspects of the character of an R.E.M. fan which we share…civility, sensitivity, exploration, intelligence, tolerance, liberalism, caring" (November 26, 2003). R.E.M. guitarist Peter Buck also observed that "almost all the fans I meet are pretty cool people. They're intelligent and tend to think about things a bit more than your average rock'n'roll fans: sensible people I wouldn't mind having a drink with" (Snow 1992, 71).

[2.2]   The development of social norms in a community has received much attention from scholars, most specifically with regard to its definition and distinction from social rules. In this respect, Burnett and Bonnici stress that rules differ from norms in that they are "more formalized through codification and are prescriptive and controllable" (2003, 334). They can in effect be used to control or punish deviant behavior. The purpose of norms, on the other hand, has been seen "to give individuals a sense of balance, a way to gauge what is normal in a specific context at a specific time. [They] point the way to acceptable standards and codes of behavior" (Burnett, Besant, and Chatman 2001, 537). Social norms therefore can "guide social interaction and may be linked to a sense of collective identity" (Kimoto 1998, 97).

[2.3]   Nancy Baym suggests that within an online community the norms that develop are "directly related to the purposes of the group. It is to meet the needs of the community…that standards of behavior and methods of sanctioning inappropriate behaviour develop" (1998, 61). Additionally, online communities may import these normative values from their off-line counterparts or develop their own by determining "what is acceptable and what is not" (Jacko 2003, 603). The establishment of norms has been deemed as vital in order to achieve social stability: "Communities, as organized sets of relationships, need mechanisms for limiting the potential for destructive activities on the part of…members" (Sypher and Collins 2001, 194). Likewise, Howard Rheingold viewed the introduction of norms as an essential safeguard, not only for the prevention of "destructive activities," but also to preserve free speech in an online community: "The only alternative to imposing potentially dangerous restrictions on freedom of expression is to develop norms, folklore, ways of acceptable behavior that are widely modelled, taught, and valued, that can give the citizens of cyberspace clear ideas of what they can and cannot do with the medium" (2000, 54).

[2.4]   Nessim Watson, in his case study of the online community for fans of the band Phish, discovered a certain normative conduct that members were encouraged to

uphold. Even though the forum did not appear to impose restrictions, "certain fan values regarding respect for the band and appropriate behavior both on the Net and at shows [were] not considered to be debatable" (1997, 113). In some communities, membership is dependent on displaying these fan values. Crabbe, Solomos, and Back (2001) found that "gaining entry to the interpretive community of football fans is a matter of being able to articulate and master the implicit cultural codes that police the boundaries of acceptance" (77). Thus, members "may adapt their behavior to what they perceive as the normative standards of the community" (Sherman 2001, 59).

[2.5]   A Murmurs thread concerning a 2004 concert in Atlanta where a large number of audience members vocally and physically opposed the band's onstage comments against George Bush displays how rejection of left-leaning liberal politics is viewed as a breach and misunderstanding of the norms of R.E.M. fandom:

> [2.6]   There were several very strange and tense political moments where parts of the crowd seemed to actually be attempting to drown out Stipe's comments by yelling "4 more years" or just booing, while the Kerry supporters were yelling back. I personally found such a contentious and almost openly hostile atmosphere to be totally depressing at an REM show… it…seemed profoundly sad to see fellow REM fans so divided, and that animosity seriously detracted from the atmosphere of the gig, and my ability to enjoy it. I mean there were lots of people walking around in Bush-Cheney t-shirts, and there was a big "W" banner that some people were holding out from the upstairs club seats. It was just really a weird feeling. I honestly can't understand why they would go to an REM show to do that. Have they never actually listened to the band's music and listened to the lyrics?
>
> [2.7]   The political thing was ridiculous—who goes to an REM show expecting anything but a liberal slant? (October 24, 2004)

[2.8]   The comments in this thread indicate that a rejection of left-leaning liberal politics by an R.E.M. fan is viewed as a rejection of not only intellectualism but also the central values of R.E.M fandom. However, this denouncement of particular political viewpoints highlights the dilemma that can be found within liberal politics, which will be explored further in the next section: how to support tolerance and freedom of speech toward opposing views and interests that are seen as a threat to liberal views. This principle has been determined as "the problem at the heart of liberal politics—how to reconcile the exercise of authority with the very values—freedom, tolerance, diversity—supposedly protected by that authority" (Fish 1994, 34).

3. Strategies of policing normative behavior

[3.1]   I shall now examine the strategies introduced by the Murmurs hierarchy to reinforce normative behavior, and the tactics that were employed by members to retaliate against these strategies. In *Textual Poachers* (1992), Henry Jenkins applies Michel de Certeau's notion of poaching from *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1984) to fandom, which opposes tactics to strategies. Strategies entail "assertions of power and dominance" (Jagodzinski 1997, 197) that are "performed from a position of strength, employing…property and authority" (Jenkins 1992, 45). They are "associated with space, and specifically with those spaces which are owned and operated by [these] forces…consolidating power over others who impinge on that space" (Bukatman 2001, 160). In contrast to this, tactics are "performances, tricks, poaches, parasitic appropriations" (Jagodzinski 1997, 197), "the negotiation and resistance of imposed frameworks" (Brooker and Jermyn 2003, 169), exercised by "the mobile population of the dispossessed and the powerless" (Jenkins 1992, 45). As such, "the place of a tactic belongs to the other" (Bukatman 2001, 160). De Certeau criticized Michel Foucault for placing too much emphasis on strategies of the dominant, which only "neglects the incessant activities of opposition" (Barbour 1993, 58). He argues that it is "impossible to reduce the functioning of a society to a dominant type of procedures" (de Certeau 1984, 48) and instead concluded that "a society is…composed of certain foregrounded practices organizing its normative institutions *and* of innumerable other practices that remain 'minor'" (1984, 48). In this sense, I will argue that within R.E.M. fandom, R.E.M. as producers performs strategies, whereas their fans use tactics. In Murmurs, it is those in charge of the community, such as the administration team, crew members, and hosts, who have strategies, while tactics are employed by subordinate community members.

[3.2]   The development of these power calculations (de Certeau 1984, 35–37) in Murmurs can be determined alongside the move of the Web site in 2001 from the previous Web board to a larger forum Web space to cater to the increased membership and to facilitate a higher frequency of posts. In this new and more populated location, there arose issues of nonnormativity that received immediate attention from normative members:

> [3.3]   I've noticed a number of people who seem to reply to every thread and start many topics when they don't even have anything to add to them… it really is getting to be a problem…I rarely start a thread myself and when I do I make sure it isn't something that's been done or that nobody would give a shit about. A simple rule that would make this place much better would be to make sure you have something to say at least most of the time that you post. Sure, there's times when a simple "I agree" and not much more elaboration is fine and ok and even necessary but try to facilitate at least a little discussion some of the time. There are people with 200 or 300 or more

posts that I've really never read anything even slightly interesting from at all. (May 31, 2001)

[3.4]   To combat this nonnormative behavior of failing to create sufficiently intelligent posts, an Ignore User strategy was implemented into Murmurs in an effort to mark and silence nonnormative posters until normative behavior could be reestablished. As Ian Buchanan states, rather than being seen as binary opposites, strategies and tactics are "dialectical rather than polemological" (2000, 86), a notion evident in the discussion of normative strategy between the Murmurs hierarchy and community members. However, I will argue that this strategy, as a result of its subversion of freedom of speech and tolerance, made visible the contradictions within values of liberalism and the difficulty of protecting these values in the community while seeking to encourage normative behavior.

[3.5]   The ignore list provided members with the option of adding fellow users to a list that removed all their posts, instead stating, "This user is on your ignore list. To view this post anyway, click here." Personal messages sent from the ignored user to the member using the feature against them were also rejected. However, hosts, moderators, and Webmasters were immune from the ignore system. An example of the feature being used against the nonnormative poster is evident in a thread created by a Murmurs host entitled "Let's ignore [member]," which urged other members to place a user on their ignore list as a result of his resistance to communal norms:

> [3.6]   He's obviously a sexist and racist asshole that doesn't belong in this community. He doesn't accept anyone that's different from him, and nothing we say will change his mind. He gives Christianity a bad name. I've put him on my ignore list, and I encourage everyone else to do the same.

> [3.7]   Well, he stopped arguing in the "PC" thread when I refused to bother refuting his points—it works. If someone is being obnoxious in their desperate bid for the spotlight, turn the spotlight off. The philosophy board is what WE make it…We can turn this train around any time. As long as we recognize what is going on, we won't be victims of it. Count me in. (November 23, 2001)

[3.8]   However, it is evident that the Ignore User strategy, through its means of exclusion and rejection, contravened the values of tolerance, goodwill, and freedom of expression that were central to R.E.M. fandom and the Murmurs community. One member lamented the loss of these values in the actions of members who were actively supporting the system:

[3.9]   please tell me this thread is a joke. what happened to live and let live. judge ye not etc. etc., ignore or engage. read or don't read??? will you be burning books next?? he's just stating his beliefs, he's just doing what he does, it's not like you have to accept any of it or respond to any of it. no one's forcing you to read his posts or respond to them. agree with them or not, he is entitled to post what he does without having to put up with bullshit like this. (November 23, 2001)

[3.10]   This was also endorsed by another poster who viewed the ignore feature as incompatible with the freedom of expression central to liberalism: "If you want to ignore him, fine, that is up to the individual but I don't think a torch lit procession demanding or even suggesting ostracism…is in the spirit of Murmurs or free speech" (November 23, 2001). However, the strategists defended their actions as their right to exercise their own freedom of speech: "I think everyone should be able to express their opinions, but when someone offends over half the people in the forum, there can be the natural consequences of opposition and rejection…The opposition and rejection is free speech too" (November 25, 2001). Ultimately, because of this, Ignore User as a feature was not tactically resisted successfully.

[3.11]   This situation highlights the contradictions and tensions within liberalism between demanding freedom of speech yet opposing intolerance to normative standards. As Kernohan states, "Just as free expression serves important interests, an accumulation of expressive activities harms important interests." Therefore, the apparent solution, which does not do away with a contradiction at the heart of discourses of liberalism, is to "weigh these interests against one another" (1998, 103).

[3.12]   In this sense, the users of the ignore feature, observing the member's "sexist and intolerant" (November 25, 2001) remarks, viewed their "important interests," that is, the values of liberalism in the community, being harmed. As Stanley Fish explains, "In the eyes of the liberal, the pronouncements of fundamentalists are…dangerous… They flow from ignorance and bigotry, and if they go unchecked they may succeed in turning the nation away from reason" (1994, 136). However, Stephen Carter suggests that liberalism "has very little idea of how to cope with the…people who embrace [conservatism]" (1987, 978) and ends up being "curiously intolerant" as a result of this (1987, 981). Larry Alexander, discussing "the failure of liberalism to provide a justification for tolerating illiberal views," concludes that this occurs because "the great liberal freedoms" are "deeply paradoxical" (2005, 147). As Stanley Fish explains, "Liberal thought begins in the acknowledgment that faction, difference, and point of view are irreducible; but the liberal strategy is to devise (or attempt to devise) procedural mechanisms that are neutral with respect to point of view and therefore can serve to frame partisan debates in a non partisan manner" (1994, 16). This

contradiction is therefore innate in liberalism, and thereby, I conclude, also in the Murmurs community: "Liberal government cannot help but be partisan, which means that liberalism as governmental non-partisanship…is an impossibility" (Alexander 2005, 147).

[3.13]   However, Reputations and User Notes, two specific strategies of surveillance by the official Murmurs hierarchy to encourage normative behavior, were successfully tactically resisted by fans because these strategies, by making implicit norms explicit, rendered community hierarchies of subcultural capital visible in a way that contradicted the liberalism values and egalitarianism of R.E.M fandom.

4. The delegitimization of strategic power through tactical resistance

[4.1]   In July 2004, two strategies, Reputations and User Notes, were introduced into the community by the Murmurs hierarchy to enforce normative behavior. However, both were successfully tactically resisted by fans who discursively positioned the strategies in a way that defended the values of liberalism within R.E.M. fandom.

[4.2]   The Reputation system was introduced to the Murmurs community as a strategy for rating members and indicating quality of posts. Because of this, its intended application in the community was to function as a system to mark the nonnormative from the normative and encourage resistant users toward normative behavior. Indeed, the notion of reputation has been viewed as working to achieve moral and social order in that it "results from transmission of beliefs about how… agents are evaluated with regard to socially desirable conduct [which] represents one or another of the solutions to the problem of social order and may consist of cooperation or altruism, reciprocity, or norm obedience" (Conte and Paolucci 2002, 1).

