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Editorial

Race and ethnicity in fandom

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[0.1] *Abstract*—This section of the special issue examines the cultural products of fandom and the intersections of race/ethnicity, class, and gender/sexuality.

[0.2] *Keywords*—Culture; Gender; Minstrelsy; Racebending; Racefail '09; Sexuality; Vaudeville

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1. Introduction

[1.1] Since May 2007, when Robin e-mailed me after talking with a friend of hers that I had met at a faculty development conference, she and I have had regular discussions about our shared backgrounds in fandom as participants and scholars. These have ranged over our interests in the particular spaces in which fandoms occur, experiential intersections of race/ethnicity, class, and gender/sexuality, as well as in critical intersections studies and theories. Over time, we have come to focus particularly on the racialized flow of cultures, historical marginalizations of specific populations based on race/ethnicity, class, and gender/sexuality in media, education, and scholarship, and the implications of how particular forms of culture flow more easily than others. One of the outcomes of our discussions is this special issue of *Transformative Works and Cultures.*

[1.2] In examining these cultural products—their inception, production, reception, and reproduction—these articles interrogate ascribed and achieved categories—their construction, assignment, performance, articulation; as fact and imagination, as causes and effects of human actions, their overlaps, gaps, relational existences; in public and private, macro and micro, and the spaces between these. This scholarship

is grounded in an epistemology where the social world is simultaneously made up of semiautonomous cultural fields, where "'field' [is] not…a subject matter, but [is]…a (social) distribution of forces, like gravitational or electrical fields. At different points in the field, the forces may push in different directions" (Arthur Stinchcombe, personal communication, 1999). In this discussion, race/ethnicity, gender, class, sexuality, and community are some of the relevant prominent fields. Race and ethnicity, as cultural forms and lived experiences, flow in ways that are historically restricted both legally and practically. Cultural forms originated and produced by minority groups are co-opted, whitewashed (and, conversely, hyperracialized), and historically monetized for the benefit of white producers and consumers. Simultaneously, cultural forms produced in racial/ethnic spaces and communities for local racial/ethnic audiences exist in and of themselves, for their respective communities. This approach highlights the importance of teasing apart such condensed discursive projects.

2. Fields of popular culture and fandom

[2.1] A myriad of practical fields of popular culture and fandom exist, both historically and in the present. Several that we are most familiar with are discussed below: minstrelsy and vaudeville, racebending, and Racefail '09.

[2.2] Minstrelsy and vaudeville are two forms of popular culture that are fundamentally products of the multiethnic/racial milieu of the United States whose influence across the mass media landscape is arguably ongoing. Although quintessentially American, both forms are also racially and ethnically marked. Blackface minstrelsy and Borscht Belt vaudeville are the marked forms that are best known to contemporary audiences. The word *minstrel* has a negative connotation, and it continues to be a racial boundary marker; *vaudeville,* on the other hand, has a nostalgic air and continues a successful assimilation whereby ethnic identity is not necessarily explicitly highlighted (Jewell 1993; Sacks and Sacks 1993; Kern-Foxworth 1994; Bogle 2001; Bial 2005).

[2.3] Racebending has at least two different meanings. Mica Pollack refers to racebending as "a strategy of questioning the validity of race categories to describe human diversity even while keeping race categories strategically available for the analysis of local and national racial inequalities" (http://www.gse.harvard.edu/news/features/pollock10012003.html; see her *Colormute: Race Talk Dilemmas in an American School,* 2004). The even newer permutation of this concept refers to a casting choice wherein a role with a particular race (or ethnicity) attached to it is given to a performer not of that race who then performs the role as the original race, or when a role's race/ethnicity is changed to match that of the chosen performer. Although this use of racebending may refer to a

situation in which an originally white character is performed by an actor of color (for example, Denzel Washington in both *Much Ado About Nothing* [1993] and *The Pelican Brief* [1993]), overwhelmingly, it has a more negative connotation wherein a character of color—indeed, often an actual person—has their race/ethnicity changed, and then that character/role is portrayed by a white actor (also contemporarily known as yellowface, for the still-acceptable practice—in contrast to blackface—of having white actors tape their eyes back or use makeup to portray Asians). Examples from this second category abound, and their histories are quite complex. Two examples are relevant: that of the still-disputed connection of Bruce Lee to the original concept of the television series *Kung Fu;* and that of the Charlie Chan film series, which was based in part on the life of an actual Chinese American police officer, although the character is always portrayed by a white actor (Huang 2010). Both meanings are linked to localized activism and to the international discourse surrounding racial practices and policies in cultural arenas of production and reception (Williams 1990) (note 1).

[2.4] Finally, Racefail '09 refers to critical race and antiracist work being done in off-line and online fandoms. Discussions by fans of color in a variety of online spaces, both private and public, dedicated to antiracist work, activism, education, and support, report ten or more years' worth of work spent confronting racism in science fiction/fantasy fandom online and off. Additional years have been spent in off-line antiracist work that cannot always be as easily documented or accessed. The growth of decentralized social networks (LiveJournal, Dreamwidth, Facebook, MySpace) changed the nature of fandom discourses away from the more centralized structuring of mailing lists and archives that flourished before 1999.

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3. Race, debate, and conflict

[3.1] This antiracist work includes a growing number of debates about racism in popular culture and fandom: the topics include racial and class stereotypes in fan fiction; racial and class stereotypes in the canon texts of the fandom; racist terminology being used by fans that embodies histories and etymology not widely known, especially in the international space of online fandoms; and, finally, ignorance of Jewish religious practices. In 2010, more recent conflicts have focused on Islamophobic commentary by fans and professional authors concerning the Park 51 Cultural Center in New York City.

[3.2] Additional levels of conflict have occurred because of the international demographic of online fandom, with debates over the history and contemporary racial attitudes in the United States compared to the United Kingdom as well as other English-speaking countries (Canada, Australia), and disagreements on antiracist

strategies and practices, including the issue of what tone can or should be taken when noting the existence of racist language, imagery, or characterizations. Since a corporation based in Russia bought LiveJournal in 2007, there have been examples of intolerance toward services for Russian speakers and complaints by monolingual fans over multilingual postings in communities.

[3.3] The largest and most widespread of the debates is referred to as Racefail '09 (or alternatively, the Great Cultural Appropriation Debate of Doom). This event differs from some of the earlier events in two ways. First, with the debates occurring from January to March 2009, the sustained nature of the imbroglio is unusual. Second, the participation of a number of professional writers and editors took the debates outside fan communities. A list of over 1,000 posts summarizing the debate was compiled by Rydra Wong; the original list was posted in her LiveJournal, then copied to a single post in her Dreamwidth journal (rydra_wong, Dreamwidth.org, February 4, 2002). Liz Henry identified 556 unique usernames in Rydra's list. The vast majority of participants made one post; however, there were lengthy discussions in many of the posts, and it was not uncommon to see several hundred comments in a single discussion thread.

[3.4] Although it may be tempting for those not familiar with the years of antiracist praxis and theory done in online and off-line fandoms to believe that Racefail '09 was a singular event that has come and gone, it actually occurred within a complex network of discussions relating to the cultural makeup of fandom and is connected to a history of work by fans of color and white allies. The Carl Brandon Society (http://www.carlbrandon.org/), growing out of the desire of fans of color to see more programming and awareness for writers of color in science fiction, originated in 1999. There are "Blogging against Racism" carnivals, dedicated communities and archives, and fic challenges and fests. Additionally, various communal efforts exist to raise funds to support fans of color attending conferences. Racefail '09 was not singular, nor are race discussions in fandom finished.

[3.5] Additionally, later debates about race, cultural appropriation, and related discussions about class, disability, language, and gender have often referred back to Racefail '09 in a variety of ways. Many fans have never heard of Racefail or the other events, but the effect on the fans, authors, and critics involved was real, and is still being referenced in off-line science fiction spaces such as WisCon and the International Conference for the Fantastic in the Arts. Nalo Hopkinson dedicated her ICFA guest of honor speech in 2010, "Reluctant Ambassador from the Planet of Midnight" (http://nalohopkinson.com/2010/05/30/reluctant_ambassador_planet_midnight.html), to the topic of race in the literature of the fantastic.

[3.6] Obviously issues of access to media are important, especially when we are talking about access to the networks of creation and dissemination involved in the processes of media production. It is understood generally that new media technology—being both expensive and powerful—is pervasive, but its relative lack of penetration into and use by racial minority communities remains relatively unexamined. Some of the most prominent research on the digital divide is fundamentally disconnected from the vast literature on race and ethnicity inside the United States, as well as outside in postcolonial projects. The dominant digital divide framework replicates one strand of race/ethnicity theory, tending to be grounded more in assimilation theory, but it does not engage with more contemporary theories. (In contrast, however, see Brock 2005, 2009, 2011; Kvasny 2006; Kvasny and Igwe 2008; Brock, Kvasny, and Hales 2010.)

4. Race and identity

[4.1] A crucial component of such critical race approaches (which are influenced by black feminist theory) to fandom and spaces of popular culture explicitly examines the interplay between salient identities, how they interact, and how they are prioritized in macro and micro situations, both by those who hold the identities and by everyone else (Davis 1983, 1990; King 1988; Collins 1990; Jewell 1993). Like any other group identity, one's membership in a fandom may have more or less salience given a particular situation. Although one might assume that a fandom identity takes the ultimately salient position in a fandom space, especially an online fandom space created specifically for the development of a particular fandom, what exactly might that fandom identity entail? Who is to determine the salience of a fan's other identities in that fan-expressive space? Not to speak about race, gender, class, sexuality—or being pressured not to speak—in a fandom space ends up creating the image of a "generic" or "normalized" fan. Such a fan identity is not free of race, class, gender, or sexuality but rather is assumed to be the default. The default fanboy has a presumed race, class, and sexuality: white, middle-class, male, heterosexual (with perhaps an overlay or geek or nerd identity, identities that are simultaneously embedded in emphasized whiteness, and increasingly certain kinds of class privilege, often displayed by access to higher education, particularly in scientific and technical fields). We're being disingenuous if we pretend that these social forces do not exist and do not affect fandom interactions, with different effects in off-line and online fandom spaces.

[4.2] Mass media is ubiquitous to the point of saturation. It is made to be experienced in groups: strangers congregating in public spaces to watch films; neighbors, friends, and families gathering around radios and televisions in private homes; individuals reconnecting after the fact to further discuss their mediated experiences, be it in person at the watercooler or online on a blog. How we experience, identify with, and internalize these narratives matter in large part because

they become our common cultural touchstones. They become our popular culture where we find comfort in knowing the narrative of the cultural scripts that make the mediated scripts resonate, whether they're the nonfictional scripts of newsreels or newscasts and sports, or the fictional scripts of drama and comedy. These scripts reflect as well as create and maintain the culture of our everyday lives, identities, and experiences.

[4.3] Popular and mass culture have a history of critical analysis that ranges from unambiguous indictment and the assumption of essentially passively receptive audiences (Horkheimer and Adorno 1972; Adorno 1998; Mander 1978), to work that recognizes the power dynamics of taste making and distinction without necessarily indicting the content of particular cultural formats themselves (Gans 1972; Bourdieu 1984; Williams 1990; Klinenberg 2007), to the even more nuanced work that examines these cultural experiences and artifacts from the top down and the bottom up, and explores the power dynamics, information creation and transmission, and transformative interactions that occur in the processes of popular and mass cultures (Bacon-Smith 1991; Jenkins 1992, 2006; Tulloch and Jenkins 1995; Hunt 1997, 1999, 2005; Laurinec 1999; Hills 2002; Gatson and Zweerink 2004). At least as important as these works are those that ask us to look as critically at the uses cultural criticism is put to, as to the cultural production, reception, and (potential) transformation processes themselves (Bailey 1989; Coontz 1992; Loewen 1995; Sternheimer 2010; Johnson 2005). How exactly culture flows, and how people dip into the stream and give and take from it are complex yet everyday processes.

[4.4] As others have discussed (Gatson and Zweerink 2004), we may, like Mary Douglas (1996), understand culture as a tool kit continuum. This concept can imply active, thoughtful political actions by social actors cognizant of their places in cultural competitions among groups (Ellis and Wildavsky 1990). One carries this tool kit around, lays it out, opens it up, and selects among a range of possibly appropriate expressions, actions, and interpretations that serve to create and/or maintain more or less open community cultures. Similarly, Ann Swidler's discussion of culture uses a metaphor rooted in Erving Goffman's (1954, 1971) symbolic interactionist dramaturgical analysis. Although Swidler explicitly uses the term *tool kit,* her simultaneous use of "bag of tricks" implies a less political and more performance-oriented use of cultural resources (1986, 273; 2001, 24). Her offering of the notion of repertoire as her central metaphor implies accessible performances, motifs, and themes. This suggests cognizant, perhaps savvy and/or cynical social actors engaged in performances of politics, identity, and community (Swidler 1986, 2001). Repertoire tends to stress a more micro-level approach to cultural choices than Douglas's group/macro-oriented focus.

[4.5] In contrast to Douglas and Swidler, Pierre Bourdieu's development of the importance of culture is centered on the concept of habitus. This concept is rooted in the denotation of routine. It implies unquestioned if not unconscious social discourse and action. Although it is often offered as the bedrock of tradition, habitus is also fragile, a state of rest that is never the state of an entire community or society, or indeed a person. Different strata and different aspects of individual lives may be more or less habituated to a particular hegemonic cultural character (Bourdieu 1984, 1991, 1994; see also Giddens 1979, 1984).

[4.6] These understandings of culture overlap significantly. In our everyday lives, we exist in a matrix of innovative uses of particular technologies—technologies whose dominant cultural images have tended to embody presumptions of danger, mindlessness, and fragmentation.

[4.7] Speaking to living in this cultural matrix, Jeffrey Ow gives us a savvy reading of his own intentional, political amorphousness, of his intersectional identities:

> [4.8] As an Asian male cyborg in my own right, I choose to play my own intellectual game with the *Shadow Warrior* controversy, acknowledging the perverse pleasures of weaving an oppositional read of the controversy, creating much more horrid creatures of the game designers and gaming public than the digital entities on the computer screen. In each level of my game, the Yellowfaced Cyborg Terminator morphs into different entities, from the individual gamer, to company representatives ending with the corporate entities. (2000, 54)

[4.9] Both the culture we make and the stories we tell/are told about that culture matter. For example, in a massive example of racebending, while the actual proportion of cowboys in the United States was mostly Mexican and African American, the iconic image of the American cowboy is a white man—John Wayne, to be exact (Katz 1993). Misinformation and erasure may be promulgated through other powerful cultural channels, such as education (Loewen 1995), but mass-mediated stories are that much more powerful because of their very nature. While earlier erasures and marginalization of people of color in the United States are being studied, contemporary people of color lead protests against the ongoing whitewashing.

[4.10] The most stunning recent example are the protests organized by fans protesting the whitewashing of Asian characters in the live-action film adaptation of *Avatar: The Last Airbender* (2005). The use of the Internet to spread information (through sites such as Racebending.com and Media Action Network for Asian Americans, http://www.manaa.org/) allowed fans of the original series to organize, educate, and publicize their protests concerning the whitewashing casting choices in

the live-action film. The actions taken included online petitions, letters of protest, and demonstrations in front of theaters in 2010. The activist work has not stopped in the last year; racebending continues to actively focus on advocating "for underrepresented groups in entertainment media" ("About us," http://www.racebending.com/).

[4.11] Scholarship on science fiction and fantasy fandom has been growing for the past two or three decades, originating in two essays published in the 1980s: Joanna Russ's "Pornography by Women, for Women, with Love" (1985), and Patricia Frazer Lamb and Diana L. Veith's "Romantic Myth, Transcendence, and *Star Trek* Zines" (1986). A good deal of that work incorporates feminist and gender analysis reflecting the feminist work in science fiction and fantasy that occurred for decades. WisCon, the largest feminist science fiction convention began in 1977; the earliest academic feminist scholarship was published in the 1980s (Marleen Barr's *Future Females* in 1981 and Natalie Rosinsky's *Feminist Futures* in 1984).

[4.12] Whereas white women have been focusing on issues of gender, fans of color have been doing antiracist and intersectional work in science fiction fandom for decades as well. However, the scholarship on fandom has an immense gap when it comes to dealing with race. Helen Merrick, an Australian feminist, fan, and scholar, in 2009 published *The Secret Feminist Cabal: A Cultural History of Science Fiction Feminisms,* which documents the decades-long history of feminism within fandom that preceded academic feminist criticism of science fiction and fantasy. Her last chapter, "Beyond Gender? Twenty-First Century SF Feminisms," argues that a similar pattern is occurring with regard to critical race and social justice work in online science fiction fandom—and this special issue of TWC is, we hope, one that continues the push begun by fans, acafans, and scholars, and points to the potential for an intersectional approach to scholarship on race and ethnicity in fandom.

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5. Contents of this special issue

[5.1] The articles selected for this special issue well represent the scope of methodologies and disciplinary approaches possible in fan studies as well as working within a broad range of types of fandoms. Mel Stanfill, in "Doing Fandom, (Mis)doing Whiteness: Heteronormativity, Racialization, and the Discursive Construction of Fandom," focuses an interdisciplinary analysis of film and television shows to analyze how the popular media construction of fans as white men performing fandom both undercuts and reinforces white privilege. Aymar Jean Christian, in "Fandom as Industrial Response: Producing Identity in an Independent Web Series," expands the definition of fan by analyzing a Web series and its creators who are fans of *Sex and the City* (the 1998–2004 television series) as well as intermittently marginalized workers in the media industry. Thomas D. Rowland and Amanda C. Barton, in "Outside

Oneself in *World of Warcraft:* Gamers' Perception of the Racial Self-Other," use an open-ended survey methodology to consider how gamers' racial attitudes intersect with avatar and interavatar creation. Finally, Sun Jung, in "K-pop, Indonesian Fandom, Social Media," uses an ethnographic and mixed-qualitative methodology carried out both on- and off-line, in South Korea, Australia, Hong Kong, Singapore, Indonesia, Turkey, and Egypt, as well as drawing on material on Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube, to analyze K-pop fandom from the perspective of Indonesian youth (aged 18–24).

[5.2] Although they draw from different disciplines, discourses, and fandoms, these four articles do similar work in deconstructing and decentering the dominant element in a number of outworn binaries: deconstructing the concept of white privilege and its dominance even when texts attempt to decenter it; decentering the idea of Western media and (white) Western fans as the sole field of study; deconstructing the idea of boundaries between off-line and online behaviors and attitudes, and between the cultures of fandom and industry. The fans whose productions and cultures are the focus of the essays by Christian and Sung are those whose national, gender, race, and sexual identities have often been erased or ignored, not only by the Western media but, until very recently, by fan studies scholarship generally.

[5.3] Stanfill analyzes the constructions of fans across different types of fandom, including fictional and documentary texts. Considering fans of baseball, the New York Mets, science fiction, Elvis, cult media, and horror, Stanfill examines the extent to which fans are constructed as white and male in popular media. However, Stanfill shows how the media constructions work to present the image of nonheteronormative fans who fail to follow the social standards required to perform whiteness that are connected to white privilege. This analysis extends Judith Butler's argument that gender is performed in other categories such as whiteness and fandom. Stanfill writes, "The need to repeatedly perform one's whiteness in order to construct and reaffirm it opens up the possibility that a white-skinned person can 'fail' at whiteness…and this article contends that fandom is one of the ways of 'doing' whiteness 'incorrectly'" (¶2.10). The popular construction of (white and male) fans as "losers" is based on the extent to which the fans fail to perform normative (white) masculinity. Their failures, shown across multiple fictional and nonfictional texts, include the perceptions of them as feminized, gay, or childish; their lack of professional employment; and their sexual pleasure in the objects of their fandom rather than in women, thus separating whiteness from privilege.

[5.4] This interdisciplinary and intersectional analysis draws on extensive scholarship in fan studies (Jenkins 1992, 2006; Hellekson and Busse 2006), gender studies (the work of Foucault and Butler), whiteness studies (Dyer, Chambers, Frankenberg, Newitz, Wray), and intersectional studies (Ahmed, Frankenberg). Additionally, by

considering constructions of fans in the context of discourses of whiteness and fandom without focusing on a single fandom or type of fandom, Stanfill addresses a gap in television and media fan studies that has failed to address racial differences in fandom, as opposed to studies of whiteness and fandom in sports and music fan scholarship. The apparent undercutting of white privilege in the popular media construction of fans as losers actually reinforces "the cultural commonsense that privilege is a 'natural' property of white, heterosexual masculinity" (¶1.2). Because (white and male) fans are shown across fandoms and genres as being able to change in order to gain control over their selves and their pleasures by deciding to self-correct their "deviance," heternormativity is reinforced, and Stanfill argues that the narrative of "that most neoliberal of buzzphrases, 'personal responsibility'" (¶4.3) focuses attention on individual choices in order to erase ideas of structural causes and reinforces white universality. The patterns noted by Stanfill, in such diverse texts as *The Fan, Fanboys, Fever Pitch, Galaxy Quest, Looking for Kitty, Almost Elvis, Fanalysis, Horror Fans, Mathematically Alive, Trekkies,* and *Trekkies II,* as well as selected episodes from *Xena: Warrior Princess, The West Wing,* and *The Simpsons,* provide a rich foundation for future intersectional work and show the need for moving away from relying solely on single types of fandoms.

[5.5] "Producing culture is political." So notes Aymar Jean Christian (¶3.1). Although not the first scholar to assert this position, in work that examines culture produced primarily or significantly within the realm of leisure and entertainment, this is a position that perhaps needs to be strongly emphasized. Christian's article examines the production process and content of a Web series, *The Real Girls' Guide to Everything Else,* a project grounded in an intersectionarily racebending response from fans of the TV series *Sex and the City,* and simultaneous antifans of the film *Sex and the City.* These politically driven moral entrepreneurs, at once fans and workers within the media industry (Christian calls them "intermittent participants" [¶0.1]—marginal workers due to their racial, gender, or sexual identities), produced a short (six episodes, 40 minutes total) answer to what they observed as the degrading of their object of fandom in its transition from television to film, as well as a piece intended to comment on the overall lack of work for "real girls" in the media industry (including television, film, and print). Christian's work connects the fan with the producer with the consumer in the professional environment, thus challenging the traditional use of prosumption (Ritzer and Jurgenson 2010), which is usually well embedded within the world of the amateur fan, no matter how sophisticated their skills and use of various kinds of capital in those prosumption practices. This connection provides an examination of the process of identity formation and cultural formation as a complex nexus, where "the central tension…is between creating something culturally and politically important (the domain of the fan and marginal) and creating something marketable (the domain of industry and the mainstream)" (¶3.11). Christian argues

that the producers of *Real Girls' Guide* have made "an intervention in race and women's genres, television, gender, and sexuality in a specific political and industrial moment," whose "criticism of the industry is as aware of structural concerns as it is of how those structures affect participants within that world; it is personal, political, and professional" (¶1.1, ¶4.6). Christian argues that even though the success of the *Real Girls' Guide* as a cultural-political intervention into industry is ultimately questionable, "such developments could force scholars to reconsider how we frame fan practices." If we do indeed "interpret the problem of post-1960s media as one of access," as Christian asserts (¶5.4), access to the cultural markets that are the most visible and powerful in terms of creating the content from which fandom emerges "should acknowledge shifts in fan and independent production in a period of technological change, seeing it as evidence of how changing social, political, and economic conditions can encourage new models for making and marketing stories through media" (¶5.6).

[5.6] Working in the context of contemporary scholarship on Internet racism and color-blind racism, Thomas Rowland and Amanda Barton survey participants in *World of Warcraft* (WoW) on the question of how their avatars, the figure within the game that is created by the player but limited by the game constraints, are influenced by the players' own racial perceptions. The question that Rowland and Barton set out to explore is whether the online virtual environment of a massively multiplayer online role-playing game (MMORG) would tend to reproduce American notions of racism, or whether it "attempts to subvert questions of race through means of neoliberal colorblindness and passing, and in so doing, contains the undesirable aspects of racism" (¶4.1). Their methodology was to directly survey players in the online gaming communities because of the difficulties of dealing with the huge amount of data generated online by fans (inside and outside the game and its forums). However, acknowledging Bonilla-Silva's (2006) criticisms of survey limitations, they provided open-ended questions as well as fixed answers. Their survey, approved by the institutional review board at Saint Louis University, was online for a month, and they received 446 responses. Although information about the survey was distributed to forums for a number of online games, the overwhelming response from WoW players led them to focus entirely on that group. Rowland and Barton's data analysis showed some weaknesses that they address, including age limitations and the inability to limit based on nationality, but they conclude that their survey "provides important preliminary data about gamers' racial perceptions and any relationship to the character creation process, and reveals the importance of further studies that will utilize more rigorous sociological methodology" (¶2.5).

[5.7] The conclusions that Rowland and Barton are able to draw emphasize a strong relationship between the racial attitudes of the gamers and the constructions of their

avatars and interavatar interactions, with the hyperbolic visual environment emphasizing the extent to which physical characteristics of others are interpreted as either being sympathetic or antagonistic. Because the physical charactersistics are specific to the "races" (the term used for "species") in the game, such as Humans, Elves, Dwarves, and a variety of hybrid "monsters" (Taurens) or various Undead, the extent to which discrimination is unconsciously expressed concerning the races in the game was shown by the responses to survey questions. Additionally, the extent to which respondents' chosen descriptors for their avatars were mirrored in their choice of descriptors for themselves, their projection of their own identities onto their avatars showed another level of the unconscious influences of racial attitudes. Some discussion of gender preferences and fetishization of female avatars (with male players being more willing to play female characters) and the influence of skill sets being associated with specific races/species in the game imply that future work drawing on intersectional theories and methods would be useful.

[5.8] Pushing the concept of cultural politics further and in different directions, Sun Jung's contribution presents the complex ethnographic environment in which the author is embedded for this work. If the ethnographic field is K-pop fandom, Jung, who is based in South Korea and Australia, has traveled to Hong Kong, Singapore, Indonesia, Turkey, and Egypt, in addition to following and embedding within various online sites of this culture, including Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube. This article uses mixed qualitative methods to primarily examine the field of K-pop fandom from an Indonesian youth (aged 18–24) perspective, where the participants share content and news, cover dance, and write fan fiction—sometimes becoming minor celebrities themselves. Jung's analysis complements Christian's discussion of how fandoms reflect and reshape the industry, emphasizing in the most contemporary way how fan culture is not separate from industry culture.

[5.9] Jung argues from a position on convergence culture that shifts the center at once from "the West" as well as suggesting the notion that with multiple centers, there will be multiple convergences: "The global cultural economy has to be understood as a complex, overlapping, disjunctive order, which can no longer be understood through existing models of center and periphery" (¶1.4). Jung thus offers us an "in-depth study…of online fan practices on social media that particularly focuses on transcultural circulation of Asian pop content via empirical research methods" and helps us discover "how transcultural online fan networks of Asian pop cultures operate, how large and diverse these networks are, who uses them, what kinds of content they distribute, and how such operations affect actual global cultural industries" (¶1.5).

[5.10] Jung's analysis is one in which race and ethnicity are central to the fandom, yet largely unremarked upon by the participants analyzed. In a fandom where the

practice of cover dance teams is one of the most prominent prosumptive engagements by the participants, and where those participants are overwhelmingly young Indonesian women self-consciously performing and embodying young Korean men, Jung presents us with a fandom whose genderbending is remarked upon, and whose racebending is visible, yet remains largely unspoken. Jung's subjects are a "small sample group…[of] well-educated, middle-class urban consumers [with advanced] English-language skills and…access to advanced media technologies" (¶2.9). Although they are a small and privileged group, Jung argues that "in the case of Indonesian fandom, fans reinterpret and re-present K-pop content within the conceptual paradigm of embracing simultaneously cool, modern, and exotic foreign culture" (¶4.22). *Hallyu,* or the Korean Wave, has been actively chosen in China, Vietnam, and now Indonesia as alternative culture in local situations of rapid change and globalization, and Jung thus focuses on "the way Indonesian youths actively and voluntarily seek, appropriate, and consume new kinds of pop culture to satisfy their emerging desires in this new and modern digital setting…while their country underwent socioideological changes after the Suharto era" (¶4.22). Jung argues that this active translation of an external ethnically identified desired Other is part of a transition and convergent practice wherein "Indonesian youth seek out and create new forms of culture by being actively involved in participatory K-pop fan practices to satisfy their desires until they can engage with their own cool 'I-pop'" (¶4.22). This raises the question of whether this is racebending. Is the racial/ethnic content of the performance as self-conscious as that of the gendered performances that the participants seem aware of?

[5.11] These four essays draw from a range of disciplinary methodologies and consider a broader field of types of fandoms, but they are in no way exhaustive of the scholarship that needs to be done in the broad field of race and ethnicities and fan studies. Some of the areas in which future work could be done are clear, as follows: more work on transcultural and international fandoms in languages other than English; more interdisciplinary methodologies, not only within scholarship generally, but within individual projects, with a particular need for more digital humanities approaches; more collaborative work to develop the technologies that will allow the ability to analyze the data on the Internet; and more work across categories of fandoms (sports, music, cult media, and science fiction and fantasy).

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6. Note

1. Racebending.com's definition of racebending appears at http://www.racebending.com/v4/about/what-is-racebending/. They make explicit the connection between the aesthetic/talent argument for the dominant practice of casting whites to portray (both real and fictional) people of color and its direct impact on the employment, incomes, and careers of actors of color: "Our organization's primary

concern is the impact of 'racebending' on underrepresented communities. Casting established characters of color with white actors has a huge, harmful impact on underrepresented communities of color and their struggles for representation. On the other hand, casting Nick Fury, Cinderella or Velma with actors of color had no discernible impact on the overall opportunity for white children and consumers to be represented by and relate to the wide array of other Hollywood characters who are white, including other incarnations of Nick Fury, Cinderella, and Velma."

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Race and Ethnicity in Fandom: Praxis

Fandom as industrial response: Producing identity in an independent Web series

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[0.1] *Abstract*—I frame the development, production, and distribution of a Web series, *The Real Girl's Guide to Everything Else,* as a fan-driven response to an industrial product, *Sex and the City.* As intermittent participants in the Hollywood industry, the series creators, a diverse group of lesbian, bisexual, and straight women of various ethnicities, positioned their series as a market-oriented product intended to reform the industry from its margins and participate in a growing new media economy. Expanded notions of fan production and industry are needed, as are fresh frameworks for analyzing the effects of digital distribution, especially for communities of color, of women, and of sexual minorities.

[0.2] *Keywords*—Fan production; Gender; Industry; Race; *The Real Girl's Guide to Everything Else; Sex and the City;* Sexuality

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1. Introduction

[1.1] The opening scenes of the Web series *The Real Girl's Guide to Everything Else* reflect what has become a convention in woman-centered television and film: four young girlfriends sitting chatting casually at brunch. "There were definitely some overt nods we wanted to make to *Sex and the City,* from a script perspective and from a style perspective," the series' writer and executive producer told me in an interview. Yet the scene almost immediately deviates from HBO's titan of women's programming. The camera first focuses on each woman's shoes, a diverse assortment including a pair of dowdy doctor sneakers, strappy heels, work boots, and bare feet. The first girl we see, Vanna, is black, and her friends are discussing not relationships or sex, but a professional disagreement the lead character, Rasha, is having with her publisher. Rasha, a Lebanese lesbian, is being forced by her publisher to write a straight, mass-market, chick-lit book instead of a political work on women's rights in Afghanistan. The story revolves around Rasha's venture into (presumably white) heterosexuality as she

sacrifices her political ideals to get the story she wants. *Real Girl's Guide* establishes itself as an intervention in race and women's genres, television, gender, and sexuality in a specific political and industrial moment. I interviewed the creators—six total, including the writer, the director, two actors, and the associate and executive producers—to theorize *Real Girl's Guide* as a case study in how industry workers, driven, as many producers are, by fandom, respond to mainstream texts and practices in ways that are both political and industrial in nature.

[1.2] The story of *Real Girl's Guide* illuminates the possibilities and challenges opened up by convergence culture, by Web series as a form, and by independent production as a fan practice. The producers of *Real Girl's Guide,* simultaneously fans and antifans of products like *Sex and the City* and occasional participants in Hollywood (mostly as actors), brought to their project an attempt to reinvent production practices and representation toward more "democratic" ends, making them more attuned to race and sexuality, the diversity within the women's market, and the affective sensibilities of fans of women's genres. In this attempt, they were partially successful, but the scale of their project raises questions about to what extent the market can absorb such work. In the end, *Real Girl's Guide* demonstrates how Web series are offering new ways of producing content and new avenues to explore and challenge representations, but also how they bring to light the limits on how revolutionary new media and fan practices can be.

[1.3] As will be discussed, *Real Girl's Guide* and its creators are not fan studies scholars' traditional objects of study. The show's creators used their love of a particular media property, *Sex and the City,* to market their own series not to a community of fans devoted to it, but to a broader group of women, in order to put forth a progressive agenda about race, gender, and sexuality in televisual representations. The urge to produce that is visible here is not new—fan studies in general and studies of fandom in marginalized groups in particular have offered countless examples of independent production, broadly conceived. What marks *Real Girl's Guide* as a slight departure from the transformative works more often studied is that it is pitched not only to a community of like-minded fans but also to the industry of Hollywood, (potential) advertisers, and the media as a product created by a group of marginalized workers leveraging convergence culture for their purposes.

[1.4] *Real Girl's Guide* is just one example of hundreds of Web series being produced by independent filmmakers, who work on the margins of Hollywood as fans of the industry but also its harshest critics. These series are as diverse and varied as anything on television or in film and include newer genres specific to digital media. Yet it would be wrong to assume that *Real Girl's Guide* is necessarily representative of the broader, as yet undeveloped market for episodic Web programming. There are not

many Web series made by GLBTQ people or by people of color, though there are at least a hundred. Interviews with these producers suggest that many of them create shows both for commercial reasons (though few make money or get sponsors) and, more importantly, to correct mainstream representations and of the industry in general. *Sex and the City* is a common object of love and dissent (Christian 2010b).