[4.3]   Community members could award points anonymously to any posts they deemed worthy of approval, or give negative feedback to those posts considered unfavorable. An individual's acquirement of reputation was then displayed on their profile through a number of small colored icons that indicated their levels achieved. A number of red icons would indicate a negative reputation, and a row of green icons indicated a positive one. A similar point system is evident within the technology news Web site Slashdot in the form of "karma," which indicates a poster's "reputation for contributing high-quality comments, measured by the ratings his/her previous comments collected" (Cheng and Vassileva 2005, 153). Therefore, a member can "read the Slashdot site…knowing that what [is] read…will come from people who the community has found tend to make valuable contributions" (Shane 2004, 13).

Alongside the rating given to users, members could also leave an anonymous comment to support their evaluation.

[4.4]   The second strategy implemented in an effort to encourage normative behavior was the User Notes feature. These were attached to a member's profile and enabled other users to post a comment about that particular member for all to see. However, the fact that the Reputations system was based on anonymity, with the author remaining unidentified, became a cause for concern for some members, who felt its introduction would have a negative effect on the community: "I think that these reputation scores are already damaging the board and will continue to do so. I see nothing positive that will come from them. Is anyone with me on this?" (July 7, 2004). Other comments from members displayed five different tactics used in order to resist both strategies, as outlined in table 1.

Table 1. *Five tactics used by fans to resist the Reputations and User Notes strategies in Murmurs.*

Tactic	Description
1	References to the tactics used in other online communities to resist strategies.
2	The use of a discourse of "childishness."
3	An emphasis on the strategies' subversion of values of tolerance.
4	The use of discourse that stresses humanitarian values of R.E.M. fandom.
5	Arguments stressing values of equality.

[4.5]   The first tactic, stressing how members in other online communities had also made efforts to tactically resist the Reputations strategy, is evident in one member's post relating the actions by some individuals to manipulate the system by acquiring positive reputation points:

> [4.6]   I saw them cause a lot of problems. Whole 75+ threads were started for the sole purpose of repping the person above you so the posters would have many green dots. People were constantly interupting [*sic*] threads to bitch about a neg rep they'd just recieve [*sic*]. I think you can disable them… no one really did that, though, they just complained about getting bad ones. People said they were afraid to post because of the reps they'd get. (July 5, 2004)

[4.7]   In the above member's example, community members' desire to gain status through an accumulation of positive reputation became the driving force for interactions and resulted in the system overwhelming the community. However, discouraging nonnormative members by making them afraid to post is seemingly the exact purpose of the Reputations system, which in Murmurs contradicts the stated

liberal ethos of the R.E.M. fan base. This prospect alerts fans that by engaging in the strategies, they are participating in a self-norming process.

[4.8]   The second tactic involved the use of a discourse of "childishness" to delegitimate strategic power. Some stressed that many members had already acquired reputations within the community on the basis of their conduct and style of interactions, and therefore, they did not need to be further classified in what was said to be a juvenile manner: "there are many people here with reputations, less so on a childish level but more of just a style of posting and replying" (July 6, 2004). Indeed, reputations are already implicitly assessed within the community through subcultural capital, a process that causes the nonnormative to be othered. However, as is evident from the poster's response, the Reputations system is viewed as providing a less sophisticated and more "childish" procedure of classification than that which already implicitly exists within Murmurs. As one member stated, "The reputations points process reminds me of the Slam books we used to pass around in junior high" (July 7, 2004), and another was reminded of her "elementary school teachers' check-mark systems on the board…don't get too many checks by your name, or it's eraser-slapping time!" (July 6, 2004). This tactic was used by another poster to criticize both strategies:

> [4.9]   I'm against them…I am intrigued by how the new system will work, once that comes together, so it's not that I'm against change. I just think that things like user notes and reputation points detract from a sense of community and they make me feel like I'm participating in a site full of high-schoolers. (July 9, 2004)

[4.10]   Although this member objects to the introduction of User Notes, she is open to supporting elements of change within the community. However, her comments imply that the recent changes will not work to maintain the normative image of the community as a liberal intelligentsia but will instead promote childish practices found in high school. This viewpoint is supported by comments from a fan who also considers User Notes to lower the tone of the community to a nonnormative, juvenile level:

> [4.11]   I find these to be akin to junior high school slambooks. I don't know if slambooks still exist, and in case they don't, I will describe one. It is a notebook where people sign next to a number and every page has a person's name at the top. The point is to make comments about every person and you sign you comments with the number you signed in next to. So, if this were a slambook and I was on [a member's] page, I might write something like cute, sweet, really nice, very cool and then sign with my number. I don't mean to put down kids in junior high; I merely feel that this was one of the more juvenile pasttimes while I was there. If someone has an issue with me,

they should pm me and start a dialog, or tell me off or whatever. (July 9, 2004)

[4.12]   Therefore, these Murmurs strategies are projected by the tacticians to be in direct contradiction to the notions of liberal intelligentsia and masculinized discourse in the community, which themselves evoke a sense of maturity and adulthood. Administrators' attempted strategies are instead tactically associated with nonnormative feminized readings and discourse, which are seen as infantile.

[4.13]   The third tactic is one that extols the virtues of tolerance found within liberalism. One member engaged in this by drawing attention to the inadequacy and failure of the imposed strategy to allow for tolerant behavior:

> [4.14]   It takes time for people to get to know one another, and I guess I don't see that as a problem. There are several people here that I respect now after initially disliking them. A simple "good/bad" indicator is oversimplifying things in my opinion. Relationships are much more complex than that. (July 6, 2004)

[4.15]   For this fan, relationships within a community are built through repeated interaction over time, and thus there is a need for the user to show tolerance rather than judge others through simplified indicators of their "good" or "bad" assigned characteristics. As I have shown, tolerance is a central value of liberalism, a notion that is also sympathetic to how relationships are developed within fan communities.

[4.16]   Another poster also questioned the purpose to which User Notes would be used and introduced a fourth resistant tactic. This involved the use of discourse that emphasized the humanitarian values of R.E.M. fandom and associated User Notes with commerciality to show its breach of these values:

> [4.17]   I am a person and I want to be treated as such. This is not Ebay and I am not selling my reputation to post here nor do I feel that my persona has to be self-organized into some nice little data elements for someone else's pleasure. We are not putting stars by people's names as being a "Good Murmursian." What are we expecting in these usernotes?…I am not here to sell myself; I am here to learn information, to discuss, to argue, to think and to comprehend. Instead of the board itself being distributed like a city, now we are the city. We are the storefronts, our usernames and our personas are being used in a manner that is inconsistent with what I think is right. (July 7, 2004)

[4.18]   User Notes are here anticipated as having a negative effect on Murmurs by transforming the community into one based on a drive for accumulation of positive

comments from other community members. In this manner, the poster views the community being changed to a setting where members are eager to classify and promote themselves in a commercial sense, and his tactic of drawing an analogy between members and "storefronts" is an objection to being used or positioned as a commodity. This reaction could have been inspired by R.E.M's anticommercial stance: throughout their career, the band members have refused to allow their music to be used for commercial advertising. This is line with Matthew Bannister's observations on the genre of indie guitar rock, where "the image of the musician is often as anti-star —'ordinary,' modest" (2006, 86).

[4.19]   The following comments engage in the fifth and final discernible tactic, which again argues for values of equality found within liberalism:

> [4.20]   This is just playground politics. The fashionable ones, the unfashionable ones, and the ones who just don't seem to fit in anywhere! You're making a coloured dot a first impression. In a forum, there shouldn't be status, everyone should feel at ease with saying something or answering back. The natural instinct of most is to "musy" up to the popular people, regardless of what they do or say. The whole idea stinks of compartmentalism, hierarchy and social acceptability—or not as the case may be. (August 16, 2004)

[4.21]   This perception is critical of the way the Reputation system favors the normative (the fashionable) against the nonnormative (the unfashionable). Within Slashdot, a similar situation occurs as "good comments made by new users or the users who haven't contributed highly rated comments so far tend not to receive a deserving attention and to collect sufficient ratings to raise the 'karma' level of their contributor" (Cheng and Vassileva 2005, 153). This is a prospect in line with what Robert Merton termed "the Matthew effect" (1968; see also Merton 1996 for a reexamination of his theory). This process of social inequality occurs when "already eminent scientists gain disproportionate peer recognition and acclaim in cases of collaboration" (Sztompka 1996, 16), while "relatively unknown scientists tend to get disproportionately little credit for comparable contributions" (Merton 1968, 57). This thereby reinforces the normative in the sense of awarding credit to "already famous people" (Merton 1968, 57), ensuring that "reputational property increases like economic capital and, just like economic capital, creates sharp inequalities in status" (Fuchs 1992, 72).

[4.22]   The following poster highlights the possibility that a member's first impression of others would be reduced to, and based on, the interpretation of a "coloured dot." For her, this is a situation that, by encouraging the influence of status within the

community in this manner, ensures the boundaries between social groups are more defined, an occurrence that promotes inequality:

> [4.23]   The entire purpose of this site even with the stupid avatars or sig files or whatever is that you have the opportunity to choose your own individuality and not have something assigned for you by other people that can positively and or negatively influence other people. Now they might do nothing, they might do something. I do not think that these are principles that this community was founded on. (July 6, 2004)

[4.24]   However, as I have already established, there is already a de facto reputation/status hierarchy within Murmurs through the subcultural fan values and via levels of subcultural capital. Rather, it is the move from implicit to explicit norms that appears to concern community members because it makes community hierarchies that contest values of equality highly visible. I argue that as long as these hierarchical systems remain implicit, the contradictions embedded within liberalism can be glossed over and remain ignored. However, as soon as the hierarchies come under surveillance or are made explicit, the contradiction becomes too visible and threatening. As Michel Foucault states, "Visibility is a trap" (1977, 93).

[4.25]   The act of surveillance in society has been deemed a strategy of power that acts as a "component in an ideological offensive to reclaim…a desired sociospatial order" (Coleman 2004, 2; see also Bell 1984, 108). I would argue that the purpose of the Reputations and User Notes strategies within Murmurs is "to operate invisibly while providing visibility; and to foster subjects' participation in their own monitoring (self-policing), sometimes involuntarily" (Ericson, Haggerty, and Carriere 1993, 35). This is to say, members are encouraged to engage in surveillance in order to mark and govern any nonnormative fan identity themselves. Therefore, the strategies could be considered as leading the community to the position of a surveillance community, or what Foucault termed "governmentality" (1978), which entails "continuity between the rule of self, household and state whose interruption precipitates crisis in all these areas" (Baddley 1997, 64). This form of control is conceived as "the ensemble formed by the institutions, procedures, analyses and reflections, the calculations and tactics, that allow the exercise of this very specific albeit complex form of power, which has as its target populations" (Foucault 1978, 102). Therefore, to "improve the wealth" (Loader 1997, 12) of the community, Murmurs employs these strategies of power to reinforce the central values of R.E.M. fandom. However, as I have shown, the strategies used precipitated crisis because they at least partially contradicted the very values of liberalism that they were attempting to defend. Ultimately, the strategies did not translate "into the values decisions and judgements of citizens" (Miller and Rose 1990, 18).

[4.26]   The Reputations system was eventually abandoned on July 7, 2004, after only 3 days of use in Murmurs, and although User Notes remains available, the feature is seldom used. Therefore, both strategies were successfully tactically resisted by the community.

5. Conclusion

[5.1]   Repercussions occur when strategies of surveillance are introduced within an online fan community by the hierarchy in an effort to encourage the self-policing of normative behavior. This situation demonstrates that when fans become aware that they are instruments of governmentality that introduces policies that contest the central values of the community, they can, as demonstrated by Murmurs, tactically reject the processes, consequently becoming self-steering (Miller and Rose 1990, 18). As Holford observes, "Technologies of governing are neither all-embracing nor universally successful…Citizens are active in state-sponsored projects; but…they do not always act along officially-encouraged lines" (2007, 99). Thus, fans can steer themselves in an alternative direction to the official strategies.

[5.2]   From this study, it is clear that strategies of governance implemented in a fan community by the hierarchy can be resisted by community members through tactical power. It is vital that the tools of governance must not visibly contradict the central ethos of the fan base, but instead appear to be working in an effort to protect these values and "improve the wealth of the nation" (Loader 1997, 12). This has broad implications for understanding the power dynamics of online fan governance and highlights how this is a dialectical process that can continue in any fan community as long as normative fan identity is policed and governed. As Henry Jenkins warns, "Tactics can never fully overcome strategy; yet, the strategist cannot prevent the tactician from striking again" (1992, 45).

6. Acknowledgments

7. Notes

1. Examples of these include a 1986 radio advertisement by Michael Stipe where "he urged people to vote for [Georgia Democrat Wyche] Fowler over a backing tape of 'Fall on Me'" (Gray 1992, 198–99), and a 1988 advertisement in a Georgian newspaper

stating, "Stipe says don't get Bushwhacked, get out and vote. Vote smart, Dukakis" (Gray 1992, 200).

2. As Michael Stipe stated in an interview with Italian television in 1989, "The one thing that R.E.M. can offer is music that you can dance to if you want, you can ignore it, you can use it like furniture, but there's also something there that you can listen to and say 'this is intelligent' or at least 'this is not stupid'" (Bowler and Dray 1995, 3).

3. For an exploration of R.E.M.'s numerous humanitarian involvements, see Gray (1992, 193–216).

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Symposium

The "lover" and early modern fandom

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[0.1]   *Abstract*—A look at 17th century fannish practices through the works of "lovers" (or "amateurs") who primarily focussed on ideas, practices, and entities rather than individuals.

1. Early modern fandom between individuals and publics

[1.1]   In the early modern period, fans were known as *lovers,* a term that has survived in English today as "amateur" and in the contemporary Dutch word for fan, *liefhebber* (literally, "lover"). Before the modern cult of personality, such fans gathered around ideas, values, practices, and categories of objects, rather than individuals. A variety of new media of the early modern period foregrounding the association of lovers can be compared to today's social media and its emphasis on networks, collaborative authorship, and reuse of multimedia objects. The study of the media of early modern lovers tells a different story than that of many histories of celebrity, which trace the gradual rise of individual fame (Rojek 2001, 102). Viewed in the *longue durée,* I argue that the focus on celebrated individuals as the crux of taste cultures has been of relatively short duration. The contours and social formations of taste cultures have fluctuated in the past few centuries, along with the history of the media in which such tastes have been expressed. It is possible that current social media might shift the center of taste cultures away from individuals once again, allowing fan activities to diverge from cults of personality.

[1.2]   The focus on the individual in Renaissance Europe has long served as a part of some definitions of the Renaissance itself (Burckhardt [1860] 1904). The fame of individuals, however, was carefully curated by the individual her- or more often himself, often in connection with the new technology of print. Stephen Greenblatt famously termed such efforts "Renaissance self-fashioning." In his wake, other

scholars have shown how famed individuals of Renaissance Europe such as Desiderius Erasmus and Albrecht Dürer worked hard to shape their reputations for the benefit of contemporaries and future generations (Greenblatt 1980; Koerner 1993; Jardine 1995).

[1.3]   In a history of celebrity in the modern West, it is tempting to move directly from such heroic Renaissance individuals to the crazes and manias surrounding celebrated individuals in the beginnings of consumer-driven celebrity culture. The origins of a personality-saturated mass market have been dated variously to the late 17th century, the late 18th century, and the early 19th century (Harris 1987; Wanko 2003; Nussbaum 2010; Baker 1999; McDayter 2009; Kahan 2010). Such culture has been typified by a popular taste for insider information about celebrities, who carefully released "confessions" or sneak peeks at their private letters to satisfy celebrity-hungry crowds. Other writers and printers also catered to the celebrity industry by producing the peculiarly 18th-century genres of scandal sheets, collections of anecdotes, and thespian biographies (notable particularly for the new phenomenon of the celebrated female actress). In a more learned and homosocial realm, collections of Ana-literature emerged (such as *Scaligerana* and *Thuana*), which supposedly captured the spontaneous personal reflections and statements of these celebrated scholars.

2. The lover identity in the 17th century

[2.1]   Moving directly from Renaissance individualism to early modern celebrity culture would pass over an important period in the formation of taste cultures in the 17th century, and one that enjoyed its own new media; one not centered, I would argue, on celebrated individuals. This was the period of the lover, or *amator,* amateur, *liebhaber,* and *liefhebber.* The social relations of lovers intervene between personally curated Renaissance fame, and the political and social activism of crowds in the early modern period.

[2.2]   We often think of the lover (or more commonly in English today, the amateur) not by what it is, but by what it is not. The amateur is by definition not a professional. In 17th-century historiography, the term, especially in Dutch, most frequently referred to a collector and connoisseur—particularly, but not exclusively, of the fine arts (Briels 1980; Filipczak 1987; van der Veen 1992; Jorink 2006; Forshaw 2006, 111; Cowan 2004, 154; Cook 2007, 72; Goldgar 2007). In historiography, the amateur or *liefhebber* was thus one who appreciated and knew culture but did not produce it.

[2.3]   The 17th-century use of the term, however, encompassed a much broader range of meanings than those studied in art history. The lover was someone who related to something, someone, or a group of people in an affective way. It thus could

refer to any member of a group. For example, *liefhebber* was the title of an official status within the Dutch Reformed Church, as well as the title of members of chambers of rhetoric, or nonprofessional members of the Guild of St. Luke, the guild for artists (note 1).

[2.4]   Anybody who wished to identify with a larger group, and who wished to foreground the work he or she did on behalf of that group in the pursuit of a common goal or taste, could self-identify as a lover within a community of lovers. Such communities of lovers intersected with other 17th-century identities. For instance, so-called intelligencers and agents served in the history of 17th-century politics, social reform, and scientific investigations as centers in networks of exchange, stretching often across Europe and around the world. In a period when politics intersected with art appreciation and scientific exchange, such agents were often also lovers of art and nature (Greengrass, Leslie, and Raylor 1994; Noldus 2006, 2003; Keblusek 2006, 97–108; Osborne 2007, 22, 24–41; Trevor-Roper 2006).

3. New early modern media supporting lover sociability

[3.1]   Several new genres emerged to support the networking efforts of such lovers. These were genres that foregrounded cultural consumers and wide networks, rather than lone cultural producers. One such genre was a highly fashionable new type of painting that emerged in early 17th-century Antwerp, a major center of both art connoisseurship and international diplomacy. The *cabinet d'amateur,* or gallery painting, portrayed collections of well-known works of art and scientific objects, inhabited by animated figures conversing, gesturing, and examining the objects.

[3.2]   Elizabeth Honig has underlined the anomalous nature of the gallery painting as the product of collaborators, as opposed to the importance placed on individuality in the history of Renaissance art. This multiple authorship extended beyond the "virtual" authorship of the many masters whose paintings are quoted within the works. By collaboration, Honig referred to the frequent partnering of masters of equal status in the production of these works. Such collaboration conflicted with the tradition of authorship "as lying in the tight interconnection between the single genius, the 'idea' of the work of art and the final product—a notion that came to fruition in the Renaissance and remained broadly operative for centuries thereafter" (Honig 1998, 178).

[3.3]   Honig related this phenomenon to the social function of these works. They served as objects of conversation among connoisseurs who could identify the various hands within the works. "On the one hand, the picture 'contains' value in the form of the canonical artists' hands whose traces are inscribed upon its surface; on the other,

a much greater value is generated by and for its beholder, who enacts a certain performance before it" (Honig 1998, 210). The aesthetic of the gallery painting was one of reuse; its value lay in linking together the observers who recognized the shared cultural reference points that reappeared in the painting, and in the creativity of the collaborating artists in rearranging such quotations in new ways, in the tradition of literary citation known as common-placing.

[3.4]   Another new genre in which both lover sociability and a reuse aesthetic appeared prominently was the *album amicorum,* or book of friends. The book of friends, easily comparable to Facebook today, first emerged in the 1540s. Its popularity increased through the 16th and 17th centuries with the emergence of foreign travel as a standard part of a university education. While, as in Victorian autograph albums, the signatures of famous individuals were collected eagerly in one's travels abroad, they coexisted within the album alongside school friends, teachers, casual acquaintances, and a wide range of lesser- and better-known individuals. The book of friends also became increasingly interactive and full of multimedia objects by the turn of the 17th century. In contrast to earlier *alba,* which often included either learned classical quotations or noble coats of arms, inscribers of books of friends increasingly pasted in engravings, created subnetworks by inscribing one another's pages, or added their own interpretations to the many emblems and miniature paintings the owners had included in the album (note 2).

[3.5]   Print culture also foregrounded the language of the lover. The advertisement of a work as written by and for lovers was one way of publishing a work anonymously. However, since the lover was usually qualified as the lover of something in particular, it was also a way to signal the work's appeal to a particular audience, or to make claims about the author's political or cultural persuasions. Searches for the use of *lover* in union short-title catalogs produces 2,447 records for *liefhebber* in Dutch works, 1,498 works for *liebhaber* in German, and 1,461 for *liebhabern* (as in, "written or published for the lovers"—"Allen Liebhabern…Beschrieben" or "Allen Liebhabern…an Tag Gegeben") (note 3). A search for "by a lover" in the title of English books (1475–1700) produced 275 records (note 4)

[3.6]   Such lovers were generally not fans of people, but of practices, arts, objects, entities, and political causes. These titles included such works as the 1682 *Conversation…between a poet, an actor, and a lover of poetry (T'zaamenspraak over de klucht van Jan Klaasz., tusschen een poeet, commediant, en een liefhebber der poezy),* Bartholomeus Korndörffer's 1635 *The Tincture of gems, written by Bartholomeus Korndörffer many years ago, but only now published by one of the lovers of the philosophic mystery (De tinctura gemmarum…von Herrn Bartholomaeo Korndorfero vor vielen Jahren geschrieben/nun aber an das Tageliecht gebracht durch*

einen der philosophischen Geheimniß Liebhabern), Lilburns ghost, with a whip in one hand, to scourge tyrants out of authority; and balme in the other, to heal the sores of our (as yet) corrupt state; or, Some of the late dying principles of freedom, revived, and unvailed, for the lovers of freedome and liberty, peace & righteousness to behold (London: Livewell Chapman, 1659), and Archie Armstrong's *A choice banquet of witty jests, rare fancies, and pleasant novels fitted for all the lovers of wit, mirth and eloquence* (London: Peter Dring, 1660). In other words, authors and printers employed the same language to conceptualize the audience-public relationship as a horizontal one of shared lover identities, whether that audience was one that loved poetry, the occult, witty jests, or liberty.

4. Conclusion

[4.1]   The identity of the lover—primarily of practices, ideas, and entities rather than of individuals—figured largely in 17th-century cultural production, consumption, connoisseurship, social reform, and political action. The history of the lover thus intervenes between the heroic, self-curating individualism of the Renaissance, and the mass market of modern celebrity culture. It can contribute to histories of the emergence of the self-aware and vocal publics so important to both 18th-century democratic movements and the emergence of consumer-driven celebrity culture. As contemporary social media appear today analogous to those of such 17th-century genres as the gallery painting, the book of friends, and print title pages, we might note similarities of reuse, circulation, and networking, as well as the development of robust identities for large groupings of lovers, fans, and publics.

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5. Notes

1. On the *liefhebber* as an official position in the church, see Mia M. Mochiuzuki (2004, 150).

2. The literature on the book of friends has expanded considerably in recent years. For special studies on changes in the books of friends circa 1600, see Marie Ryantová (2007) and Vera Keller (2011).

3. From *Short Title Catalogue Netherlands* (http://picarta.pica.nl/). These do not represent titles about lovers in the romantic sense. Of the 106 hits for *liefhebber* as a title word, all used the word in the sense of fan rather than romantic lover. Compare to *Das Verzeichnis der im deutschen Sprachraum erschienenen Drucke des 17. Jahrhunderts* (The Cataloue of Printed Seventeenth-Century Works Appearing in German-Speaking Lands, http://www.vd17.de/).

4. From *Early English Books Online* (http://eebo.chadwyck.com). Separating *lover,* meaning "fan," from its romantic sense is more difficult in English publishing than in German or Dutch, particularly given the prevalence of ballads in EEBO. I chose to search for "by a lover," which reduced the number of hits produced, compared to German and Dutch. By this, I do not intend to show that the usage of *lover* with this meaning was any less prevalent than *liefhebber* or *liebhaber* in Dutch and German, respectively.