[1.5] What we call a "Web series" is a peculiar invention. It exists variously as amateur and independent media and as corporate and advertising product. Short form and low budget, it is not quite television but is still filmed and episodic. Originating in the 1990s but picking up in the mid-2000s, Web series developed primarily as a vehicle for independent filmmakers and production companies to tell stories and grow audiences in ways previously unavailable to them: in ways more sustained than YouTube-based viral videos, higher in audience scale than most low-budget film, with a lower cost and fewer barriers to entry than mainstream television, but also with the smallest potential for revenue from advertising and sponsorship. Web series, then, exist between the conflicting and shifting currents in the new media economy. They represent the desire among many working in media for a new kind of television, as mainstream television industries face uncertainties about their business models. They suggest the maturation of online video from one-off amateur content to more rigorous —and expensive—production (Christian 2011).

[1.6] Independent Web series, therefore, move discussions of fandom from affective, cultural, and moral economies to the industrial economy, where the values of alterative narratives of race, gender, and sexuality are brutally negotiated in a market for stories and viewers. Confronted with this market, producers, as fans, poach from the industry its narrative formulas and some marketing practices, but offer up more loose and flexible means of production along with more open and diverse forms of representation.

[1.7] *Real Girl's Guide* is a tiny show by film and TV standards and is a small, lean operation. The series produced six episodes, each between 5 and 10 minutes in length, making about 40 minutes total. The producers also filmed some auxiliary (fan) content: about 25 minutes of vlogs from potential dates for its lead characters (in the show Rasha goes on a series of Match.com-like dates with men). Season 1's total budget neared $10,000, slightly more than that of many independent Web series but far below that of mainstream or corporate Web content. Across multiple distribution sites, the series has amassed a total of 200,000 views as of this writing, fewer than a typical viral video and many of the top Web series, but a respectable number for a low-budget niche Web show; the vast majority of indie series fail to make such a mark. Most of the series' fans were young women, and the producers assume a large number of them were racial minorities.

2. Economies of fandom: Toward fandom as industrial practice

[2.1] I attempt here to marry independent production in convergence culture to broader discussions of fandom. While this joint consideration of independents producing for both communities and markets may seem peculiar, it borrows heavily from theories of users (fans) feeling compelled to produce their own material to fill in narrative holes within mainstream media texts (Jenkins 2006).

[2.2] For marginalized groups, the need to produce is greater, and while fan studies has been relatively silent on issues of race, it has provided a robust literature on the interpretive work women have done as fans. Jenkins notes that the media's structural blindness to women as readers causes them to "find ways to remake those narratives, at least imaginatively" (2006, 117). Fan studies of women have traditionally examined how they collectively imagine and produce robust alternative worlds; these studies include Sarah Wakefield's (2001) work on how Scully fans created alternative communities in opposition to other groups devoted to *The X-Files,* Nancy Baym's (2000) studies of soap opera fan communities, Helen Taylor's (1989) work on *Gone with the Wind,* and Camille Bacon-Smith's (1992, 228–54) work on slash. The women in these studies do the work of interpretation, from "small acts of personal power and assertiveness" such as naming pets and children after favorite characters (Taylor 1989, 31) to selecting what novels within a genre to read and endorse (Radway 1984). "Production" becomes a natural extension of a practice of radical personalization that female fans undertake as subjects excluded from mainstream narratives. Like Bacon-Smith's writers of slash and Francesca Coppa's (2008) *Star Trek* vidders, the *Real Girl's Guide* creators have taken notions of play and personalization from producing for communities to producing both for communities and—potentially—for the market: "All imaginative play…requires at least an underlying assumption of narrative, a 'what if' carried out to its structural completion" (Bacon-Smith 1992, 291). The question raised by *Real Girl's Guide* is, what if *Sex and the City* reflected the racial and sexual diversity of "real" women, and what if our production used the franchise to show the market this imaginative possibility?

[2.3] Why focus on independent production by marginalized individuals? One could argue that fan studies has always been concerned with marginality, as preoccupied with its implications as are scholars of identity—race, gender, class, and sexuality—in post-Marxist cultural studies. With its now lengthy intellectual history, fan studies continues to grapple with the marginality of fan activity, even as—or perhaps because—fan production has become so valuable to the industry. Fan production ought to be seen as an industrial practice, an attempt to speak to and reform the industry within a marketplace not only of ideas, but also of capital. For those historically excluded from mainstream production—as the multiracial, sexually diverse producers of *Real Girl's*

Guide are—such a vision is crucial to understanding why and how fans produce responses to mainstream texts such as *Sex and the City.*

[2.4] Fan scholarship has provided robust theories for understanding the value of fandom outside of traditional political economy in order to validate the activity of people far outside of Hollywood and New York. Among the most prominent of these is John Fiske's "cultural economy of fandom," and his 1992 article bearing that title is a seminal text. Using Bourdieu, Fiske seeks to legitimate a "pop culture economy" that brings industrial texts from capital markets to the realm of culture: "The relationship of popular culture to the culture industries is therefore complex and fascinating, sometimes conflictive, sometimes complicitous or co-operative, but the people are never at the mercy of the industries—they choose to make some of their commodities into popular culture" (48). Fiske's concept was useful for taking fan studies out of the realm of pathology—a very real concern (Jenson 1992, 9–29)—and into that of valid cultural criticism. Fiske framed fan practices as noncommodities or different kinds of commodities: he saw fandom as making "commodities into pop culture" instead of making commodities in itself, a general position echoed in early scholarship (Ang 1985; Katz and Liebes 1993; Jenkins 1992; Radway 1984). Later formulations of the "moral economy" focused on "social expectations, emotional investments, and cultural transactions that create a shared understanding between all participants within an economic exchange" (Green and Jenkins 2009, 214). Such theories appropriately responded to what most fan practices were: the work largely of amateurs or independents working far outside the industry and making mostly noncommercial products.

[2.5] As mainstream industries (particularly television) grew aware of the power of fan engagement, fan studies sought to make sense of the interactions that developed between the industrial economy and alternative economies. Much of the research revolved around mediating the feuds between the industry's quest for money and fans' noncommercial practices, implicitly separating the two in order to legitimate and indicate the importance of fan production. Positioning fan practice as a cultural activity—rather than an industrial activity—reflected how most fans talked about their practice and confirmed it as an important object of scholarly study:

> [2.6] One becomes a "fan" not by being a regular viewer of a particular program but by translating that viewing into some kind of cultural activity, by sharing feelings and thoughts about the program content with friends, by joining a "community" of other fans who share common interests. For fans consumption naturally sparks production, reading generates writing, until the terms seem logically inseparable. (Jenkins 2006, 41)

[2.7] In the earlier years of fan studies, fans were described as reluctantly poaching from mainstream texts to satisfy and produce nonindustrial demands. But corporations wanted to use fan production to make more money. Controversy erupted when producers failed to heed fan advice about industrial texts (Jenkins 1992, 120–51, for example) or betrayed their trust (Abercrombie and Longhurst 1998, 174–74). As the Web has made it easier to harness user-generated content, numerous scholars have crafted theories of the relationship between fan practices and major media companies, seeing it variously as mutual (Banks and Deuze 2009), conflicted (Jarrett 2008a, 2008b; Burgess and Green 2009), or exploitative (Andrejevic 2008; Terranova 2000).

[2.8] While all of these theories and studies are rich and appropriate for their objects of study, we need to build upon them to incorporate a key and increasingly important part of fan production: fan-inspired Web series as commodities meant to push the industry in one direction or another, works aimed not only at a subculture or fan community but also at the market itself. *Real Girl's Guide* shows what happens when creators come from marginalized groups with a much more conflicted relationship to mainstream texts, when those creators regularly interact with the industry, and when the Web offers sophisticated distribution platforms, a small but growing economy where fans can, if they want to and if they are lucky, make money. The minority, female, and lesbian and bisexual creators of *Real Girl's Guide,* who are excluded from the centers of the industry but still participate in it, are not satisfied to create texts solely for cultural or subcultural economies.

[2.9] The writer, director, and producers of *Real Girl's Guide* are mostly actors who regularly audition and work for traditional media industries, primarily television. They produced their Web series not only to buttress their résumés, but also to resolve the fundamental flaws they see in how television series are made, cast, and marketed. This essay takes from John Caldwell (2008) a more expansive view of production culture, going beyond the most visible "above the line" participants and the less visible "below the line" workers to include the marginal, incidental players: the actors who occasionally get cast, the producers with limited resources, the independent filmmakers who sell a single work to public television. I frame their practices as industrial, as crucial to the state of the industry as are the network television studios. In this effort I contribute to a growing body of literature that sees independent production in the digital age as fundamental to understanding changes in media economies (Mann 2010).

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3. Practicing political representation

[3.1] Producing culture is political, and *Real Girl's Guide*'s origins are explicitly so. The series makes clear how independent artists react to mainstream and corporate

content and create new works out of their readings of this content. While the series is superficially at odds with *Sex and the City* and many other mass-marketed products, interviews with the show's creators revealed a more complicated politics, motivated by discontent and dismissal but animated by respect, love, and eagerness to improve the industry and its texts by reforming practices behind the camera and representations in series content. Because the barriers to distribution and production of Web series are lower, the core of women making *Real Girl's Guide* were able to channel their disagreements with the industry into a productive, restorative endeavor.

[3.2] But it was irritation, not affection, that initiated the *Real Girl's Guide* project. Screenwriter Carmen Elena Mitchell, who is white and identifies as bisexual, started writing the script the day after she saw the first *Sex and the City* movie with Reena Dutt, a straight Indian American woman who became associate producer of *Real Girl's Guide* and also played Sydney in it. "I was just really appalled by the materialism, the lack of diversity, the superficiality…They're pretty bad movies. But they still got an audience," Mitchell told me. Dutt echoed Mitchell's concerns, noting that the one actor of color in the film, Jennifer Hudson (playing Carrie's personal assistant, Louise), was allotted a stereotypical role. Mitchell made clear that it was the *Sex and the City* film, not necessarily the TV series, that spurred the production of *Real Girl's Guide.* The series, she said, addressed real issues. Mitchell interpreted the film's materialism and thin story line as disrespectful to the series' fans, who flocked to it in droves so they could revisit the characters: "I think what's happened is they basically took the success of the series and exploited that, exploited people's attachment to the characters and basically used it as a way to sell shoes…I think both movies are totally product-driven." (The creators of *Real Girl's Guide* were not the only ones who, after the release of the film, responded to it in this way: writer Elisa Kreisinger developed the Queer Carrie Project after its release [Coppa 2010].)

[3.3] At face value, such statements are clear examples of antifandom and the moral text. "Hate or dislike of a text can," as Jonathan Gray writes, "be just as powerful as can a strong and admiring, affective relationship with a text, and they 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). Dutt and Mitchell's feelings did initiate production, but not simply to sustain a community or subculture. Their statements above represent a carefully constructed characterization of Hollywood, one eventually aimed at a reformative project to produce an alternative commodity: the Web series. While appearing to criticize the media as a whole, Mitchell's comments are actually directed at specific industry practices and dynamics: the need to extend the profitability of a franchise, the presumed exploitation of female audiences as an underserved market, the casting of mostly white actors in Hollywood films, and the use of product placement to help underwrite large production budgets.

Marketing and content were particular concerns of hers—and the large investment required for films, versus the relatively cheaper form of television, heightened her concern. Mitchell remarked on the narrow range of content sold to women:

> [3.4] The movies that we see that are marketed towards women, they tend to be white, all this retail therapy: "you're sad so you go out and buy shoes." It's just very consumer-driven. Story tends to be secondary. There are a lot of familiar plots that we see again and again. There's this idea that we're just giving people what they want, but I don't think that's true.

[3.5] Here, Mitchell identifies the areas where current industry practices are limited: race in marketing, ideologies of mass culture (Ang 1985), narrative formulas, and the presumed desires of monolithic minority or female audiences.

[3.6] Aside from criticizing corporate practices—to be addressed in the following section—most of the Web series' creators lamented the limits and flaws of the marketplace for actors, which were made clear by *Sex and the City*'s narrow representation of white women. Dutt, who is primarily an actor, focused on the lack of "fulfilling" roles for women of color within the industry, recalling personal incidents: "Most of the time I'll walk into an audition office, and I'll get into character and they'll say, 'can you do this with an [Indian] accent?'" Nikki Brown, who is black and played Vanna is *Real Girl's Guide,* said roles deemphasizing race are hard to come by in Hollywood: "You come out here and it's not quite about talent…The representations aren't as positive as I'd like them to be, for my own race." Robin Dalea, who identifies as multiethnic and played Rasha, the lead, said the issue is supply and demand: there are many more actors than there are roles, and race and gender only add to those imbalances.

[3.7] *Real Girl's Guide,* then, is a product of discontent with the industry, with how it operates both behind the scenes and within its products. It is not, however, a resistant project in the colloquial sense. Mitchell is not anti-industry or anticapitalism. She characterizes *Real Girl's Guide* as a commodity intended to change "what's seen as marketable for women," and she praises progressive examples in the mass media, citing writer-actor Tina Fey as a positive force. In fact, all of the Web series' creators peppered our conversations with examples of what they see as positive changes in the mainstream media. Reena Dutt cited South Asian actors—*The Office*'s Mindy Kaling and *Scrubs*'s Sonal Shah—and black actors—Jada Pinkett-Smith and Halle Berry—as examples of women who produced their own original material. Jennifer Weaver, an associate producer on *Real Girl's Guide* who also played Liz (the lead's girlfriend), praised the roles for women on Showtime's *Nurse Jackie* (Edie Falco) and CBS's *The Good Wife* (Julianna Marguiles). Nikki Brown cited the diversity on *True Blood* (the lead's black best friend, Tara, played by Rutina Wesley), and Robin Dalea highlighted

roles for women and people of color on *Grey's Anatomy, Damages,* and *Mad Men.* But such roles "are rare, and a lot of them are white," she said.

[3.8] The creators turned their disappointment into a project to correct representational imbalances. Aware of what the industry does well and where it needs to be improved, the production team sought to create a different model for media representation. Simply, *Real Girl's Guide* takes what it wants from the mainstream and leaves out what it disagrees with. Its most obvious differences are its lesbian lead and multicultural cast. For Mitchell, it was important to write scripts that did not force the characters to play up their race or sexuality. "I liked that Carmen wrote diverse characters where that wasn't the focal point," said Brown, who found it "refreshing" that her character, Vanna, "went to Columbia, is bossy, and happens to be African American…You don't get that that often." Heather de Michele, the series director, who is white and identifies as lesbian, liked that race did not drive the story, despite the diversity of the cast. "The characters happen to be of color but it has nothing to do with the story," she said.

[3.9] Despite its issues with *Sex and the City, Real Girl's Guide* is still a fannish work, aware of which conceits and strategies work well—as noted before, all of the women behind the camera are avid film and television fans and follow industry trends. Like many Web series, *Real Girl's Guide* borrows from elements of the show that inspired it, both visually and narratively, while adapting it to fit niche communities and personal experiences. This is a more flexible, inclusive way of making a series than is standard in the industry. As she tried to establish the tone of the show, Mitchell imagined how the *Sex and the City* foursome would fit into her own life, demonstrating an affective (interpretive and personal) relationship with the media text characteristic of most fan practice: "If the *Sex and the City* women were real women, and they were my friends, who would they be?" Mitchell used her diverse network of friends for inspiration—some of whom, like Dutt and Weaver, were participants in the series—and the conversations in the show loosely mirrored "half-serious" and "crazy" conversations she has had in her own life. Other characters, moreover, are loosely based on the actors playing them. Visually, de Michele, the director, retained some explicit nods to the HBO series: the focus on shoes and the shots of the girls having brunch were deliberately retained and emphasized. "These women would take the time to get together and be together," she said. "That was actually kind of neat about *Sex and the City,* something that we actually enjoyed."

[3.10] At the same time, the Web series, as a work of antifandom, takes pains to differentiate itself in numerous ways from its inspiration, most obviously, as discussed, in its racially and sexually diverse cast. In addition to these factors of identity, the series seeks to create a world more visually raw and less slick than *Sex and the City.*

"We wanted to sort of strip away the pretense," de Michele said, through the use of natural lighting and handheld camera work, which have become de rigeur in many Web series and independent films. In keeping with her feminist principles, Mitchell used a professional dilemma, not a relationship issue, as the driving force in the plot. She wanted to tell a parable of "what lengths women will go to to get ahead in a field that feels very dominated by men." So Rasha encounters comedic hijinks and tense situations, all of which come into conflict with her own ideals of women's independence. In her zeal to reach a professional and intellectual goal, Rasha finds herself in many *Sex and the City*–type situations—bad dates, awkward sexual moments, even a run-in with a "Mr. Big." Yet in a departure from the original show, Rasha responds with self-conscious—and, for the audience, humorous—disdain, condescending to do what she has to do and resigning herself to her travails as a professional woman.

[3.11] What is *Real Girl's Guide*'s ultimate political project, and what does it say about representation? We can find an answer in the story. *Real Girl's Guide*'s central plot is Rasha's quest to write about a serious issue (Afghan women) and sell her work to the publishing industry (which is dominated by chick lit). This quest serves as a loose allegory for producing independent and fan media in a centralized media system. The central tension in *Real Girl's Guide* is between creating something culturally and politically important (the domain of the fan and marginal) and creating something marketable (the domain of industry and the mainstream). Rasha is writing about Afghan women, who are not marketable, a goal with which the independent writer Mitchell possibly identifies. In the end, though, Rasha compromises on her dream, writing the manuscript she wants but selling the book packaged with free women's products like cosmetics, a clear nod to dominant chick-lit culture. For Mitchell, this was an important compromise, a way to chart a third way in political and grassroots production, to take the cultural economy of marginal works and place it within industrial practice: "[We've] got to continue to write what we want to write and to find the stories that we want to write. And sometimes it's going to have to take some creative packaging to get the stories out there." For de Michele, such compromises are intermediary steps in progress:

> [3.12] It's definitely a feminist story, and we're all feminists driving it. But we also recognize that we have to package something so someone will eat it. It's sort of like this stupid compromise that women have to make just to step ahead, but it just comments on the reality, while being smart within that reality.

[3.13] The tension here between reality, progress, and the compromises between them is significant. If there is a political project to the Web series, it is to remake

industry practices from the outside in, not forgetting what corporations do well but understanding their limitations. *Real Girl's Guide* is an unconventional story, but it is packaged in a somewhat familiar way—the *Sex and the City* conceit—and marketed as a familiar comedic romp. The next section will discuss how the series was made and sold to audiences.

4. Practicing political production and distribution

[4.1] Filming and distributing a Web series is a very specific way of creating visual media. There are few festivals for Web series like those for traditional independent film, even less interest on the part of major film companies, no major TV channel for regular distribution (where independent film has Sundance and IFC), underdeveloped financing practices (neither corporate nor political investors are socialized into funding it), and even more uncertain paths to obtaining revenue. Because the path is unclear, Web series creators borrow from various models and innovate strategies along the way. They are, first and foremost, very invested in the film and television industries but find in the Web a potentially powerful platform for distribution. Most of the people interviewed came to Web series through theater, acting in, directing, or producing independent plays and showcases in New York and Los Angeles. For them, film and television have greater impact than theater. But television has high barriers to entry, and film distribution takes much longer. Mitchell, who had been acting and writing short stories, found her work failed to reach even her close friends. She had worked in traditional independent film but found this genre too limiting:

> [4.2] I've been a total gung-ho advocate of the Web because after having my experience with film, [I realized that] it can reach a much broader audience, [but] your audience is still fairly limited to film festivals. But put something online, you can reach people all over the world. And if you're speaking to something that people are interested in or hasn't been talked about that much, then your audience really grows and people start circulating your videos.

[4.3] The team behind *Real Girl's Guide* found in the Web series a way to connect with audiences (using television's serialized structure), tell an engaging visual story (through film), and reach a wide group of people (through the Web).

[4.4] Yet even as they mixed media formats, the women behind *Real Girl's Guide* situated their practices within broader debates about the film and television industries and saw their series as an opportunity to propose different pre- and postproduction and distribution practices. They are keenly aware the industry is as flawed behind the scenes as in its representations. One of the most common refrains among the group

was their disenchantment with the raced and gendered dynamics of the industry. Most were fluent in contemporary marketing speak, often citing the desirability of young white male viewers, the most coveted group in both film and television. As residents of Los Angeles with numerous ties to filmmakers, they were also intimately aware of the greater representation of white men in positions of power in Hollywood. Mitchell recalled the numerous times she had described her project to colleagues and felt quite marginalized:

> [4.5] Even right now, when we go out to plug *Real Girl's,* it's all guys. It's all white guys in their mid-20s to mid-30s, and as soon as you say something with the word "girl" in the title, it's kind of like they don't hear anything else. They put you in a box: "oh, it's a girl film." I've also got some sort of condescending remarks like, "oh, you didn't shoot it on the RED [a digital camera], well…" as if they're trying to out-tech me, assuming I don't know technically a lot about filmmaking. There's also this understanding in that world that what really sells is work that is marketed to the 18-to-34 male demographic, and [*Real Girl's Guide*] is deliberately going out of its way to not touch that demographic and basically market to everybody else. It's like, "well, why would you deliberately write something that's not commercially viable?"

[4.6] Mitchell's criticism of the industry is as aware of structural concerns as it is of how those structures affect participants within that world; it is personal, political, and professional. She acknowledges who is producing content, whom the content is made for, and reasons why women might not feel welcome in such a marketplace. She takes this criticism and uses it as a foundation on which to increase *Real Girl's Guide*'s importance. This industry reform project would eventually become a practical sales pitch to potential investors: *Real Girl's Guide* would be a woman-produced series marketed to women and people of color, and it would be commercially viable: "Guys in the industry, they think about the market first and the content secondly…We kind of went the opposite way, which I think made our series really successful, because we focused on story, and we focused on interesting characters and we focused on going beyond traditional demographics," said Mitchell, clearly trying to formulate a way to think about marketing content as artistic, progressive, and at the same time commercial.

[4.7] How did the creators put these concerns with the industry into practice, in their production and marketing of *Real Girl's Guide?* In production, the creators operated the way most independent film, especially alternative independent film, has operated for decades: they conceived of their group as variously a family and a collective. Everyone, from actors to producers, shared responsibilities on set. Weaver and Dutt

were both actors and associate producers, with responsibilities on the set and before filming began: Dutt managed craft services, and Weaver helped out as a production assistant and with the art department. In preproduction, Weaver helped audition actors and find costumes; after production, she helped Mitchell research the submission deadlines of various festivals. Everyone helped with fundraising. The producers raised money by e-mail and through creative events, such as a karaoke night with a $10 entry fee and raffle. They asked three comedians to be *American Idol*–type judges but to only give positive feedback, in keeping with the project's progressive thrust. In the end, the team was able to raise half the project's budget, and they put in their own money for the other half.

[4.8] The actors all said they were able to help shape their characters and to follow their instincts. Some participated in the project from its inception and thus had input from the beginning. Others contributed during shooting. Dalea said she was able to change parts of the dialogue that did not feel right to her, and she suggested one of the more memorable lines in the series—when Rasha refuses to go for a wax by saying, "I went to Columbia"—on the set. Such connections between actors and their characters helped them feel connected to the work and the project. Dalea said of her character, "We have the same value system but she has the balls to go out and fight for it." Similarly, Brown said she relates to Vanna's love of fashion and her diverse group of friends. Since Dutt had helped spark the project, her character hews close to Dutt's own off-screen personality as a "crazy, goofy" girl, and she found it a welcome change from her mainstream roles: "My last three auditions were medical practitioners…[but] Indian American girls can be different. They can be your best friend that's zany and not appropriate."

[4.9] This picture of collaborative production fueled by personal investments might call to mind a less commercial project, perhaps nonprofit theater. Yet *Real Girl's Guide* is, in the end, a product intended to be packaged and sold. As a result of the Web's distribution possibilities—which most independent Web series cannot successfully harness—and the producers' passion for the project, *Real Girl's Guide* was able to achieve a sizable audience for a low-budget show; as Brown said explicitly, "Because you believe in it, you want to market it…I felt like it was a very collaborative effort." While most of the marketing was handled by Mitchell, some of the actors and producers pitched in, mentioning the show wherever they could, at festivals and among friends. Dalea works in marketing and so offered to write a number of press releases and blog posts for the series. "I offered that up. That's not something they requested of me." Her marketing efforts got them entry into a few festivals and stories on National Public Radio and in *Jezebel* (Montgomery 2010; Peterson 2010), in addition to mentions in other niche media, such as the lesbian Web site AfterEllen (Kregloe 2010).

[4.10] What really catapulted the series to success, though, was a growing network of distribution sites created for releasing independent and minority Web series—a way to stand out from YouTube's vast ocean of content and mainstream sites like Hulu (Christian 2010a, 2011). The first site Mitchell approached for distribution was StrikeTV, a site created by Hollywood professionals after the Writer's Guild of America strike in order to provide an alternative channel for distribution outside the mainstream networks. The executives at StrikeTV liked the *Real Girl's Guide* script and told the team to send them the show after it was completed. Once the show went live, other sites started expressing interest: DailyMotion, RowdyOrbit, and Koldcast were video sites, while all-purpose lesbian sites AfterEllen and OneMoreLesbian also distributed the series. Koldcast provides distribution for independent filmmakers, while RowdyOrbit focuses on series by and about people of color and is itself trying to create a viable market for racially diverse programming (Christian 2009). AfterEllen has supported a number of lesbian Web series in an effort to counter the dearth of content within the mainstream media, and OneMoreLesbian has held real-world marketing events for original Web content: "The lesbian sites have been so incredibly supportive. They have gone out of their way to spread the word about us," Mitchell said. Such sites are far from the discourse of subcultures, from the affective and moral economies of fandom; they try to marshal the marketing potential of marginal communities into an independently sustainable commercial market, although they have not yet succeeded. *Real Girl's Guide*'s diverse cast and inclusive story, along with its invocation of a popular franchise, helped widen its distribution options and introduce it to a range of audiences and networks similarly invested in its political and industrial project.

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5. Conclusion: Futures of fan production and the growing importance of distribution

[5.1] *Real Girl's Guide* is a wholly transformative work, in many ways divorced from the "original"—*Sex and the City.* Yet *Sex and the City* permeates the project and its marketing. Indeed, much of the coverage of the series references the HBO show. Latoya Peterson's article for *Racialicious* and *Jezebel* starts by framing the Web series as a show for a "post–*Sex and the City* world" (Peterson 2010); both pieces for NPR, a blog by Alicia Montgomery and an interview with the actors by Tony Cox, reference *Sex and the City* in their headlines (Montgomery 2010; Cox 2010). All this is not accidental; the creators encourage it as a way to grab attention for their series and reflect their inspiration. Upon the release of their NPR interview, conducted in conjunction with the release of *Sex and the City 2,* the producers e-mailed their media contacts with a release titled "NPR Talks to *Real Girls* about *Sex and the City 2* and

More." When Mitchell first reached out me via e-mail, she too framed the series in relation to the HBO franchise.

[5.2] What started as both fandom (for the *Sex and the City* television series) and antifandom (for the film) here gives rise to marketing, a way for independent producers to enter a broader cultural and economic conversation, a tool to gain a wider audience, media attention, and a potential pitch to marketers. As one of few successful women-centered properties, *Sex and the City* is a useful symbol for a market in the throes of convergence, even as it signals affective and cultural desires among fans (Christian 2010b).

[5.3] The heart of this essay is a story of what happens when barriers to distribution change. While YouTube is now more than 5 years old and has brought success to numerous amateurs, the story of independent distribution online is still being written, as numerous players enter the market and offer producers more targeted networks. Better and more streamlined channels aimed at underserved niches, primarily people of color, women, and gay people, have created opportunities to shift the discourse of independent production from cultural and affective desire to industrial and market-oriented practice.

[5.4] Such developments could force scholars to reconsider how we frame fan practices. We interpret the problem of post-1960s media as one of access: those without corporate backing lacked any way to distribute their products to mass audiences (Kellner 1990; Gitlin 1983). Television was controlled by an ever-shortening list of corporations, who opted for programming to the least common denominator, often at the expense of those deemed less valuable in the market. This lack of distribution led to crises of representation for numerous groups, particularly racial minorities and gay people (Gray 1995; Gross 2001). After years of exclusion, members of marginalized groups, like fans, felt compelled to produce. Production, though, meant little without an efficient way to deliver the result to the right audiences. The video revolution of the new millennium offered a potential solution to this problem.

[5.5] Some people were no longer satisfied to produce solely for affective communities. Participants within the industry—and fans of its products—saw their skilled friends (cinematographers, actors, directors) intermittently jobless. They saw a television industry consistently refusing to cast marginalized people as leads. So they seized the opportunity to try to correct imbalances through industrial practices, not outside of them. They would craft a marketable narrative, produce it well, and sell it to distributors—the growing number of independent networks—who packaged stories for advertisers and made it easier for viewers to find them.

[5.6] Whether or not these series have made money, which few have, is significant. The market for content created without corporate funding is not yet developed, and may never be, as companies like Google and Hulu seek to dominate the space and push out newcomers (Vaidhyanathan 2011; Christian 2010c; Wu 2010). As of this writing, *Real Girl's Guide* does not have a sponsor. Yet this does not diminish the importance of a market response to imbalances at a specific moment in history. We should acknowledge shifts in fan and independent production in a period of technological change, seeing it as evidence of how changing social, political, and economic conditions can encourage new models for making and marketing stories through media.

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Race and Ethnicity in Fandom: Theory

Doing fandom, (mis)doing whiteness: Heteronormativity, racialization, and the discursive construction of fandom

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[0.1] *Abstract*—The fans depicted in mainstream media representation are unrelentingly white in a way that constructs fandom—from *Star Trek* to baseball to Elvis—as the property of white bodies. Though whiteness is typically understood in contemporary American culture as a position of privilege, represented fans seem to contradict this conventional wisdom; they are conceptualized in television shows, fictional films, and documentaries as white people deviating from the constructed-as-white norm of heterosexuality and employment through a "childish" fixation on the object of their fandom. Dominant culture produces an idea of fandom as a sort of failed nonheteronormative whiteness that serves a regulatory function, positioning the supposed inadequacy of fans as the result of bad—but correctable—decisions, reinforcing rather than challenging privilege as a natural property of white, heterosexual masculinity as it produces fandom as a racialized construct.

[0.2] *Keywords*—Discourse; Representation

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1. Introduction

[1.1] If, as many have argued, fans are increasingly central to the contemporary mediascape (Coppa 2006; Jones 2000; Sandvoss 2005), they are becoming so within the constraints of cultural common sense, making it incumbent on fan scholars to analyze what fandom means culturally (note 1). In examining the discourse of fandom circulating in contemporary culture, it quickly becomes apparent that, in addition to being constructed as losers, as other scholars have noted (note 2), fans are culturally understood to be white people, particularly white men. This discourse both runs counter to the conventional fan studies wisdom that fans are substantially or even primarily women (Bacon-Smith 1991; Coppa 2006, 2008; Jenkins 1992) and erases racial difference within fandom, which raises the question of just who is newly fundamental to media systems.

[1.2] More particularly, fans are not just constructed as white but more specifically as what Richard Dyer (1997) calls "skin" white rather than "symbolically" white. Though the physical appearance of the fans represented in mainstream cultural artifacts is phenotypically white, these images of fandom do not fit comfortably within the positive valuation usually attached to whiteness in dominant American culture. This disjuncture is produced, I argue, through the ways in which fans are constructed as nonheteronormative, for, as Roderick Ferguson (2003) notes, heteronormativity is racialized as white, and deviance is racialized as nonwhite. Ultimately, this articulation of white bodies, fandom, and nonheteronormativity in the mainstream media constructs fandom as a nonheteronormative variety of whiteness, positioning the supposed inadequacy of fans as the result of substandard—but standardizable—self-control. This works both to reinforce the cultural commonsense that privilege is a natural property of white, heterosexual masculinity and to produce fandom as white.

2. Fandom and whiteness as discourse

[2.1] I begin from the premise that both whiteness and fandom are discourses. Discourse is understood here, following Michel Foucault (1972, 80), as either "an individualizable group of statements" that have a common theme and therefore effectiveness, or "a regulated practice that accounts for a certain number of statements." This latter framing points to the fact that discourse is not just regulated but itself works to regulate the possibilities from which statements (understood as encompassing both literal utterances and things like practices) are formulated. It is through this accounting for statements that discourse constitutes cultural common sense. What we say, think, or do is produced within the constraints of what it makes sense to us to say, think, or do; Ruth Frankenberg (1993, 78) points out that the "discursive environment" we inhabit is as much a concrete and difficult-to-change factor in how we go about our lives as is the material environment. These discursive environments are important because the statements formulated within them, though not necessarily addressing the question of how the phenomena they describe "really are," are nevertheless "one of the prime means by which we have any knowledge of reality," as "how anything is represented is the means by which we think and feel about that thing, by which we apprehend it" (Dyer 1997, xiii). Discourse, this is to say, produces what gets to stand as reality: it is performative, such that when a statement, broadly construed, is produced from within that regulated and authoritative space of the possible, the act of saying something makes it true. These are, then, "practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak" (Foucault 1972, 49).

[2.2] Moreover, the discourses available to us from culture serve to produce not just reality in general but subject positions in particular (Foucault 1972). Discourse effectively brings us into existence by constructing the categories that make us

intelligible to ourselves and others as subjects. We then come to inhabit those categories through what Louis Althusser (1971) terms interpellation; individuals become subjects through hearing someone called and recognizing that the call is meant for them; in so doing, they occupy the position that is being hailed. This process does not, of course, require that we actually be hailed by a police officer, as in Althusser's example, or even that we literally be called; as Jillian Sandell (1997, 218) argues, "interpellation works when an individual hears and recognizes a cultural story and understands his or her place in it." By these means, discourse not only constructs a concept of fan and a concept of white, which are socially real, but also—through that moment of call and recognition—produces subjects to occupy those positions.

[2.3] The discourse of fandom in circulation in mainstream media representations has consequences for what fans are understood to be, both by nonfans and by fans themselves. This discourse—as it was described by scholars in the early 1990s and as it, regrettably, remains in the present—constructs fan as a stigmatized category (Brower 1992; Jenkins 1992; Lewis 1992a). Fans are associated in the popular imaginary with danger, violence, and pathology or just loneliness, alienation, and loserdom (Jenkins 1992; Jensen 1992; Johnson 2007; Lewis 1992a). Fans have traditionally been depicted as people who "are brainless consumers who will buy anything associated with the program or its cast" (Jenkins 1992, 10; see also Johnson 2007). In this discourse, fans are understood to "devote their lives to the cultivation of worthless knowledge" (Jenkins 1992, 10; see also Johnson 2007; Lewis 1992a). They "place inappropriate importance on devalued cultural material" (Jenkins, 1992, 10). They're "social misfits" and "feminized or desexualized" (Jenkins, 1992, 10). They're "infantile, emotionally and intellectually immature" (Jenkins 1992, 10) (note 3). Perhaps most dramatically, fans are constructed as "unable to separate fantasy from reality" (Jenkins 1992, 10; see also Jensen 1992; Lewis 1992a).

[2.4] This cultural construction of fandom would seem to be exactly opposite to the cultural construction of whiteness. Whiteness, scholars inform us, is the unmarked category (marking others), the unexamined category (subjecting others to examination), and the norm (making others insufficient), the cumulative effect of which is privilege (and disadvantage for others) (note 4). Ross Chambers (1997, 189) adds that although "there are plenty of unmarked categories (maleness, heterosexuality, and middle classness being obvious ones)," it can be argued that "whiteness is perhaps the primary unmarked and so unexamined—let's say 'blank'—category."

[2.5] Not all representations of whiteness equally accept this cultural windfall of privilege, however, which scholars have generally explained in one of two ways. Some argue that such constructions demonstrate, as a backlash against the perceived

destabilization of white male privilege, a belief that white men are now victims of discrimination (note 5). Alternatively, other authors contend that such representations of white male nonprivilege disrupt the naturalness of our culture's equation of whiteness with superiority and thus represent an opportunity to rework and undo white privilege (Hill 1997a; Newitz and Wray 1997a, 1997b). Though the former point of view argues that nonnormative whitenesses obscure a continuing white privilege and the latter argues that white privilege is actually undone, both are based in the premise that whiteness is the master category controlling the meaning of these representations, and that it can only have one meaning at a time. However, both of these views miss the insight of intersectionality: subject positions are complex and produced by the confluence of a wide variety of factors, such that as things play out on real bodies no one is purely dominant or purely subordinated (note 6). As a result of intersectional complexity, as Chambers (1997, 91) argues, "in the end, identity becomes a bit like a poker hand, in which the value of the ace (whiteness) can be enhanced, if one holds a couple of face cards or another ace (masculinity, heterosexuality, middle classnesss) or, alternatively depreciated by association with cards of lower value (ethnicity, lack of education, working classness)." Fandom, I contend here, is represented by mainstream media as one of those cards of lower value.

[2.6] In particular, the point at which fandom and normative whiteness come into conflict in these representations—and fandom becomes constructed as an insufficient whiteness—is around the issue of self-control. Indeed, the construction of the category "white" has traditionally been in some sense predicated on an equation of whiteness with self-control and blackness with the lack thereof (Dyer 1997; Floyd 2009; Roediger 1991; Savran 1998). As David Roediger (1991, 100) has argued, the historical invention of whiteness came out of a move to "displace anxieties within the white population onto blacks"; in particular, slurs used against whites perceived as lazy became ways of stereotyping people of African descent, and the lack of work ethic these insults implied became understood as a black trait, a constitutive Other to a whiteness thus constructed as hardworking. This was a "notion of whiteness having to do with rightness, with tightness, with self-control, self consciousness, mind over body" (Dyer 1997, 6). Whiteness, that is, was invented as part of larger historical trends that worked to "eliminate holidays, divorce the worker from contact with nature, bridle working class sexuality, separate work from the rest of life and encourage the postponing of gratification" (Roediger 1991, 96).

[2.7] As Dyer's and Roediger's formulations begin to suggest, whiteness is heavily predicated on sexual self-control in particular; indeed, Mike Hill (1997b, 157) argues that "although more obviously connected to race and class issues, whiteness sustains itself ultimately on sexual grounds." The foundational status of this can be seen from

how sexuality is racialized: "sexual stereotypes commonly depict 'us' as sexually vigorous (usually our men) and pure (usually our women) and depict 'them' as sexually depraved (usually their men) and promiscuous (usually their women)" (Nagel 2003, 10). Under this construction, white male sexuality is "vigor" without "depravity," and is modulated and controlled. This is grounded in the construction of whiteness as affiliated with civilization and rationality as opposed to sexuality (note 7). The counterexamples reinforce this: a failure of the normative expectation of sexual self-control is central to the failure of whiteness built into the category of "white trash," a group typically constructed as having a propensity for incest and rape (Newitz and Wray 1997a, 1997b; Sandell, 1997), and the production of white men as victims quite specifically includes a sense of an inability to keep not just a job but, crucially, a girlfriend (Ching 1997; Dyer 1997).

[2.8] There is a similar failure of—or deviance from—sexual normativity built into popular cultural images of fans, working to undermine the position of privilege their whiteness would otherwise provide. Following Kyle Kusz's (2001, 393) call to "read whiteness into texts that are not explicitly about race if one is to disrupt Whiteness as the unchallenged racial norm," I contend that it is vital to figure out what the whiteness of fandom does when fandom is constructed as nonnormative in the ways elaborated above. Importantly, while the whiteness of white trash is well acknowledged—it's even in the name!—the whiteness of the culturally constituted category of "fan" has yet to be considered in depth; scholars consider whiteness and fandom in the context of sports (Crawford 2004; Müller, van Zoonen, and de Roode 2007; Newman 2007; Ruddock 2005) or music (Bannister 2006; Brown and Schulze 1990; Ching 1997; Yousman 2003), but virtually never with fans of television or film beyond an acknowledgment that the population is white (i.e., Jenkins, 1992), nor in considerations of the category "fan" across objects of fandom.

[2.9] The latter is precisely what I wish to do, using an expansive definition of fandom that includes not just the groups that fan studies, as a field, traditionally looks at such, as science fiction/fantasy and cult film fans, but also music and sports fans. The juxtaposition of different types of fans may strike the reader as odd, given the tendency for fan scholarship to focus on one type of fan and to not engage with work that has been done on any other sorts of fans (Schimmel, Harrington, and Bielby 2007). However, in examining fandom as a discourse, I begin from the premise that the use of the same word (*fan*) to delineate these various cultural practices, though perhaps arbitrary in the Saussurean sense, nevertheless does cultural work. Like Matt Hills's (2002, 121) argument that "from a Bakhtinian perspective, we need to consider how cult discourses circulate across and between these different contexts of use," it is important to consider the ways in which there is intertextuality between all deployments of the word *fan,* such that any use inflects the others.

[2.10] In examining fandom and whiteness as discourses that are in some sense antithetical, the prevalence of white-embodied people as the bearers of fandom in dominant cultural representations reveals the ways in which whiteness is less the outcome of pigmentation than behavior. Beginning from the insight that gender is constituted through enactment (Butler 1990; West and Zimmerman 1987), and extending this insight to other social categories, both fandom and whiteness are something "done." The need to repeatedly perform one's whiteness in order to construct and reaffirm it opens up the possibility that a white-skinned person can fail at whiteness (Ahmed 2006; Dyer 1997), and fandom is one of the ways of doing whiteness incorrectly. Much like white trash is "a naming practice that helps define stereotypes of what is or is not acceptable or normal for whites in the U.S." (Newitz and Wray 1997a, 4), so too is "fan": the discursive construction of fans as white in popular culture works to produce a notion of appropriate fandom through whiteness and appropriate whiteness through fandom.

[2.11] To investigate this mutual production, I not only consider several types of fans, but I also mix televisual representations of fandom with filmic ones, and fictional film with documentary film; after all, as David Savran (1998, 37) points out, mixing genres lets one see "how, within a given culture, hegemony necessarily works itself out on many different levels." My argument here is based in analysis of 12 films and seven television episodes centering on or prominently featuring fans that were released in the United States between 1995 and 2008. The fictional films are *The Fan* (1996), a baseball thriller; *Fanboys* (2008), a comedy about *Star Wars* fans; *Fever Pitch* (2005), a romantic comedy about a baseball fan; *Galaxy Quest* (1999), a comedy about science fiction fans; and *Looking for Kitty* (2004), a comedy about a baseball fan trying to track down his runaway wife. The documentaries examined are *Almost Elvis* (2001), about Elvis impersonators (indicated to also be fans); *Fanalysis* (2002), a documentary short about a variety of cult media fans; *Horror Fans* (2006), which is what the title indicates; *Mathematically Alive* (2007), about fans of the New York Mets; and *Trekkies* (1997) and *Trekkies II* (2004), which chronicle the practices of *Star Trek* fans. Television is represented by four episodes of *Xena: Warrior Princess,* a historical fantasy series that ran from 1995 to 2001; two episodes of political drama *The West Wing* (1999–2006), and a 1998 episode of the animated sitcom *The Simpsons* (1989–present). In all of these representations, fiction, documentary, and television alike, the overwhelming tendency is for fans to be white, and indeed, as I'll discuss below, the exceptions serve to reinforce that white norm.

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3. God hates fans: (Non)normative masculinity and fandom as a sexual orientation

[3.1] The lens used here to make sense of representations of fandom, that of heteronormativity, is a complex notion. In addition to its being racialized as white, it is a norm demarcating a socially correct instantiation of not only sexuality, but also gender and class. Judith Butler (1993, 238) gestures toward part of this inextricability when she notes that "homophobia often operates through the attribution of a damaged, failed, or otherwise abject gender to homosexuals," and the equation can easily run the other way, with "damaged, failed or otherwise abject gender" suggesting a corresponding "failure" of heterosexuality. Elsewhere in *Bodies That Matter,* Butler points out the ways in which race operates differently on bodies differentiated by sexuality or class as well as how gender is racialized and race is gendered, indicating (somewhat obliquely) the complex interconnections between these categories. Ferguson (2003, 1) pulls together these threads much more explicitly, arguing that "racial difference," "sexual incongruity," "gender eccentricity," and "class marginality" cannot actually be disentangled from one another as demarcations of deviance from the norm.

[3.2] In the encounter with this complex of norms, much like their phenotypic whiteness, fans seem to get gender and sexuality right in that they visually indicate maleness and are constructed as having a heterosexual disposition, but when it comes to behaving in a way consistent with constructed-as-white normative, middle-class, heterosexual masculinity, fans are constructed as falling down on the job. Fans are, first, men who are questionably masculine, and, particularly, not virile or athletic. This is particularly interesting given that sports fandom, at least, would commonly be understood to be integral to normative masculinity. This points to the way in which masculinity is precisely something that must be enacted; these fans may be oriented toward a masculinizing object, but, at least as constructed in dominant cultural representations, they don't act very manly about it, namely, through their exhibition of excessive, uncontrolled affect (note 8). Sometimes the marking of fans as insufficiently masculine is direct, as when the white-skinned characters of *Fanboys* are insulted as "ladies," "Spice Girls," or the perennial favorite, "pussies," or question whether each other has "the nut sack to go through with" their plan to steal a copy of *Star Wars Episode I: The Phantom Menace* before its theatrical release. Though accusations of nonmasculinity may be a common weapon in the male insult arsenal, there is a way in which being open to such accusations in the first place suggests that the manliness of the target is vulnerable to a challenge, and this is reinforced by having a woman use these insults toward the fans on several occasions in the film. A similar fannish emasculation is demonstrated by fan character Guy in *Galaxy Quest,* who is hysterical and cowardly in the face of danger: "I'm the guy in the episode who dies to prove how serious the situation is. I've gotta get outta here!"

[3.3] Fans are also constructed as insufficiently manly when they're shown as overweight or unathletic. This is typified when a friend of the fans in *Fanboys* comments that "this is, like, the most exercise you guys have had all year" as they all run across the grounds at *Star Wars* creator George Lucas's production facility, Skywalker Ranch, in the course of their heist. Similarly, when the parents of one teenage fan in *Galaxy Quest* shrug at his strange pronouncement that he needs to use fireworks to help land a spaceship, they comment that "at least he's outside." The implication is that he does not go out often, which suggests that he is not physically active (though he is thin), and the blatant suburbanness of the family's home codes fandom even more heavily as white than their visual markers alone.

[3.4] Perhaps the most dramatic departure from standard masculinity is a costumed, overweight, pasty-white fan who is focused on for an extended scene in *Trekkies.* At the time he is interviewed, this man is attending a convention dressed not as a major character from *Star Trek,* nor even as a minor character, but as the (extrapolated) wife of a minor character. The connection to the show is so tenuous that it almost seems as if he chose to dress in drag and then retroactively sought a convoluted justification. This choice is also visually marked as disconcerting through zooming so close that viewers can see his makeup running from his sweat, adding failure at femininity through bad drag to his transgressions. In an exaggerated form, this single fan encapsulates the lack of masculinity attributed to fans as a group, making it clear that having a body both male and white is not sufficient to guarantee normativity as he, like other fans in these constructions, conspicuously "does" normative masculinity and whiteness incorrectly.

[3.5] Fans are also imagined to be insufficient with respect to classed and raced normative masculinity to the extent that they are constructed as not having successful careers. In a basic way, that the fan has a dead-end job has a certain cultural obviousness. The documentary *Horror Fans,* to which the employment of fans isn't strictly relevant, nevertheless seems to go out of its way to mention it, including a segment in which a white fan describes himself thus: "I'm a massive horror fanatic. On top of that, I'm a filmmaker. And by day I work at Blockbuster Video." This works to reinforce the cultural association of fans and lack of success, and it does so for no apparent reason (note 9). Similarly, some of the characters in *Fanboys* work presumably low-wage jobs in a comic book store; one who doesn't, Eric, is held up as the success within the group, but even he doesn't get all the way there: he works as a used car salesman in his father's business. Middle-aged white man Gil Renard, the central character in baseball thriller film *The Fan,* is established as a failure of normative masculine business success in the film's first 10 minutes when he is called in to the boss's office and told that he is very close to being fired for poor performance. This lack of employment success is dramatically demonstrated in

ensuing scenes as the knife salesman humiliates himself in the course of his work: in an effort to increase his sales and keep his job, he goes to potential customer after potential customer, demonstrating the quality of his company's knives by shaving first his arm hair and then his leg hair, eventually getting to the point that he jokes, "any more of these demos and I'm going to have to start shaving the hairs on my ass," which frames his body as exploitable and vulnerable. These are traits associated with femininity rather than masculinity in dominant American culture, and moreover the idea of him potentially dropping his trousers to make the sale frames him as prostituting himself, the homosexual flavor of which is also antithetical to mainstream understandings of normative white masculinity. In this way, fans are represented as in violation of the construction of whiteness as "enterprising" (Dyer 1997, 31).

[3.6] A further departure from heteronormative white masculinity comes from the construction of fans as childish and immature. In a basic sense, *Trekkies, Horror Fans,* and *Fanalysis* all include scenes in which fans describe their fan practices as continuous and unchanged since childhood, marking them as in some sense stuck there. Fictional white Boston Red Sox fan Ben in *Fever Pitch* is more explicitly framed as existing in a state of arrested development: a childhood trauma led to his being a fan, and he likes that baseball is simple, safe, and predictable, unlike "real life." He even asks for relationship advice from a high school student he coaches, which constructs him as less mature and knowledgeable than a teenager. Ben's lack of adulthood is underscored when his girlfriend, Lindsey, goes to help him decide what to wear to meet her parents and discovers that "this is not a man's closet" because Ben's wardrobe consists almost entirely of Red Sox paraphernalia rather than more sober attire; she tells him "you're a man-boy. Half man, half boy." Harry Knowles of *Ain't It Cool News,* consulted as a Web guru in the documentary *Fanalysis,* similarly describes the fan as occupying this sort of liminal adulthood: "Someone who has a nine to five job in the real world, and they want to have the wife, but they're still hanging on to being a child." Importantly, the suggestion here is that fans do want "the wife," but their residual attachment to childhood in the form of fandom is incompatible with the achievement of this desire; as Gayle Rubin (1993) points out, heteronormativity is constructed as a domain of sexual activity between two (and only two) mature adults, such that any concurrence of the youthful and the sexual is regarded as impermissible.

[3.7] Perhaps most dramatically, in line with Joli Jensen's (1992, 16) argument that representations frame "fandom as a surrogate relationship, one that inadequately imitates normal relationships," fans are also more specifically marked as failing at heterosexuality (and not just at the broader concept of heteronormativity) as a result of their fandom. The substitution of fandom for partner relationships is played up for comic effect when three of the four fans in *Fanboys,* in a catalog of their fan practices, acknowledge that they had "named their right hand Leia," which gains force as

nonnormative by drawing on the cultural common sense, described by Rubin (1993), that masturbation is inferior to partnered sex. The centering of the fan's romantic and sexual world around the object of fandom is also demonstrated by one white fan in *Mathematically Alive,* who says of his fandom that "it's almost perhaps too important to me because I will blow off anything, whether it's a date or wearing this jacket on a Saturday night in Manhattan. I couldn't care less. It's Mets first." Though the structure of the comment makes it hard to follow, it seems that he's willing to blow off a date *or* fashion; the upshot is that his desire for the Mets is greater than his desire for women, which would make it difficult to engage in heterosexual courtship rituals. Certainly, in both the fictional film *Fever Pitch* and the documentary *Trekkies,* fans indicate that their fandom has been the cause of breakups with romantic partners in the past.

[3.8] More explicitly (in both of the common senses of the word), the characters in *Fanboys* are constructed as unfamiliar with information pertaining to sex; when they are caught by the security guards at Skywalker Ranch, the head guard informs them that "Mr. Lucas is touched and mildly flattered by what you have done here" in seeking to steal the film so that their dying friend can see it, explaining that the breaking and entering charges will be dropped if they can prove that they are, in fact, "fanboys" by means of "a simple quiz." The equation of fans with failed heterosexuality is rendered obvious in this scene when said quiz not only consists of *Star Wars* trivia they're supposed to know, such as, "What is the name of the gunner in Luke's snow speeder?" (which they can indeed answer without hesitation), but sexual trivia they're supposed to not know, such as "Where is a woman's g-spot located?" (which generates head scratching). In this way, the cultural association of whiteness with normativity is broken when it comes to fans, who are constructed as unable to have socially appropriate romantic or sexual relationships.

[3.9] Fans are also sometimes constructed as violating heteronormativity in the most obvious way through being gay. Sometimes this is a momentary appearance of homoeroticism, as when Ben in *Fever Pitch* is so excited to receive his season tickets that he leaps, half-clothed, onto the delivery man, or a white male fan in *Fanalysis* exclaims "I love you!" to actor Bruce Campbell and tries to kiss him. Other times, there is a more specific insistence on homosexuality. *Fanboys,* as with most things, is not subtle about this: "gay" and "fag" are common forms of invective among these characters (and not just the male ones). In particular, they call the *Star Trek* fans they encounter things like "Kirk-loving Spock-suckers," and their use of the accusation of homosexuality as an insult makes it clear that these men perceive a need to restabilize their own heterosexuality though destabilizing that of other men (Pascoe 2007)—despite the ultimate outcome of this being that all fans are tainted with sexual deviance. Moreover, fan Eric's brother asks whether, while they have been hanging out together, the fans have been "sticking G.I. Joes up your butts," raising the specter of

anal eroticism—which mainstream culture assumes is an automatic indication that a man is gay. Finally, Gil in *The Fan* is consistently and extensively marked as sexually deviant, whether visually, as when he accosts a baseball player in a steam room in a scene that is evocative of a gay bathhouse; musically, as with the consistent use of the Nine Inch Nails song "Closer," with its lines "I want to fuck you like an animal/I want to feel you from the inside," in all of the scenes in which he is obsessing over player Bobby Rayburn; or both, as when "Closer" plays with Gil standing in Rayburn's closet among his clothes.

[3.10] The Spock sucking and ballplayer fucking in these representations begins to get at the idea that at least part of what fans get out of fandom is sexual pleasure, and the decision of Fred Phelps's Westboro Baptist Church to picket the 2010 San Diego Comic-Con convention would seem to suggest that the far right, at least, has made the same judgment. Fan scholars, however, have not drawn this conclusion despite their wealth of arguments about the sexual pleasure experienced by fans. This pleasure is noted, though not really examined, by Busse and Hellekson (2006) and Jones (2000). Certainly, the connection of fandom and sex is present but latent in many discussions of fan fiction: fan fiction is an erotic practice (Jenkins 1992; Sandvoss 2005); fiction that includes or centers on sex is widely acknowledged to be a major genre well within the mainstream of fandom (Busse and Hellekson 2006; Driscoll 2006; Jenkins 1992); many of the major organizational practices of fan archives point to the fundamental role of sex in the production of fandom: the genres, at the broadest level are gen (no sex), slash (same-sex sex), and het (opposite-sex sex) (Busse and Hellekson 2006; Driscoll 2006); stories are labeled and archives are searchable by the pairing of characters who have a sexual or romantic relationship in the story (Busse and Hellekson 2006; Driscoll 2006); and fan fiction is rated in a way that usually denotes, like the Motion Picture Association of America's ratings, level of sexual explicitness rather than violence (Busse and Hellekson 2006). Drawing on all of this research as well as the evidence of the constructions examined here, it would seem that other practices than the specific production of erotic creative works should be examined with respect to sexual pleasure—certainly, its construction in media representations appears to demand such analysis.

[3.11] After all, in *The Simpsons* episode "Das Bus," the white, overweight fan character typically known as Comic Book Guy is shown to be attempting to download a racy picture of *Star Trek: Voyager* commanding officer Captain Janeway, only to be thwarted by his slow Internet connection. The purpose of the scene is to forward a plot about Homer becoming an Internet service provider, but the way that goal is achieved promulgates the idea that fans eroticize the object of fandom. Similarly, in *The West Wing* episode "Arctic Radar," White House deputy chief of staff Josh Lyman asks a staff member wearing a *Star Trek* pin,

> [3.12] Tell me if any of this sounds familiar: "Let's list our ten favorite episodes. Let's list our least favorite episodes. Let's list our favorite galaxies. Let's make a chart to see how often our favorite galaxies appear in our favorite episodes. What Romulan would you most like to see coupled with a Cardassian and why? Let's spend a weekend talking about Romulans falling in love with Cardassians and then let's do it again." That's not being a fan. That's having a fetish. And I don't have a problem with that, except you can't bring your hobbies in to work, okay?

[3.13] This scene, too, constructs an idea of fandom as deeply, inevitably, involving sexuality, most notably through calling certain fan practices a "fetish" and the way in which Lyman's "And I don't have a problem with that" echoes the *Seinfeld* "not that there's anything wrong with that" quip about homosexuality. Indeed, fans are constructed as using the object of fandom to add extra erotic charge even in cases where they are engaged in partnered relationships, as when Ben in *Fever Pitch* finds his girlfriend especially sexy when she wears a Red Sox jacket or *Trek* fans in *Trekkies* discuss their sexual role-playing of characters from the show. Through representations such as these, fans are constructed as directing sexual attention toward the object of fandom, and when this is viewed in light of their nonnormative masculinity and failure of heterosexuality, it begins to seem as if fandom itself is a nonnormative sexual orientation.

[3.14] The idea that fandom is a sexual orientation is reinforced by the rhetoric used to discuss fan practices. Ben of *Fever Pitch,* for example, broaches the subject of his Red Sox fandom to his new girlfriend by saying, "There's something you don't know about me," and "I've been avoiding this," and his admission is framed as a variety of coming out. Indeed, the rhetoric of coming out or of being in the closet about one's fandom is used by two different fans in *Trekkies 2.* Fans are also associated with other discourses of nonnormative sexuality, as when one fan in *Trekkies* says, "Fans: we recruit!" and taps into the conservative antigay idea that homosexuals recruit, or a fan in *Trekkies 2* deploys a version of Queer Nation's chant, "We're here, we're queer, get used to it," by proudly proclaiming, "I'm here, I'm into *Star Trek,* get used to it!"

[3.15] In a more theoretical sense, if, following Sara Ahmed (2006, 3), we understand the "orientation" in sexual orientation spatially, it becomes clear that "orientations shape … 'who' or 'what' we direct our energy and attention toward." The directions we so face "make certain things, and not others, available," because in facing one thing we are turning away from other things (14). As a result, by being oriented toward the object of fandom, the fan, though constructed as intending to be heterosexual, is presumed incapable of being oriented toward the opposite sex, or indeed toward any "real" person. Ahmed adds, "The choice of one's object of desire

makes a difference to other things that we do. In a way I am suggesting that the object in sexual object choice is sticky: other things 'stick' when we orientate ourselves toward objects, especially if such orientations do not follow the family or social line" (101). In orienting themselves toward the object of fandom, fans aren't following that normative, white line, and what accordingly sticks to them in the cultural imaginary is nonheteronormativity: nonmasculinity, lack of business success, immaturity, the inability to get a girl, even homoerotic attachment.

4. Whiteness, self-control, and hetero ever after

[4.1] If the role whiteness plays in all of this seems a bit fuzzy, consider this: whiteness is predicated on sexual self-control, and fans are constructed as white people sexually out of bounds. The happy ending (for those representations that have one, generally the comedies) is when this tension is resolved and fans are reincorporated into heterosexuality by trading in some of their behaviors that are incompatible with it. Fandom is thus constructed as fully able to be salvaged into normative white, heterosexual, masculine self-control; the deviance of the fan is the product of bad but correctable decisions. Though heterosexual romance coming to fruition is a common trope of happily-ever-after in film, positioning fandom as the specific problem that must be solved to make it possible does a particular kind of cultural work that requires closer examination.

[4.2] In *Fever Pitch,* Ben loses Lindsey and decides that he needs to grow up and give up his fandom by selling his lifetime season tickets to the Red Sox. Ultimately, Lindsey does not let him make this sacrifice for her, saying, "If you love me enough to sell your tickets, I love you enough not to let you," but it is his willingness to abandon his childish pursuits that proves to her that he is worth it and gets her back. Similarly, Windows in *Fanboys* finds heterosexual fulfillment when he realizes that his coworker, Zoe, who is somewhat fannish but more restrained in her appreciation (she can, for example, describe the sex act the security guard at Skywalker Ranch quizzes her on), is attracted to him; for this to happen, he has to get over his tendency to be scared of and/or awkward around women—which is constructed, of course, as a fan trait. This narrative of moving past all-consuming fandom to constrained fandom compatible with heterosexuality turns up even in the two *Trekkies* of documentaries. In *Trekkies,* we are introduced to fan Gabriel Koerner, who is excessively nerdy and focused on his fandom, but by *Trekkies 2,* he has grown up, become more calm in his appreciation of *Star Trek,* and found a girlfriend. In all three cases, although fandom doesn't have to be given up, it does have to be brought under control, and it is this alignment with the white norm that makes these fans eligible for redemption.

[4.3] In some sense, the image of fandom put forth in these mainstream cultural representations is a story about that most neoliberal of buzz phrases, "personal responsibility." That the ways in which fans are constructed as sexually out of control due to bad decisions they personally made frames this deviation from the white norm of self-control as ultimately correctable, and the whiteness self-control defines stays within reach for them. This rests on the extremely individualist argument that people's outcomes are the result of their choices and behaviors rather than structural factors (Brown 2003; Duggan 2004; Smith 2007). Underlying the "salvageability" of fans is the same logic by which "the white trash stereotype often serves as a useful way of blaming the poor for being poor," forestalling any discussion of structural causes of poverty (Newitz and Wray 1997a, 1). It's the argument that individuals are the same underneath a raced candy coating, which results in a "disinclination to think in terms of social and political aggregates" in favor of a focus on the individual (Frankenberg 1993, 148).

[4.4] It's also a distinctly (though dissimulatedly) white position to take. As Chambers (1997, 192) argues, "In contrast to those whose identity is defined by their classificatory status as members of a given group, whites are perceived as individual historical agents." This, then, is why the category "white" is what he calls "the unexamined"—it's not perceived as relevant, because white people are "just people," whereas others are some of those "hyphenated" Americans. That is, though whiteness is constructed as blank and nothing in particular (Dyer 1997; Frankenberg 1993; Kusz 2001), it clearly is something. It's the norm-defining something (Frankenberg 1993). It's the body that is meant when universality—itself a hegemonic construct (Butler, Laclau, and Žižek 2000)—is invoked. As Ahmed (2006) points out, some bodies are more interpellated than others; correspondingly, it's at best a mistake and at worst bait and switch when only organizations such as the Ku Klux Klan count as instantiations of white supremacy (Wiegman 1999). Simply by having white skin, universality is possible for fans, for "bodies that pass as white, even if they are queer or have other points of deviation, still have access to what follows from certain lines" (Ahmed 2006, 136–37).

[4.5] Indeed, the exceptions to the overall trend of fans as white serve to reinforce that whiteness is the expectation for fans. The fans who appear in these representations who are not white are not the central characters who reform and get their fandom under control. Frequently, they aren't even fans with personalities or fleshed-out characters but rather appear only briefly, such as in *Mathematically Alive* or the episode "Soul Possession" of the television show *Xena: Warrior Princess.* In *Galaxy Quest* and *Trekkies 2,* nonwhite fans are even less central, appearing only in groups of fans forming the background bodies of convention scenes. The end result is that, generally, finding fans of color in these representations is a bit like finding Waldo.

The exclusion of nonwhite bodies from the recuperation narrative of fandom can be understood either as constructing nonwhite fans as incapable of being normalized or as operating within a logic that everyone will identify with and want to emulate the redemption of the white fan. In either case, the marginalized presence of nonwhite fans reinforces the construction of self-control as a characteristic of white people.

[4.6] In the end, much as Robyn Wiegman (1999) argues that Forrest Gump's lack of privilege works to disarticulate the connection between whiteness and privilege, deviant whitenesses—like white trash or queerness, or, I've argued here, fandom—seem to dispute the universality of whiteness. However, the construction of fans as lacking privilege is based on an assumption of whiteness precisely *as* privileged. As Dyer (1997, 12) points out, "Going against type and not conforming depend upon an implicit norm of whiteness against which to go." It is this norm, then, that makes the fan deviance intelligible *as* deviance, and it is reinforced by the possibility of fans' recuperation. Privilege is regainable for fans in the happy ending of normativity because their skin whiteness makes them eligible for symbolic whiteness, and in this way, these representations serve to reinforce rather than undermine American culture's essential connection of whiteness and privilege. Kusz (2001, 394) argues that "constructions of Whiteness as unprivileged, victimized, or otherwise disadvantaged—images that seem to contradict the ideology of Whiteness as privileged—can work in particular contexts as a mechanism to resecure the privileged normativity of whiteness in American culture," and it would seem that representations of fandom constitute one of those contexts.

5. Acknowledgments

[5.1] I thank Lisa Cacho, Robert Mejia, Siobhan Somerville, and Laurel Westbrook for their insights from this piece's early stages.

6. Notes

1. My title owes much to Schilt and Westbrook's (2009) "Doing Gender, Doing Heteronormativity," which itself riffs on West and Zimmerman's (1987) "Doing Gender."

2. See, for example, Brower (1992), Coppa (2008), Driscoll (2006), Hills (2002), Jenkins (1992), Jensen (1992), Johnson (2007), and Lewis (1992a, 1992b).

3. For similar arguments on the issues of gender/sexuality and maturity in representations of fandom, see Driscoll (2006), Hills (2002), Jensen (1992), Johnson (2007), and Lewis (1992a, 1992b).

4. On these constructions of whiteness, see Chambers (1997), Dyer (1997), Frankenberg (1993), Hill (1997a, 1997b), Kusz (2001, 2007), and Newitz and Wray (1997a).

5. See, for example, Dyer (1997), Frankenberg (1993), Kusz (2001, 2007), Savran (1998), and Wiegman (1999).

6. Ahmed (2006), Collins (2000), Crenshaw (1991), Ferguson (2003), and Frankenberg (1993) all provide excellent explanations and deployments of intersectional thinking.

7. For an elaboration of this construction of whiteness, see Dyer (1997), Ferguson (2003), Floyd (2009), Frankenberg (1993), Nagel (2003), Sandell (1997), and Savran (1998).

8. The distinction that can be made here between sports fandom and other sorts does point to some challenges of looking at "fan" as a broad discursive category; fan type may well be another axis of intersection, with more or less privileged types of fandom positioning one as closer to or farther from heteronormativity. Further research is clearly needed.

9. Though the actors, directors, and other industry experts interviewed in *Horror Fans* can also in some sense be classified as fans, this is resisted by the film's identification of them in their "expert" roles; accordingly, their success in the industry is not structured as fan success but rather as a given relative to their professional status.

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Race and Ethnicity in Fandom: Praxis

Outside oneself in *World of Warcraft:* Gamers' perception of the racial self-other

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[0.1] *Abstract*—The popularity of massively multiplayer online role-playing games (MMORPGs) has created a unique, heavily populated virtual reality wherein player characters are explicitly differentiated by the physical characteristics of their avatars. To investigate the way real-life race perceptions influence these adopted player-character identities, we invited MMO players to participate in an online survey. In this study, we are particularly interested in overlap, or deviation, between real-life racial perceptions and the perception of fictional fantastic races (elves, dwarves). On the basis of the data collected, we found that whether players consciously associate themselves with their avatars or consciously dissociate themselves from their avatars, real-life racial tendencies unconsciously manifest through players' choices of their avatars and in their interactions with other players within the game environment.

[0.2] *Keywords*—Avatar; Fantasy; Identity; Massively multiplayer online role-playing game; MMORPG; Race; Survey

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1. Introduction

[1.1] The recent wealth of scholarship dedicated to the rising field of online ludology and Internet culture confirms that those in the profession of studying literature and communication can no longer afford to neglect the medium of the Internet for cultural expression and interaction, and as a vehicle for storytelling. While early projections of the Internet had supposed it would remain largely a niche medium for utopian and virtual self-expression in a limited sense (Nakamura 2002, 2008), the post-Internet age into which we have entered has erased any such expectation (Nakamura 2008). The once-minor worlds of online role-playing games have expanded into their own macrocosmic digital universes and are no less a global and significant presence than commercial Web sites, Internet commerce, worldwide telecommunications, and information exchange.