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Symposium

Editorial policies, "public domain," and acafandom

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[0.1]   *Abstract—Transformative Works and Cultures*' editorial policies are transformative in their own right, putting fans first and acknowledging the dual nature of acafans.

[0.2]   *Keywords*—Academic publishing; Research subject; Sharing

1. Introduction

[1.1]   "The burden of what we share in public is on us," write Karen Hellekson and Kristina Busse (2009), editors of the online-only fan studies journal *Transformative Works and Cultures* (TWC), in an essay outlining the journal's editorial philosophy and its conception of fan privacy and the stance of academics in fan studies. This statement directly addresses fans' responsibility to consider their privacy when they publish their work on the Internet, but it equally describes what acafans ought to keep in mind whenever they quote or cite fan publications.

[1.2]   An acafan by accident (note 1) and author of a recent article for TWC (Musiani 2010), I have found myself, at various stages of the publishing process, reflecting on the broader implications, for my double status of fan and researcher into fandom, of TWC's peculiar editorial requirements and policies. These policies stimulate questions about acafandom's very nature, and about the ways in which, as a set of research and publication practices, it experiments with ethics and relationships to the research subjects. I present here some reflections on this topic, revolving around three main questions: What are the innovations at work in the editorial policies of scholarly outlets, such as TWC, that are overtly aimed at acafans? What reconfigurations of the public domain, as it is commonly understood by academics, do they suggest? And what definition of privacy does this conception of academic publishing entail, both for the fan as a research subject and for the acafan herself?

2. Defining acafandom with editorial policies

[2.1]   The acafandom label has recently emerged in scholarly debates in the field of fan studies as a way to reconcile academic interest and "immersion in the…subject matter…[It represents] an effort to position the author within the center of the debate and to elevate different tastes within the field of media studies" (Tait 2010). As fan studies is shaping and stabilizing itself as a field or subfield in its own right, Henry Jenkins, Tara McPherson, and Jane Shattuc point out that new challenges emerge for cultural critics who are both insiders and outsiders to their research subject. The most notable of these challenges is to find a way to write about "multiple (and often contradictory) involvements, participations, engagements, and identifications with popular culture—without denying, rationalizing, and distorting them" (Jenkins, McPherson, and Shattuc 2002, 7).

[2.2]   As shown by a recent special issue of the online fan studies publication *Flow,* "Revisiting Aca-Fandom," the debate on acafandom is currently very lively, questioning the label's usefulness as a theoretical trope, its agency as an instrument for privileging or neglecting specific tastes and topics, and its relationship with scholars' supposed obligation to reveal their emotional attachment to their research subject in case it unduly affects their positions, their likes and dislikes, or their scientific and critical distance (Tait 2010). Pointing out that thoughtful academic study of any subject requires a very deep level of engagement with the material and time-consuming dedication, Catherine Coker and Candace Benefiel (2010) interestingly reverse acafandom's most frequently asked question: "The question…is not whether the engagement of an acafan is appropriate in the study of cultural production, but how can the critical study of any text succeed without the passionate and knowledgeable participation of the scholar?" According to Jen Gunnels and Flourish Klink (2010), the key to the acafandom debate is to acknowledge the centrality of the question of participation "in and through the body," as fandom is a performed set of practices; it is "something that one *does.*" Her approach is reminiscent of Antoine Hennion's pragmatics of taste, which he sees as a means to put "reflexivity on the side of the amateurs and not only on that of sociologists concerned not to bias their analyses" (2009, 55). Paul Booth (2010) notes that "fandom is a universal practice invoking appropriation" and that "by looking at fans, we as academics inherently validate fandom as an area of study," only to ask, "What, then, is it precisely that we validate?" With this article, I intend to add a further dimension to the debate on acafandom, discussing how it contributes to the reshaping of its own label.

[2.3]   As often happens, my own venture into the realm of fan studies was the result of my being a member of a fan community and wanting to let the world know about some features of it that I considered important and neglected. After inviting me to

take a wonderful journey with *Earth 2*'s colonists, how dared CBS let the series end on a cliffhanger and not tell me whether Devon Adair, the main character and my personal favorite, would overcome the mysterious ailment that had forced her companions to put her into hibernation, in the hope of gaining time to find a cure? On the other hand, as a social scientist by training, I felt naturally inclined to approach the subject from an academic perspective, both in the types of questions I asked and in the ways I answered them. What happens when fans of a canceled series want more of it? How does the ending of a series influence the subsequent creative writing about that series? When fans fill in gaps in a series by writing fan fiction for it, what needs are they fulfilling? (Musiani 2010). TWC was founded in 2008 with the ambition to publish "articles about transformative works, broadly conceived; articles about media studies; and articles about the fan community" (http://journal.transformativeworks.org/index.php/twc), and to me, a newcomer to the field of fan studies, it appeared the ideal venue for my work.

[2.4]   While I was going through peer review and the prepublication process, I was directed by the journals' editors to an essay they had written for the Organization for Transformative Works: "Fan Privacy and TWC's Editorial Philosophy" (Hellekson and Busse 2009). The more I pondered it, the more I found myself thinking that the essay, in addition to outlining the rationale for the journal's editorial policies, was also proposing a conceptualization of acafandom by defining the right ways of doing things for an academic in the field of fan studies, and was doing so by reconfiguring the rules of engagement in what is commonly considered one of academia's essential practices: publication.

Figure 1. *Author guidelines or editorial philosophy? (Screencap, http://transformativeworks.org/projects/twc-citation.) [View larger image.]*

3. The fannishness of academics and the humanness of fan subjects

[3.1]   TWC's "strong encouragement" to contributors is, at a first glance, simple. Its editors want academics to ask fans for permission before citing their work (e.g., fan fiction, art, and videos) that is posted on Web sites or in online communities that are,

formally, freely accessible and open to any Internet user. What is less simple is the rationale behind it, and what it means for an academic to adopt this policy. There are a number of things at stake here.

[3.2]   First, the call for a "good-faith effort" (Hellekson and Busse 2009) to secure fan consent has implications for the researcher's stance toward the research subject; it reshapes the boundaries between the two. Indeed, in this respect, acafan research ethics appear to be closely intertwined with feminist research practices; most notably, they are reminiscent of feminist scholars' rejection of the artificial separation between the researcher and the researched, as well as the notion that such a separation produces more valid results (Sarantakos 2004). The editors of TWC, like feminist scholars, advocate a dialectical relationship between the subject and object of research, a form of participatory research, and a "conscious partiality": the "researcher's understanding of the connectedness to the experiences of the research subject through partial identification" (Cook and Fonow 1990, 79).

[3.3]   Second, the editorial policy also specifically addresses fandom as distinct from other communities that are placed under the lens of the social sciences, fans as distinct from other "human subjects" in research, and fan studies scholars as distinct from other academics. "In the academic realm, publicly posted material is considered published, and thus it may be freely cited," but TWC's editors require academics to deviate from this standard and ask permission to cite fannish material, arguing that this practice is better suited to a world in which fandom is increasingly mainstream and where "many fans worry about academics citing their transformative artworks, like fanfic, fan art, or fanvids, without asking" (Hellekson and Busse 2009). For a scholar, therefore, practicing acafandom means revisiting her concept of "public domain" and her habit of freely citing creative works published on the Internet (Templeton 2008), keeping in mind what, as a fan, she would consider public, semipublic, and private; as Kristina Busse points out, "the dilemma that online researchers have to confront is how to respect a user's or group's perceived privacy while simultaneously not ignoring their voices" (Busse 2009).

[3.4]   Third, the editorial policy suggests that academics in the field of fan studies should treat artifacts and texts found online (images, stories, videos) as if they were human subjects, subjecting their work to the stricter institutional monitoring reserved for research using people. This seems odd in academic settings in which online content is generally considered as discourse and text, and can be sampled, analyzed, and interpreted as such. Yet TWC's editors are suggesting that the dichotomy between representations and people (White n.d.) is a particularly unsatisfactory guiding principle in certain research contexts, such as qualitative research into fan communities by people who are members of that fan community. In such contexts, the boundaries between the observer and the observed are constantly evolving and ceaselessly redefined.

[3.5]   Finally, the policy suggests that the acafan should feel bound by the community norms of both academics and fans, not just by those of academia. The acafan certainly has privileged access to the terrain of fandom, inflected by her personal tastes, and is thus more likely than a random observer to be able to grasp all the complexities and nuances of fan communities. Therefore, she is likely to do a better job as a scientist. But with this privilege also comes an additional ethical requirement, which is to remain accountable to her fan community, observing its rules as carefully as those of her academic community.

4. Conclusions: Acafandom as "fans first" research ethics?

[4.1]   Is the "middle ground between the codes of best practices in both the academic and fannish realms" (Hellekson and Busse 2009) the way to go? I am still pondering

the question, but I feel comfortable with one conclusion: the analysis of innovative editorial philosophies and practices such as the one proposed by *Transformative Works and Cultures* opens up new aspects of the definition of acafandom and allows us to add another layer to the mainstream conception of it as an interweaving of intellectual and emotional engagements (Jenkins n.d.), which fan scholars have no choice but to either embrace or resist (Bogost 2010). Indeed, these recent experiments suggest that acafandom may be defined by research ethics that put fans first—not only because fannishness is a part of the scholar's personality and thus the scholar's tastes vis-à-vis the objects of study become relevant, but also, and maybe more importantly, because fans are themselves coproducers of amateur academic reflections on fan cultures (Hennion, Maisonneuve, and Gomart 2000).

[4.2]   TWC's attempt at a hybrid editorial policy, melding fandom and academic rigor, gave the researcher in me new food for thought. It suggested that I consider how fandoms are particularly delicate research fields, not only because the researcher wears two hats as fan and scholar but also, and perhaps even more, because the two hats tend to superpose and blend; because to the publicity of scholarly sources acafandom adds the publicity, or semipublicity, or privacy, of fans' confessions, sharing, and musings; because acafandom questions and redefines the dichotomy of text and human subject, in both the observer and the observed; and, finally, because the policy asks scholars to be accountable to a double set of rules and enriches ethical research guidelines with new questions, if not (yet?) with new answers.

[4.3]   While I was elaborating these rather scholarly musings, the fan in me was negotiating her fannish identity and her attachment to her fandom subject. I remembered how, one hot August in 1998, the teenage me had stared in disbelief at the end credits of the last episode of *Earth 2,* realizing that the intriguing and distressing cliffhanger would be the ending point of the series. I also remembered that my *Earth 2* article for TWC was originally a final paper for a graduate course, and its first draft contained a prelude in which I was confessing, even excusing, the effects of that teenager's fannish musings on me, now an older fan, and on my choice to use the *Earth 2* fan base as a case study in my research on Internet-based participatory practices. When I was first told that no such apologetic confession was necessary if the article was to be published in TWC, I was startled and slightly annoyed. Now, after several negotiations with my fannish identity and my research methods, I not only realize that it was unnecessary but understand that it would have been inappropriate to include it.

[4.4]   Does this mean I am a bona fide acafan now? Maybe; more likely, there is no single answer to the question. But one thing is sure: my TWC experience has opened up new paths of reflection on the importance of fans as both human subjects and

creators. It has suggested that instead of being a privilege bestowed on fans by the researcher, this double significance can be a discreet, yet ever-present and deeply internalized, part of her methodology. This theoretical and empirical positioning, more perhaps than the extent of her preferences and emotional involvement in her subject of study, should be the trademark of a researcher able to both deal with the fan in the academic, and bring out the academic in the fan.

5. Acknowledgment

6. Note

1. Labeling myself an "acafan by accident" is not an attempt to distance myself from the acafan identity. I use the label to indicate that I became interested in the series as a fan first, and only later asked research questions about it; my research was usually on other topics. More specifically, the word *accident* means that I chose to investigate a particular TV series not because it suited my needs for a scholarly case study, but because I liked it as a fan and was at the same time inclined to have an academic perspective on it because of my personality and profession.

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Symposium

H/c and me: An autoethnographic account of a troubled love affair

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[0.1]   *Abstract*—An autoethnographic view of the hurt/comfort genre, its significance, and its appeal.

1. (A partial) history

[1.1]   When my brother and I were small children, our parents took us about twice a month to rent one video each. "Don't you want a different one this time?" they would ask me, as I returned again and again to the same tape. "You must know that one by heart." I almost did; but as those of a fannish disposition will appreciate, that was no obstruction to me wanting to watch it again. The tape was a home safety instructional video featuring the BBC puppet characters Sooty, Sweep, and Sue: a bear, dog, and panda who inexplicably appeared to be siblings, and lived with their puppet operator/adoptive caretaker, Matthew Corbett.