[1.2] The extensive world building and design essential to these games, mostly taking their underlying conceptual format from the pen-and-paper role-playing games of the 1970s, means we can begin to investigate questions of real-life phenomena as they may or may not appear in virtual form. We have chosen to examine identity formation, particularly as it manifests in the question of race, racism, and virtual race. The design and selection aspects of massively multiplayer online role-playing games (MMORPGs) mean that the question of identity is entirely intentional, negotiated, and discursive. The design of a player's avatar, or in-game representative figure, through which the player interacts with the virtual environment and all other players in the game, means the player may assume an identity completely distinct, or "Other" than his or her real-life race, socioeconomic status, physiological traits, and personality.

[1.3] As Taylor (2003) points out, the design of these virtual avatar bodies is the end result of a long process of intentional design, resulting in what he calls "intentional bodies," and the choices in the design are intended to credit "legitimacy" to these bodies as real. Nakamura (2008), in her work on racial bodies in what we might call the Internet age (alluding to her latest identification of the post-2000s digital culture as post-Internet age), described the phenomenon of Internet avatar bodies as a sort of virtual tourism; players, regardless of their real-life race, gender, or physiological traits, could experience a simulacrum of life through the perspective of an alternate entity. However, the economic and cultural conditions giving rise to the Internet at this time were such that white became the expectation for any Internet user, regardless of his or her profile or avatar characteristics (Nakamura 2002). This is in keeping with what Feagin (2010) calls the "white racial frame" of late 20th-century American race studies and racial perspectives.

[1.4] In Nakamura's later work on Internet racism (2008), she retracts the description of white default for the Internet, mostly because of the rapidly accelerated expansion of the Internet, although she replaces it with the notion of neoliberal color blindedness, which is, she says, in its own way a form of racism. Nakamura is drawing on Bonilla-Silva's term *color-blind racism,* which is, in his understanding, a late 20th-century American manifestation of racism that does not recognize itself as racist, at least for those within the dominant (or privileged) race. In light of Nakamura's work on race on the Internet, we pose the question: do these MMORPGs, in particular *World of Warcraft* (WoW), which is the largest, although not the oldest, reintroduce notions of racism into interavatar interactions, or, under the ideas of white default and color blindness, subvert and contain the idea of race altogether?

[1.5] Following this idea about race and racism in MMORPGs, we formulated a survey to invite responses from players concerning what we hoped might be both unconscious and conscious notions of identity and race in WoW. Originally our work was not limited

to WoW; we also invited responses from other popular MMORPGs, including *Everquest, Age of Camelot,* and *Lord of the Rings Online,* and we furthermore assumed that the concepts of identifying with an avatar would be familiar to respondents, as this phenomenon has been used in the majority of digital games and constitutes a major component of best-selling games such as *Mass Effect* and *DragonAge.*

[1.6] Our work on avatar identity formation and the phenomenon of intentional bodies follows a long line of excellent work. Taylor (2003) shows how designers work to create realistic bodies that allow for adequate player immersion but within a particular vision of the world that results from designers' experiences in real life. Turkle (1984, 1995) has pioneered the field of decentered subjectivity in avatars through computers as vicarious thinkers and through psychoanalytic examinations of the many new dimensions through which information is consumed in cyberspace. Pearce (2009) explores the way in which intentional communities prefer to maintain their group identity despite the termination of its virtual setting. She begins with a thorough and excellent investigation through the history of avatar design and virtual environment studies. Boudreau (2007) approaches identity formation as a process of networked interactions, focusing on its involvement of multiple identities, which includes, but does not privilege, the player-avatar relationship. More recently, Gatson (2011) has problematized the notion that online identity is less authentic than off-line identity by insisting that the phenomenon of a named, virtual self is not distinct from off-line markers of identity.

[1.7] Following Nakamura's (2008), Bonilla-Silva's (2010), and Feagin's (2006, 2010) description of late 20th-century American racial perspectives off-line (in real life) and online, we define race as a classification of humans (the species is important, as it distinguishes from virtual gaming in which race in fact indicates speciation) defined by similar, heritable physical characteristics and shared history and traditions, and thus both biological and cultural elements are present. This corresponds closely with the definition given in the *Oxford English Dictionary,* which ties the concept of identifying common physical traits to common descent from the work of Blumenbach (*De Generis Humani Varietati Nativi,* 1775). We believe this conception of race has become common in the vernacular.

[1.8] The most important aspect of race by this definition is that it is visible. For human race, physical characteristics such as skin color and nose shape are the most prominent markers of race (Alcoff 2006). Nevertheless, *race* is a problematic term; its definition in both the vernacular and academic senses is constantly evolving. The term can refer to a national or ethnic group, which may or may not display physical variation. Contemporary racial theorists now view race as a fluid cultural construction, defining it as more performative than physical, a combination of visible characteristics

and behaviors (Alcoff 2006; Omi and Winant 1994). Furthermore, in interpersonal interactions, race is formed by both automatic responses and controlled reactions; even if the controlled responses are suppressed, this does not prevent these automatic reactions from establishing certain prejudices (Devine 1989). Bonilla-Silva (2010) describes race as a phenomenon of social construction, but one that insists, rather than denies, on its social reality. In this, it exists, like *class* and *gender,* as categories, and is undergirded by "racial structures" that reinforce racial privilege.

[1.9] In American society, a color-blind, default white perspective—what Feagin (2010) calls a "white racial frame"—obscures automatic or perceived racially differentiated responses, and equates actions and attitudes associated with white culture as positive. Race is performative on both the conscious and unconscious levels. Awareness of these levels can determine one's ability to pass as another race, but also allows one to parody the representation of another race. Nakamura (2002) identifies this as virtual tourism, or "passing," as far as it occurs online, particularly when a person (usually white) tries on or passes as another race. The second race can only be experienced as the Other, and thus no real vicarious experience can be had. A similar phenomenon from history (though not to suggest that this has passed from our society) is blackface, which follows a comparable pattern of exoticism or mocking, but not a true vicarious experience. Like transgendering, passing is not well tolerated by most spectators, though the personal act of passing does not cross lines of taboo.

[1.10] In the virtual environment of the MMORPG, the term *race* is used for the speciation of characters. During character creation, the player is required to select one of several races, providing a fundamental physiological framework upon which to add further defining traits of gender, name, and class (the character's skill set). This act of self-identity construction produces the avatar, who acts in preprogrammed behaviors according to the player's control, and often within several distinguishing, racial behaviors. For instance, dwarves may utter a bowdlerized oath in a dialect roughly approximating the Scottish dialect. Thus, though the differentiation of avatars crosses the species boundary (they are not all human), the two major components of race are represented in the physiological and behavioral differentiation. In most games, race furthermore carries a cultural, or ethnic, context, as members of the various races share common cultural frames: dwarves, for instance, in mining; elves in a symbiotic relationship with nature; trolls in rude speech and primitive tribal social structures. In fact, most MMORPGs operate within an inherent institutional racism, since players are first exposed to racially homogenous societies (the homelands of various races) that do not encourage (or sometimes allow) interracial interaction. This is particularly prevalent in WoW, wherein new characters are introduced in racially segregated environments and only egress these environments to encounter multiracial societies.

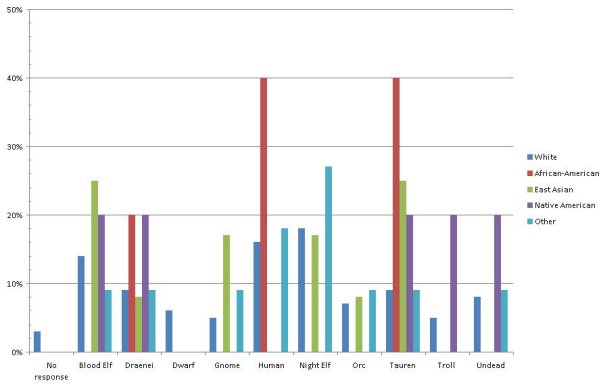

Figure 1. *Player choices of race in character creation in World of Warcraft. [View larger image.]*

[1.11] These races include traditional fantasy races from literary traditions, such as elves, dwarves, and trolls. Some races are original to various games, but are mostly hybridizations of man and beast (the Tauren race) or variations of traditional races (the Blood Elves) (note 1). Humans are one race among many, and this race usually does not feature more specific racial identification, such as black or white. The classification of this speciation as race complicates the situation further, as the term includes entities that might be considered monstrous (e.g., Taurens). In some cases, these races indicate a type originally human, but exposed to degenerating or transformative conditions, as the undead vampires or zombielike animate, sentient corpses. Within the context of these games, however, these fantastic races constitute a distinguishable type from the normal (i.e., human), without necessarily implying an evolutionary connection. They also share similar heritable characteristics, originate from the same virtual location once the player starts playing the game, share an in-game narrative of a racial history, and form a culture the way humans do. Therefore, these types operate according to our conception and to vernacular understandings of race; even as human, all in-game races maintain alterity from real-life categories and act as Other.

[1.12] The negative side of these types of social identification is the phenomenon of racism—that is, discrimination based on perceived or self-identified race, and prejudicial judgment based on racial stereotypes. Anna Everett (2005) shows that many of the video games currently available tend to utilize stereotypical human characters: epic heroes tend to be white, while martial artists tend to be Asian. Meanwhile, there are few black characters. Thus, she posits, we interact with games through "an understanding of encrypted, or encoded, meanings that represent desirable gaming heroes naturally as predominantly white, and victims and antagonists naturally as nonwhite 'others'" (313). Through the use of such ancillary gaming supports as magazines, she identifies the problem in many games: "Standardization practices increasingly reify or naturalize nonwhite characters as

objectified third-person Others whose alterity is so irremediably different that ideal players would have little to no incentive to adopt them as avatars or skins" (316). She further claims that games such as *Imperialism* (1995) elicit what the postcolonial theorist Abdul R. JanMohamed identifies as "a complete projection of [the gamer's] self on the Other: exercising his assumed superiority, he destroys without any significant qualms the effectiveness of indigenous economic, social, political, legal, and moral systems and imposes his own versions of these structures on the Other" (Everett 2005, 316). Everett's assertion agrees with Patricia Devine's (1989) identification of racial impulses as automatic: players introduce several of their racial impulses into the game environment in terms of their own character creation and in terms of player-player interaction. Given that these impulses are automatic and without awareness, and considering the alterity of all races in WoW, we question whether WoW's attention to race/speciation highlights racism or subverts all identity as passing. These encounters, mediated through avatars (not infrequently with voice, through secondary chat programs) and as heavily differentiated as they are, might prompt unintended racial reactions—that is, racism. At the most basic level, this occurs as a differentiation of white and nonwhite.

[1.13] With the increasingly diverse array of avatars, few or none of which are characteristically light-skinned, or indeed even human, it becomes difficult to differentiate white from nonwhite. This phenomenon is not rare: Nakamura (2002) describes the experience of trying to find diversified avatar characteristics even in minority-oriented online chat rooms. Instead, players perceive two different relationships: the real self and the avatar, and the avatar (virtual self) and the Other (Turkle 1995; Pearce 2009). The first begins with the player's first experiences in the game, and the act of initiating this relationship through character creation is accomplished partially with deliberation toward the second relationship. In other words, the player constructs a new identity with a mind toward how this character will be perceived as hostile or friendly, or helpful or unnecessary by other players. The negotiation of the first relationship to the second underscores the significance of physical differentiation among avatars, and in so doing emphasizes the importance of racial relationships in the game.

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2. Using a survey to discover racial perspectives

[2.1] To test the potential presence of a default white racial frame in character creation and interavatar interactions within MMORPGs, we sought data directly from players within these online communities by the use of an online survey. Bonilla-Silva discusses the use of surveys to identify racial ideologies, which, he says, are "produced and reproduced in communicative interaction" (2010, 11). He identifies the potential limitations of surveys; many of these utilize antiquated questions that draw

on theoretical foundations from the 1950s and 1960s. Most importantly, surveys as they normally appeared (with fixed answers) limited the capacity of the respondent to provide original or unprompted answers.

[2.2] The scope of our project was limited by our inability to sift through the seemingly endless bulletin boards, fan fiction, wikis, and elusive in-game comments. Rather than comb through all of these products of player-publisher/programmer collaborative media, we invited players to provide us directly with structured feedback through a survey designed to assess players' perceptions of race. We invited all gamers, regardless of their real race, ethnicity, or nationality. Respondents were filtered only by language, as the survey was presented only in English. The survey was available for anyone who wished to participate for the month of January in 2010. During that time, we received 446 responses, mostly from players of the well-known online game *World of Warcraft.* We posted invitations to participate in the research survey on prominent bulletin boards and online publications for MMORPG fan communities, including WoW Insider (http://wow.joystiq.com), Ultima Online Forums (http://www.uoforums.com), Dark Age of Camelot (http://www.darkageofcamelot.com), and MMORPG.com (http://www.mmorpg.com).

[2.3] This survey was created using the Forms feature of Google Docs and comprised 18 questions divided into three topical sections (Appendix A). The first prompted respondents to enter information on the MMORPG and the avatar he or she played most often. The second gathered information on a secondary character, an avatar unique from the first that the player considered just as crucial to his or her self-identity as the first. The third section gathered information on the respondent's real-life identifiers in terms of race and demographic descriptors (age, gender). Each section furthermore asked respondents to identify racial or cultural descriptors of his or her in-game avatar race and real-life race. These data were intended for comparison to highlight areas where in-game racial perspectives mirrored real life, so that we might discover correlation.

[2.4] We had hoped for responses from a wide cross section of real-life races, with which we could begin to identify correlations of real-life and in-game racial perspectives of the Other. By comparing the two, we could begin to see how certain real-life racial perspectives might be imposed in-game fantasy racial relations. For this purpose, we relied on key descriptors (table 1) culled from studies of racial prejudice (Devine 1989; Krueger 1996; Wilson 1996; Taylor and Stern 1997; Dhingra 2003). Some of these descriptors included *aggressive, arrogant, ambitious, hard-working, intelligent, lazy, musical, violent, self-confident, selfish,* borrowed from Krueger's study (1996) of racial group perceptions in black subjects, and common stereotypes of Asians from Taylor and Stern's study (1997) of commercial advertising in America. In

addition, respondents were asked to identify gross generalizations of an openly racist perspective of both the real-life races and in-game races. While these questions were somewhat leading and suggestive of racial perspectives, respondents seemed to indicate more confusion in the application of these questions to in-game race; thus, we cannot conclude any reliable results from these data, and we draw no conclusions from questions 5 and 19. Unlike the traditional surveys that Bonilla-Silva (2010) criticizes, this survey included open-ended answers. We acknowledge that such questions still cue specific types of answers, but in this case, this strengthened the survey rather than limited it. A survey with only open-ended questions would, we assume, only have confused respondents. For this survey, these overtly racial questions, such as 5 and 19, led respondents to give original answers in question 20 that provided much more relevant reflections.

Altruistic, philanthropic	Obnoxious
Civilized, sophisticated, educated	Peaceful, assuaging
Clever	Poor
Criminal	Proud, arrogant, narcissistic
Demure	Self-sacrificing, team player
Dull, unintelligent	Self-serving, selfish
Effeminate, feminine	Sexually desirable
Eloquent, well-spoken	Sexually perverse
Guided, ambitious	Spiritual, heavily religious
Hard-working	Submissive, weak
Intelligent, studious	Uncivilized, barbaric, savage
Lazy	Violent, aggressive
Masculine, manly	Polite, cooperative

Table 1. Key descriptors used in survey.

[2.5] From the responses we received, we aggregated the numbers to indicate the racial breakdown of players and their avatars, and we speculated as to possible reasons for correlations of real-life and in-game race. Furthermore, from the hundreds of personal original comments provided by the survey respondents, we attempted to provide an image of online racial perspectival frames among players and the ways in which interracial relationships are complicated through the phenomenon of players electing specific racial identities distinct from real life. We analyzed the results of the 446 responses to determine the racial composition of the players and of their avatars, and we looked for indications of racial perspectives of in-game races that possibly mirrored real-life racial perspectives. Data analysis revealed several weaknesses in our study structure. After consulting with our institutional review board, we included a notice in our informed consent form that survey participants must be over 18 years of age, and we included only age categories over 18 years of age in our survey. Our

choice to use an anonymous public survey made it difficult to filter respondents by age, so we could avoid collecting and publishing data on minors. Furthermore, our preliminary research focused specifically on American racial categories, but because of technical limitations of the Google Docs form environment, we were unable to filter the nationality of respondents. Therefore, we were unable to analyze the data within a strictly American cultural context, and our efforts to understand data possibly gathered from an international community were unavoidably complicated. Despite these limitations, we think that the survey provides important preliminary data about gamers' racial perceptions and any relationship to the character creation process, and reveals the importance of further studies that will utilize more rigorous sociological methodology to collect data from online gaming communities.

3. Questions of race and identity

[3.1] While interacting with(in) these games, the player negotiates multiple self-identities simultaneously. For Filiciak (2003), avatars enable pseudonymous management of multiple selves: "On the Internet people perceive us as our avatar, and such a perception is highly appropriate because when I play I am more my own avatar than the person sitting by the console/computer. To specify which of these identities is more true or more false is probably impossible. In any case, it would appear that our virtual 'self' is closer to our images of ourselves than the one we present" (93). This approach to identity agrees with Boudreau (2007), especially when Filiciak attributes this convergence of self-identity and avatar identity to the fluidity of the postmodern hyperidentity, one in which we are more concerned with a divergence of many identities specific to certain social situations—identities through which we move freely. The liquid identity is apparent by the correlation of self-descriptions and avatar descriptions and in the comments provided by our respondents.

[3.2] As we see in the comments below, the negotiation of the real self to the Other and the avatar is vital, and in many cases, it is a deeply personal experience for players. The decisions in creating an avatar are viewed in some ways as crafting an extension of the player's self-identity. Jos de Mul (2005) proposes to reallocate Paul Ricoeur's theories of self-identity through the use of video games; players are continuously engaged in the resolution of the entanglement of the "dialectics between the *self* and the *other*" (255). In the case of MMORPGs, the Other is recognized primarily as the avatar and secondarily as other players as elements in the virtual environment, which exist alongside virtual terrain, questing elements, and monsters. The first exists in the manipulation of the virtual environment within the player's personal computer or console; the second exists entirely within the virtual environment and results in players congregating into communities, called guilds, for the purposes of mutual enabling and social interactions, including friendship. These

communities tend to be long-lasting and take on identities or brands of their own; members will often retain close connections across various gaming platforms (Pearce 2007). However these guilds form, they highlight the interactive and participatory culture of the MMORPGs, defining the game experience as necessarily communal. These interactions are influenced primarily by visual encounters between avatars based on perceptions of character skill set (class) and physical speciation (race). Thus, game experience is discursive in the constant perception and observation of the Other as player in the game, a discourse of evaluating other characters on the basis of visual cues against their potential for support in accomplishing common goals (Neitzel 2005).

[3.3] By these three elements—the negotiation of the self and Other through character creation with an eye toward future encounters of self (avatar) and Other (virtual environment, players); the phenomenon of self-forming guilds; and the primarily visual interface of the game—we can conclude that the virtual MMORPG gaming environment is predicated on the consequences of racial interactions and represents a real struggle of an individual of self and Other (world) played out in a hyperbolic visual manner. Furthermore, we can establish that crises of self (avatar) and Other (players) must be viewed as sympathetic or adversarial. In evaluating the hostility of the Other in this world, the player must rely primarily on visual cues of physical characteristics. Thus, decisions and interpersonal, or interavatar, relationships can be made solely along the same mechanisms by which we as humans understand race. We can safely conclude, therefore, that these games are predicated thoroughly on issues of race.

[3.4] We understand such a topic can be exceedingly difficult to navigate, considering the highly emotional and sensitive reactions respondents may have to questions of race, racism, and prejudice. In this regard, we had mixed responses from the respondents: while respondents found some of the questions too overtly racist and thus hesitated or declined to answer, respondents had no hesitation answering other questions that were potentially just as racist, likely because they disassociated fantastic race as it appears in the game with real-life racial sensitivity. In other words, respondents recognized racially discriminatory questions when they dealt with real-life race, but failed to recognize equally discriminatory questions when they focused on in-game race. Furthermore, because of the structure of the survey, the respondents were unable to see the later questions until they had finished previous questions, and they were unable to revise their answers. At the end, when respondents were given the opportunity to provide original unguided comments, several mentioned they could now see that in-game race discrimination was in fact very similar to real-life racism.

[3.5] The majority of respondents (97 percent) indicated a primary avatar from WoW (note 2). We anticipated a larger response from WoW players, as our experience

indicates that members of this community are often more willing to communicate their interest in the game through outside projects such as ours. We did try to encourage a more balanced response by posting invitations on forums catering specifically to games other than WoW. Furthermore, we received additional publicity from a generous notification published in WoW Insider (formerly WoW.com), run by our request, though no remuneration was made (note 3).

[3.6] The majority of respondents (89 percent) identified themselves as white (Caucasian). Of these respondents, 32 percent played as Elven (18 percent Night Elf and 14 percent Blood Elf), and 16 percent played as Human (the remaining 52 percent are spread over various other races). Only 1 percent of respondents identified themselves as black. These respondents played only three races, the majority being Human (40 percent) and Tauren (40 percent). Another 3 percent of the respondents identified themselves as East Asian, and of these, nearly half (42 percent) played as Elven. Hispanic (3 percent), Native American (1 percent), and Other (3 percent) made up the rest. Hispanics played mostly as Elven (50 percent); Native American respondents each chose a unique race, but of these, all but one are arguably monstrous (for example, Troll, Tauren, Undead, and Draenai each represent a hybridization of man and beast, or a perversion of man). Figure 1 illustrates the results of players' responses.

[3.7] Although only 31 percent of respondents indicated their real-life gender as female, the avatar genders were much more balanced: 44 percent of respondents indicated their primary avatar is female. With secondary characters, female avatars were dominant at 52 percent (see figure B.3).

[3.8] White players described their avatar as *sophisticated* (37 percent), *clever* (40 percent), *hard-working* (37 percent), *intelligent* (37 percent), *self-sacrificing* (40 percent), *cooperative* (40 percent). This corresponds closely with how these players chose to describe themselves, with *sophisticated, educated* (58 percent), *clever* (57 percent), *intelligent* (71 percent), *polite and cooperative* (63 percent). While some descriptors probably viewed as negative were less frequent (e.g., *criminal,* 1 percent of respondents), some had a higher percentage of respondents than expected, such as *sexually perverse* (given with no elaboration provided), *submissive,* and *violent* each gaining 7 percent, 7 percent, and 4 percent, respectively, by white players. These showed even higher frequency in minority players. Some apparently positive qualities were less frequent than expected: *sexually desirable* (12 percent), *guided, ambitious* (19 percent), and *spiritual* (7 percent). Interestingly, while white players described their avatar as *hard-working* (19 percent; only 3 percent identified their avatar as *lazy*), players tended to describe themselves as either *hard-working* (31 percent) or *lazy* (30 percent).

[3.9] White players chose descriptors for their race predictably along those traits that make successful gamers, though they are in no way intrinsic to avatar choices, according to game mechanics. In other words, these races are not particularly handicapped or enhanced to succeed in the game: *better at physical activity* (35 percent), *better at teamwork* (37 percent), and *better at reaching goals* (34 percent). In choosing descriptors of their real-life race, white players tended to characterize their race as *better at earning money* (27 percent) and *reaching goals* (28 percent). Figures B.1 and B.2 break down these results.

[3.10] Players tend to value characteristics in their avatar that are practical in the virtual environment of the game and choose these same descriptors for themselves. In doing so, the respondents (or players) ascribed an intentionality or agency to their avatars that is not intrinsic to the game since, in terms of game mechanics, no in-game race is more clever or intelligent than any other, nor can any avatar sacrifice him- or herself without the player's intent to do so. Thus, in identifying the characteristics of their own (and we may assume therefore the ideal) avatar, the respondents in fact were providing the description of an ideal player, and hence *clever, sophisticated, intelligent, self-sacrificing,* and *cooperative.* In ascribing this sort of agency to the avatar, the player is essentially projecting his or her own identity onto the avatar.

[3.11] Several of the respondents' original comments reinforce the avatar-as-self identification. One respondent writes (all respondent's comments appear as typed): "I am not a role player by any stretch of the imagination so trying to describe the characteristics of my toon [avatar] was not easy for me to do. I basically based off of myself for the most part because I do not change my behavior when I am online." Another respondent indicated "I don't Role Play in games, so generally what my character is like is dictated by the *class* and my *personality*" (emphasis added). Since the game's programming rarely attributes a certain set of behaviors to the avatars directly, based on initial creation, the implication of this respondent is that gamers also project certain behavioral obligations to certain classes: healers must heal, and thus must produce an empathetic personality. However, behaviors produced by any given class will itself vary from player to player, thus indicating that while the player perceives a certain behavior-per-class expectation, no such standard exists objectively.

[3.12] At times, the association of player-avatar goes deeper. One respondent mentions a friend "who will only play blood elves because he is admittedly vain—he only wants to be beautiful. I myself typically prefer taurens due to their large size, I'm quite above the average in height and weight IRL [in real life] and to me being

represented by a character that isn't head and shoulders above the crowd just seems… odd."

[3.13] We also encountered variations to this pattern. Some players seemed to sense that we were anticipating this avatar-race perception and tried to offer comments to the contrary. In so doing, they used implied racial perceptions of the fantasy races. For instance, one commenter said, "Never judge a character based upon appearance. More often than not you will be wrong. I've known stupid Ogres that Indian doctors [played] in real life, and an elven druid that turned out to be a black football player." Another offered: "I don't know any undead [creature] player that doesn't play like an evil bastard." Often players failed to realize that when they were making judgments on characters because of extreme differences in physical appearance, they were in essence making racial differentiations. Characters that looked "especially awesome" or had "visual appeal" were as important in decision making as class opportunities.

[3.14] For white players of WoW, this meant focusing on elven or human characters because of their visual appeal. The physical appearance of elf and human (light skin; long, straight hair; tall and slender) vaguely correlates with white characteristics. We do notice that elves and humans tend to exhibit historical similarities with cultural narratives of white/Western races. Players adopt these races as vicarious agents in real-life racial prejudices (human and elf as privileged, and nonhuman/elf as monstrous, liminal, or disenfranchised). This accomplishes what Bonilla-Silva calls "softly otheriz[ing]" nondominant races (2010, 3). While the aggressive tendencies of humans tend to be viewed as righteous or honorable, similar tendencies in nonhuman races are described by one player as "genocidal." The stereotyping of various other races comes out in jokes or taunts: "elves being lithe and arrogant, perhaps, or dwarves being gruff and industrious," and "blood elf males are all pansies, gnomes should be punted." One respondent acknowledged race stereotyping by claiming to work against it, where her "troll characters [are] different from the expectations people have for their race, just to make a character more interesting and developed in my role play. So, even though many troll roleplayers…play their trolls violently, or their gnomes good at mechanics, I specifically don't." Another player accepted that there is "a fair amount of stereotyping based on the race a person chooses. Blood elves are associated with females or gay men. The same could be said for female undead. Orcs, male undead, and male tauren are considered the most masculine of characters and it seems to me they attract the type of people that are the most insecure about their physical masculinity or body image." This comment was offered by a white woman in the 18–24 age bracket, and it is interesting in conjunction with the relative rarity of white, black, or East Asian respondents selecting "sexually desirable" or "masculine" as self-descriptive terms. (The comment also invites

speculation as to how the player may be aware of other players' lack of positive body image.)

[3.15] Players also seemed aware of their associative identity of avatar-player. One respondent said, "I consider my characters symbolizing a certain part of me." Several respondents imply a metaphorical relevance to the events of online game play with that of real life by associating in-game actions with real-life decisions: "I do not roleplay my characters. What I do and say online is what I would do or say normally"; "I play my character mostly how I would act in real life"; "I think I play my character a lot like I am in real life." The imposition of a person's real-life personality into a fantasy environment via the avatar is suggested by another's comment that "I suppose I created my character as an ideal version of what I would like to be, if I were in that environment." This avatar-as-self identity persists despite opportunities to reinvent or renew the process to more advantageous results: the commenter continues, "If I were to start over [I would create a different character], but with the time and effort I have invested in this character, I'm sticking with her." This persistent avatar-as-self identity is echoed by other players who indicate that having few avatars is preferable to experimenting with many different avatar-identities.

[3.16] Sometimes players authenticate this avatar-player association by supplying a narrative backstory. In one sense, this echoes de Mul's (2005) appropriation of Ricoeur's identity theory via narratives, in that we construct a sense of self-identity through identifying with characters of a narrative (*mimesis*^{3}). One respondent offered, "I like my ingame characters to have a background story. I have even written some pages about the story of my characters, tho it isn't finished yet and I have much more that isnt written down on paper. I tend to give my characters names that somewhat fit their race. I also enjoy collecting items and such that increase the characteristics of the ingame character." (The perception of appropriate names-to-race suggestion and how players perceive this correlation are also of some interest.) This sort of identity construction is particularly practical within online role-playing games: while the nature of game represents playable narratives (Neitzel 2005) through its nature (*mimesis*^{1}), the plot arc in the game through questing provides the *mythos* of coherency for the player-avatar, that while the avatar actually experiences the virtual challenge, the player through the avatar can appropriate that *mythos* into their own experiences (hence players expressing the actions of the avatar through the first-person pronoun) (*mimesis*^{2}). Through the creation of a narrative *onto* the avatar, the player is in fact appropriating a narrative for the self (*mimesis*^{3}) (Ricoeur 1984; de Mul 2005).

[3.17] Yet in the dual nature of the avatar, it is still a puppet, or a mask (à la Jung) (Filiciak 2003). Some players are aware of this identity association and specifically spoke against it. In several cases, respondents spoke of the attempt to separate

player and avatar: "Most of my characters are not direct extensions or representations of myself, though they may embody a few traits that I don't or can't have but would like to experience"; "For the most part I try (emphasis on try) to keep myself separate from the characters I create"; "I see my characters as characters, not as avatars of myself. I usually make up a little backstory for them (that I never use, I don't role-play) just because that feels natural to using a character." In one case, the respondent chose not to choose descriptors for his character, saying "my character is just a puppet."

[3.18] While female players were more aware of and vocal about the fetishization of the female avatar, male players were more willing to explore "transgendered" (strictly defined as men playing female characters and women playing male characters) avatar-player relationships by playing as female characters, while seemingly unaware of a reason for this. Male respondents commented on the trend; for example, "Also i think girls tend to play female characters, and men tend to play both." One might speculate that male players unconsciously fetishize the avatar, adding another layer to the avatar-as-self identity, viewing the avatar not only as a projection of their narrative self-identity but also as a sexual object, a relationship that female players are aware of but do not engage in (figure B.4).

[3.19] Finally, several comments addressed one mitigating factor in the selection of race through character/avatar creation. In many online role-playing games, several classes (character skill sets) are limited to certain races. Any discussion of interpersonal (or interavatar) interactions and perceptions of race in virtual realities must take account of players' immediate perceptions of class and the restrictions on race based on class preference. While class does heavily influence the player's experience with the game, its influence matches at least the importance of race. Class tends to influence a character's utility, especially regarding group abilities and mechanics of group questing, while race tends to evoke an emotional or less rational reaction: dislike of the undead, hazing of short races, avoidance of orcs and trolls.

[3.20] It is gratifying to see one's research have an impact on the participants. Several respondents indicated that the survey made them aware of how real-life race relations can parallel fantasy race relations. One respondent offered: "I like that your survey has brought up the fact that we consider human ethnicities to be 'races' in the same way MMO games consider dwarves, night elves and humans to be different races. Poignant!" Another said, "I wouldn't want to stereotype about a human race in this way—which is now making me wonder about doing it for a fictional race"; "I like to consider my character a projection of the personality traits I like best about myself. However, I have never consciously considered a relation between the appearance and perceptions of my character's race and that of my own."

4. Conclusions

[4.1] In this project, we elected to gather data from gamers themselves to determine the amount that real-life racial perspectival frames have influenced virtual racial interactions. Following this line of approach, we ask whether WoW maintains phenomena of late 20th-century and 21st-century racism, including white default racism, and whether WoW attempts to subvert questions of race through means of neoliberal color blindness and passing, and in so doing, contains the undesirable aspects of racism.

[4.2] To answer this query, we propose, in looking at the comments and data aggregated from our respondents, that the data confirm how scholars have formulated avatar-player hyperidentification, and that by this phenomenon of players projecting their self into the avatar, players inadvertently reintroduce a visible notion of race into the game. However, because players recognize a differentiation of the avatar as a "self-Other"—a mask or puppet—the construction of interavatar relationships as inherently racist goes largely unrecognized by players. This is in keeping with Bonilla-Silva's (2010) description of American racism as being self-denying. Hence, our conclusion is to find aspects of both possibilities operating within online games: players softly otherize fantasy races but are unaware they are doing so. Concurrently, they own the behavior of their avatar but deny the consequences of their avatar's actions. Some of this may be attributable to the inherited tradition of many of these fantasy races from other media, including fantasy literature, online fan fiction, and cinema. However, we maintain that this racial perspectival frame is mainly linked to real-life racial ideologies, because even these inherited traditions are linked to the default white racial frame of contemporary American culture.

5. Appendix A: Survey

We have reproduced the questions from the survey. Respondents took the original survey in a Google Docs form, which prompted them to answer one section of questions before they were able to see the next section of questions, and so on. The page breaks below indicate the original section breaks.

The survey consisted of 5 pages after the informed consent form, which partially outlined the scope of the project and asked for respondents' permission to publish their responses. Respondents were allowed to withdraw at any time from the survey, according to specifications set out by the institutional review board of Saint Louis University.

Page 1: Survey of Race in Massive Multiplayer Online Role-Playing Games

Thank you for helping us gather information on fantasy races in games. Please pass this link on to your gaming friends and help us get a lot of feedback!

1. Characters: We would like you to answer some questions on what kind of characters you play. For this section, please answer according to your primary character (this can be whichever character you consider foremost: perhaps the highest level, the most recent, your favorite, the oldest, one for which you've written stories, or the one with the most game-hours logged). You will have the opportunity to comment on other characters later.