[1.2]   Sweep, who was never portrayed as particularly intelligent, suffered a series of mishaps in this video caused by his ignorance of safety in the home. I presume he was then shown the proper way to safely conduct himself, but I do not remember that. That was not the reason I wanted the video. Even aged 4 or 5, for some reason I failed to understand yet was vaguely, uneasily aware of, I wanted to see my favorite fictional characters hurt.

[1.3]   I am a pacifist ideologically, and am personally afraid of violence. I used to have nightmares that somehow conscription would return, the absolute worst scenario my younger brain could imagine, and low-flying airplanes still frighten me. The thought of committing physical violence on another human makes me feel sick. Yet as I got older, my predilection for fictional pain and anguish only grew stronger—but only ever on the part of characters I liked and identified strongly with, usually the youngest

members of fictional families. This disturbed me. It felt secret, wrong, and I did not understand it. Like many acafans, I was already an ardent writer of fan fiction despite having no idea what it was. *The Animals of Farthing Wood* and *Sonic the Hedgehog* continued their adventures in the pages of my diaries, and when I desired more stories without the effort of actually writing them, I nagged and wheedled my older brother to "write me more Sonic stories," which good-natured attempts remain unfinished in boxes and files in an attic.

2. Break-enter theory

[2.1]   When I was 13, my life was dramatically interrupted by a complex, life-threatening, and horribly misrepresented illness called anorexia nervosa, and by subsequent inpatient hospitalization. Though I hesitate even to name the illness, for fear of the misconceptions it has caused and will cause about me, I cannot write autoethnographically without stating this fundamental division of my younger and elder selves. I began to reemerge, in my later teens, a darker, harder, more cynical human being, suspicious and impatient with everything, drained of compassion for myself or anyone else. And at this time, I discovered the Internet, organized fandom, FanFiction.net, and the vast proliferation of hurt/comfort fiction that, despite my distaste for vulnerability or weakness of any sort in real life, suddenly provided me with reams and reams of exactly what I'd always secretly wanted: my favorite characters being hurt and then comforted. Over and over again. My guilty secret now had a name and took on a life of its own. Now I knew that other people liked it. But surely it wasn't normal. I justified it to myself by pretending it was only the comfort part I was interested in—the making better, the reparation. That was good, surely? That was being a normal human (normal humans shouldn't be interested in observing pain). I seized upon the Freudian *fort-da* theory in self-explanation as soon as I discovered it: the controlled experience of loss is necessary and fundamental to pleasurable restoration (Freud [1920] 1995, 599–601) (note 1). That must be it. I wasn't evil. I was just wise enough to see that things had to go horribly wrong in order to get better.

[2.2]   Then, by chance, when I was about 17, I stumbled across a copy of Camille Bacon-Smith's *Enterprising Women* (1992). After my initial shock that there was such a thing as scholarship about fandom, I skipped straight to the central section on hurt/comfort. Now a real theory by a real academic could explain me to myself. But what I read repelled me. An exploration of vulnerability in suffering? An outlet for denied female pain? And worst of all—that abhorred term—a *feminine* reworking of hypermasculinist dominant-culture narrative? (Bacon-Smith 1992, 270–79). *Vulnerable* and *feminine* were two labels I absolutely rejected for myself and anything that could possibly interest me; *female* I grudgingly accepted as my genetic lot. I

almost starved myself in what was partially a misguided attempt to prove that, body notwithstanding, I was not feminine, or weak, or dependent on anyone or anything, that I could exert my will over the mess and chaos of existence. The way to get by in this world, I had learned the hard way, was to be tough, independent, and not reliant on anything, especially not the demands of the unruly body. I was tough. I was self-disciplined. My mind told my body what it could have when, and what it couldn't.

[2.3]   Thus decided, the next thing I attempted was the deliberate abandonment of h/c for slash. Being of an age where sex occupied a large proportion of my thinking, this worked very well for some time. I was pleased. All along, I had been on the moral high ground: it was the repressive, violent, compulsorily straight regime of dominant culture that had led me to h/c in order to satisfy my appropriately radical queer proclivities. H/c aficionados, I informed myself, didn't really know what they wanted: they were the unfortunate dupes of a culture that celebrated violence and denigrated the complexities of sexuality. But I, being clever, had found a subcultural space from which to practice tactical resistance. (I remind the reader I was still only 18 years old or so, in apology for my naïveté.) Conveniently ignoring the intimate, boundary-broaching entanglement of trauma, affect, and sex one finds so clearly in much slash, h/c, and h/c slash (Cvetkovich 2003, 49–56, drawing on Freud's image metaphor of the sensitive organism for consciousness in "Beyond the Pleasure Principle"), I told myself I could separate them clearly. I read the most pain-free slash I could find, largely that espousing an assimilationist queer agenda of love and joyful sex. But then I went away to university, my life experience broadened, and I came gradually to the conclusion that sex—which I then defined as trusting, caring fun without harm—did not account for the full range and complexity of my problems and needs. Sometimes I didn't even want it.

[2.4]   And so, inevitably, I returned to reading h/c. And yes—my latest guilty secret, surely the most pathological even I could get—h/c slash. Why was I so compelled, over and over, by these tales of failed bodily and psychic integrity? Why was I so drawn to the often humiliating suffering of the always-male characters I identified with the most?

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3. Some insights

[3.1]   H/c is a huge phenomenon. Sometimes it is sentimentalized to the point of absurdity, to the point that the characters seem like compulsively overemotive parodies of themselves. Sometimes it is gritty with verisimilitude and almost devoid of the comfort element. Certainly, Bacon-Smith had a narrow view of it, understandable when one considers the date of her work and the small range of material she had to analyze. There is plenty of fic that could be and is called h/c that has very little in

common with her paradigm. Yet still, elements of her theory strike a half-embarrassed chord with me. I want the characters I identify with to be made vulnerable, because that is something I cannot afford. I do not want to be vulnerable and I am not a victim, not in real life. Not 99 percent of the time. Yet perhaps h/c fic is my little pressure valve—when the irrational, embarrassed part of myself that feels unfairly wounded and wants to be comforted lives vicariously through a character for a moment. Not a female character. That is uncomfortable, and too close to home.

[3.2]   But there is more to it. Perhaps h/c taps a fantasy: the empathetic, nontransmittable understanding of pain. "Western man has become a confessing animal" (Foucault 1980, 59) (note 2) not only in our discourse-formed compulsion to be categorized and interpretable, but also to be understood and accounted for. Pain being the least transmittable of sensations, the dawning understanding that in mental and physical recovery from severe trauma one is most entirely and necessarily alone and uninterpretable came as a shock that I found difficult to assimilate. In h/c, transmission is unnecessary—the comforting character understands, though no one else does. Unnecessary and unwanted: apprehension of the confession compulsion brings a healthy skepticism of "the institutions of power/knowledge that make confession and disclosure potentially less than liberatory" (Cvetkovich 2003, 92). All the more so when, in awkwardly accepting the identity-signifier of survivor or ex-anorexic or (insert pathology/valorization of your choice), one realizes that the mark comes with a terrifying expectation of something called authenticity. I used to make up answers to my psychiatrists' questions because I didn't know what I was supposed to say. It didn't matter: I quickly realized that anything I said would be always already interpreted in terms of the institutionally ratified models of mental illness they had learned, relentlessly invested in the fantasy of a private sphere and individual pathologies magically detachable from globalized late capitalism and the decline of left-wing politics in the UK. (If I met them again—how much I would not talk, how much Foucault and Benjamin and Chantal Mouffe I would give them to read instead!) Thus my enjoyment of h/c comes with a firm condition: not too much talking. If there is too much talking, I stop reading. If the comforter understands, let him understand, but none of the "melodramatic fantasy that the trauma survivor will finally tell all and receive the solace of being heard by a willing and supportive listener" (Cvetkovich 2003, 22).

[3.3]   Then of course there is the narcissism. "One of the things I love most about reading and writing hurt/comfort," says fan fiction writer Mokibobolink, "is that it gives my favorite characters a chance to be the center of attention" (2010). I like this aspect too—and I suspect, given that I like the hurt party to be the character I identify strongly with, that it fulfills my perpetual younger-child need to be noticed and valued in comparison with other people. For it is also a matter of power and hierarchies, of

leveling things out: I like the attention and appreciation bestowed on the hurt character to equalize differences of rank, race, class. I do not want the characters I see as privileged to be hurt; I want them to do the comforting and the worrying and the appreciating. I was unaware of this until my LiveJournal friend Merisunshine36 (March 6, 2010) inadvertently explained me to myself in a post on her frustration with James Kirk: "Kirk represents everything that's upsetting about the way American white boys…are continually favored over everyone else in AOS [Alternative Original Series], and I hate that. I hate how AOS fandom rarely questions this premise, and instead loves to depict him as some Mary Sueish (yes, I said it) combination of genius hero, tragic woobie, loving patriarch, sexual lion and occasional psychic" (note 3).

[3.4]   I replied:

> [3.5]   Ok, you've just explained to me why when I was all about Kirk/Spock, if I was going to read h/c, I couldn't have hurt!Kirk. Because my brain doesn't want him to be tragic! I think at some level I was saying, "He's got everything going for him, he's not allowed to be a tragic woobie!" And also I liked hurt!Spock cos it tended to make Kirk realize how awesome he (Spock) is. Hurt!Kirk just = more tragic hero worship.

[3.6]   Being mixed race, proud of my brain but uncomfortable in my body, and not particularly demonstrative, it was only reasonable that I should choose Spock as my point of nonprivileged identification—and thus, I now realized, the character I desired hurt and comforted. I was starting to understand tragedy as societal, not as the ill-fated rise and fall of one brilliant, hubristic hero—"personal" experience, to risk the cliché, as political. Thus the parentheses in the title of section 1 above: it is my history, but it is piecemeal, contextless, because those are the memories I have access to. I am doubtful whether "my history" can really belong to me: I can experience it, certainly—I can even write that experience—but I am doubtful whether individuals can possess histories apart from the local and global contexts that shape those histories, above and below the levels of individual consciousness that fluctuate throughout our lives.

[3.7]   This is why I cannot—and think I should not—attempt a totalizing theory of h/c. Its affect needs to be interpreted through these social/personal histories, parts of which must necessarily escape us. We can theorize its potential and effects; we can describe our experiences of it to each other, look for more or less frequently recurring patterns in its pleasures and problems, and try to understand what that tells us about ourselves and our communities in the context in which we live. But the attempt to say what it is, and why people like it, will only lead us back to the exhausted, self-consuming mystery of an individual human nature detached from politics. Not to

mention the fact Bacon-Smith never quite accounted for: some people don't like it at all.

[3.8]   To return to the concrete: nowadays, I accept my gender happily in the abstract, and am on reasonable terms with my physical body. Perhaps, were I some archetype of a sane person, I would be able to express my own occasional vulnerability, acknowledge without frustration the needs and frailties of my own body in the contexts that constitute that body and my existence in it. Perhaps then I would not love to read h/c anymore. And it is true that I have expanded my reading interests, choosing fic more because I admire and enjoy the author's work than because I am pursuing a particular genre designation. Yet good h/c by an author I admire is still a deep source of pleasure to me, and a delight to find. The archetype of sanity being beyond anyone, it is probably just as well to have fiction keeping us sane enough, happy enough to carry on with life.

4. Acknowledgments

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5. Notes

1. This is Freud's famous analysis of a game played by his 18-month-old grandson, consisting of throwing away a toy in order to experience its pleasurable restoration, while enunciating his approximation of the German *fort* and *da* ("gone" and "there"). Freud suggests that the controlled and mastered repetition of trauma followed by its resolution allowed the child to cope with the real intermittent absences of his mother, as well as enacting a form of revenge for the pain caused by this absence. He relates this explicitly to the adult games of art and drama that "do not spare the spectators (for instance, in tragedy) the most painful experiences and can yet be felt by them as highly enjoyable" ([1920] 1995, 601).

2. By *man,* Foucault of course meant people in general.

3. *Woobie* is a joking fan term for an (excessively) tragic figure made repeatedly to suffer in canon and fanon.

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Symposium

Subverting the canon in feminist fan fiction: "Concession"

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[0.1]   *Abstract*—A close reading of feminism and patriarchy within obsession_inc's *Concession.*

1. Introduction

[1.1]   Transformative work, a genre that has been accepted as inclusive of fan fiction, offers a form of commentary on the canon (source material) by introducing new perspectives and interpretations that subvert the original intention of the canon (note 1). One fan and writer, obsession_inc, draws a clear distinction between different relationships that fan works may have with the source:

[1.2]   In "affirmational" fandom, the source material is restated, the author's purpose divined to the community's satisfaction, rules established on how the characters are and how the universe works, and cosplay etc. occur…"Transformational" fandom, on the other hand, is all about laying hands upon the source and twisting it to the fans' own purposes. (obsession_inc 2009)

[1.3]   Hence, transformative work is important in challenging the assumptions of the canon, and by means of this assumption, it brings to light new concerns on the part of the fan creator. Historically, women have participated strongly in fandom—both as consumers (Larbalestier 2002, 159) and as producers (Coppa 2008) of fan work—and there is a distinguished history of their use of fan works to accomplish feminist counterreadings of source material (Busse 2009; Stein and Busse 2009; Coppa 2006; Jenkins [1988] 2000; Merrick 2000).

[1.4]   Although there is enormous merit to the long-standing scholarship on the feminist implications of woman-oriented participation of fan culture, analyses of specific fan works also remain crucial in aiding understanding of individual fan responses to the interaction of popular fandom with kyriarchal assumptions and reactionary thought. This study will examine the fan novel *Concession* (obsession_inc 2010a), based on the 2007 film *Iron Man.* I will investigate the idea that feminist fan fiction capably explores feminist concerns by drawing attention to the presentation of patriarchy in the source text and by re-presenting the canon based on a more explicitly woman-oriented worldview. I will consider the following two elements: first, the expression of male privilege at the cost of female alienation; and second, the unequal power dynamics of male-female interaction and the control of the female body as an outcome of normative heterosexuality.

2. Context: Fan fiction exploring the gaps

[2.1]   Among the many roles fulfilled by fan fiction is the exploration of perceived gaps in the canon (Watt 2004, 49; Lamerichs 2009, 23), which includes, but is not limited to, creating stories for characters, places, and events that are alluded to, only incidentally featured in, or even wholly absent in the canon. Transformative fan fiction, in response to these gaps and to perceived failings of the canon, often engages them directly by addressing them in the fan work.

[2.2]   In *Concession,* the viewpoint character is *Vanity Fair* journalist Christine Everhart, a minor character from the canon. During the first film, on which this story is based, Christine is introduced and then quickly discarded as an attention-seeking society reporter who opens the movie having a one-night stand with Tony Stark. In a scene that ensures the film will be unable to pass the Bechdel test, Stark's aide, Pepper Potts, ushers Christine out the next morning while referring to her job as "taking out the trash." Christine reappears briefly in the sequel, where, after Pepper comments that she "did quite a spread on Tony last year," he retorts that she "wrote a story as well." Despite being depicted visually as a woman of considerable intelligence and career success, Christine is nonetheless deprecated in the script proper as a subject of sexual humor, which reveals a blatant misogynistic streak in the supposed hero, Stark.

[2.3]   If Stark embodies the privilege of white male wealth, whether he is meant to go against typically heroic qualities or not, his behavior still remains acceptable—even, ultimately, affirmed—by the source material. The author's choice of protagonist thus becomes a challenge to the attitude that canon adopts as well as a shift from the male-centric military-industrial complex of the films to a socially aware snapshot of women's experiences. This is in keeping with the use of fan work to address aspects of

the source material problematic to fans; in a story from the *Iron Man* fandom, one main point of contention would be the prevalence of the dominant male gaze of the canon.

[2.4]   Beyond merely filling in gaps, then, feminist fan work works toward its intention of correcting the cultural hegemonies established in canon by filling in those gaps with work that is expressly woman-centric. As the author of *Concession,* obsession_inc, observes in a commentary that alludes to her body of work:

> [2.5]   And hey, amazing thing, female characters can be improved and made sympathetic and awesome! Male characters can be genderflipped, Starbuck-style! Female characters that are only mentioned by name and never shown can be introduced and used! Entirely new female characters can be created! (obsession_inc 2010b) (note 2)

[2.6]   The malleability of the source works within fan culture thus becomes a means of simultaneously critiquing and fixing their perceived flaws. To choose *Iron Man* as a fandom for remix is especially fascinating because of both the longevity of superhero comics as a fandom and that fandom's expressly kyriarchal culture. Unlike *Star Trek,* for example—another long-lived fandom that has produced extensive cultural critique and commentary—superhero comics are grounded in the modern world, and as such, they are more open to influences from contemporary social mores without the liberty of projection into the future as in several other speculative genres. Hence, the assumptions that are to be addressed in the *Iron Man* fandom are far more reflective of real-world assumptions in the society upon which the source material is based.

3. Male privilege, female alienation

[3.1]   Male privilege is the invisible assumption that maleness is normative or a societal default. In this fan text, male privilege is expressed through the imbalance of power and authority between men and women. The result is the sense of alienation experienced on the part of the female characters. In *Concession,* for example, the theme of male privilege is laid out clearly from the introduction, where Christine Everhart notes that, for her article,

> [3.2]   ostensibly, it's about him, but the story she's hearing underneath it, from one person after another, is the story of the woman with the cool smile and sharp eyes, whose job it was to deftly arrange matters behind the scenes and then to fade into watchful obscurity as Stark took the stage.

[3.3]   The use of "underneath," "behind the scenes," and "obscurity" serve to underline Pepper's subordinate position in an environment where the focus is always

on Stark. However, it is only Christine, a woman, who notices this. The text makes it explicit that the male characters are in a position where—as Jim Rhodes puts it—"I didn't really think about it," and where they can afford not to think about it.

[3.4]   Pepper, who "arrange[s] matters behind the scenes," also experiences the constant and systemic erasure of her identity, not just through daily interaction with menfolk but also through the manner in which Stark replaces her birth name, Virginia, with a nickname for his own amusement. The author draws out this erasure even further by comparing Pepper to Happy Hogan, who, despite being oppressed in terms of class, still has the ability, as a man, to confront Stark's erasure of his name by denying it as "just a dumb joke. I prefer Harry." Pepper, as a woman, has no such agency to protest, especially since vocal women are often perceived to be transgressive in a negative sense.

[3.5]   Privilege is further enabled by the structure of power and authority—that is, as institutions dominated by men, especially by means of physical force. In *Concession,* the primary manifestations of this violently legitimized hegemony remain subdued and do not appear directly in the text. Still, enough reference is made to the tyranny of Tony Stark for his absences to become threatening and sinister lacunae, rather than impotent. However, the primacy of male strength is also recalled more directly when Christine is interrogated by Agent Coulson. Despite her erstwhile confidence in her work, Christine is aware of her powerlessness, "helplessly furious in the face of authority in a way she hasn't experienced since she'd first been armed with a press pass, back in high school." By virtue of her professional success in a career track rigged against her, Christine has been lulled into a false sense of security, but incidents like these serve as reminders that public activity is a privilege that the patriarchy can revoke at whim.

[3.6]   The *Iron Man* canon is permissive, even sympathetic, in its celebration of white male wealth; as Ronald C. Thomas Jr. observes, the canon is set in a mythos that revolves about Stark's existence "rooted in his place in the American military-industrial complex" (2009, 155). *Concession* thus challenges this perspective by recasting the virile male heroes as victimizers and co-opting secondary female characters as protagonists.

[3.7]   Consequently, the female characters are excluded and act as outsiders in the context of male hegemony. Christine is hindered and frustrated in her investigation by male characters such as Rhodes, Hogan, and Coulson, and in her frustration she perceives the gap between men and women as more than social—even as governed by biological differences—when she remarks that the world around her is composed of "those testosterone-packed acronyms invented by the people who came up with the PATRIOT Act, just what the world needed." Her frustrated declaration, reminiscent of

second wave feminism, resorts to a cissexism that glibly reveals the limitations of mainstream Western feminism, even as it captures Christine's reaction to the misogyny of the old boys' club system.

[3.8]   Pepper suffers isolation the most; for her, it is quite literal, when she is imprisoned by Stark. Even before her incarceration, though, she is surrounded by male privilege and has little access to any form of support. Other women, who are likely to share in her experience of oppression, are shown to be helpless against patriarchy as well. For example, Nikki Pakrashi, who is described as stylish and competent, can still only advise Pepper to take "the path of least resistance" in accepting Stark's increasingly controlling behavior, because Stark occupies a superior status in the military-industrial complex. Neither can Julie Lo, who has "known her since college," offer any real help, having lost contact with Pepper in part as a result of Stark's control over her work life. Women being powerless, Pepper is dependent on the aid of men; but even those in positions to help her, like Hogan, see their apathy as justifiable:

> [3.9]   Christine doesn't like to accuse people who're kind enough to talk on the record, so she doesn't voice the second part of that statement: **You went along with this?**
>
> [3.10]   He spreads his hands helplessly. "Look, I know, I know. The whole thing was kind of crazy, but he's the boss, okay? I'm just the driver…"

[3.11]   This exchange illustrates the power Hogan holds as a man—it is his action or inaction that ultimately decides Pepper's fate, more than even Mimi's intervention. The inequality in their power and status distances Pepper from Hogan and Stark, even as her right to the company of her peers is rescinded by her male superiors.

[3.12]   *Concession* relates to canon in that it reflects on the portrayal of women in mainstream superhero comics. Much has been made of the historic antecedents of misogyny in the superhero genre—where "women are cast as threats to male freedom and power, to be escaped and/or controlled" (Best 2005, 96)—and this continues to hold true in a framework where masculinity is cast as power and femininity as weakness, where "the affective pull of female vulnerability…is used as the grounds for the protectors [*sic*] violence" (Stabile 2009, 87). By throwing into relief the cultural implications of such a system in a more sociorealistic world (as opposed to the superhero universe of the canon), *Concession* questions the values and principles that the canon and its creators enable. The escapist nature of the superhero genre, as *Concession* demonstrates, panders explicitly to patriarchal fantasy; obsession_inc utilizes the fan work to extrapolate such circumstances into her own real-world environment.

4. Heterosexuality and disparity, and the body politic

[4.1]   As a result of the fundamental inequalities in the gendered politics of their universes, *Concession* shows heterosexual relationships and heterosexuality as an institution to be oppressive as well. A power disparity exists, one in which the woman's life is strongly dependent on her man's, and the relationships in the text tend to be characterized by such a paradigm.

[4.2]   For example, in *Concession,* Pepper is constantly viewed not as an individual but as someone defined by her relationship with Stark. Where Stark is framed like an icon, as "master of his soul, captain of his fate, titan of industry. The man, the myth, the legend," Pepper is frequently the subject of speculation by the media, to the point of Julie's declaration that "not fucking him was just, you know, normal" becoming an act of resistance by its refusal of the dominant media narrative. Even male allies are guilty of this oppression: Christine, who began her investigation aware of the disparity between "Tony Stark, weapons manufacturing mogul, foreground; Virginia Potts, personal assistant, background," interviews Rhodes only to find that he, too, is guilty of seeing Pepper as Stark's, rather than seeing Pepper as herself:

> [4.3]   "We're talking about Tony Stark, so yeah, anything's *possible.* And, okay, he always trampled over everybody's boundaries, but he used to try to be better about it, at least with Pepper. The hostage thing, though—after that, he stopped trying."

> [4.4]   Christine frowns, noting *the shift from Pepper-as-subject to Pepper-as-object* [italics mine].

[4.5]   In fact—as *Concession* attempts to demonstrate—the way heterosexuality is set up in society ultimately facilitates patterns of abuse. Civil marriages and partnerships have long been associated with certain extra male privileges, such as the prohibition of a wife testifying in court against her husband and the marital exemption for rape. *Concession* critiques and mocks the protection that heterosexuality seems to lend men:

> [4.6]   "Simple? *Darling,*" Arlene says with great patience, "don't be stupid. Every married couple is an inexplicable, impenetrable organism to the outside world, understood only by themselves. We'll never know what happened between them that night, or any other night for that matter, but I can tell you with great certainty that it wasn't *simple.*"

[4.7]   In this vein, when Rhodes defends his ignorance of Pepper's plight with the argument that "Tony—Tony loved her, I've known that for a while now," he also

privileges Stark's emotions over Pepper's. Stark's attraction to Pepper becomes an excuse for her abduction, and this is made possible by Rhodes's nonchalance. Hence, in a society that privileges the experience and actions of men, it is not merely the heterosexual partner who oppresses, but all other men who also accept the existence of this structure.