This character was created for: (please select one game)

World of Warcraft	Star Wars Galaxy
Lord of the Rings Online	Dark Age of Camelot
Everquest	Ultima Online
Everquest II	Other

---------- End of page 1 ----------

2. Races: Please choose the appropriate race for your character. *Question 2 asks the survey participant to choose the race of his/her character from a drop-down menu based upon the game chosen in question 1. See pages 4 and 5 for a breakdown of races by video game.*

3. Character gender: What gender is your character?

Male

Female

Other (gender is not relevant to this race)

4. Character-player association: How long have you played this character:

Less than a week	Longer than 3 years
Approximately 10-100 hours	Longer than 5 years
Approximately 100-500 hours	Longer than 10 years

5. Race strengths: How would you describe your character's race?

Better at physical activity	Better at making things
Better at earning money	Better at individual confrontations (pvp)
Better at doing harm	Better at talking trash, intimidating
Better at sneaking about	Better at leading a group

Better at deceiving	Better at communicating
Better at asserting itself	Better at teamwork
Better at producing popular music, dancing	Better at reaching goals

6. Race characteristics: How would you describe your character?

Altruistic, philanthropic	Obnoxious
Civilized, sophisticated, educated	Peaceful, assuaging
Clever	Poor
Criminal	Proud, arrogant, narcissistic
Demure	Self-sacrificing, team player
Dull, unintelligent	Self-serving, selfish
Effeminate, feminine	Sexually desirable
Eloquent, well-spoken	Sexually perverse
Guided, ambitious	Spiritual, heavily religious
Hard-working	Submissive, weak
Intelligent, studious	Uncivilized, barbaric, savage
Lazy	Violent, aggressive
Masculine, manly	Polite, cooperative

7. Secondary characters: would you like to repeat these questions for a secondary character?

Yes—continue to second section of survey

No—continue to last section of survey

----------End of Page 2 ----------

[Pages 3 and 4 were used to allow respondents to answer the above questions for a secondary avatar.]

14. Secondary character: Please indicate your reason for creating a secondary character. If none of these apply, please select "Other."

I wanted to try out a different race.

I wanted to try out a different gender.

I wanted to play the game from the beginning again.

I wanted to have a different experience with the game.

I lost, killed, or maxed out my primary character.

I wanted to finish off the subscription I had paid for, but didn't want to use my primary character.

I created it to appeal to someone else (a guild, a friend, a significant other, etc.).

Other

---------- End of Page 4 ----------

15. Player gender: Please indicate your gender.

Male

Female

16. Player age: Please indicate your age.

18–24

25–34

35–45

45+

17. Player race: I would describe myself as:

White, Caucasian	East Asian
Black, African American	Middle Eastern/Arabic
Hispanic	Other, please specify
Native American	

18. Player descriptors: I would describe myself in real life as:

Altruistic, philanthropic	Obnoxious
Civilized, sophisticated, educated	Peaceful, assuaging
Clever	Poor
Criminal	Proud, arrogant, narcissistic
Demure	Self-sacrificing, team player
Dull, unintelligent	Self-serving, selfish
Effeminate, feminine	Sexually desirable
Eloquent, well-spoken	Sexually perverse
Guided, ambitious	Spiritual, heavily religious
Hard-working	Submissive, weak
Intelligent, studious	Uncivilized, barbaric, savage

Lazy	Violent, aggressive
Masculine, manly	Polite, cooperative

18b. Additional answer: Would you like to offer more comments?

19. Race descriptors: I would characterize people of my race as:

Better at physical activity	Better at making things
Better at earning money	Better at individual confrontations (pvp)
Better at doing harm	Better at talking trash, intimidating
Better at sneaking about	Better at leading a group
Better at deceiving	Better at communicating
Better at asserting itself	Better at teamwork
Better at producing popular music	Better at reaching goals

19b. Additional answer: Would you like to offer more comments?

20. Additional comments: Would you like to share any personal anecdotes or comments on gaming experience that is pertinent to this topic?

Thank you for taking our survey. Your input has helped us to get a good glimpse into the online community of gamers!

6. Appendix B: Aggregated results

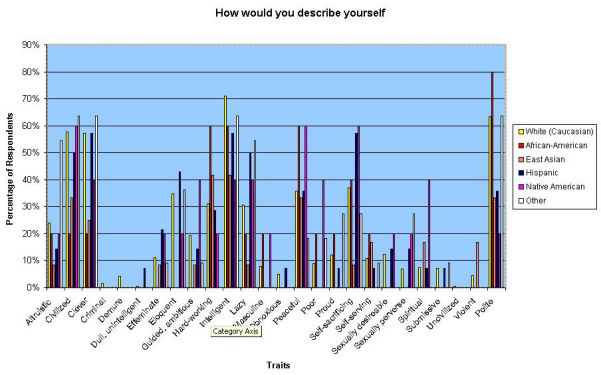

Figure B.1. *Responses of all respondents when asked to identify traits of themselves, broken down by race. [View larger image.]*

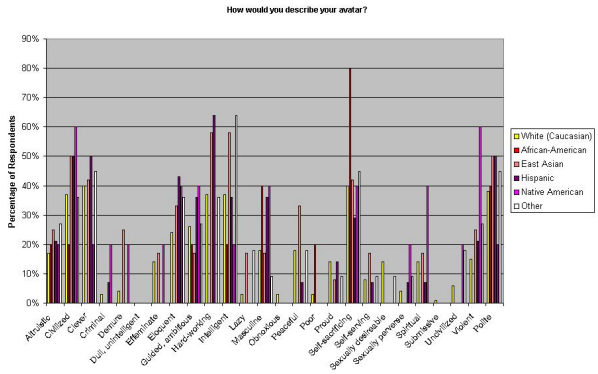

Figure B.2. *Responses of all respondents when asked to identify traits of their individual avatar, broken down by race. [View larger image.]*

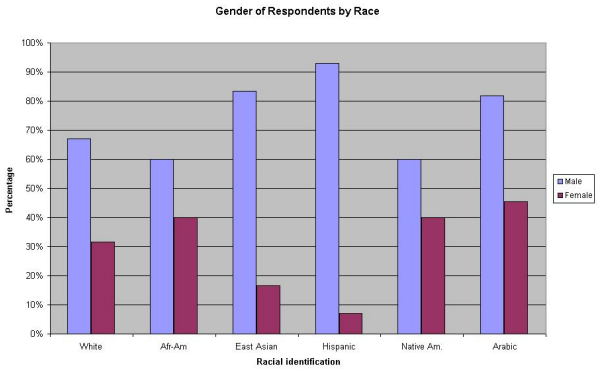

Figure B.3. *Real-life gender of respondents, broken down by race. [View larger image.]*

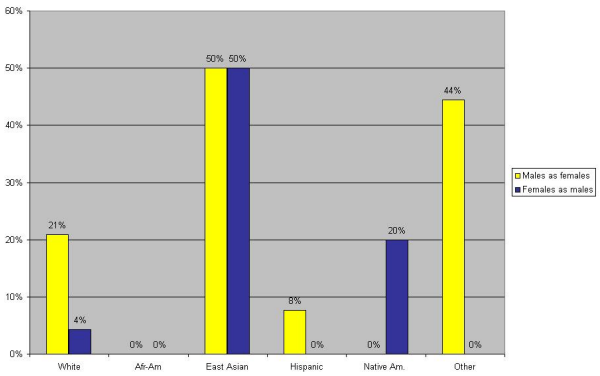

Figure B.4. *Percentage of respondents indicating their experience playing transgendered, broken down by race. [View larger image.]*

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7. Acknowledgments

[7.1] An early version of this work was presented at the 31st International Conference on the Fantastic in the Arts in 2010. Our thanks to Ruth Evans for her insightful comments and guidance, and to Kara McBride, who helped navigate the intricacy that is the institutional review board. We also thank both friends and the

many survey respondents who helped by providing us with personal anecdotes, comments, and explanations of game mechanics and the experience of role-playing online. All data collection processes and procedures were approved by the institutional review board at Saint Louis University.

8. Notes

1. See Blizzard's official World of Warcraft Web site for images and a description of Taurens: http://us.battle.net/wow/en/game/race/tauren.

2. Several players noted more than one game as their primary interest; our software did not prevent respondents from selecting multiple games. These data are reparable, however, as race selection of the subsequent questions was game specific.

3. Our research invitation was published on WoW.com in a January 13, 2010, entry, "The Classifieds: News Briefs on Guilds and Players": http://www.wow.com/2010/01/13/the-classifieds-news-briefs-on-guilds-and-players/.

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Race and Ethnicity in Fandom: Praxis

K-pop, Indonesian fandom, and social media

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[0.1] *Abstract*—Around the world, pop consumers are increasingly accessing popular products through social media. Online fan groups of Korean popular music (K-pop) in Asia have dynamically and transculturally circulated their product through social media such as Facebook and Twitter. In October 2010, Super Junior, a K-pop idol boy band, was ranked as the number one worldwide trending topic on Twitter—ranking even higher than a sensational news story about trapped Chilean miners. Regional fans in Indonesia in particular have been identified as the source of a spike in tweets on this topic. Such a phenomenon illustrates how social media–empowered online fandom enhances cultural flow and affects transcultural pop circulation dynamics. I examine these dynamics by means of the specific case study of K-pop fandom in Indonesia. By focusing on three specific aspects of new media circulation of K-pop in Indonesia—performing immediate transculturations, embodying K-pop, and building intimacies—I contextualize transnationally focused, newly emerging, and social media–deployed cultural circulation driven by online fan practices.

[0.2] *Keywords*—Cultural circulation; Ethnographic research; Facebook; Fan community; Global cultural economy; Online youth culture; Twitter

Jung, Sun. 2011. "K-pop, Indonesian Fandom, and Social Media." In "Race and Ethnicity in Fandom," edited by Robin Anne Reid and Sarah Gatson, special issue, *Transformative Works and Cultures,* no. 8. http://dx.doi.org/10.3983/twc.2011.0289.

1. Introduction

[1.1] In the second week of October 2010, Super Junior, a K-pop (Korean popular music) idol boy band, was ranked as the number one worldwide trending topic on the Twitter weekly chart—ranking even higher than the story of the 33 Chilean miners who were hoisted from captivity after 69 days underground (Mashable 2010) (note 1). This fact is of no small interest to the study of Asian popular cultures, particularly considering how gripped the world was by the epic plight of the miners. Regional fans in Indonesia in particular have been identified as propelling Super Junior to this unexpected top position as their online participation generated a great percentage of tweets. News of the Super Junior Twitter sensation spread across the Internet: US-based Associated Press filed a story on October 13, 2010, noting that Super Junior "gained wider fame in August after a YouTube video clip showing a group of dancing Thai policemen impersonating its members became a pop sensation. The officers shimmied and swung their hips in the five-minute video spoof of 'Sorry Sorry,' a hit song by Super Junior" (http://abcnews.go.com/Technology/wireStory?id=11870029). "Sorry Sorry" had already found Internet fame in late 2009 in a YouTube video showing a group of inmates in a Philippine prison dancing to the song, where it garnered over 4.6 million hits. The success and popularity of examples such as these reflect the ways cultural content crosses cultural and national borders largely through grassroots-driven new media circulation, particularly via social media.

[1.2] Around the world, pop consumers are increasingly accessing popular products—music, film, television, and other audiovisual media content—through online social media. Social media refers to "a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, which allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content" (Kaplan and Haenlein 2010, 61). From user-generated content Web sites to peer-to-peer networks, these channels now play a central role in global cultural circulation. With youth consumer groups as central figures, social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter have recently become the fastest-growing media platforms to circulate global cultural products. Scholarly analysis of the creative flows or cultural circulation in the global cultural economy has been framed in a number of ways, including anthropological understandings of exchange (Mauss 1976; Bourdieu 1977; Appadurai 1996), sociological interpretations of the contemporary economy (Castells 1996; Callon 1998; Lee and LiPuma 2002; Thrift 2005; Barry and Slater 2005), and accounts of mediation that are part of what might be called media theory (McLuhan 2001; Bolter and Grusin 1999; Lash 2002). The dominance of these critical perspectives has tended to place cultural circulation and global cultural economies in a conventional domain, largely focusing on mainstream circuits and the formal economy.

[1.3] Here, I evaluate the recently emerging alternative cultural circulation that arises from grassroots participation in online social networking practices. A collective "you" (manifested through the famous *Time* magazine Person of the Year edition in 2007), made up of individual grassroots/Web users, with the help of Web 2.0 technology (discussed in more detail below), challenges the traditional broadcast principle of centralized content production and distribution. I am aware that these deployments of social media are still shaped by and function within the context of corporate and state control. The hierarchical nature of the Web renders them more suitable for commercial exploitation, where the typical client-server structure gives the owner of the server maximum control over user activity and data. However, I wish to focus on grassroots-driven cultural circulation in social media. This is not to claim that this new way of cultural circulation is completely democratic; rather, the power of grassroots community networks enables bottom-up cultural circulation, which is different from the traditional top-down model that is predominantly led by corporate and state power. There has been a general shift in governance from hierarchy and markets to networks; as Mark

Taylor states, "what is emerging at the moment is a new network culture" (2001, 5). Nevertheless, I do not suggest that there is a binary opposition between the two different circulation models; they are still intricately and closely interrelated. As is evident from my example of Super Junior, both old and new media platforms enable transcultural media flow, which exemplifies Henry Jenkins's notion of media convergence, "where old and new media collide, where grassroots and corporate media intersect, where the power of the media producer and the power of the media consumer interact in unpredictable ways" (2006a, 2). I acknowledge the notion of media convergence, but I concentrate on the ways in which cultural content freely flows across multiple media channels and across cultural and national borders through social media–delivered online fan practices.

[1.4] The conceptual framework that I deploy here draws on an important paradigm shift that recognizes how contemporary cultural flows are formed by particular combinations of globalization dynamics and technological innovations. Recent research into culture industries has attempted to map the links between circulation of cultural goods, cultural practices, and economic production within the framework of the changed global culture industry and market environments (Lash and Lury 2007; Pratt and Jeffcutt 2009). Many studies have explored how cultural products increasingly circulate across national borders, a phenomenon emblematized by Arjun Appadurai's five dimensions of global cultural flows: ethnoscapes, mediascapes, technoscapes, finanscapes, and ideoscapes (1990, 1996). The global cultural economy has to be understood as a complex, overlapping, disjunctive order, which can no longer be understood through existing models of center and periphery (Appadurai 1990). However, relatively little work has undertaken a sustained empirical analysis of this phenomenon beyond the conventional center-periphery cultural distribution models. Although many scholarly works discuss global information and cultural phenomena, they often focus solely on Western forms of knowledge and culture, using Western symbols and Western truth claims as the basic structural unit (Raine 2002, 188). For example, while Lash and Lury (2007) reconceptualize an understanding of cultural industries within the context of globalization, their work focuses predominantly on the aspects of (Euro-American) center-to-periphery flows. This ignores the fact that various non-Euro-American global cultural industries have emerged as important sites of creative production and circulation.

[1.5] In terms of technological innovation, media studies scholars like Henry Jenkins have examined how new tools and technologies enable consumers to appropriate and recirculate media content, and how they blur the distinctions between producers and consumers within the conceptual paradigms of participatory culture and media convergence (2006a, 2006b). Such a phenomenon reflects the era of democratization of cultural production (Fetveit 2007), where bottom-up platforms like YouTube have become a core site for cultural distribution (Burgess and Green 2009; Dwyer 2010). Some studies explore how the practices of fan communities are increasingly incorporated within the logics of the media industries (Green and Jenkins 2009; Jenkins 2006b, 144–49; Johnson 2007; Murray 2004; Shefrin 2004). By means of the notion of participatory culture, Jenkins notes that when empowered by new media technologies, "fans and other consumers are invited to actively participate in the creation and circulation of new content" (2006a, 290). By its very nature, online fandom–driven cultural circulation presents a challenge to empirical research, and academic interest in the topic has been sporadic. Jenkins, using the notion of pop cosmopolitanism, briefly discusses how digital media has accelerated Western fandom of Asian popular cultures such as Japanese animation and Hong Kong action films, which has enhanced the transcultural flows of media content (2006b). Nevertheless, in-depth study is still needed of online fan practices on social media that particularly focuses on transcultural circulation of Asian pop content via empirical research methods. Through such an in-depth analysis, we will discover how transcultural online fan networks of Asian pop cultures operate, how large and diverse these networks are, who uses them, what kinds of content they distribute, and how such operations affect actual global cultural industries.

[1.6] Social media fandom–driven cultural flows reinforce changing transcultural dynamics between East and West—dynamics that once operated predominantly within the conventional center-periphery paradigm, and dynamics that were once centered around Western (predominantly US and UK) popular cultures and their consumer markets and industries. In an age of volatile changes in global culture industries driven by technological innovation and globalization dynamics, understanding these online cultural flows is crucial to developing effective grassroots media-based transcultural creative circulation environments. I use the case study of fan groups in Indonesia to examine these dynamics to demonstrate via empirical analysis the integrated phenomenon of the changed cultural market environments of Korean popular music fandom and fan network practices that deploy social media.

2. K-pop fandom in Indonesia

[2.1] Since the early 2000s, Korean popular culture has become broadly recognized and embraced by both Asian and (to some extent) global pop consumers in what is now commonly known as the *Hallyu,* or the Korean Wave (Chua and Iwabuchi 2008; Jung 2011). Starting from the regional popularity of television drama series such as *Winter Sonata* (2002) and *Full House* (2004), the *Hallyu* phenomenon today also encompasses Korean popular music, or K-pop (note 2). Indonesian youths have embraced many foreign musical forms during the past few decades, and Indonesia has been identified as the fastest-growing K-pop market in Southeast Asia: "Throughout the 1990s, 'alternative' musical genres such as rap, punk, and hard rock, derived from North American and European commercial cultures, captured the enthusiasm of large number of Indonesian youth" (Bodden 2005). After Suharto (the authoritarian second president of Indonesia, in power from 1967 to 1998), Japanese popular culture also became popular in Indonesia, signifying associations with the modern and the cool: "Many Indonesian teenagers and youths [are] attracted to Japanese animation films (*anime*), Japanese pop music (J-pop or J-rock), and Japanese fast food—such as *hoka-hoka*

bento" (Surajaya 2010, 217). The Taiwanese romantic comedy *Meteor Garden* became a nationwide sensation when broadcast in Indonesia in 2002, and it remains the most popular foreign drama series in the history of Indonesian television (Heryanto 2010).

[2.2] In large part as a result of cable television and the Internet, Korean popular products have been dynamically distributed in Indonesia since the early 2000s. Beginning with *Winter Sonata,* which aired in Indonesia and in many other Asian countries in 2003, countless Korean drama series have been broadcast on various local television channels such as Indosiar, a station specializing in Asian dramas from Korea, Japan, and Taiwan. These television dramas have attracted many youth audiences (Ida 2008; Heryanto 2010), and the major sources of attraction include "the good physical appearance of the actors (especially the males), beautiful scenery, glamorous lifestyles, and the characters' successful engagement with the conditions of modern living in big cities" (Heryanto 2010, 220). With youth fan groups as the backbone of the phenomenon, K-pop—predominantly the product of idol girl and boy band music—has also gained recognition in Indonesia; in 2010, over 120 fan-operated K-pop-related events were held, including fan gatherings and Korean pop festivals and concerts. One of the key attractions of K-pop, according to many Indonesian fans, is its modern, cool attributes, in large part originating from Western popular culture forms such as American hip-hop and R&B, European electronic music, and pop and visual elements from J-pop. K-pop produces culturally hybridized global music forms and transcultural imageries, the origins of which are ambiguous (Lee 2011, 39). K-pop is a carefully manufactured hybridized pop product that combines both East and West as well as global and local cultural aspects. The main reason for such strategic cultural hybridization is to meet the complex desires of various consumer groups, which maximizes capitalist profit (Jung 2011).

[2.3] Another key factor in the recent popularity of K-pop in Indonesia is the increased sociocultural dynamism driven by globalization. Krishna Sen and David T. Hill (2000) note that Indonesian media, including television programs, pop music, books, and magazines, is heavily influenced by the world beyond its borders. They note that "in the last two decades of the twentieth century, satellite and digital technologies, and the related financial integration of the world have made it infinitely more difficult to keep foreign cultural products outside national media borders" (13–14). Diversification of cultural media products has been accelerated on the basis of media liberalization processes in the post-Suharto era. The fall of President Suharto's authoritarian regime brought diverse voices and different cultural actions to Indonesian society (Kim 2010, 59). Younger generations in particular had begun eagerly embracing the new kinds of global popular cultures that were flowing into the nation. Ritty Lukose, in a study of globalization and youth in India, discusses how a particular youth group, Liberalization's Children, emerged as a result of India's economic and cultural transformation, driven by the nation's globalization processes. According to Lukose, the youths are "urban, hip, cool, full of ambition, and confident. This construction of the social category of youth directly links the values and attitudes of this new generation to the economic liberalization of the economy and the cultural impact of globalization" (2008, 134). As such, the case of the Indonesian youth reception of K-pop signifies the sociocultural transformation in post-Suharto Indonesia. The recently increased influx of global popular cultures into Indonesia also mirrors the dynamics of capitalism. Japan emerged as the first modern industrialized East Asian country; now others, like Korea and Taiwan, are challenging Western-dominated global capitalism (Heryanto 2010, 210). K-pop products signify the capitalist profit-oriented K-pop entertainment industry sector. Thus, K-pop's popularity in Indonesia refers to the intricate intersection between capitalist desires of the Korean entertainment business sector, the globalized desires of the Indonesian media industry, and the local audiences' desire for cool, modern pop cultures.

[2.4] The scope of K-pop fandom is most evident from the increased number of K-pop-related Web sites, and the situation is similar in other pop markets. For instance, a search for "K-pop" on Google yielded over 86 million results in English; 2,100,000 results in Indonesian; 2,200,000 results in Thai; and 3,100,000 results in Vietnamese (November 1, 2010). On Google Trends, it is evident that the search volume for K-pop has exceeded the one for J-pop since late 2009 (figure 1).

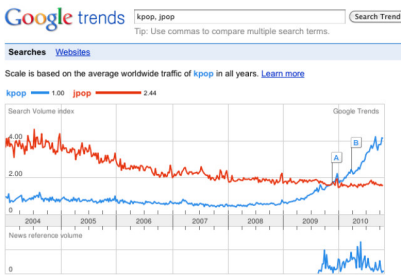

Figure 1. *A screencap of a Google Trends (search volume index) result demonstrates the dramatically increased online search volume for K-pop and how it exceeded J-pop, which until recently was the most sought-after Asian pop genre, both within and beyond Asia. [View larger image.]*

[2.5] A huge percentage of Web sites appear to consist of fan-generated content on social media. *Time* magazine reported, "For many artists in Korea's booming music industry, social media like YouTube and Twitter have become crucial tools to reach audiences in formerly hard-to-access markets like the US and Europe" (Yoon 2010). As previously noted, fan community practices on social media increasingly enhance the transcultural flows of K-pop to a large degree. Jenkins notes that

> [2.6] grassroots cultural production and distribution demonstrated a demand for Asian content that preceded any systematic attempts to commercially distribute in the West. Yet, we underestimate the impact of these grassroots intermediaries if we see them as markets or even marketers; they also play a central role in shaping the reception of those media products. (2006b, 162)

[2.7] As such, grassroots media plays a key role in the emerging transcultural flows of Asian popular content, enhanced by Web 2.0 technologies, and the social media–empowered online K-pop fandom signifies the phenomenon. When Super Junior became a top Twitter trending topic, it became clear that online fan practices on social media enhance transcultural K-pop flows and enable once-unknown Asian popular cultures to easily reach "audiences in formerly hard-to-access markets" (Yoon 2010). The increasing numbers of social media users in the region support this phenomenon.

[2.8] Indonesia has experienced strong user growth within a fast-rising economy where more and more people are beginning to use social media for sharing daily news and circulating media cultural products. As of October 2010, Indonesia is ranked as the second highest country for Facebook use, after the United States, with almost 30 million users (Socialbakers 2010). Only a month earlier, Indonesia was the third highest country (with approximately 28 million users), after the United States and the United Kingdom, demonstrating the rapid increase of Facebook users in the country. In June 2010, nearly 93 million Internet users visited Twitter worldwide, an increase of 109 percent from the previous year. Indonesia reported the highest penetration, with 20.8 percent of Internet users in the country visiting Twitter that month (ComScore 2010). Significantly, Indonesia is experiencing fast-growing penetration of social media, and such a change in the media environment affects how Web users seek and share foreign cultural content through social media.

[2.9] In what follows, I explore how K-pop fandom in Indonesia demonstrates the ways in which today's pop content travels freely across cultural boundaries as a result of social media–empowered online cultural distribution. I focus particularly on three visible aspects of online fan practices: performing immediate transculturations, embodying K-pop, and building intimacies. I look in particular at how youths in post-Suharto Indonesia now embody these three aspects and play a key role in this transcultural pop phenomenon. With the help of various technologies, the youths choose K-pop to satisfy their desires for cool, modern pop cultures. I do not wish to imply that this small sample group represents all Indonesian youth; Indonesia is a big nation, with a wide range of ethnic, religious, regional, linguistic, and class divisions, and I acknowledge the diversity of the youth population in Indonesia. The members of the youth group that I investigate are well-educated, middle-class urban consumers, as is evident from their English-language skills and their access to advanced media technologies. Furthermore, they belong to a group of enthusiastic fans; they are not an ordinary consumer/audience group. By studying this specific group, I intend to explore one of many cultural phenomena evident in this rapidly transforming media environment of contemporary Indonesia, although my findings may also have relevance for audiences in other fast-changing countries that have undergone globalization.

[2.10] My methodology combines a literature review, participant observation, questionnaire surveys, and interviews. It includes ethnographic research in Jakarta and Jogjakarta during July 2010, where I initially conducted questionnaire surveys on various Indonesian-based K-pop Facebook fan pages. I then conducted a series of open-ended e-mail interviews with this group of pop consumers, Web users, and fans. Finally, I conducted face-to-face individual and focus group interviews with selected interviewees in Jakarta and Jogjakarta. In total, I collected 36 questionnaires and interviewed 13 participants. Three individual interviews and three focus group interviews were conducted. At the time of the interviews, the participants were aged between 18 and 24. Among 36 questionnaire participants, 7 were men and 29 were women; in my analysis, questionnaire respondents are designated with the prefix QR. All the interviewees were women; these interview participants are designated with the prefix IP.

3. Performing immediate transculturations: Near–real-time posting and translating

[3.1] According to the average worldwide traffic of "K-pop" on Google Trends, Indonesian is the third most used language after Vietnamese and Tagalog (the primary language in the Philippines), and the number of Indonesian-speaking users has been quickly increasing since 2009. One of the main driving forces behind K-pop fandom in Indonesia is unquestionably advanced digital technology, and without new media technology, today's K-pop fandom would surely not exist. The strong user growth in social media allows the instant, simultaneous, and multidirectional circulation of K-pop. In Indonesia, users between 18 and 24 constitute the majority of the social media user population—40.55 percent (Hui 2010). This group of young Web users is made up of technology-savvy digital natives who have never known a world without the Internet (Prensky 2001; Palfrey and Gasser 2008). Many of these users, who are keen on playing computer games and updating their Facebook pages daily (if not hourly), exploit the Internet and new media technologies. As Prensky memorably phrased it, digital natives are "native speakers" of the language of computers, video games, and the Internet (2001, 2). Hwang Sang-Min (2004) uses the term *cyber new generation* to refer to this group of digital-friendly young Web users. According to Hwang, evidence that members of this new generation regard cyberspace as a playground stems from the fact that they genuinely enjoy various online practices such as playing games, creating avatars, and forming communities. In doing so, "they create unique lifestyles [values and attitudes] based on their [shared] experiences in cyberspace" (16). A notable new lifestyle of the digital generation in Indonesia includes transcultural online pop consumption practices, which offer them access to foreign pop content on an everyday basis. The growing number of K-pop-dedicated fan pages on Facebook provides evidence that K-pop is one of the most highly valued forms of pop content in this context. According to my questionnaire survey of K-pop fans in Indonesia, 95 percent of the participants responded that they

mostly use the Internet to consume and circulate K-pop products; all but one of the survey respondents chose social media (YouTube, Facebook, and Twitter) as their first preference. This high percentage reflects current online pop consumption patterns among youths in Indonesia.

[3.2] Further evidence of this lifestyle shift is presented by the number of hours fans spend on their online activities. Sixty-one percent of the questionnaire respondents indicated that they are online more than 6 hours a day, and more than 30 percent are online for more than 10 hours every day (table 1). Some stated that they are online practically all day, every day (note 3):

> [3.3] [I spend online] 20 hours a day, and for K-pop, I think 15–17 hours. (QR4)
>
> [3.4] Min. 12 hours a day…max. unlimited. (QR24)
>
> [3.5] Well to be honest, I'm (almost) an online freak, and since [I've known about] K-pop, every time I'm online, I always do something related to K-pop itself, whether just chatting with another [K-pop] lover, [looking] for K-pop news, watching live performances, etc. (QR11)

[3.6] It is also evident that they spend most of their online time on K-pop-related activities. Some answered:

> [3.7] Online?…hmmmm…10 hrs or more…and I spend almost 24 hrs [on] K-pop activities such as listening to K-pop, browsing, watching, talking. (QR33)
>
> [3.8] Between 8–12 hours, I don't know, but mostly I do spend my time on K-pop things. (QR12)

[3.9] QR33 stated that she spends almost 24 hours a day on K-pop-related activities. Her response seems exaggerated to me; I assume that this is how she emphasizes her dedication to K-pop. She may listen to K-pop while she is sleeping or working via her MP3 player or her laptop. These responses clearly show how Indonesian youths have created a new lifestyle, one explicitly driven by digital technologies.

Table 1. Time spent online by Indonesian youth

Time per Day Spent Online (hours)	No. of Study Participants Reporting General Online Activities	No. of Study Participants Reporting K-pop Activities
1–2	1	5
3–5	12	13
6–9	11	7
More than 10	11	10
Other	1	1

[3.10] As mentioned earlier, 95 percent of the questionnaire participants stated that they mainly use the Internet to consume and share K-pop content. One of the two notable reasons why they choose the Internet was the lack of K-pop content off-line:

> [3.11] In my country, [anything to do with] K-pop is hard to get. (QR1)
>
> [3.12] [There are] no Korean music programs [on] Indonesian Television. So I have to search [for] information using [the] Internet. (QR2)

[3.13] In other words, the culturally insufficient off-line market environment enhances the development of the online circulation of K-pop. In fact, when I visited Jakarta in July 2010, I did not see many shops where fans could obtain K-pop products. The situation in Jogjakarta was even worse: only two shops sold legitimate K-pop products, and the product range was limited. In Hong Kong and Singapore, the situation differs because K-pop products are stocked in major CD and DVD shops in various shopping malls, where they are prominently presented as best sellers. In contrast, in the Manga Dua shopping mall, one of the biggest shopping malls in Jakarta, for example, there was only one small Asian DVD shop, and it sold a limited range of K-pop products.

[3.14] Another reason the respondents choose the Internet was because the K-pop information presented was timely, convenient, easy to obtain, and up-to-date:

> [3.15] [I prefer the Internet] because online, I get news about K-pop very quickly. (QR3)
>
> [3.16] Online, [we] can immediately obtain all about K-pop with ease and up-to-date. (QR26)
>
> [3.17] Nowadays [the Internet] is the media [that provides] the fastest way to [be] informed…and I can easily find out about my idol. They're really up-to-date. (QR8)
>
> [3.18] Definitely Internet…because it's easy, cheap, and very fast [to be updated]. TV, cable TV, or magazines [are] usually very slow. And there [are] so [few] K-pop information sources in Indonesia. (QR19)

[3.19] Among the 19 respondents who specified the reasons they preferred to use the Internet, 12 addressed its speed. Unquestionably, immediate updating is important for online fandom. Most fans repost and retweet K-pop content that is initially

distributed by K-pop news Web sites such as allkpop (http://www.allkpop.com/), which is popular among overseas fans in particular because of its near–real-time posting. As Johnny Noh, one of the site's cofounders, said, "Our team can translate and have an article up within five minutes of release from the Korean media" (personal interview, e-mail, October 5, 2009). These fans usually obtain this K-pop content—which is translated and rereleased by allkpop—and then repost it on their Facebook or Twitter pages by clicking the "share" button that appears at the bottom of each news item:

> [3.20] Usually I post news that I take from international fan forums or other K-pop news site, e.g., allkpop. Then, [I] usually share the linked videos, uploaded 2PM [idol boy group] images. (QR10)

[3.21] Another online platform where fans can access uploaded K-pop content includes Web sites that provide fan-subtitled (fan subbed) content. One such site, ViKi (http://www.viki.com)—the name is a portmanteau of *video* or *visual* and *wiki*—was cofounded by Moon Ji-Won and Ho Chang-Seong, who created the system to break down the language barrier by building a Web-based volunteer translation community (Jung 2010). According to Moon, some popular programs' subbing can be completed within only a couple of hours of its broadcast. Via ViKi, these fans can also easily repost uploaded and translated content on social media using the "share" button that appears near each entry. This environment allows the grassroots circulation of media content through the click of a button, reinforcing the immediate transcultural flows of popular cultures.

[3.22] Social media has thus quickly become one of the most popular platforms for consuming and distributing K-pop among overseas fans. All 36 questionnaire respondents and 13 interview participants have Facebook accounts, and all of them use Facebook to consume and circulate K-pop content. Over 72 percent (n = 26) mentioned that they also use Twitter. About 91 percent (n = 33) chose social media as their first preference for accessing K-pop:

> [3.23] I prefer Facebook to make a 2PM fan group…it's easy. I have an Indonesian [2PM fan] group on Facebook named Hot Bunnies. (QR10)
>
> [3.24] Facebook…it's much easier than the other platforms because it has everything I need. (QR24)
>
> [3.25] [I prefer Facebook] because there [is] always up-to-date news, pics, videos and many more. (QR28)
>
> [3.26] Because [Facebook is] so fast to get the info. (QR26)
>
> [3.27] [I use] me2day [Korea's microblogging Web service]. They're really up-to-date, and when you sign into [K-pop stars'] official fan-page you can see their messages for fans [and] you can send them your message too…[on me2day], my idols post their pictures and share everything…I buy K-pop merchandise via Facebook. There are lots of K-pop online shopping [malls] on Facebook. Usually I pre-order to get original products from Korea. (QR8)
>
> [3.28] Usually I use my mobile Internet to [consume] K-pop…using Twitter to mention K-pop idols. (QR10)

[3.29] These fans prefer social media platforms because of their immediacy and ease of use. From my vantage point as an observer, it is evident that a large portion of social media practices of Indonesian fans is dedicated to K-pop fan activities. In this sense, their social networking Web pages are mini versions of K-pop news blogs and fan club Web sites or forums. Thanks to its practical attributes, such as quick and easy setup, simple functions, immediate peer networking, and instant distribution, social media has now become the most popular channel to circulate and share K-pop content among fans in Indonesia and elsewhere.

4. Embodying K-pop: From cover dance to romance stories

[4.1] Indonesian fans use social media not only to consume and circulate K-pop but also to re-create K-pop content. This range of re-creation varies. The commonplace employment of user-friendly software to re-create videos and images online has done much to fulfill Alvin Toffler's (1980) prediction about the rise of "prosumers," whose activities blur the distinction between producers and consumers. Jenkins (2006a, 3) has extended Toffler's work and offered an influential elaboration of media convergence, in which new practices are driven by a participatory culture as participants engage in a dynamic interaction rather than occupy prescribed, distinct roles as producers or consumers. The notions of the prosumer and of participatory culture are reiterated through the concept of Web 2.0, a term coined by Darcy DiNucci in 1999. This term was given to the concept of the Web as "a space for collaboration and reciprocal communication" (Gere 2009, 212). Here, the two keywords for the Web 2.0 environment are *participation* and *collaboration.*

[4.2] K-pop fan practices on Facebook among Indonesian fans illustrate this collaborative participatory culture in a Web 2.0 environment. The fans collaboratively re-create K-pop-related texts and images, then distribute their altered content. Two of the most common examples are K-pop cover dance practices and fan fiction practices on Facebook. Covering dance is one of the most common collaborative fan activities worldwide. The term *cover* usually means a version of a song sung by an artist different than the original singer. However, in the case of fan activities, *cover* refers to a version of a song or dance performed by fans. It is no longer a surprise to find K-pop dance cover clips created by fans in Peru or Egypt on YouTube. In Thailand, some of the top cover teams dedicated to mimicking K-pop idol groups have gained YouTube fame and have become minor celebrities themselves. Two

examples are the Wonder Gays, a dance team that covers the work of the Wonder Girls, a five-member idol girl group; and Ongchelic, a dance team that covers the work of SNSD (aka Girls' Generation), a nine-member idol girl group.

Video 1. *Ongchelic cover dance video on YouTube.*

[4.3] According to the nationwide joint fan group United K-pop Lovers Indonesia, there are more than 100 K-pop cover teams in Indonesia. At a K-pop cover dance competition held in Bandung in July 2010, over 40 teams attended. Most cover teams have their own Facebook pages, Twitter accounts, and YouTube channels to promote their activities. One of the leading teams is MC Entertainment. According to the introductory statement of their Facebook page, "MC Entertainment is a group which covering Korean idol group from INDONESIA. Inaugurated in September 12th 2009. We're Indonesian but we do love Korea especially K-pop."

[4.4] These fan covering practices highlight the importance of dance to the current popularity of K-pop. According to the interview responses, the well-crafted dance moves of idol stars initially attract many fans. All 13 Indonesian interviewees unanimously identified "amazing dance" as one of the main reasons why they like K-pop:

> [4.5] I love K-pop because they can sing very well and dance very well at the same time…whenever I see their dancing, it always makes me feel like I want to dance. (IP6)
>
> [4.6] Compared to J-pop, K-pop has much better dancing. There are many J-pop boy bands, but their dance [moves are] not really good…so-so…But K-pop dance is really good! (IP8)
>
> [4.7] I left J-pop for K-pop…I used to like J-pop like NEWS and KAT-TUN. I saw them dancing, and they danced like… very simple and easy [moves]. Then, when I saw Super Junior, SHINee and TVXQ [idol boy bands], I was like…WOW! They can sing and dance so well! It was so amazing! (IP1)
>
> [4.8] K-pop's colourful and modern…[K-pop] music's similar to American music like R&B, hip-hop and pop and it makes us dance…Indonesian pop groups are a bit boring. I hope they'll become as interesting as K-pop [groups]. (IP2)

[4.9] Many of these fans described their amazement at well-choreographed and well-crafted dance performances by K-pop idol groups (note 4). Some interviewees like IP1, IP2, and IP7 pointed out how K-pop is "modern" and "cool" by comparing it with American pop. Although they acknowledged the similarities between K-pop and American pop, they emphasized the uniqueness of K-pop, particularly the powerful and colorful dance performances of idol groups.

[4.10] According to the fan group United K-pop Lovers Indonesia, over 90 percent of the cover teams in Indonesia are girls and women in their late teens to early 20s. This means that the majority of the K-pop boy band cover teams consist of female members. Among the 13 interview participants, 8 are members of cover dance teams. All of them cover boy bands. One interviewee is a leader of SHiny Girls Indonesia (figure 2), a cover dance team of SHINee. On SHiny Girls Indonesia's Facebook page, the team posts images of real SHINee members as well as of them wearing SHINee costumes; they also post videos of their cover performances and their practice sessions.

Figure 2. *SHiny Girls Indonesia was created in May 2009, and all four members are women in their early 20s. They have a Facebook page, "SHiny Girls (SHINee Dance Cover) Indonesia," a YouTube channel (http://www.youtube.com/user/SHinyGirlsSHG), and a Web site (http://shinygirls-shg.blogspot.com/). [View larger image.]*

SHINee - Lucifer & Hello full dance cover (cover...

Video 2. *SHiny Girls Indonesia cover dance video on YouTube.*

[4.11] IP6 mentioned that she loves the cool dance moves of SHINee that she cannot find from the local Indonesian bands:

> [4.12] I feel good when I practice SHINee's dances. I never really danced before this group. We love SHINee and we want to be like them…we practice about two days a week if we're not too busy because of exams and stuff.

[4.13] Another interviewee, IP3, said of dance:

> [4.14] Boy group dances are much more difficult [such as] Super Junior and TVXQ, than girl groups [such as] f(x) and Tiara. So it takes much longer [to learn]. But it's more fun [to learn boy bands' dance].

[4.15] Significantly, it is not only the physical dance moves that these cover groups attempt to mirror, but also the specific masculine identities of the bands themselves through the adoption of certain props, hairstyles, and other features:

> [4.16] I bought shoes very similar to SHINee's shoes, and I found this headphone from online shopping exactly [the] same as theirs. For our performances, we often make our own costumes. We are trying to make [ourselves] as similar [to SHINee] as possible. (IP6)

[4.17] IP3 confessed that she consciously attempts to mimic the hairstyle of Hong-Ki, the leader of FT Island (an idol boy band).

[4.18] It can be argued that their cover dance practices epitomize the ways in which the fans attempt to deconstruct normative gender representations, which in turn reinforces the construction of new Indonesian femininity. Such a questioning of the essentialist notion of gender has been introduced by Judith Butler's concept of gender performativity:

> [4.19] Gender is in no way a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts proceed; rather, it is an identity tenuously constituted in time—an identity instituted through a stylized repetition of acts. Further, gender is instituted through the stylization of the body and, hence, must be understood as the mundane way in which bodily gestures, movements, and enactments of various kinds constitute the illusion of an abiding gendered self. (1988, 519)

[4.20] Here, Butler argues that sexuality and gender are culturally constructed through the repetition of stylized performances of gender in time. By their repetition, these stylized bodily performances establish the appearance of an essential and naturally given gender. Indonesian fan cover practices indeed well signify this notion of gender performativity, through which they attempt to subvert the normative gender representations. They are also simultaneously yearning to embrace a modern coolness by mimicking K-pop dances. In the course of their covering practices, fans want to demonstrate their desire to embrace cool modern

pop cultures and to transgress gendered representations. Through mimicking and altering K-pop content, the fans cross regional, cultural, and to some extent sexual boundaries. Web 2.0–empowered participatory culture accelerates these border crossings.

[4.21] Another popular way of practicing participatory cultures within the online K-pop fandom is creating stories. One of my interviewees moderates a Facebook page, "K-pop *Iyagi* (story)," where she and another K-pop fan write stories based on K-pop song lyrics (http://www.facebook.com/Kpop.Iyagi/). They completed an online series of short stories, *Bubble Love,* in which each of its 18 chapters is inspired by a different K-pop lyric. Unlike the usual fan fiction texts, *Bubble Love* focuses on the lyrics themselves, rather than the K-pop artists. The stories in *Bubble Love* often feature a Korean male character and an Indonesian female character in a romantic relationship usually set in Korea, even though neither author has ever been to Korea. Chapter 8, for example, is inspired by SHINee's song "In My Room" and features a male Korean character, Seon Ho, and Vivian, an Indonesian female character, and offers a sketch of Seon Ho's life in Bupyung, a satellite city near Seoul. My interviewee mentioned that her readers appreciate the modern, cosmopolitan settings of Seoul and the depiction of intercultural relationships because they make the stories more mysterious and exotic. In this example of K-pop *Iyagi,* K-pop songs have transformed into a new culturally hybridized object created through the collaborative and participatory imaginations of these Indonesian fan writers.

[4.22] K-pop-inspired content—whether a parody video, fan fiction, or other K-pop user-generated content—now appears online from fans all over the world. Through participatory fan practices, fans reinterpret and re-present K-pop on the basis of their diverse desires and imaginations. In the case of Indonesian fandom, fans reinterpret and re-present K-pop content within the conceptual paradigm of embracing simultaneously cool, modern, and exotic foreign culture. An important point here is the way Indonesian youths actively and voluntarily seek, appropriate, and consume new kinds of pop culture to satisfy their emerging desires in this new and modern digital setting. By means of the example of *Hallyu* in China and Vietnam, Baek Won-Dam (2005, 33, 163) argues that the local audiences in these countries "chose" *Hallyu* as an "alternative culture" while they were undergoing the process of socioideological changes during the 1990s. Baek notes that after the deconstruction of its socialist structure, China could not find its own cultural identity as it entered the capitalist era, and therefore, it chose *Hallyu* as a temporary measure to fill the cultural void: "Because there was a cultural vacuum, the marketing strategies of Korean enterprises [such as casting a Korean television drama star Ahn Jae-Wook as a commercial model] unexpectedly constructed *Hallyu*" (33). Vietnam also chose "*Hallyu* as a transitional substitute" for its new cultural identity as it transitioned from the premodern cultural system to the modern capitalist system; the reason for this choice was partly the result of the similarities between Korean and Vietnamese cultural traditions (67, 163). K-pop fandom in Indonesia may be similarly understood through the ways in which Indonesian youth "chose" K-pop as an "alternative pop culture" while their country underwent socioideological changes after the Suharto era. Such an aspect is evident from the ways in which a number of interviewees commented on how they expect their own Indonesian pop music to soon become cool and modern. One of the interviewees, IP2, said, "I know there are so many talented Indonesians and they'll make good music soon. Then, I will listen to them." Indonesian youth seek out and create new forms of culture by being actively involved in participatory K-pop fan practices to satisfy their desires until they can engage with their own cool "I-pop."

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5. Building intimacies: Talking to Dong-Hae *oppa* on Twitter

[5.1] Much K-pop fan activity consists of exchanging and sharing K-pop information and news with fellow K-pop fans. The fans feel intense connection to their chosen stars, relevant Web sites, and other users. Since the emergence of Web 2.0 technologies from mid-2000, online fan activity has advanced in the area of Web-based information sharing and social networking. Web 2.0 technologies present new opportunities for developing diverse online community environments and enhancing interactivity, participation, and feedback between individual users. Empowered by Web 2.0 technologies, the Indonesian K-pop fans I interviewed actively share their K-pop experiences with other fans, predominantly through fan networks on social media. Some interviewees mentioned that they first got to know about K-pop through a Facebook invitation from their friends:

> [5.2] Last year, I got a Facebook invitation to join the Super Junior fan group page from my friend. That was the beginning [of my interest in the fandom]. (IP12)
>
> [5.3] I have more than 1,000 Facebook friends and over 75% are K-pop fans…I have about 300 Twitter friends and about 90% of them are K-pop fans. (IP1)
>
> [5.4] I have Bulgarian and Turkish friends on Facebook. I call them *eonni* [big sister] because they're a bit older [laugh]…we often chat about SS501 [idol boy band] *oppa* [big brother] and we love it. (IP4)
>
> [5.5] I have a Turkish friend and he is a Super Junior fan. Whenever he uploads something [about Super Junior], he sends me the links. I think we have a good connection…and a good relationship [through these fan activities]. (IP2)

[5.6] Many fans indicated that they build networks, especially international networks, through social media–driven K-pop fandom. Because they share a common interest and passion in K-pop, they are able to build instant yet strong emotional connections with each other despite different cultural and national backgrounds. For instance, K-pop fans from different countries often plan and carry out international projects to support their favorite stars. In 2009, the international fan club of K-pop idol boy group 2PM organized a flash mob video competition to support the band. Through such participatory interactions, fans cultivate a sense of connectedness with fellow K-pop fans from all over the world. Paul Booth explains, "As media fandom has moved online,

fans have started to use a variety of different means to interact with, and to create, texts. New fans use digital technology not only to create, to change, to appropriate, to poach, or to write, but also to share, to experience together, to become alive with the fan's community" (2008, 515–16). Through participatory fan interactions, K-pop fans build a sense of connectedness and eventually construct a new kind of online youth culture where they share and experience with fellow fans from the other side of the world. In K-pop fandom in Indonesia, fans spend a significant amount of time online each day participating in international Web forums and maintaining their Facebook pages and Twitter feeds. They are eager to cross cultural borders through new media practices such as these. They are willing to experience new foreign cultures, and they are unafraid of meeting new people from different cultural contexts.

[5.7] As I briefly mentioned earlier, fans often participate in international projects through which they easily achieve transnational social networking. A good example in the case of Indonesia is "1,000,000 Facebookers to bring K-pop on Indonesian Television" (1,000,000 facebookers mendukung pembuatan acara Kpop di Televisi Indonesia; http://www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=112954108751659). A K-pop fan created this Facebook group to encourage the local broadcasting industry to produce and broadcast a K-pop music program. Her initiative soon attracted many local K-pop fans. With the help of some enthusiastic fellow fans, she formed a nationwide joint fan group, United K-pop Lovers Indonesia (UKLI). In August 2011, the number of the group members was over 48,000. In February 2012, UKLI will host Korea Sparkling Festival, inviting many K-pop artists. This will be the biggest Korean culture and K-pop event in Indonesia ever, and it will be the first transnational K-pop event purely planned and organized by fan groups in Indonesia. Such activities signify how online participatory fan practices on social media create transcultural networks and eventually reinforce the cultural flows between Indonesia and Korea.

[5.8] Fans use social media not only to connect with fellow fans, but also to connect with their favorite stars. Many Super Junior fans mentioned that they began to tweet because their *oppas* have Twitter accounts, and Twitter is the easiest way to follow their daily routines. Dong-Hae from Super Junior, for example, has almost 650,000 followers, and each tweet attracts up to 3,000 comments.

> [5.9] I use Twitter and me2day. They're all really up2date, and when you sign in to their official fanpage you can see their message for fans [and] we can send them our messages too…[It's] really fun to chat on me2day where my idols post their pictures and share everything. (QR8)
>
> [5.10] More and more fans are using Twitter because they can communicate with their stars directly…[Compared to Twitter] Facebook is complicated. Twitter is easier to use and updates are much faster. (IP2)
>
> [5.11] I am following Dong-Hae, Hee-Chul and Shin-Dong [of Super Junior]. It's so fun to read their tweets, and see their photos…[It] feels like I know them better now. (IP6)

[5.12] These fans use Twitter in an attempt to both understand their stars and to demonstrate their dedication to them. Many interviewees indicated that Twitter is faster and more immediate than Facebook, and Twitter gives the impression (although this may not of course be followed through in action) of possible direct communication.

[5.13] Star-fan dynamics have greatly changed thanks to Twitter, and fans can now closely observe the daily routines of their idols, updated in real time, thus encouraging a strong sense of connection with the stars. Most importantly, Twitter has changed the dynamics between stars and fans with different national and language backgrounds, and in this sense, Twitter may be seen to some degree as having diminished (if not removed) the language barrier from transnational fandom. In the case of transnational K-pop fandom, there were few adequate channels for communication between stars and their overseas fans before Twitter. Twitter now allows immediate, direct, and constant communication between the stars and their overseas fans. First, this is because there are many translation groups on Twitter who immediately translate K-pop idol stars' tweets as soon as they are uploaded. Second, the stars upload photos and videos that do not require written or verbal explanation. Third, and most important, the 140-character limit of Twitter messages means that non-native-English-speaking K-pop stars and fans often post in short English sentences, thus permitting access to a range of fans from different and non-Korean-language backgrounds. It appears that more and more K-pop stars are communicating with their overseas fans through social media, especially through Twitter. The emergence of Twitter has not only changed the dynamics of overseas K-pop fandom, but has also created a new paradigm of transcultural circulation of K-pop.

6. Conclusion

[6.1] New knowledge, cultures, and lifestyles are increasingly transmitted transculturally, quickly, and easily in this ever more globalized, diverse, and technologically mediated world. The growth of social media since the mid-2000s has rendered various Asian popular cultures—once considered marginalized and difficult to access—now freely accessible as they flow across different national borders. Consequently, it is now unsurprising to see an Australian teenage girl in a tram looking at photos of J-pop boy band Arashi on a Facebook fan page on her iPhone, or a Turkish college student watching the popular Korean television drama series *Secret Garden* (2010–11) on YouTube on a newly purchased Samsung Galaxy Tab during a class break. Advanced new

media technologies (particularly social media) enable global pop consumers to easily access once unknown and marginalized popular cultures, such as K-pop.

[6.2] I have used Indonesian K-pop fandom as a case study to examine how social media–empowered fan practices enhance the transcultural flows of K-pop, and how such flows reflect the changing global cultural industry landscape within the Web 2.0 environment. Particularly noteworthy is the key role that Indonesian youth groups play in this phenomenon. By practicing Web 2.0–empowered participatory culture, they both immediately embrace cool and modern pop products and easily transform and recirculate those products and directly connect to the stars. Most importantly, such participatory practices enable them to cross regional, cultural, and to some extent sexual boundaries, permitting them to satisfy their complex desires within the reorganized post-Suharto social setting of Indonesia. Considering the insignificant presence of both K-pop and Indonesian pop consumers in the global pop market to date, the recent social media phenomenon of K-pop, largely driven by Indonesian youth fan practices, is symptomatic of the changing global cultural industry environment. Social networking sites such as Twitter have been embraced by Indonesian K-pop fans, suggesting that the field of pop cultural consumption is opening up well beyond the traditional US/European-dominated pop scene. Rather than giving the world the new Lady Gaga, K-pop and its demonstrated ability to cross borders may suggest nothing less than a new truly globalized playing field for the next pop phenomenon, be it from Korea, Indonesia, or Bhutan.

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8. Notes

1. I use "Korea" to mean South Korea or the Republic of Korea.

2. The term *K-pop* usually refers to Korean popular music in the overseas market, while *K-drama* refers to Korean television dramas. According to Stevens, "'J-pop' is widely used by East Asian audiences to describe music from Japan overseas and has become so integrated in a wider East Asian consumer market that this terminology has recently been transformed to describe other Asian pop cultures: 'K-*poppu*' ['K-pop'] (Korean popular music and culture) is another trend seen in both Japan and other international markets" (2008, 16–17).

3. Most of the participants are not native English speakers and sometimes use Internet-specific terms. I have thus slightly altered the quotations for grammar and clarity. These adjustments have been placed in square brackets.

4. Such well-trained performances are the result of the Korean entertainment industry's strict training system, whereby young idol star wannabes learn to sing and dance. The K-pop training takes a long time—generally 3 to 5 years. For further explanation, see Jung (2011).

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Editorial

Textual echoes

Cyber Echoes

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[0.1] *Abstract*—This section of the special issue gathers articles by scholars who attended Textual Echoes, an academic conference solely focused on fan fiction.

[0.2] *Keywords*—Academic; Conference; Fan fiction; Proceedings

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1. Textual echoes

[1.1] This special issue of TWC gathers articles by scholars who attended Textual Echoes, an academic conference solely focused on fan fiction, organized by the research group Cyber Echoes and hosted by Umeå University, Sweden, in February 2010. The members of Cyber Echoes—Berit Åström, Katarina Gregersdotter, Malin Isaksson, Maria Lindgren Leavenworth, and Maria Helena Svensson—are also the guest editors of this issue.

[1.2] Fan fiction has received academic attention for some time now, and two main tendencies in particular have attracted attention. Resistive readings were at the heart of much of the early criticism, often with a focus on how fan fic creates (mainly homoerotic) new pairings and depicts explicit sexual scenes (see, for example, Jenkins 1992; Penley 1992). That is, fan fiction authors were often lauded for their defiance of cultural norms. On the other hand, and more recently, scholarly attention has been directed to how fan fiction may uphold cultural hegemony (Scodari 2003) and has drawn attention to how resistive readings simply make implicit or latent themes explicit (Woledge 2006). The contemporary output of cultural texts that defy preferred readings and encourage audience participation has also resulted in analyses that are more hesitant in proclaiming fan fiction necessarily subversive (see, for example, Gwenllian Jones 2002). Despite increased interest in fan activities of various kinds, and despite the increasingly varied academic response to them, fan fiction as a text form has been relegated to the sidelines as only one expression, and there is still a

need for developed and sustained close readings. Fan fic texts deserve to be investigated with the same interest, methodological stringency, and academic seriousness as other texts do. Close readings can illustrate overlaps between the abovementioned tendencies and offer additional ways in which fan fic demonstrates negotiations of canon structures. To this end, Textual Echoes invited scholars who approach fan fictions as literary, linguistic, or cultural artifacts—as objects of analysis.

[1.3] The essays in this issue, like the conference contributions, are examples of so-called third wave fan studies, which are characterized by their widened theoretical and methodological scope and, importantly, by the move away from the binary view of fan activities as either subversive or hegemonic. Treating fan fic texts as objects of study opens up possibilities to provide further nuance to discussions of fan creations, for instance regarding their relation to older literature (whether derivative or original) and their aesthetic, and possibly also commercial, value. As all authors in this issue demonstrate, no general conclusions can ever be drawn when investigating the vast field that is fan fiction, even when the texts studied originate in the same fandom. What is also evident from the articles included in this issue is that fandoms and popular canons such as Star Trek, which have previously been given much attention by scholars, still yield a multitude of interpretations and new meanings.

[1.4] With the content of both collective and specific fan fiction sites exploding, it is of course increasingly difficult to speculate about which texts will spark the interest of fan fic authors. The story worlds typically discussed at the Textual Echoes symposium proved to be quite complex, often dispersed across different media formats (written texts, TV series, films, manga), and in most cases serialized. Complex story worlds naturally give rise to different means of fan interaction with them, whether it is a question of filling a gap by a complementary narrative, repairing elements which are deemed lacking in the canons, or offering alternative readings that in some cases can be reincorporated in the canons. Sustained close readings of fan fiction can illuminate negotiations with elements running through the entirety of the story world, interaction with individual episodes or installments, or alternative readings of single characters.

2. Keynote speakers

[2.1] Textual Echoes invited two keynote speakers who opened and closed the three-day symposium with insightful analyses of the field. Elizabeth Woledge's opening lecture, "Fan Fiction—The Logical Extension" (http://stream.humlab.umu.se/index.php?streamName=FanFiction), dealt with, among other matters, the status of the fan, and Woledge made many connections between fan fiction writers and writers of canonical texts. Both types of writers are derivative in similar ways: canonical writers such as Shakespeare or Margaret Atwood

also use other texts in their own writings. One main argument was that fan fiction writers, just like appropriated writers, are engaged in the similar writing processes. In her closing lecture, "Affect and the Individual Fan: Rethinking Aesthetic and Economic Values of Originality" (http://stream.humlab.umu.se/index.php?streamName=AffectAndTheIndividualFan), Kristina Busse situated fan fiction in a long history of aesthetics, and successfully problematized the much-debated terms *originality* and *repetition.* One important point Busse stressed concerned the love for familiar tropes fan fiction writers share and the concurrent desire to search for new ways to use them in their writing.

3. Symposium presentations

[3.1] The internationality of the Textual Echoes conference went beyond hearing speakers from different countries; there was also a focus on primary material gathered from fandoms outside Britain and North America. The Anglophone perspective that has characterized much of fan studies was challenged; new insights were gained into, for example, how the textual production originating in fandoms in Poland, Sweden, and France varies as a result of cultural differences, and how national fandoms are organized and developed. Presentations also focused on Japanese fandoms connected to manga and yaoi, and on yet another set of cultural practices and codes.

[3.2] This is not to say that Anglophone culture was ignored. On the contrary, fantastical story worlds, such as the Harry Potter and Star Trek (and spin-off) universes, the worlds of the TV programs *Supernatural* and *Torchwood,* and vampire worlds were the focus of a number of presentations. These story worlds were characterized as dissolving boundaries—boundaries beyond even the fantastical canons themselves—while still adhering to the texts' latent or nonlatent themes. In the case of popular culture texts, presenters noted the contemporary media climate: audience participation is encouraged, and story worlds may be regarded as open texts, thus decreasing the traditional distance between sanctioned products and fan interaction. Open texts could then be seen in relation to presentations focusing on fan fic treatments of classics, such as novels by Jane Austen, which to a greater extent are surrounded by aesthetic and content-specific rules. In a more modern classic, *Bridget Jones' Diary,* a linguistic analysis of the nouns that follow possessive pronouns reveals that focus even on such details can demonstrate differences between source text and fan texts.

[3.3] Fan fic, as a text form that attracts a young audience, was analyzed as an expression of budding sexuality; as a safe place to investigate desires; and as an opportunity to depict, in writing, culturally charged "first-time" scenarios. Given children and adolescents' familiarity with the form, it was also suggested that fan fic

holds extensive pedagogical possibilities when seen in relation to other practices, such as the rhetorical concept of *imitatio*.

[3.4] The preponderance of alternative depictions of sexuality in much of the primary material resulted in several talks about new pairings. Queer theory was applied to counter the pathologization of female fans involved in yaoi, and readings of other types of fan fiction illustrated tendencies of resistance to culturally scripted norms. Slash and femslash from a number of fandoms was analyzed, but rather than arguing exclusively that fan fics in these categories were automatically subversive, several presenters drew attention to how generic structures and cultural norms still influence and circumscribe fan fic representations. There was also an interest in more radical fan fic rewritings, such as human-to-animal transformations and mpreg (male pregnancy stories), with presenters concluding that power reversals are often the end result.

[3.5] It was also illustrated that an enlarged concept of fan fiction yields interesting results when seen in relation to ludology. In these readings, fan fiction came to be seen as a hybrid text form, bridging the gap between narrative and play. Games are often set in fantastical story worlds, particularly online games; they rely on players filling the gaps and providing avatars with background stories and motivations, much in the same manner as fan fic authors do. In these discussions, a concept returned to was *intertextuality,* a key term that worked as a natural (perhaps given) cohesive framework for all presentations at the symposium. Intertextuality emphasizes the necessity of seeing fan fiction within the context of literary studies, and to doing close readings of individual texts instead of drawing general conclusions about an entire fandom. When analyzed as literary and cultural artifacts, fan fics evidence each individual author's interpretations and the ways in which she or he creates intertextual links to her or his chosen canon by basing even profoundly altered stories on characterizations, complex plot elements, or narrative structures found in the canon. Careful analyses of individual texts can further suggest ways in which cultural norms are negotiated and/or contested by individual authors, but such analyses may also show how the writers are powerfully influenced by representations and stereotypes in a wide variety of texts.

[3.6] The abstracts from the symposium are available online (http://www.mos.umu.se/forskning/cyberekon/symposiumabstracts.htm).

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4. The texts in this issue

[4.1] The essays in this issue's Theory, Praxis, and Symposium sections deal with issues ranging from gender and queer theory via ludology and transmediality to issues regarding commerce in relation to fan works.

[4.2] Charles W. Hoge explores the possibilities that emerge when reading fan fictions as play in "Whodology: Encountering *Doctor Who* Fan Fiction through the Portals of Play Studies and Ludology" (Theory). The textual world of *Doctor Who* seems particularly open to fannish engagement, not least because there are whole episodes of the series missing as well as a lack of emotional scenes, which gives the fans opportunities to fill in gaps in narrative and characterization. Hoge shows how *Doctor Who* fan fic constitutes a paratextual world that not only parallels the TV series, but also leaves discernible marks in the canon, especially in the new series (2005–). Applying game and play theorist Roger Caillois's criteria for games to fan fiction, Hoge finds that fan fic shares several traits with games, for instance—and perhaps unsurprisingly—the concept of mimicry. A less expected element in fan fiction, and one that is a basic component of games, is what Caillois calls *agon*—that is, competition between players. Hoge demonstrates how *Doctor Who* fan fic aligns itself with the idea of *agon* as well as with the "sensory-wrecking stupefaction" (¶3.4) linked to the notion of *illinx.* Furthermore, he argues that both the act of creating fan fiction and the content of fan fic can be parts of the process of *illinx*.

[4.3] The Praxis essays in this issue address the themes of desire, sexuality, and identity in relation to fan fictions. Bridget Kies, Mark McHarry, and Kate Roddy discuss, from different perspectives, both how these themes are treated within the fan fic texts and how they can be understood as parts of complex and sometimes ambiguous identity formation processes and as articulations of desire.

[4.4] Rather than focusing on the "one true pairing" often expressed in fan fiction texts, Bridget Kies explores the erotic triangle of Tom Paris–Harry Kim–B'Elanna Torres in "One True Threesome: Reconciling Canon and Fan Desire in *Star Trek: Voyager*." Problematizing the resistance-incorporation paradigm (according to which fan productions are either resisting or incorporating elements of the canon) that characterized much of early fan studies, Kies discusses fan fic authors' reorientations of desire, identification, characterization, and genre. Her close readings of 11 triad fan fics show how some combine traditional romance story lines, for instance depicting marriage and child-rearing, with the queer erotic formation of the threesome. Other fan fics present endings that deviate from romantic genre conventions as well as from expectations in a heteronormative society. Kies concludes that the romantic triangle "loses its stability when the triad attempts to align itself with heteronormativity and remains stable as it distances itself from certain hegemonic values" (¶4.2).

[4.5] In "(Un)gendering the Homoerotic Body: Imagining Subjects in Boys' Love and Yaoi," Mark McHarry gives a background to the manga genres of boys' love and yaoi, its Western expression, as well as to *dōjinshi*, fan comics with young male characters. He goes on to present a close reading of Maldoror's *Freeport*, a fan novel based on the

anime *Gundam Wing,* through the lens of psychoanalytic and philosophical theories by Elizabeth Grosz, Julia Kristeva, and Michel Foucault. McHarry argues that although the characters in *Freeport* can be seen as "queer border dwellers" (in Thomas Piontek's terminology), they are situated in a nonliminal space rather than at a threshold separating sex and gender. He thus problematizes the binary concepts that have governed much of Western queer theory, showing how "productive subjects, able to desire and be desired" (¶6.3) can be imagined along other ungendered lines.

[4.6] In "Masochist or Machiavel? Reading Harley Quinn in Canon and Fanon," Kate Roddy discusses fan fic writers' reworkings of the seemingly masochistic Harley Quinn (the Joker's girlfriend in the Batman canon) in relation to medical and feminist discourses about female submissiveness. She shows that while in the canon Harley Quinn is mistreated by the Joker, the fans reconstruct and question her (potential) submissiveness by portraying gender, subjectivity, and power as very complex issues. Roddy's analyses highlight fan fic authors' awareness of BDSM tropes and theories according to which the masochist is not necessarily a passive victim, but rather the one tacitly directing or manipulating the dominance/submission games. The masochist can be Machiavellian, in the sense that she is creative and manipulative. Fan writers use the conventions of BDSM play to question and subvert the idea of female submissiveness as passivity, thus problematizing its pathologizing and antifeminist connotations. How to interpret Harley Quinn's "ambiguous subjectivity" is, in the end, up to the reader who is invited "to participate in the text instead of merely consuming it" (¶5.4).

[4.7] Maria Lindgren Leavenworth discusses the text world of *The Vampire Diaries* (TVD) and fan fiction linked to it, in "Transmedial Texts and Serialized Narratives" (Symposium). The three core features of transmedial worlds—mythos, topos, and ethos—are all treated in relation to TVD fan fiction, which builds on different parts of the TVD story world, each containing different characters and ontologies. Naturally, story worlds that present partly different stories and characters in different media provide rich material for fans to engage creatively with (even if it might prove challenging for readers of TVD fan fic to keep track of which mythos, topos, or ethos is relevant in a particular story). Similarly, the serial format itself seems to spark fannish activity. Lindgren Leavenworth shows how the puzzle of the transmedial narratives and the redundancy of the serialized form "push and pull in somewhat different directions" (¶12), and that fan fic writers actively participate in the meaning-making processes related to the expanding text world.

[4.8] The question whether fan work should remain free is raised by Nele Noppe in "Why We Should Talk about Commodifying Fan Work" (Symposium). She advances arguments for a commodificaton of fan work and sees opportunities for hybrid

economies for Web-based commerce. Hybrid economies place themselves between commercial and sharing ones, yet build upon both. The best example so far is open source software, which shares many characteristics with production of fan works. However, it is not likely that fan work will be commodified in a near future, not only because many fans resist such a development, but also because current economic practices privilege large companies rather than individuals. Noppe points out that some sort of legal recognition would be required for a hybrid economy to function in the context of fan works. She argues that the conditions for a hybrid economy suit contemporary media fandom well and that "different economic systems that prioritize different values can coexist and reinforce each other" (¶4.3).