[4.8]   No wonder then that the institution of heterosexuality ultimately kills women, as embodied in the character of Maria Stark. For Maria, her death is, as Arlene observes, "merely the incidental price" of killing Howard; and Howard's death is "escape," not "revenge." The fact that Maria is perceived to murder Howard as a form of escape suggests that her death alone would not have bestowed any freedom. Rather, working against the expectation of domesticity, she pursues direct conflict with her husband, the embodiment of her oppression, at the cost of her own life—and to no avail, given that the cycle of abuse continues into the next generation in the relationship of her son and Pepper. With her suicide, then, the text reaffirms the comprehensive and pervasive nature of patriarchal heterosexuality.

[4.9]   Of the eight mechanisms by which Adrienne Rich believes heterosexual male power is enforced (Rich 1980, 638–70), all but the last two listed involve some kind of control over the female body. In literature, feminist authors, "in dealing with the female body from a feminist perspective…can also read this body as a social construct" (Hite 1988, 123); feminist fan fiction can therefore criticize the patriarchal nature of body politics through exploration and re-presentation of the female body.

[4.10]   One kind of male privilege is a sense of entitlement toward women's bodies, on demand. In *Concession,* this is most striking in the way Stark assumes control of Pepper's body, abetted by other male characters:

> [4.11]   this is like the GPS chip all over again, but this time there's this kid saying things like *the illusion of the possibility of return* like it was a dainty, harmless kind of game that the ridiculously wealthy played over tea and crustless cucumber sandwiches. Of *course* it would be on Stark's account; that way Pepper wouldn't even be bothered to write up the expense reports afterward. Of *course* a grown woman would give her employer control over the process of moving her possessions. Of course, why not, who wouldn't?

[4.12]   Yet it is also seen in less dramatic, less explicitly abusive fashions. John Lowery is comfortable enough intruding upon a stranger's personal space to have "plowed across the lobby with a big friendly grin on his face and a big friendly hand raised," oblivious to the fear with which Pepper responds. Similarly, the security guard, Gregor, casually comments on Christine's appearance—"Your hair, I like it much better this way, now. A good cut, I think"—as though he should have the right to approach a

woman and judge her instantly by her appearance. Women are, in this society, presumed to be always on call for the male gaze, determined by the whims of the men around them rather than by their own desires. Healey and Johnson (2006) dissected the superhero comic medium's attempts to fit characters' bodies into a narrow, binarist range, with unrealistically proportioned women served up for heterosexual male consumption. *Concession* inverts this dynamic by realistically centering it around the experience of having a woman's body in a patriarchal society.

[4.13]   Building on feminist critique of body politics, *Concession* thus subverts a typically male-defined discourse through female-centric stories. Christine challenges the patriarchal notion that "sanitized, deodorized, and idealized images of women's bodies become the only ones we encounter and accept" (Roberts et al. 2002, 138) when she goes on her toiletries run at 2:00 AM, dressed casually and shopping in "the euphemistically named Feminine Care aisle." She recognizes Agent Coulson as out of place because of his presence in a typically female space; this scene reaffirms the validity of the female body, particularly the experience of menstruation, which is critical in the cultural context of white middle-class America, where women are frequently shamed into concealing their menses.

5. Conclusion

[5.1]   Stripped of nonnormative characters—*Concession* mainly follows the stories of two relatively middle-class, white women in North America who face marginalization only in terms of gender—the text offers an interesting critique of sexism in the corporate world and the military-industrial complex, external to other oppressions. This manifests in the analysis of tangible, systemic discrimination, in the feminist movement's concerns over bodily autonomy, reproductive rights, and workplace equality, and also in poststructural theory, such as the concept of male privilege and of heterosexuality as an institution.

[5.2]   However, *Concession* also represents the issues of a mainstream feminist movement that is grounded in a privileged model of femininity. As earlier mentioned, Christine's scorn at 'testosterone-packed acronyms' in patriarchy calls to mind of the binary essentialism of second-wave feminism (Stone 2004, 87). Also glaringly absent from the text is the presence of chromatic characters, another failing of mainstream feminist narratives (Amos and Pamar 1984, 4). While original characters like Pakrashi and Lo meander across the fan text as supporting characters, correcting the absence of chromatic women from the source material, *Concession* is largely unconcerned with the intersectional misogyny present in this interstitial region. In this respect, then, feminist fan fiction closely reflects and follows the development of mainstream Western feminism in its representation thereof.

[5.3]   Feminist fan fiction can be said to operate its feminism on two levels: on one, feminist ideas are explored within the plot, setting, and characterization of the text itself, while on the other, the structure of the canon is dissected and made subject to feminist media analysis too. It is the latter point that distinguishes feminist fan fiction from feminism in original fiction; it is this point that has been of notable interest to fan studies researchers, and that would be worth studying in future work within the discipline.

6. Acknowledgments

7. Notes

1. Heymann (2008, 449) advocates framing "transformativeness" as existing along a spectrum, rather than as an either-or option: "The relevant question should be the degree of transformativeness—the amount of interpretive distance that the defendant's use of the plaintiff's work creates. If that distance is significant enough to create a distinct and separate discursive community around the second work, the defendant's use is more likely to be transformative (and, perhaps, fair)."

2. In her remark, obsession_inc references the rebooted science fiction television series *Battlestar Galactica,* which features a character named Starbuck. In the original 1978 series, Starbuck was a man, played by Dirk Benedict; the 2004 series revised the character as a woman, played by Katee Sackhoff.

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Book review

Personal connections in the digital age, by Nancy Baym

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Nancy Baym. *Personal connections in the digital age.* Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2010, paperback, $19.95 (196p) ISBN 978-0745643328.

[1]   Combining a wealth of scholarship with illustrative anecdotes, *Personal Connections in the Digital Age* offers an accessible, chatty, and cogent account of how new communications technologies affect interpersonal communication and relationships. Nancy Baym has long addressed these questions in her work, including *Tune In, Log On: Soaps, Fandom, and Online Community* (2000) and more recent work on social networking sites and music fandom. *Personal Connections* is not a book about fandom, though it draws on Baym's earlier research and uses examples from fan studies. Rather, it is an engaging introduction to online communication and is a good foundation for anyone attempting to understand online fandom, communities, or personal social networks.

[2]   This book is part of the Polity Press Digital Media and Society series (http://www.polity.co.uk/digitalmediaandsociety/), which aims to make current thinking on digital media accessible to a broad audience. *Personal Connections* features six chapters. The chapters build upon one another conceptually, though the detailed index makes it possible to navigate the book more topically. Overall, Baym offers an overview of online communications research, providing a road map from which students, scholars, and other interested readers could further explore this diverse literature. Drawing on disciplines including communication, media studies, science and technology studies, and sociology, as well as research in human-computer interaction, Baym deftly illustrates the complexities of communication, community, and identity online.

[3]   From the first chapter, "New Forms of Personal Connection," it is clear that *Personal Connections* is as interested in similarities between digital forms of communication and other forms of interaction as it is in differences. It focuses primarily on the Internet and the mobile phone, both technologies that seem to blur traditional boundaries by which we have understood communication. The distinctions between communicating with one and communicating with many are lost, a strict sense of privacy and publicity is blurred, and the ability to extend communication across space and time in new ways shapes the forms of communication seen in digital media. Yet despite ways in which digital media challenge traditional frameworks, Baym argues they are part of everyday life in the present historical moment and emphasizes "how people incorporate digital media into their routine practices of relating" (5), rather than sensationalizing the new.

[4]   This perspective becomes clearer throughout the second chapter, "Making New Media Make Sense," which turns to the stories we tell about new media, which both reflect and shape the meanings we assign to those technologies. Through advice columns such as Dear Abby, as well as reprinted newspaper cartoons, Baym illustrates how online communication moved from the fringes of society to become a mundane part of cultural life. In letters from the mid-1990s, "cyberaffairs" were viewed as a result of the Internet's destruction of real-life relationships, reflecting a technologically determinist perspective in which a technology is seen to directly cause social behavior. Opposed to technological determinism is the social constructivist perspective, which views the uses of new technologies as the outcomes of social factors. Finally, Baym introduces and endorses a social shaping of technology perspective that maintains that the affordances and constraints of technology are taken up and reworked by individuals in diverse ways. This centrist position, in which both technology and society shape meaning, is closely related to studies of media domestication that track how technologies move from the edges of society to being thoroughly integrated parts of daily life. This, then, is the nuanced approach seen in later letters to Ann Landers and her ilk, as the electronic form of communication is ignored to focus on the personal relationships and difficulties that may have led to an affair. This chapter indicates that new media forms of communication are remarkable only insofar as they provide a moment in which ever-present anxieties about the nature of self, others, and relationships can be expressed.

[5]   Digital forms of communication, which occur in the absence of visual and embodied social cues, are the topic of chapter 3, "Communication in Digital Spaces." Baym's primary argument here is that digital communication should not be understood as an impoverished version of face-to-face communication, but as a mixed modality that combines elements of face-to-face communication with elements of written communication. From this perspective, we can see that there are social cues specific to

digital formats that enable us to nuance communication, from emoticons to caps lock to abbreviations and slang. These cues, as well as photos, video, or other multimedia representations of self, allow us to convey friendliness, build intimacy, or express strong emotions. Other factors that affect digital communication include social forces such as race, gender, or culture, as well as familiarity with a medium or our existing relationships with those with whom we communicate. Thus, Baym repudiates claims that the lack of cues and the asynchronicity of digital communication necessarily lead to antagonism or impoverished relationships.

[6]   From communication may come community, and such is the focus of the fourth chapter, "Communities and Networks," which is likely to particularly appeal to those interested in fandom. Baym retains the term *community* in talking about online groups, justifying it through five qualities that indicate community both on- and off-line. These include a shared sense of space, shared practices, shared resources and support, shared identities, and interpersonal support. Baym gives several examples, including some drawn from the soap opera fans of *Tune In, Log On,* as evidence for the existence of these qualities in online communities. However, she then turns to social networking sites and the growing importance of what she terms "networked individualism," or the creation of a personalized community that centers on the self rather than on a topic or shared identity. In this context, she acknowledges that it is more difficult to claim a shared space, and even shared practices or community norms can be difficult to identify. Near its end, this chapter turns to accusations that online interactions weaken real-world communities, presenting evidence that Internet and mobile phone users are slightly more civically and politically engaged than nonusers. Though the effects of this engagement are unclear, Baym refuses to place the digital in opposition to the real, arguing that it is clear that "new media do not offer inauthentic simulations that detract from or substitute for real engagement" (98).

[7]   In chapter 5, "New Relationships, New Selves?," the process of meeting new people is discussed, as is the presentation of self. Digital forms of interaction may be said to lower inhibitions, make it easier to find shared interests, and make it easier to make friends across social divisions; simultaneously, they force us to consider whether those we interact with are who they say they are. To a degree, we can rely on identity cues, such as screen names, photos, displays of technical skill, or lists of "likes" to understand one another. Even social identity, seen in group membership or friend groups (on social networking sites in particular) can be used to make sense of another user's identity or to communicate about the self. And while the absence of embodiment in these contexts seems to make it easy to lie or to create varied identities, these breaches of authenticity occur off-line as well, and the evidence is that most people offer fairly accurate, if slightly idealized, representations of

themselves online. This chapter also features a brief overview of the ways in which differences of gender, culture, and race persist in online identities.

[8] Once we have met someone, how do we use digital media to build or maintain that relationship? This question is at the heart of chapter 6, "Digital Media in Relational Development and Maintenance." Baym begins with a story of online meeting turned on- and off-line friendship, suggesting that as relationships strengthen, more forms of communication are added, which gradually expose us to more social cues (as in moving from e-mail to telephone calls to a first date). Additionally, it seems that the closeness of the relationship changes the communication content; as discussions span more topics and include more personal information, the relationship becomes closer. Less remarkable, and more prevalent, than online acquaintanceship turned real-life interaction is the off-line relationship that grows to include digital components. Many people use various digital media to communicate with real-life friends and family members, and Baym notes that there is no correlation between the most common media used in a relationship and the closeness of that relationship. That is to say, the coworkers we see each day are not, by virtue of face-to-face communication, closer to us than the family members we may Skype or e-mail several times a week. Thus, digital communications technology is not isolating people but rather augmenting existing social relationships. There are, however, risks to digital forms of relationship maintenance, including the ambiguity of the social networking site "friend"; disagreement about the manners of mobile phone use in social settings; and the risks involved with disclosing too much information to what may be uncertain audiences.

[9] In her conclusion, "The Myth of Cyberspace," Baym returns to the problems of technologically determinist accounts that frame cyberspace, the online, and the digital as separate from embodied life and social interactions. Such a stance inevitably leads to broad generalizations and minimizes the effects of the users' decisions and autonomy in media use. Instead, Baym states that "mediated communication is not a space, it is an additional tool people use to connect, one which can only be understood as deeply embedded in and influenced by the daily realities of embodied life" (152). She argues that this requires us to take a highly contextual approach to the study of online communication as it is being used by some groups of people in some circumstances for particular reasons. Returning to a social shaping of technology perspective, this is to say that both the nature of the media and the needs and desires of the users shape the meaning and utility of a given medium at a given time.

[10] Perhaps the greatest strength of *Personal Connections* is its steadfast refusal to accept dominant narratives or simple explanations for the relationships we carry on in digital forms, while providing a stunningly clear introduction to these complex social and technological dynamics. Yet this book remains fairly firmly in a Western, largely

United States–based perspective on digital communications. Though there are nods to digital divides, inequalities of access, and global differences in technology use, these are not central. Additionally, questions of privacy, which have attained new prominence in an age of Facebook's and Google's dominance, are only mentioned in passing. These criticisms, however, do not detract from the value of this book for a newcomer to the field. With a stunning bibliography and a solid introduction to the major questions of digital community, identity, and communication, *Personal Connections* is a welcome replacement for the dry textbooks, facile summaries, and marketing hype that often fill this role.

Book review

The functions of role-playing games: How participants create community, solve problems, and explore identity, by Sarah Lynne Bowman

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Sarah Lynne Bowman. *The functions of role-playing games: How participants create community, solve problems, and explore identity.* Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2010. $35.00 (216p) ISBN 978-0786447107.

[1]   Sarah Bowman's *The Functions of Role-Playing Games: How Participants Create Community, Solve Problems, and Explore Identity* is a provocative foray into the world of role-playing games (RPGs), their connections to forms of role-playing and performance in other contexts, and their implications for understanding identity and learning in gaming contexts. As a serious study of the continued importance of RPGs—a genre of game ranging from tabletop contexts such as *Dungeons & Dragons* and *Vampire: The Masquerade* to games for digital computer and console systems such as *World of Warcraft* and the Final Fantasy series—this text attempts to explicate how players of these games form meaningful communities, solve problems as part of role-playing, and express forms of identity through role-play. For fan studies, Bowman's emphases on narrative and identity may be fruitful points of entry to understanding RPGs as a game genre and as a creative fan practice.

[2]   In what is at once an analysis of role-playing games and advocacy for their consideration as spaces for legitimate study, Bowman argues that these "games provide a healthy, useful outlet for creativity, self-expression, communal connection, and the development of important skills over time" (9). While it is not the first scholarly work to attempt to unpack the significance of role-playing games (Bowman cites Gary Alan Fine's classic *Shared Fantasy: Role-Playing Games as Social Worlds,* among other texts), she attempts to characterize contemporary role-playing games

and connect them to a wide swath of valued enterprises outside of games, from fostering social connections among youth to applications within military and governmental contexts. Throughout, Bowman's key argument is that RPGs connect to a wide set of concerns and endeavors: They are game-based performance spaces, they foster explorations of identity, and they have relatively untapped potential for applications in education. This is a commendable stance, and she successfully illustrates that the forms of play found within these games cut across a wide range of cultural and educational practices.

[3]   The scope of Bowman's text is quite ambitious, both theoretically and in terms of the topic of study itself. Her approach is to first discuss the historical evolution of the form (chapter 1), connect RPGs to other forms of communal role-play (for example, improvisational theater and therapeutic role-play; chapter 2), and describe how interaction within RPGs can provide community for players (for example, by building empathy; chapter 3). She further argues that RPGs lead to the development of skills (for example, interpersonal skills through military or governmental training; chapter 4), aid problem solving (chapter 5), and guide identity play and identity alteration (chapters 6 and 7). By describing the role-playing game in a variety of contexts, Bowman is attempting to map out how we may develop a theory of the form in general, bringing to bear a sizable range of theoretical perspectives to elucidate both the ways that these games are played and how meaning is made of them by their participants. Much of the text focuses on extensive literature reviews, supplemented with interviews with RPG players and brief ethnographic notes based on her own immersion within RPG communities, and it should be most useful for readers interested in connecting games to issues of performance and identity in particular.

[4]   Bowman concludes the book with a typology of nine different forms of role-playing characters (chapter 7). These types—"the Doppelganger Self," "the Devoid Self," "the Augmented Self," "the Fragmented Self," "the Repressed Self," "the Idealized Self," "the Oppositional Self," "the Experimental Self," and "the Taboo Self"—present the reader with a provocative starting point in attempting to characterize the forms of identity that evolve through the play of RPGs. For instance, the Taboo Self represents a classification of RPG play as a means to express often taboo behaviors (such as rape, incest, and transgenderism) in the relatively consequence-free environment of a game. In contrast, the Repressed Self is Bowman's attempt to characterize how some RPG players express, as she puts it, their "Inner Child" through game play, allowing the performance of the "youthful, naïve self within each of us" (170). Bowman's Selves, which are presented descriptively and supported by anecdotal evidence, are a potentially useful typology that could begin to capture the various ways by which players of RPGs make meaning of their activities within an RPG game space.

[5]   I note that Bowman's argument in this final chapter is categorical in nature, less intent on furthering a theoretical argument than on presenting the reader with a set of classifications of the types of Self she finds of most interest in RPGs, and then, as she puts it, striving to "delineate the types of roles that players enact and their relationship with those roles" (177). The book in general can be seen as an extended literature review, concluding with the beginnings of an evocative classification scheme for the understanding of identity play within RPGs. Readers interested in identity in gaming in particular may find the theoretical underpinnings of Bowman's many Selves to be lacking, but her attention to the description of players' recounting of their motivations (chapter 7) is compelling. As some studies of role-playing gaming had previously insufficiently characterized the diversity of identity play that players engaged upon with RPGs, it is notable that Bowman has sought to explain the "complexities of characterization" (164) that typify RPG play of this sort. Throughout the text, she suggests that the creation of an "RPG character" cannot be understood as a disconnected, insular enterprise but should be conceived of as the meaningful development of alternate identities that can connect to valued practices outside of the game.

[6]   With regards to this emphasis on identity play, a telling choice was to use the terms "Gamemaster," "Dungeonmaster," and "Storyteller" almost interchangeably throughout the text. Bowman states that "this individual was originally dubbed the Dungeonmaster (DM), though gamers often prefer using the terms Gamemaster (GM), Storyteller (ST), or Referee. The Storyteller oversees the world of the game and is often responsible for inventing the metaplot that ties the universe together" (25). This is significant—we begin with Bowman's overt discussion of a variety of RPG terminology, and then immediately (in the next sentence) implicitly adopt "Storyteller" as the default term. "Storyteller" is the preferred term in White Wolf's *World of Darkness* RPG series (referenced widely in the book), and it emphasizes a form of narrative-based play in which players coconstruct characters and stories with the Storyteller. This again reflects Bowman's recurring interest in performance and narrative within these games and makes clear the lens through which she inspects the potential value of role-playing games as spaces for the exploration of different conceptions of Self.

[7]   We can see, then, that Bowman's Selves (for example, the Taboo Self or the Repressed Self, as discussed above) are primarily of interest to Bowman in how the player performs transgressive activities within the space of an RPG. Her analysis of the forms of performance and narrative-based identity play in these games is, in many ways, based on a consideration of one subgenre of the role-playing game: White Wolf's *World of Darkness.* The interviews she conducted for this work show that her participants highly valued the White Wolf/*World of Darkness* game system (chapter 3),

and she has clearly had significant experience playing within this particular game world herself (chapter 6 includes many discussions of her personal play experiences). Though Bowman implies her claims are important for understanding many different forms of this game genre (see discussions of *Dungeons & Dragons* in chapter 6, for instance), much of her focus in the text is on only this one. She puts great emphasis on how storytelling and role-playing play key roles in identity expression within the *World of Darkness* system, while implying that these experiences are significant for understanding RPGs in general.

[8]   Although Bowman convincingly argues for this RPG's importance, it is less clear how she sees her Selves (and the educational opportunities offered by RPGs) instantiating within other popular games often described as RPGs. I am left wondering how generalizable Bowman's work is to the task of understanding a variety of fan activities in other games commonly classified as RPGs, be they tabletop games such as *Call of Cthulhu* or digital games such as the Final Fantasy series. That is, while Bowman aptly calls attention to the RPG as a play space for the self, RPGs are a broad category of game, with a number of variants and interpretations of game rules.

[9]   Though Bowman convincingly argues that RPGs can serve as play spaces for the enacting of many different Selves, the text could have been strengthened by greater attention to the constraints on the rules and structures of RPGs. Missing was any significant discussion of role-playing games as *games.* While her data provided many interesting examples of how players perceived their activities within RPGs, Bowman did not link these perceptions to respected game studies and game design practitioner literatures that have explored the nature of games' rule-based frameworks (say, Eric Zimmerman and Katie Salen's 2003 book *Rules of Play,* among other texts). Bowman views games and game design almost entirely from the perspective of players' narrative and identity exploration. An analysis of the rule-based systems of these games and how they can constrain and/or shape what players do within them would have benefited her text—for example, by helping to better determine how a particular game's combat system might guide or limit an individual's expression of one of the Selves. As RPGs involve both identity play and adherence to a rule system, ultimately the reader is left wondering how Bowman's many Selves may emerge from the specific rule-based systems of the games she studied.

[10]   Finally, Bowman makes broad use of theory, citing scholars including Erving Goffman, Sherry Turkle, Victor Turner, and Joseph Campbell. She does present an interesting set of possibilities for understanding RPGs, and she uses this wide range of theories to argue that RPGs are connected to other, valued practices outside of games. But though she appears to be genuinely concerned with performing interdisciplinary research, her text contains just too many illustrative examples of role-playing games'

potential, linking them to a variety of theoretical approaches that might match cases and are not clearly connected to one another. This lack of connection occasionally disrupts the text's flow. Also, she does not always investigate unfamiliar scholarship very deeply. For example, in chapter 4, she cites a newspaper account of David Shaffer's research on urban planning games rather than citing his work itself. Most significantly, Bowman's text can be seen as more multidisciplinary than interdisciplinary. She employs multiple theoretical approaches to understand RPGs, but she does not connect them with one another or meaningfully synthesize them.

[11]   *The Functions of Role-Playing Games* works best as scholarly advocacy for the legitimacy of a particular fan activity (narrative, identity-based, role-playing game play). That is, Bowman's primary goal seems to be to argue that RPGs are interesting, valuable, and worthy of study—which is certainly true, and it is important that scholarship in this area moves beyond Fine's nearly 30-year-old *Shared Fantasy.* However, Bowman relies inordinately on one subgenre of RPG, and she is unfortunately agnostic on key issues raised in game studies literatures that might have yielded deeper insights into the relationship of RPGs as game systems to the identity play she finds so compelling. The lack of theoretical coherence leaves the reader enticed by the potential breadth of intellectual endeavors that RPGs may touch upon, but confused as to how they interrelate.

[12]   Yet as Bowman herself admits, the "volume [was] not intended to provide a comprehensive list of the various issues raised by participation in RPGs," and she believes that she has focused on "the most important and universal aspects of role-playing, regardless of format" (181). Though she convincingly argues that there is much in *World of Darkness* role-playing games that is worthy of study, the depth of these games and their relationship to other forms of games still remains unexplored. Perhaps in future work Bowman's Selves can be further investigated, tested in a wider variety of RPG contexts, and connected with a more meaningful discussion of RPGs as games. RPGs are certainly fascinating and compelling (for players and scholars alike), and although flawed, Bowman's text should be an impetus for scholars to move the discussion from the mere potential of these games toward further understanding the specific ways that role-playing, game narratives, and rule-based game systems can all interact to create meaning for their players.