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[5.1] Cyber Echoes wishes to thank Umeå University and especially Humlab for their financial and material support, as well as Challenging Emotions, part of the research environment Challenging Gender, also at Umeå University. We were fortunate to have invitations accepted by our keynote speakers, Elizabeth Woledge and Kristina Busse, who framed the symposium and offered astute observations throughout the three days. Kristina Busse also kindly suggested this issue of TWC as a publication venue, for which we are grateful. Naturally, any symposium is only as good as its presenters, and we are happy that the participants braved the dark and the cold, and made such great contributions.

[5.2] The following people worked on TWC No. 8 in an editorial capacity: Cyber Echoes—Berit Åström, Katarina Gregersdotter, Maria Lindgren Leavenworth, Maria Helena Svensson, and Malin Isaksson (guest editors); Kristina Busse and Karen Hellekson (editors); Anne Kustritz, Patricia Nelson, and Suzanne Scott (Symposium); and Louisa Stein (Review).

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Textual Echoes: Praxis

(Un)gendering the homoerotic body: Imagining subjects in boys' love and yaoi

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[0.1] *Abstract*—Language is a condition for a subject's formation, and identity is a factor in a subject's understanding of self. The Japanese-derived literary forms boys' love and yaoi portray male subjects as valorizing and acting on same-sex erotic desire, yet with little or no sense of possessing a same-sex desiring identity. Following Elizabeth Grosz, Julia Kristeva, and Michel Foucault, a reading is performed of a Western yaoi fan fic to explore how subjects in yaoi and boys' love enter into language, and hence subjectivity.

[0.2] *Keywords*—Anime; Comic market; Dōjinshi; Fan fiction; Gender; Manga; Queer; ボーイズラブ; 同人誌; コミケット

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[0.3] Language is the threshold of all possible meaning and value. [It is] a condition for the production of subjects.

—Elizabeth Grosz, *Sexual Subversions* (1989)

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1. Introduction

[1.1] Boys' love emerged in the late 1960s as women in Japan began creating commercial manga about young males in homoerotic relationships and self-publishing similarly themed fan comics called *dōjinshi* that featured young male characters taken from popular *shōnen* (boys) manga. The genre has gained popularity worldwide. Today it comprises not only manga and dōjinshi but also anime, fan fiction, artwork, fan and commercial videos, cosplay, video games, audio CDs, posters, movies, and other forms.

[1.2] There are clearly marked boys' love sections in major bookstores, popular manga such as *Be-Boy Gold* are sold in convenience stores in small towns, and *visual kei* bands, dressed in androgynous style, perform live and on television. "Otome Road," a nickname for the Higashi Ikebukuro district in Tokyo, has billboards and signboards of *bishōnen* (note 1) to entice passersby into stores selling boys' love products (figures 1, 2, and 3).

Figure 1. *K Books billboards with boys' love advertising on a building in the Higashi Ikebukuro neighborhood, Tokyo, June 2009. (Photograph by the author.) [View larger image.]*

Figure 2. *Close-up of K Books outdoor display case, June 2009. (Photograph by the author.) [View larger image.]*

Figure 3. *Entrance to one of the boys' love stores in the Ikebukuro neighborhood, January 2011. (Mandarake, 3-15-2 Higashi Ikebukuro, Tokyo; photograph by the author.) [View larger image.]*

[1.3] Boys' love is a creation of its fans. One of the most popular expressions of fan activity is Comic Market, a fan-organized event in Tokyo that in recent years has attracted more than 550,000 people over three days twice a year to buy or sell dōjinshi, which are created by circles —that is, small groups of friends or individual artists. Almost since Comic Market's inception in 1975, female fans of boys' love have outnumbered by large margins male fans of manga and anime featuring *shōjo* (adolescent girls), though recent preliminary research shows a shift to greater attendance by male fans (note 2).

[1.4] Commercial publishers attend Comic Market to see how their characters are used in dōjinshi so that they may adapt their works to better satisfy fans. The canonical shōnen manga and anime used by many boys' love fans as the basis for their characters and settings rarely provide signs signifying overt erotic desire. Yet commercial publishers produce homoerotic-themed works using characters in best-selling children's manga, as homage to their boys' love readers, as in a Nippon Telegraph and Telephone Corporation phone card featuring *Gundam* characters from the anime *Endless Waltz* (figure 4).

Figure 4. *Endless Waltz. Duo Maxwell (left) and Heero Yuy. A Nippon Telegraph and Telephone Corporation telephone card offered to readers by the magazine Animage (Tokyo) in 1998 to mark its 20th anniversary. That year, the anime Endless Waltz, featuring Duo, Heero, and other characters from the 1995–96 TV series Gundam Wing was released in Japan. [View larger image.]*

[1.5] Boys' love's Western expression is most often called yaoi, which is an acronym of *yamanashi, ochinashi, iminashi,* meaning "no point, no climax, no meaning." The term was coined by a group of Japanese fans who titled a 1979 dōjinshi *Rappori yaoi tokushu gou* (*Rappori*: Special Yaoi Issue) (McHarry 2003). A Google search on June 26, 2011, returned about 37,000,000 Web pages with the word *yaoi,* a number that has grown steadily from approximately 135,000 pages on May 4, 2003 (note 3). Yaoi is seen on the Internet, in bookstores, and at anime/manga conventions, most notably Yaoi-Con, which has been held annually in or near San Francisco since 2001. Yaoi authors, artists, and consumers post comments, stories, and artwork to Web sites, social media sites such as Twitter, YouTube, LiveJournal, Facebook, and deviantART, to fan fiction archives such as FanFiction.net, and to discussion groups such as the Yaoi-Con Forums. One post may stimulate multiple comments. A work in one form, such as a story, may inspire works in another, such as illustration (figures 5 and 6). Although there are significant differences in content, form, and fan practices inside and outside Japan, I use the term "boys' love" to include both regions (note 4).

Figure 5. *Lorialet, Freeport fan art, August 26, 2005. [View larger image.]*

Figure 6. *Randi Smith, "The Call" undated Freeport fan art. [View larger image.]*

2. Identity

[2.1] Boys' love is strongly anti-identitarian around gender identity. In earlier work about boys' love, I argued that

> [2.2] It portrays free-floating conceptions of self, one that refuses identity (including as hetero, homo, or bi), even as this self grounds itself in a male body and affirms the desirability of male-male eroticism. (McHarry 2007, 184)
>
> [2.3] Both (or more) of the partners in a relationship lack the cultural accretions of masculinity normative in the West and in Japan. By removing these notions of masculinity—by "ungendering" masculinity—yaoi and boys' love fans eliminate barriers that impede their characters from bonding. (McHarry 2011, 126–28)
>
> [2.4] The partners act on space and time. They may do so to acquire subjectivity. (McHarry 2010, 182–83)

[2.5] Identity formation is central to subject formation. It comprises actions taken by the self as

[2.5] Identity formation is central to subject formation. It comprises actions taken by the self as well as by others on its behalf (Butler 2004, 128). Identity creates a space and a state for oneself to cohere around ideas. This coherence may be fictive, as in Lee Edelman's characterization of a gender identity of "homo" (1994, xix), but the barriers erected around it are real. As it includes, identity excludes.

[2.6] Language is also a condition for a subject's formation. In Elizabeth Grosz's characterization, it is "the threshold of all possible meaning and value" (1989, 39). But identity, in an attempt to maintain its coherence, defends itself against language. As Edelman described it, "To enter into language is always to be sundered into identity and to be imbued with a need to defend that identity as a bulwark against the negativity, the endless differentiation, of the language (in which) one has become" (1994, 73).

[2.7] Here I use a Western fan fic, Maldoror's fan novel *Freeport* (2004–6), to look at how boys' love subjects may enter into language, and hence subjectivity, without necessarily entering into a sexual identity (note 5). I adopt the word *divagation* to describe temporal-spatial divagations in boys' love. *Divagation* recalls Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's definition of *queer* as "recurring, eddying, *troublant*" (1993, xii). I will look at how queer divagations may help illuminate how relationships among characters are constructed. I consider two questions: How do bodily practices act on, and are acted on by, discourses in *Freeport,* in investing them with meaning? How does Maldoror use bodily and textual practices to inscribe power and resistance, and to create alternative temporalities in social space?

[2.8] *Freeport* is set in the distant future, after a war between Earth and its colonies in space. Although its characters are based on those in *Gundam Wing,* they are in an alternate universe in which how they act is the author's invention. Her story takes place on the shipbuilding colony Freeport, an immense hub-and-spoke structure in space, home to 130,000 citizens. In the eyes of the law-enforcement agent Wufei Chang, it is "the worst den of sin in the solar system" (chapter 1). Wufei works as an investigator for the Earth police agency Preventer. Under orders to capture a criminal who has fled to Freeport, Wufei has convinced his former teammate, Duo Maxwell, who is now a mechanic, smuggler, and Freeport resident, to sneak him into the colony.

[2.9] Wufei symbolizes the law, hunting predators who do political violence, no matter the cost. During his stay in Freeport, Wufei realizes to his horror that the ramshackle industrial city in which he is living with Duo is anarchist. It has no law, no police, and no government. Freeporters distrust outsiders, and they especially detest law-enforcement agents from Earth.

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3. Entering into language

[3.1] According to Michel Foucault, subjectivity is "an effect of power" (1971, 30) and is exercised on the body: "Power relations can materially penetrate the body in depth, without depending even on the mediation of the subject's own representations" (1980, 186), and power "wrap[s] the sexual body in its embrace" (1978, 44). Wufei is denied the ability to publicly "enter into language." He is on probationary status, the means by which Duo was able to smuggle him into Freeport, and by custom, this demands his silence except when talking privately with Duo. The collar around Wufei's neck marks his body as one not allowed to make public representations. Wufei is, Duo tells him, "not a citizen…You're an extension of me…That's why you're not allowed to talk to anyone, or have a life or do anything without me. I'm your

you're not allowed to talk to anyone, or have a life or do anything without him in your quarantine" (chapter 2).

[3.2] Discursive power may have wrapped part of Wufei's body, and the power of Freeport's unwritten rules binds him to Duo, but Maldoror shows him acting, using his body since he is deprived of language, to gradually attain subjective status. Power helps produce subjects, and it is expressed in part by discourses. Foucault characterized Western post-Enlightenment discourses around sex as multiple, increasing (1978, 30), demanding examination, and seeking causation (59), "an entire glittering sexual array" to produce truth at "a nearly fabulous price" (72). These discourses helped bring about an explosion in the number of perversions to be controlled as individuals' sexual practices were identified and cataloged as imagined types, one being the homosexual, which has been elaborated to such an extent as to become a "species" (43). In Foucault's view, confession became key to the transformation of sex into discourse and unlocking truth (61); it could exonerate, redeem, and purify (62).

[3.3] These observations underlie much of Western poststructuralist, feminist, and queer theory. Yet to a large extent in boys' love texts, it is as if these discourses do not exist. The textual practices in boys' love attempt to exclude them. Wufei does not confess to anything related to sex. He resists examination by dint of his muteness, and he is not (consciously) seeking exoneration or redemption. The truth Wufei seeks is the identification of a criminal, not that of his own erotic desires. He and Duo are not Foucauldian types to be categorized: Duo is nominally straight, married to a woman on another colony, and Wufei, though gay, does not express it as an identity. He contains expression of his erotic desires and suppresses the possibility of emotion leading to love, behavior that Duo mocks:

> [3.4] "Chang Wufei sleeps around. I'm sorry, this completely changes my conception of the universe. Maybe even the law of physics."
>
> [3.5] "I do not sleep around," Wufei corrected with dignity, not bothering to honor the rest of the comment with a reply. "I have friends—two, at this point in time—with whom I entertain sexual relations when I'm not on duty and we are available for each other…I choose them carefully," he continued sternly, "to make sure they are not likely to compromise themselves emotionally over a relationship, and of course I vet them through Preventer security."
>
> [3.6] Duo's eyes had been getting progressively rounder. Finally he blinked and then thumped his fist against his chest. "Oh, the romance," he stated sardonically.
>
> [3.7] Wufei gave him an ascetic look. "Romance is not something any of us are looking for." (chapter 25)

[3.8] Freeport citizens may or may not assume Wufei and Duo are erotically engaged, but no one seems interested in finding out how or why. Duo's friends and neighbors attribute no more meaning to his friendship with Wufei other than its potential to make Duo happy.

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4. Abjection and body

[4.1] In theory about the body, Grosz posits that the developing subject must be interlocked

with a signifying system (1990, 81); it becomes a subject only when it can signify its corporeality in the symbolic (85). It is in danger of losing materiality altogether to the abject: "The abject entices…the subject ever closer…It is an insistence on the subject's necessary relation to death… being the subject's recognition and refusal of its corporeality" (89). In the thinking of Julia Kristeva, the abject subject's rejection of others is a recognition of "the impossible [that] constitutes [his] very *being*" (Kristeva 1982, 4). It is a "violence of mourning" (15) brought about by what "disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules" (4). It is a state where laughter masks "a hatred that smiles, a passion that uses the body for barter instead of inflaming it" (4).

[4.2] The abject state is implicated in the formation of real-life subjects in Kristevan psychoanalysis. In fiction, abjection is a textual practice that employs bodily practices. In boys' love, the author is often emphasizing directly to the reader the bodily consequences should the subject not overcome the abject. In *Freeport,* Maldoror shows Wufei becoming aware of the enormity of what is at stake: his existence as subject, able to love and be loved. Wufei is in a state of literal mourning over the loss of his family, who were killed during the war, and at the government that Preventer serves having betrayed its goals by being complicit in the brutal exploitation of its citizens. Maldoror shows him fighting, from minor squabbles to physical confrontations, almost constantly with Duo, a violence of metaphorical mourning wherein Wufei bemoans both the "hellhole" that is Freeport and the proud anarchist his former wartime teammate has become. One of these arguments comes when he realizes how alien Freeport's system is to what he considers his core beliefs:

> [4.3] Wufei was appalled, and not just as a representative of law and order. This went against so much he'd been taught and believed in. "I can't believe this obscenity works."
>
> [4.4] "Define 'works.' Do we have a level of violence to rival most colonies? Sure. Is it dark, cold and stinky? Well, yeah. Do we get drifters and psychopaths and malcontents and rebels? Hell, we embrace 'em. Are we all one accident away from total disaster and a hullbreach? You betcha! Do we have kids with rickets, thieving meals, peddling drugs and living little better than rats like they still do in every slum today, even in the richest countries? No." (chapter 8)

[4.5] In this scene Wufei rebuts Duo's argument at great length, yet after several weeks of living with Duo on Freeport, he begins to grudgingly accept Duo's observations, keeping silent in the face of Duo's assertions such as, "A society with ghettos is at war. It's just not the kind of war that has tanks and Gundams" (chapter 15).

[4.6] Wufei had bartered with Duo to be allowed onto Freeport, offering him the chance of capturing a hit man named Carver. In this bargain, Wufei follows his habit of suppressing erotic passion. But that barrier begins gradually eroding after several weeks of sharing a small room on a common mission with a wartime comrade he trusts and by whose side he engages in life-or-death battles:

> [4.7] Wufei realized he was staring at Duo's [sleeping] profile again. It was bathed in

the glow of the laptop Wufei was supposed to be using to review news reports of recent disturbances throughout L3.

> [4.8] [Duo] had a faith in himself, in the future, in this chaotic, violent colony, that… seemed to radiate from him, feeding his restless energy…And he had a fierce loyalty towards Freeport and the people he met and dealt with.
>
> [4.9] That faith had been placed in Wufei as well. And here, tonight, in the glow of the laptop's screen—scrolling through riots where he should have been present, rather than rotting in Freeport—tonight, Wufei didn't feel worthy of it, and not only because his presence here was in part a sham. Wufei had no faith. He lived for Justice because it was his duty to the dead; he had faith in nothing and no one. (chapter 19)

[4.10] Wufei disturbs the system and the order, first on Earth by greatly overstepping his bounds as a police agent, then on Freeport where he kills someone in his few days there. He does not respect borders in either place. His smile masks a hatred toward anyone who might exploit the weak, including the government he had sworn to uphold. He is in many ways a precarious being. Yet as he gradually understands Duo's motivations for his anarchist beliefs, he begins to accept Duo's having them. Eventually Wufei begins to share some of them. As he sees more of Duo's personality, Wufei begins to think about his own and how it may hinder his relationship with Duo. Wufei begins to reciprocate the faith Duo has in him, and in so doing, he begins thinking of himself as able to have faith in others. He thus begins to overcome the abject.

5. Becoming subject

[5.1] The semiotic, in Elizabeth Grosz's view, is a sort of decentered libidinal organization (1989, xxi). In boys' love, it applies to the not-yet-subject—that is, someone who is not yet able to relate productively to others. This person must overcome the abject to do so. In contrast, the symbolic is the order of language and representation. Applying this conception to *Freeport,* we see Wufei striving to attain the symbolic.

[5.2] Wufei acts by distancing himself slowly and publicly from being an extension of Duo. He works to acquire agency. He helps his neighbors and others in the gritty industrial sector in which they live, and he acts to hunt, with Duo, the criminal Carver. Already physically far away from the Preventer agency, he further distances himself by neglecting to report to them, by no longer attempting to live by their regulations, by changing his appearance, loosing his hair from its ponytail, and by eventually severing ties. As he moves away from the language of Earth-based notions of policing and judicial procedure such as presumption of innocence and due process, he sheds his status as a law enforcer. Duo helps in this, acting to pull Wufei out of his shell, as if showing him that the symbolic order he had lived under is not merely inappropriate for Freeport, but also for Wufei himself as subject. Duo does this, in part, by continually making clear to Wufei that they can relate in ways other than as smuggler and cop. To this end, Duo maintains a constant barrage of erotically suggestive verbal interplay, teasing Wufei, trying to provoke him, incite him, into physical action. This, too, is a bodily practice.

[5.3] In Freeport, the symbolic is under pressure, and with it, major related elements, including

time-space. The boundaries in boys' love, among its characters as well as the frame that surrounds its discursive field, tend to be approached in something other than a straight line of temporal progression. Grosz writes that "the boundary between…self and other…must not be defined as a limit to be transgressed so much as a boundary to be traversed" (1995, 131). *Traverse* is a word that admits of an oblique approach, a playing at the limits, and it carries a temporal resonance, not necessarily a binary crossing but continued crossings back and forth, that are, in boys' love, queer divagations along boundaries and between subject and object. Duo and Wufei, and many boys' love characters, act on desire by inciting one another to acts, resisting these acts, and inciting each other again in a process of approaching, retreating, and approaching again from another angle, the barriers preventing them from bonding.

[5.4] This is a type of play. Jane Gallop quotes from Roland Barthes's *The Pleasure of the Text* that pleasure "is a drift, something…that cannot be taken care of by any collectivity…the pleasure of the text is scandalous: not because it is immoral, but because it is *atopic.*" To this Gallop adds, "'Atopic': strange word…not of a place, neither here nor there" (1988, 109). No fixity: a drift, a divagation. Mark Vicars and Kim Senior posit a definition for *yamanashi,* which above I defined as "no climax": "Like a day dream or the twilight between dream and sleep…where there is no need to 'climax' but it is possible to rest in perpetual abeyance…to pause, redirect, and relocate our imaginings to another moment" (Vicars and Senior 2010, 190).

[5.5] Grosz writes that boundaries are a product of passage: "It is movement that defines and constitutes boundaries" (1995, 131). If so, then the movement of bodies and bodily synecdoches —such as blood and semen—through space as characters come (in multiple senses) together, helps define boundaries in boys' love.

[5.6] Boys' love authors use both textual and bodily practices to traverse barriers. Maldoror brings Duo and Wufei to their first sexual experience together by associating sex with freedom and the absence of government-imposed rules. She emphasizes this with her setting, the sector in which they live having anarchist slogans painted in large letters on its interior walls. In addition to Duo's provoking Wufei verbally, he does so with his body. After a vicious fight with Carver and his gang, Duo and Wufei make their way back home, physically exhausted. As they walk, they argue over who had won their contest to kill more of Carver's men. It was a tie. Wufei says, "Then we're even," to which Duo responds, "First one back wins it then," and takes off running, with Wufei close behind:

> [5.7] Wufei didn't lose sight of Duo as they ran past the writings high up on the sector wall, but he could see the huge letters as if they were printed in the air in front of him.
>
> [5.8] "Only my freedom."
>
> [5.9] His heart pounded as he chased the darting black shape, braid dancing like a war banner.
>
> [5.10] "Do what you want if you think you've earned it."
>
> [5.11] He could feel every inch of his body, the sensual trickles of sweat down his back, the unbound hair whipping his face, every nerve singing a fierce pagan hymn to
>
> the pleasure of having survived and paid in blood those who had tried to kill them.

[5.12] "Live now. Tomorrow we die."

[5.13] Duo slammed into [his] backyard door—he didn't have time for a breath, Wufei piled right into him.

[5.14] "I won!" Duo huffed.

[5.15] "Didn't." Words and gasps blended, melded with Duo's hurried breathing. "You cheated."

[5.16] Duo's hands were hard as they grabbed his arms, swung him around and pinned him against the door.

[5.17] "I won," Duo purred, and kissed him fiercely. (chapter 22)

[5.18] To which Maldoror adds, immediately after that last sentence, the voice now hers as the author: "Live now. Tomorrow we die." She is making a textual intervention, a textual practice to underscore the collapse of Wufei's symbolic. She is putting it in the past. She is freeing Wufei and Duo from the past and the future, suspending them only in the present, suspending time as they run through space, overcoming physical and metaphorical barriers in their path, their highly active bodies contrasted with the seemingly immutable slogans, outside of time. These slogans, too, are interventions in the text. Grosz writes that time inheres in space and objects (2005, 181), that it causes objects to exist (180). In other words, time causes subjects to become subjects. Time is also a force. In *Freeport,* subjective space is enclosed. Its subjects are on a colony, surrounded by the vacuum of outer space. Maldoror uses her locus to vector time, to concentrate it as urgency, to emphasize to Wufei that "tomorrow we die" and that therefore Wufei must live in the present.

6. Queer border dwellers

[6.1] According to Grosz, in Kristevan thinking, abjection "marks the threshold of the child's acquisition of language," in which the spaces between subject and object "need to be oppositionally coded for the child's…subjectivity to be definitely tied to the body's form and limits" (1990, 86). If abjection marks such a threshold, then boys' love authors such as Maldoror are intervening early in the formation of subject.

[6.2] A threshold is a type of border. It marks the passage from one space to another. It's a liminal place in which one typically does not linger. As one crosses a threshold, he or she leaves the past behind to enter a new space. The threshold prevents the now-past from entering the to-be present. It walls off the past; it's a refusal of the past, including past language. This may be so not only for subjects in fiction but also for real people. Thomas Piontek has called the sissy boy a "queer border dweller," one who has not yet acquired, who may never acquire, the accretions of masculinity that allow him to pass for straight (2006, 61). Piontek is following here the reasoning of Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, who wrote that the "great advance in recent gay and lesbian thought" of theorizing "gender and sexuality as distinct…may leave the effeminate boy…in the position of the…haunting abject of gay thought itself" (1991, 20). Piontek reasons that the

sissy boy "points toward alternatives to the binary thinking that has structured gay thought" (2006, 61).

(2006, 61).

[6.3] Piontek's queer border dwellers are at the threshold of the separation of sex and gender. It is this threshold that is portrayed in *Freeport,* and in much of boys' love. It is a threshold between semiosis and symbolic, the nonmasculine and the masculine, between being boys in love and entering into a sexual identity. It plays out in boys' love as Grosz hypothesizes that it may in real life. Judging by the boys' love stories I have read, their authors appear to make this threshold nonliminal; in their stories, it's as if this threshold is continuous. In so doing, they are refusing to separate sex and gender, refusing the advance identified by Sedgwick. However, they do show their subjects overcoming the abject. They do so in order to allow their subjects to enter into language, and thus to become productive subjects, able to desire and be desired by others.

7. Dedication

[7.1] Dedicated to the memory of Camilla Decarnin, my best friend and toughest editor. I miss her companionship very much.

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8. Notes

1. *Bishōnen,* "beautiful boy(s)," is a uniquely Japanese erotic topos dating from at least the 10th century CE. A notable early example is found in the *Heike monogatari* (Tales of the Heike), which has an account of the death of the young noble Atsumori, a bishōnen. The word is still part of the vernacular.

2. Over the 30 years up to 2008, women have represented 71 percent of those selling dōjinshi at the Comic Market (men, 29 percent) and 57 percent of attendees (men, 43 percent) (Comic Market 2008, 21). However, preliminary data from a survey carried out in August 2010 at Comic Market 78 by the Contents Research Team of Tokyo University and Tokyo Institute of Technology show that 60 percent of respondents reported themselves as male, 33 percent as female, with 7 percent not answering the question (Nakamura 2011).

3. Google searches are subject to large fluctuations for searches with a high number of returns, but the trend of rapid growth between 2003 and 2011 is clear.

4. Among the differences is the prevalence of the seme/uke topos in boys' love created in Japan as opposed to trends in the United States. *Semeru* is a verb meaning "to attack, assault." *Uke* has noun and verb forms meaning "to accept, assure, receive." In Japanese boys' love, the seme is a male character who is older, taller, and more experienced than the uke. In US yaoi fan fiction and art, this topos is less prevalent, and in some works, it may be marked as exceptional or problematized. Another difference is the way in which fan and commercial activities overlap. In Japan, many manga artists were or are still dōjinshi artists. In the West, fans create scanlations—unlicensed translations of manga and anime into English or another language, which are posted on the Internet.

5. While my analysis in this article is limited to *Freeport,* the text's praxis—techniques, practices, art—in bringing its subjects into language and hence subjectivity may be seen in other boys' love fan fics. I look at one fan fic because a detailed analysis of one work allows it to be pulled out of the readerly impulse to create a totalizing metanarrative. Analyzing one work lets me tease out

the readerly impulse to create a totalizing metanarrative. Analyzing one work lets me tease out its arguments and affects, examine its processes, and situate it against other works. In the context of boys' love, this can help to prevent readers from imagining that a same-sex desire underlying boys' love may represent, in the words of Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, "a coherent definitional field rather than a space of overlapping, contradictory, and conflictual definitional forces" (quoted in Angles 2011, 10).

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Textual Echoes: Theory

Whodology: Encountering *Doctor Who* fan fiction through the portals of play studies and ludology

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[0.1] *Abstract*—The fan fiction that is inspired by the textual world of both the original and new series of *Doctor Who* seems to provide a paratextual world of its own that produces a fascinatingly multidirectional relationship with the narratives that inspire it. Specifically, an interrogation of the intersections of these two worlds yields compelling evidence that the textual world of the new incarnation of the television series is aware of the concerns that tend to be generated by the writers of fan fiction and has adapted its own world to accommodate, or at least acknowledge, many of those concerns. If the writing of *Doctor Who* fan fiction can be productively read as play and as a creative, ludic engagement, how might the heuristic of ludology be employed as a means to encounter these texts and the playful relationship they create with the textual world from which their content is inspired?

[0.2] *Keywords*—Magic circle; Narrative; Paratext; Play

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1. Introduction

[1.1] One of the most compelling allures of fan fiction for this researcher is the fact that it is a playful invitation: it encourages the fan/reader to become a writer to participate in the "magic circle" world of the text, and collapses the barrier that has long held the reader at arm's length from the text itself. In the form of fan fiction, criticism of a textual world may now transgress creatively into a new space to express itself. The meanings generated from such an invitation are explored here, especially as they manifest from within the textual world of both the original and new *Doctor Who* (1963–89, 2005–) television series; beyond this, a critical eye is brought to a consideration of the production of compelling new voices into that world, whose creative exercise can be seen to repair entrenched textual elements that viewers/writers have deemed faulty or lacking. The generation of fan fiction is here a creatively powerful act that extends beyond the screens of its considerable body of readership, but in fact is found to influence in a fairly direct manner the narrative landscape of the traditional text of the current *Doctor Who* television series itself.

[1.2] For the purpose of this project, I use the term "textual world" to refer to the canon, or the television series itself, as the scaffolding around which the fan fiction borrows and maintains at least rudimentary structures. The fan fiction, or the fanon, is accordingly designated with a concept borrowed from Gerard Genette as belonging to the paratextual world, weaving within, without, and alongside the textual world with a conditional narrative freedom. I use these terms to enhance the claim that fan fiction truly accompanies, or travels alongside, the television series in which it involves itself and does not reside in a state perceptibly outside of the series. It is not the intention of this project to privilege the textual world over the paratextual, only to situate an awareness of a structure of narrative context in which the rules established by the television series provide a framework within which fan fiction must work. *Doctor Who,* along with science fiction in general, is alive with impossibilities, including monsters and time travel, that create a textual universe in which all boundaries are vulnerable to acts of transgression. With this in mind, we need not look so deeply into the matter to see that material travels with freedom back and forth between the textual world and the paratextual world. Obviously, the textual world maps out the parameters of what a *Doctor Who* narrative can be, informing the criteria around which fan fiction can construct itself, but we can trace meaningful contact between these spheres in the opposite direction as well; Matt Smith, the actor portraying the current (11th) Doctor, revealed that he wrote his own fan fiction to prepare for the role because "I wanted to feel like Doctor Who, understand where he'd come from" (Johanson 2010). When the actor playing the titular role acknowledges the potential and importance of the paratextual world as a means to access connectivity with the textual world, the two-way nature of this relationship is illuminated beautifully.

[1.3] The new series episode "Love and Monsters" (2006) also appears to work within its story line with the notion of a fan community, as it concocts a story in which fans of the Doctor, regular people who have had encounters with him, create an organization devoted to investigating these sightings. While not necessarily producing fan fiction, as the Doctor is not actually a fictive character within this story and does in fact make an appearance toward the end of the episode, this community does seem fannish. (From outside the textual world, of course, the viewer is aware that both the Doctor and this fan community are united in their fictiveness.) This story also seems to acknowledge the ubiquitous fan concerns about the lack of conventional romantic plotlines in the textual world, in that it produces a romantic relationship between two of its members, Elton Pope and Ursula Blake; this union is somewhat comically rendered and doomed, as Ursula is absorbed by a monster (initially disguised as an intruder into the fan community), and the subplot here does not directly involve the Doctor himself. Nonetheless, it does seem to offer a space within the textual world for a fairly easily interpretable version of a fan community. In a less pronounced manner, the character of Larry Nightingale in "Blink" (2007) has fannishly collected on video a series of bizarre half-conversations the Doctor has, on screen, with an unseen conversant as well as photographs revealing the Doctor's presence during specific catastrophic moments throughout human history. These documents are not seen as souvenirs of a television program as much as they are evidence of something unusual

transpiring in the real world. Such textually mandated interactions with fan communities illustrate that the presence of fan fiction appears to have much to offer the textual world, in that the creative forum it provides for the expression of fan concerns is hardly a dead end as far as the textual world is concerned. This evidence suggests that the presence and creations of the *Doctor Who* fan community echo into the textual world itself.

[1.4] The principles of play and ludology, the study of games, may be applied here to provide a compelling heuristic through which to encounter *Doctor Who* fan fiction in a multidirectional fashion, through both the act of writing and the content of the fan fiction itself. As a game in which the player/author actively takes on an existing narrative in order to contribute to it, fan fiction functions definitionally as a game, and consequently, because this game is entirely involved in the construction of narratives, it appears to defy or at least complicate ludologist Markku Eskelinen's claim in "Towards Computer Game Studies" (2001), and game studies and cybertextualist scholar Espen Aarseth's claim in "Quest Games as Post-narrative Discourse" (2004), that a game cannot necessarily be understood to exist as a narrative. "If I throw a ball at you," Eskelinen claims, "I don't expect you to drop it and wait until it starts telling stories" (2001, 175). This example underscores the profound differences between a game that is entirely physical in its expression and one that, like fan fiction writing, involves a much higher degree of cerebral participation and a foundation based, in ways that other games are not, in the productive deployment of the player/writer's creativity. The act of play in fan fiction writing involves the generation of a new narrative, organized around the fan writer's creative interaction with the textual world around which the writing is based. The game, in a way, is the narrative. To extend Eskelinen's non-storytelling-ball analogy to fan fiction, it is true that the ball is never going to tell stories, but the player is. Perhaps we may see the ball as the textual world; in receiving it, the writer/player takes it on, and the narrative she produces from that prompt marks her engagement with the game. It is perhaps more productive to see the relationship between game and narrative as more of a fusion and less of a categorical compartmentalization; particularly helpful is Marie-Laure Ryan's suggestion that a useful approach could be made "by connecting the strategic dimension of gameplay to the imaginative experience of a fictional world" (2006, 203).

[1.5] Furthermore, the ludologist claim that the rules of a game are a significantly more important defining point than that game's narrative concerns (Ryan 2006, 184) is also complicated by fan fiction, in that the rules, in many cases, are so inextricably intertwined with concerns about narratives, defining their context, possibilities, and boundaries, that they would have no reason to exist if the narratives they delineated were not absolutely central to the game of fan fiction writing. However, to see that the game and narrative cooperate in this manner, wrapped together by their rules, is not merely fuel for an apparent complication of the ludological claim that the two must be critically considered as mutually exclusive: as a classifactorily transgressive hybrid, it is actually productive. Accordingly, an exploration of the *Doctor Who* fan fiction universe in which it is regarded as the cumulative acceptance of the invitation to play the game of contributing paratext to

the textual world must begin by recognizing the importance of the space that is created when the aspiring, inspired fan fiction writer steps into the magic circle of the game.

2. The magic circle of *Doctor Who*

[2.1] *Doctor Who* fan fiction, like all fan fiction, is subject to a series of specific rules set forth within the narrative parameters of its textual world; in other words, there are rules that must be adhered to for the fan fiction to participate productively in the paratextual world. In this way, the production of fan fiction evokes the creation of the magic circle, Johan Huizinga's (1992) oft-cited notion of the semisacred space in which the game takes place. The magic circle requires that its participants believe in the integrity of the space in which the game is being played; if this belief falters, the circle breaks and the game falls apart. So long as the fan fiction writer remains in the magic circle, contributing text to it, that writer is charged to adhere to the rules that hold the circle together. It is productive, within this context, to be able to conceptualize fan fiction authors as players in this space. With this in mind, the question should be asked: in what ways can the writing of *Doctor Who* fan fiction be read as an act of stepping into the magic circle?

[2.2] It may be argued that science fiction in general is essentially, among other things, about the navigation of transgressions. The *Doctor Who* textual world is rife with such violations of conventional expectation. Here we encounter the Doctor himself, a Time Lord who is capable of violating the line between life and death by regenerating his body and persona when he needs to, as well as violating the linear nature of time by traveling in his TARDIS. The TARDIS itself violates our understanding of how space works, in that it is tremendously larger on the inside than it is on the outside. (It is virtually impossible for a new character, either in the textual world or the paratextual world of fan fiction, not to react to this spatial anomaly the first time she or he encounters it.) Beyond these features, many of the monsters violate our understanding of what we know can and cannot exist, and even within this, they violate established, discrete boundaries of classification. The Cybermen, as a classic example whose presence echoes through both iterations of the television series and across the fan fiction universe, are essentially humans who have either chosen or been forced to become mechanical creatures: they are people and robots at the same time. For this array of transgressive notions to survive the viewing and reading experience, they must be accepted within the textual and paratextual worlds; disbelief must be suspended. The threadbare budget for special effects and costumes in the original series called for a similar suspension of skepticism on the part of the viewer, but the survivability in fan fiction of, for example, the Yeti and some of the other less-convincing monsters seems to indicate that this viewer cooperation was maintained, fueling the translation of these monsters into the paratextual world. Acknowledgment of the legitimacy of these transgressions must be given by the viewer, the visual participants in the magic circle of the textual world, for it to function. If, at any point, we cry out, "That rickety old police box can't travel in time!" we have sullied the

magic circle with skepticism by denying its properties, and we subsequently break the world of the presented narrative.

[2.3] However, the magic circle, even if it is challenging in its irrationality, is also fun, and it draws in potential players with this allure. According to Huizinga, although this attribute is easy to recognize, it is difficult to define: "The fun of playing resists all analysis, all logical interpretation. As a concept, it cannot be reduced to any other mental category" (1992, 3). However, the appeal of the *Doctor Who* textual world seems to meet this criterion of bringing in players who are attracted to its paradoxical nature, and the fun attached to connecting with it is described well in the ebullient language of the new series creator and self-proclaimed fan of the original series, Russell T. Davies. He discusses his love of the fourth Doctor, Tom Baker, arguably the most popular (or at least the most well-recognized) Doctor in the first incarnation of the television series: "I was a Tom Baker man, really. I was just the right age. I was 11, going into comprehensive school, and that's when I really, really fell in love with the show. That was the most extraordinary combination of an actor and a part coming together, in just absolute television magic. I loved that very much" (Parker 2009). Though it is important to stop short of making any universal statements regarding a community as diverse as that of *Doctor Who* fan writers, it seems fair to assume that a similar sense of magical attraction fueled for others the sense of fun needed to propel them into the magic circle of fan authorship. Reading through the introductory material for many fan fiction stories reveals extensive use of the word *fun,* frequently deployed in ways that seem to refer to the content of the story itself and the playful action undertaken by the writer to compose the story; *fun* seems to operate multivalently in many of these introductions. For example, at the beginning of the fan text "Life as It Happens" (2011), author Lilahkat reminds us of the playfulness the textual vocabulary of the *Doctor Who* textual universe allows: "Time flies when you're having fun." Significantly, too, "Amused" (2007), by Rosa Acicularis, invites readers to the piece with the claim that "sometimes you have to make your own fun," a statement applicable both to the entertaining nature of the story's content (this writer's story note amusingly cautions us that the piece "contains tomfoolery, silliness, and historical inaccuracies") as well, presumably, as the fun of the impulse that this writer feels to create and share work with a reading audience.

[2.4] The rules of the magic circle leak out of the textual world and take root in the paratextual world. The television series literally models the rules; through the narratives it presents, it clearly shows us what is acceptable and what is available for use within the field of play, and either through omission or direct refutation lets us know what is unacceptable. We can see in the textual world that the Doctor is troubled by killing and thus kills only as a last resort; we also do not see him killing other entities within the narratives supplied by the textual world. As a result, we know that a fan story in which the Doctor goes on a killing spree would be considered unacceptable and a violation of the rules—unless, of course, these actions could somehow be rationalized and reconciled to the rules. A fan writer may still produce work that contains violations of these rules; there

is no gatekeeper to prevent such work from being brought into existence. However, the violations inherent in such work would preclude its inclusion in at least one significant fan fiction repository. The *Doctor Who* fan fiction archive A Teaspoon and an Open Mind (http://www.whofic.com/), in its submission guidelines, sets out some of the parameters that must be respected to enter the magic circle of the paratext and contribute to its fan fiction repository:

> [2.5] We do not allow transcripts or stories which heavily feature song lyrics ("song-fics"). Nor do we allow stories that are about the actors rather than the characters (also known as RPF). We also ask that you don't make stories, or chapters of stories, out of inquiries, requests, rants, or other such discussion-type material. If you don't have a title for your story, or you really want someone to write a story about Rose's pet cat falling in love with K9, or you want to gripe about the plotline for "Keys of Marinus," there are more appropriate places online to do that. (http://www.whofic.com/guidelines.php)

[2.6] To be accepted and included within this fic archive's paratextual world, fan fiction must be narrative and not musical, must not violate the delineation that separates a character from its actress/actor, and cannot engage in a critique of the textual world that does not resolve itself into a relevant creative narrative. It is significant here that fan fiction is not to be a blatant sounding board: complaining about the plots offered up through the textual world, or the taking on of themes too peripheral to be taken on by fan fiction writers, is not acceptable. In fact, the presence of submission guidelines at all clues us into the notion that within the game of fan fiction writing, there are rules that must be respected if a writer intends to have her or his work included in this collection. Fan contributions are discarded, cast off from the possibility of inclusion within the paratextual world, if they violate these rules; they represent a threat to the integrity of the magic circle that negotiates fan fiction's relationship to its textual world.

[2.7] However, transgressing some of the minor rules that define the textual world presents itself frequently, and fan author The Chibi's Are Stalking Me sets this atmosphere for friendly narrative violation succinctly at the opening of "What If" (2007): "There's a lot of 'what if's in Dr. Who…Random Pairings, random settings, in short nothing is sacred. It's all mine for the warping. Enjoy." There are rules, but there is also a lot of room for creative flexibility within the allowances of the paratextual world. The rhetoric that the magic circle is a place of stagnant, unbending sacredness is certainly not universally embraced by all fan writers. A textual world immersed in time travel by its very definition seems to invite its fan writers to explore the spaces before the beginning and beyond the end of the parameters set for the textual world. These violations are fairly common. A good example is BlackPaperMoon15's "I Vow" (2011), which offers a glimpse of the ninth Doctor just before he meets Rose. Of course, his encounter with Rose literally opens the textual world of the new series (in 2005's "Rose"), but it also opens an opportunity for a fan writer to work outside of the temporal boundaries it inaugurates, which can be done,

and is done by BlackPaperMoon15, all while staying within the rules of the magic circle. Similarly, the Teaspoon and an Open Mind repository lists an entire category of "missing scene" fan fiction pieces, which paratextually address moments before, after, or off-screen; thought but not spoken; or in any other way not included within the textual world. Typically these violations of the textual world involve the sexualization of characters who do not exhibit such desires or behaviors as defined components of their textual world personalities; these transgressions do not seem to threaten the status of fan fiction as material that is accepted as belonging within the magic circle. Though this lack of overt sexuality, which characterizes both iterations of the television series, is routinely and fascinatingly transgressed by pieces that fall under the categories of romance, slash, and femslash, other, more serious violations of the textual world's parameters are almost never depicted. For example, as I mention above, the Doctor is never portrayed as a serial killer, or as wildly incompetent in the face of danger, or as disinterested in what happens to the people and creatures around him—unless some explanation of the appearance of this transgressive behavior is forthcoming within the story itself and somehow serves a greater purpose of good.

[2.8] Furthermore, fan fiction is allowed to repair moments in the textual world that have failed to satisfy the requirements of its fan writers. As long as one stays within the rules that compose the magic circle, one can, for example, inaugurate a story, as does MissDoctorDonna at the beginning of "The Runaway Bride—Alternate Ending" (2010), with the claim, "I didn't think Donna would have let the Doctor go off all upset, so I've rewritten things the way I thought they should have gone." This notion that the fan fiction writers rewrite details to recuperate them with their conceptions of how they should have gone motivates much of the paratextual world, and it is productive to explore some of the possible sources of these dissatisfactions. The intertwining relationship that emerges between the paratextual and textual worlds is charged by some of the very impulses that inspire the contributions of MissDoctorDonna and others in the fan community.

3. Ludic potentials in *Doctor Who* fan fiction: Elements of the game

[3.1] When both the acts of the construction of *Doctor Who* fan fiction and the textual result of these constructive activities are transposed onto the critical taxonomy set forth by game and play theorist Roger Caillois, interesting connections take shape, and a productive exploration of this relationship reveals further support toward the intertwining relationship between these textual and paratextual worlds. Specifically, when Roger Caillois's requirements for games—*agon, alea, mimicry,* and *illinx* (2001)—are applied across the spectrum of *Doctor Who* fan fiction, the results are anything but straightforward. *Agon,* the element of competition between players, is Caillois's first characteristic of games, and it seems present in *Doctor Who* fan fiction, at least where the alignment of characters and traditional plot structures is concerned. Specifically, the

Doctor must be placed in a good-versus-evil competition with an antagonistic agent. There is a large group from which to choose; fan writers who do not wish to invent their own adversaries can borrow from a corpus that includes the Master, Daleks, Cybermen, Sontarans, the Slitheen, and the Sea Devils, just to name a few of the more popular adversaries. There is clearly a win condition for this conflict, presented as a solution to the conflict stirred by the *agon,* and relevant to fan fiction: the machinations of evil must be overcome, usually by the evil force being outsmarted and destroyed, or at least defeated. Outside of the narrative trajectories of the fan fiction itself, competition may be evidenced in the form of popularity contests that pit the quality of one fan fiction story against others.

[3.2] The notion of *alea,* the element of chance, does not really factor into the process of *Doctor Who* fan fiction because the process is, like any form of writing, a deliberate act. While it may present deus ex machina sorts of structures, in which the element of chance within the story facilitates change or progress that otherwise would have been impossible, one feels uneasy making a claim that this is truly chance, rather than the textual results of conscious choices made by the writer. One can conceive, however, of how interactive forms of fan fiction, in which the reader would be able to select from a series of choices which path the story takes, might solidify the presence of *alea* here. This has already begun to be addressed in the *Doctor Who* fan community: Alden Bates's *Confrontation on Zerron* (2010) engages this *aleaic* possibility directly in its presentation of a "make your own adventure" interactive fan story in which the reader is prompted, at the end of each narrative section, to select an option that, depending on the reader's choice, takes the story along differing trajectories.

[3.3] Callois's notion of *mimicry,* however, is much easier to find here, as the construction of all fan fiction might be read as an act of mimicry. For example, *Doctor Who* fan fiction that violates the rules set forth within the textual world that create its magic circle would be excluded from the canon; too many deviations might remove it altogether from the "fan" position. A fan fiction piece that drifts too far from the parameters of the textual world runs the risk of losing its fan status altogether and becoming a satellite text, connected only in a distant and perhaps shallow way to the textual world that it has failed to mimic successfully enough to be brought into orbit around.

[3.4] *Illinx* is the most squirrelly of the components of play, but it still might be seen to manifest itself within the realm of *Doctor Who* fan fiction. It also allows a productive consideration of how ludology can be seen to offer a multidirectional relationship with fan fiction, as it becomes a visible element both in the act of constructing fan fiction and in the results of those acts of construction, the content of the fan fiction itself. *Illinx* involves games "based on the pursuit of vertigo and which consist of an attempt to momentarily destroy the stability of perception and inflict a kind of voluptuous panic upon an otherwise lucid mind. In all cases, it is a question of surrendering to a kind of spasm, seizure or shock which destroys reality with sovereign brusqueness" (Caillois 2005, 138). While

perhaps not directly applicable to the act of writing fan fiction, this type of sensory-wrecking stupefaction does seem to exist within the narrative content of both the textual world and its fan fiction. In particular, the Doctor's ability, as a Time Lord, to regenerate, dodging death by undergoing an increasingly spectacular and violent change of personality and appearance (thus allowing actors to depart the show and be replaced by new actors without losing the narrative continuity established for the textual world) certainly seems aligned to the process of *illinx.* Fan writers are attuned to this sense of wild disorientation that the textual world exudes, and they connect it to their own work. For example, fan writer Margaret Price, in her introduction to the fourth Doctor story "The Alliance of Death" (2005), offers a vivid description of postregeneration disorientation that sounds very much like *illinx:*

> [3.5] Regeneration is an integral part of a Time Lord's life cycle. As one body becomes old and worn out, another takes its place. All perfectly natural.
>
> [3.6] This was what the Doctor had been trying to convince himself of for the last few days, thinking it would be only a matter of time before his new persona finally established itself. After all, this was his third regeneration. He should have the hang of it by now…
>
> [3.7] Unfortunately, this was precisely the problem. The Doctor was having quite a bit of trouble getting the hang of his most recent regeneration, which had been brought about to save his life. He was currently at an unstable stage and kept getting the strangest yearnings to do equally strange things; something he hoped was only temporary and not a permanent facet of his new, slowly forming personality.

[3.8] *Illinx* also involves games of metamorphosis and transgression, and both of these elements are active contributors to the *Doctor Who* textual and paratextual worlds: metamorphosis is clearly evident in the Doctor's regenerations, as well as being an ability of innumerable monsters within the textual world and its fan fiction iterations; and transgressions are evident everywhere. Perhaps these are most immediately visible in the power of the TARDIS itself, as the act of time traveling seems to fit within the parameters of this definition. Furthermore, the extradimensional nature of the TARDIS, which transgresses our understanding of space in that it is larger on the inside than the outside, may play into this notion as well. While *illinx* is typically unraveled by game theorists to describe amusement park rides and similar voluntary acts of whirling, disorienting, nonlethal violence to the body, this description seems to mirror the emotional and physical condition one exhibits when exposed to the TARDIS for the first time. Fan writers are aware of this notion and work with it. For example, writer Imorgen's *The Emissary* (2010) offers a finely understated acknowledgment of *illinx,* voiced through first-time TARDIS visitor Melissa: "'Your ship defies common sense,' she blurted, feeling a little dazed." This defiance of common sense is a unifying factor that holds the paratextual and textual worlds together.

4. An array of avatars: Playing with the *Doctor Who* cast

[4.1] For many fan writers, an appealing elements of the *Doctor Who* textual world may be this very relative interchangeability and expandability of the cast: the Doctor regenerates; companions come aboard, depart, and are replaced. All of this allows for a diverse cast from which a writer may choose. If we are to cast fan fiction ludologically as a game, we can see this attribute of the textual world as providing a large number of available avatars into which the fan fiction can immerse itself. There is also the option of grafting an entirely new character into the fan fiction, which is done frequently in pieces that introduce new companions into their stories for which there is no traceable precedent in the textual world. These characters are sometimes borrowed from other science fiction series (there is a strong tradition of crossover work, which intertwines *Doctor Who* with other science fiction or dramatic television series or movies), but they seem more frequently to be generated as fresh entities by the writers themselves. Interestingly, while the textual world would technically allow for fan fiction writers to craft a new incarnation for the Doctor, this seems to be done only rarely, as the element of presenting a central character who is recognizable from the textual world is apparently important to most writers. Certain characters within this field appear to be more popular than others: the tenth Doctor (David Tennant) is utilized far more frequently than any other incarnation, with only the ninth Doctor (his immediate predecessor, Christopher Eccleston) also showing a significant level of creative fan interest.

[4.2] A Teaspoon and an Open Mind is an outstanding fan fiction archive. An August 10, 2011, visit to its clearly organized, open-entry catalog of material revealed that the tenth Doctor is by far the most popular, with 15,115 stories dedicated to his character; the ninth Doctor follows with 4,188 stories, then the fifth (Peter Davison) with 1,047; after this comes the fourth (Tom Baker) with 954, and the eighth (Sylvester McCoy) with 860. (The current Doctor, played by Matt Smith, is the subject of 1,264 entries, which, though he has only been a part of the textual world since 2009, still ranks his popularity higher than any of the Doctors from the original series. Such an attraction to the show's newest Doctor seems to indicate that fan writers are more drawn to the characters in the new iteration of the television series.) After this is a precipitous drop-off in the number of stories devoted to the remaining Doctors, which would seem to indicate that the earliest three incarnations (William Hartnell, Patrick Troughton, and Jon Pertwee, who appeared on the air between 1963 and 1974) are only infrequently used as the basis for fan fiction narratives. Why would the uneven levels of fan writers' interest in this vast textual world reflect a seeming lack of consideration for the show's roots? Why would only the most recent avatars, so to speak, receive the majority of the fan writers' creative attention? The BBC erased the master tapes of 108 episodes from the first and second Doctors' years (1963 to 1969); the lack of a viewable textual world around which to create fan texts might play into fan writers' lack of investment in these early periods; the slow pacing of the episodes that do survive, and simply the age of the material, might also fail to attract fan attention.

Perhaps, though, the answer lies at least in part with the basic sex appeal, or lack thereof,

Perhaps, though, the answer lies at least in part with the basic sex appeal, or lack thereof, of the titular character, especially within the distant, avuncular characters represented within these first three incarnations. Hartnell was depicted as a grandfather type (indeed, the first Doctor was literally so); Troughton played the role as a cosmic hobo; and Pertwee assumed the guise of an older Victorian dandy. Although likable, these characters never exuded a sexual presence, and the show itself did not explore themes of sexual tension within the Doctor and any of his companions—or anyone else, for that matter. The fan fiction that unravels from the corpus of the first three Doctors largely (but not exclusively) replicates the emphases that pervaded the televised textual world. In other words, the focus seems to be more on plot, monsters, and conflict than anything angling toward emotional relationships or romantic entanglements. The textual world did not provide for these as viable elements, and fan fiction writers, it seems, for the most part respected the emotion-thin parameters of this particular universe. The Doctors with the least fan fiction attention both occupied the role in the 1980s, much later than this formative era for the textual world. This seeming discrepancy may perhaps be explained if these Doctors can be read as reflections of, or throwbacks to, the earlier years of the television series: the sixth Doctor (Colin Baker, with 395 stories) possessed an acidic and domineering personality that seemed to resemble that of the first Doctor, and the seventh Doctor (Sylvester McCoy, with 526 stories) displayed a propensity for physical comedy and pratfalls, similar to those performed by the second Doctor. In other words, these traits may have served to render these incarnations of the Doctor less appealing for fan writers for some of the same reasons that the predecessors they evoked have been avoided.

[4.3] One of the primary themes that emerges in current *Doctor Who* fan fiction, and a possible motivating factor governing the writers' rationale for selecting specific avatars from within the textual world, is this very notion of frustrated romance. In fan fiction, this typically but not exclusively involves the Doctor (usually in his tenth incarnation) fighting his desire for Rose Tyler, Martha Jones, Donna Noble, or even Jack Harkness—though occasionally the romantic interest comes from a character generated by the writer, or even a character from deeper back in the textual world's past. Many of these works take the tension and innuendo that exists in the actual series and push them further, satisfying the curiosity of a viewership who might wonder what might have happened if only…The fact that many companions depart the textual world when they fall in love with a secondary, nonrecurring character is significant. In many cases, nonrecurring characters are written into the textual world almost solely to serve the narrative purpose of generating a romantic subplot; the potential of romance for companions in the original series has to be written for them into the textual world from the outside. Jo Grant (Katy Manning), Sarah Jane Smith (Elisabeth Sladen), Leela (Louise Jameson), Romana (Lalla Ward), Nyssa (Sarah Sutton), and Tegan Jovanka (Janet Fielding) all departed the series in this manner.

[4.4] Romana, for example, departs the series at the conclusion of "Warrior's Gate" (1981); at the end of the episode, she confronts the fourth Doctor (Tom Baker) with her decision at the door of the TARDIS, and he reacts, hurriedly, by handing her the robotic

decision at the door of the TARDIS, and he reacts, hurriedly, by handing her the robotic dog K-9, an exchange that stands in lieu of any physical contact between the two. The Doctor says, "I'll miss you," then shouts, as she walks away into the ether of the alternate universe in which she has chosen to stay, "You were the noblest Romana of them all!" The somewhat sterile nature of Romana's departure is problematized by the notion that she, like the Doctor, is a Time Lord, and a viewer might think that such a connection would warrant a bit more emotion. Perhaps the highly charged, tear-jerking departure of Rose Tyler (Billie Piper) in "Army of Ghosts/Doomsday" (2006) in the second series, who also ended up trapped within an alternate universe, was meant as an emotional tourniquet for the textual world, which had left important situations bleeding during its first incarnation. Thus, this work of possible narrative reparation may be read as a response, at least indirectly, to fan concerns about the lack of emotional depth in the original series; it marks one moment in which the fans, who crafted similar responses within the fan fiction community, may have influenced developments within the textual world. The significant number of fan fiction texts that begin with the "what if?" structure provide a reminder that fan writers are frequently inspired to re-present material in the textual world that has dissatisfied them in some way. Certainly, precedent does exist for this intertwining, back-and-forth relationship between the textual and paratextual worlds of *Doctor Who.*

[4.5] Perhaps as a result of the early textual world's apparent dearth of emotional content, the Doctor's companions are frequently used by fan writers as a means to offer more productive territory for explorations of conventional romantic and sexual relationships. These characters thus become more attractive as avatars because more flexibility is allowed by the ground rules of the textual world for their romantic and sexual interaction. Vvj5's "Five Times Sarah Lied to the Doctor about Harry" (2010), for example, illustrates how companions can be centralized and provided a romantic tension that was entirely lacking in their presentation within the original textual world. Perhaps for fan writers such as Vvj5 the best way to embrace the classic *Doctor Who* with a romantic plotline is to bypass the nonsexualized main character altogether and focus on less defined characters whose sexuality has not been categorically wiped clean from the textual world in advance. The very notion intimated in this title, that romantic interest would have to be clandestinely kept from the Doctor, is a powerful hint that such themes were subversive within this version of the textual universe.

5. The new *Who:* Responding to the fan community?

[5.1] Perhaps this attachment to the companions as flexible, sexualizable avatars reveals the level to which fans were not enamored of these romance-thin plot tendencies within the textual world. Accordingly, the very nature of the show, in its earliest years, did not provide the groundwork for the type of material that fan fiction writers enjoy pursuing in new series-related work. Matt Hills's invaluable "The Dispersible Television Text: Theorising Moments of the New *Doctor Who*" cites the producer of the new series, Russell

T. Davies, who agrees that emotional moments in the original series were few and far

T. Davies, who agrees that emotional moments in the original series were few and far between but were memorable among the show's fan base.

> [5.2] I can't think of any other programme where you'd consciously have to say, "Let's add some emotion in there," because most drama is already about emotions. *Doctor Who* really wasn't before…A lot of classic *Doctor Who* gets defined by little moments of emotion between the Doctor and Sarah Jane Smith, or by an event like Jo Grant's departure [which] are so memorable [to fans] simply because they are the only tiny emotional moments in the entire output. (Hills 2009, 28)

[5.3] Though this view of the emotional limitations of the classic series has created some controversy among its more dedicated devotees, I would like to add that one of my strongest memories of the era being described above was indeed the departure of Jo Grant from the textual world of the third Doctor; the moment in which she announced her intention to leave the Doctor, and placed her hand in the hand of the young man with whom she'd fallen in love, has stayed solidly within my memory much more strongly than the plotline of the episode ("The Green Death," 1972), which was in its own right memorable for its giant, green, irradiated maggots and huge murderous dragonfly. This touching but understated moment appears to be more recognizable as fan fiction than as an actual scene from the television show, and it is the very desires of many fans for this type of moment that seemed to have infused the writing of the new series, which perhaps repairs the emotional hollowness of the relationship between the third Doctor and Jo Grant with the much more emotionally, and sexually, charged relationship between Rose Tyler and the ninth and tenth Doctors.

[5.4] The new series may perhaps be read as a response to fan concerns that the original series failed to substantiate latent emotional themes that viewers were interested in seeing, and Hills suggests that the show itself is something of a fan response, maybe even the most direct actualization of the impulses that fan fiction put together:

> [5.5] By contrast [with the original series], new *Who* regularly incorporates "character" or emotional moments into its adventure-oriented, up-tempo flexi-narratives. In one sense, this appears to involve "giving fans what they want," or reflecting a fan's way of experiencing the series (as made up of special moments) in the writing and production process. (2009, 29–30)

[5.6] Fan fiction becomes a creative representative of the voice of what fans want, and those responsible for the new series (many of them self-proclaimed fans themselves) are reading it, and responding productively by bringing this fan awareness into the textual world. This can be read from the new series in its narrative tendencies toward what Matt Hills calls "foregrounding special moments":

> [5.7] New *Who* is also to an extent foregrounding its intertextual citations of

> [5.7] "New *Who* is also to an extent foregrounding its intertextual citations of past triumphs, monsters and fan memories, such as the Autons from *Spearhead from Space* (1970) appearing once more in "Rose" (2005). And some of its self-reflexive moments even go so far as to blur authorial, character and fan voices, such as Stephen Moffat's scripted "Time Crash" (shown in 2007 as part of the British Broadcasting Corporation's [BBC's] *Children in Need* telethon) featuring David Tennant's Doctor telling the former, fifth Doctor (Peter Davison) "you were *my* Doctor—all my love to long ago." (2009, 30)

[5.8] The voice of fan fiction, or at least strong evidence emanating from the paratextual world, may be found here, undisguised, within the textual world. Transplanting the fan voice, it seems, to the tenth Doctor, offers a vehicle for the fandom of the teleplay's writer, and the acknowledgment in this declaration of love that the fifth was "*my* Doctor" offers what might be an explanation as to which Doctors fan fiction writers choose to devote their stories. Perhaps this notion of having a specific Doctor belong to a fan writer as "mine" offers one possibility to explain upon which Doctor individual fan fiction writers tend to focus most of their creative energy. The tenth Doctor, David Tennant, admits to being a fan of the original series and offers a compelling explanation for the selection of "his" Doctor: "Tom Baker [the fourth] and Peter Davison [the fifth] were the two that I grew up with. I think there is something about it, like a chick hatching from an egg. Who you see first is who you imprint on. But, I've liked them all" (Parker 2009). One wonders if fan fiction writers would see their attachments to particular incarnations of the Doctor, as avatars to be, in the same manner. However, complicating this notion is the fact that many of the writers represented within the Teaspoon collection seem to work across the spectrum of the textual world, not only composing stories about more than one Doctor, but frequently addressing multiple incarnations of the Doctor within a single story. This tendency to align a single avatar with other versions of himself has been inaugurated by the textual world as being within the boundaries of the rules of the magic circle as early as "The Three Doctors," which aired in 1973.

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6. Opportunities *Doctor Who* fan fiction brings to the table

[6.1] Though it is obvious to say this, it is nonetheless an important point to make: fan fiction writers are allowed a level of direct, extratextual communication with their readers, delivered frequently through the introductory paratext for their stories or within the comment sections following their work; that is a level of playing with the reader unreplicable by the writers responsible for generating stories for the textual world itself. One must admire the trailblazing rhetoric of many of these fan fiction writers, who bring to the paratextual world bold voices that a ratings-conscious television series would not be likely to emulate. SlasheTTe, for example, a writer who has a pair of *Doctor Who* stories collected on the FanFiction.net archive, cautions readers of her "The Master's Daughter" (2010), "If you are in any way against bisexuality do not read. Or get over it." This

wonderfully confrontational engagement with the reader is of course a feature that the

wonderfully confrontational engagement with the reader is of course a feature that the actual textual world simply cannot provide; the textual world can supply itself with potentially controversial characters, but it cannot directly warn the viewer that the diversity presented by these characters must be accepted. For example, the series' introduction of its first uncloseted recurring bisexual character, Jack Harkness, is not accompanied by any challenges to the reader that she or he can quit watching if his sexuality offends. Though this observation is obvious, it highlights the power of the fan fiction writer, who can create paratext to demand attention toward a character's attribute that may be read by some viewing audiences as controversial. In this sense, the use of fan fiction as a means for a writer to impose her own narrative, or at least a narrative she desires to contribute, onto a reader in ways that use the scaffolding of the textual world can be seen as an act of play, and an actively ludic opportunity for engagement that is not available to a fan who simply watches the textual world.

[6.2] The long run of the original television series, from 1963 to 1989, allows a considerable amount of diversity from which fan fiction may work, but the scope of the creative opportunity provided by this textual world is vastly enhanced by the fact that many episodes from the first and (especially) second Doctors' eras (1963–1969) are quite literally missing. The actual tapes of these episodes were erased by the BBC in the 1970s, and they now exist only fragmentarily: in written telescripts describing the action, dialogue, and stage directions; in still photographs taken during the filming process; and, as a result of the diligent work of the show's early fan community, in audio recordings captured by fans who held microphones up to their television screens when the episodes originally aired. The gaps these missing episodes present in the *Doctor Who* narrative create a fan void that ultimately compromises fans' attempts to familiarize themselves with the entirety of the textual world. As a result, some fans have responded by creating "recovery" versions of these missing episodes, many of which can be found on YouTube, in which still photos are displayed while fan-recorded audio track footage from erased episodes plays, or animated content fills in the blanks of the missing scenes, accompanied by the fan-recorded audio. Whether this material qualifies as fan fiction is debatable, as the creative act is different here: the fans' creativity in these projects involves the process of recovering existing photographic and soundtrack fragments from the missing episodes and using these to assemble, as coherently as possible, re-created iterations of the complete narrative content of the lost episodes. A new narrative is not created from scratch; rather, we see a version of an old, lost narrative constructed through these fan projects. However, the potential radiating from the fragments that survive from these missing episodes creates another possibility for the writers within the paratextual world.

[6.3] The original series' largely lost "Evil of the Daleks" (1967) provides the contextual entrance for Johne's "Samantha's Turn" fan fiction piece, archived at Teaspoon. The fan writer plays with both the presentational format of the original text and its actual content in the construction of her work. Not only does the writer incorporate the number of episodes in her story from those in the original narrative (seven, of which six are missing), but she also says in the story notes, "We can speculate endlessly about how *Evil of the*

but she also says in the story notes, "We can speculate endlessly about how *Evil of the Daleks* would have been different if Pauline Collins had stayed on as Samantha. It's quite possible that Victoria, or perhaps Mollie, would not have existed. In this version, though, I've kept them in" (Johne 2010). The missing episodes/text, within the established structure of the textual world, allows a space for speculation and play and subsequently opens the possibility for "this version" to present itself; even if teleplays exist for these missing episodes, the film does not, and a writer can, and in this case does, play within the territory that has been hollowed out in the textual world through the destruction of most of the relevant episodes.

[6.4] The notion of fan attention being given to "spaces between" in the textual world is expansive, and significantly, written fan fiction does not seem to be the only electronically disseminated iteration to address *Doctor Who.* Fans have created a tradition for recasting the textual world in the form of fan-generated "previews" for episodes that have already aired. This is a technique whose foundation is borrowed from the new series. As the credits roll at the end of each episode in the new *Doctor Who* series, a "Next Time" promotion is shown in which, as the theme music swells in the background, rapid-cut preview images of the next episode are shown, usually concluding with a cliffhanger image or line of dialogue. This feature has been adopted by the *Doctor Who* fan community, whose members play within the boundaries of this structure to create scores of fake "Next Time" trailers. These videos can be found across the YouTube landscape, many constructed around episodes from the original series, as well as for lost episodes for which these advertisements did not exist when they aired. These videos may be read as a sort of fan-generated folk art, artistic manipulations of the mass-disseminated raw material of the textual world that reveal the moments the fan artist finds most compelling. Although they add nothing new per se to the textual world, they arrange the preexisting content in such a way that a new iteration of the specific episode treated is created. A fundamentally new narrative does not emerge, but an expression and ordering of what fans believe to be the most important features of the narrative become apparent. Importantly, the rules of the textual world are maintained through this paratextuality, in that no new text is actually added; but the reorganization of this material seems clearly to be a ludic activity in its own right, in which the fan creator's favorite moments can be expressed through playful reassembly. As such, these fan-generated "Next Time" videos may also be seen as a possible subspecies of fan fiction.

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7. Conclusion

[7.1] The critical framework that blossoms from a consideration of ludology provides a useful and productive framework through which the fan fiction paratext inspired by the textual world of *Doctor Who* can be investigated. These paratexts may be read as active engagements in the play offered by the textual world of the television series that supplies the magic circle around which they construct themselves. Furthermore, the opportunities

that are created by the successful entry into and maintenance of the magic circle of *Doctor*

that are created by the successful entry into and maintenance of the magic circle of *Doctor Who* appear to take the shape of a multidirectional conversation that unfolds across the textual and paratextual worlds. The result is, as might be expected within the wildly engaging universe of science fiction, an entertaining and fruitful exchange that negotiates an unstable relationship with the boundaries it is supposed to uphold, sometimes adhering to the rules of the textual world and sometimes straying beyond these into spaces fan writers feel the textual universe fails to reach.

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Textual Echoes: Praxis

Masochist or machiavel? Reading Harley Quinn in canon and fanon

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[0.1] *Abstract*—Creative responses to the DC Comics character Harley Quinn, sometime girlfriend and assistant to the Joker and established favorite among female fans, are considered. By means of examples from an array of media (fan fiction, short film, and comics), I observe how the character's trait of submissiveness is read and (re)constructed. First acknowledging the antifeminist possibilities of the submissive female and masochism's portrayal within medical and psychoanalytic discourses, I then move on to explore the ways in which fans use the Harley character to overcome these negative stereotypes of sexual submission. I show that fan works exhibit evidence of familiarity with concepts of the Jungian shadow self and with real-life BDSM practices and philosophies. The central thesis is that we can understand the masochist as potentially Machiavellian—that is, creative and manipulative. Fan fiction echoes postmodernism's concern with ambiguous subjectivity and employs strategies that shift the responsibility for character construction from creator to reader.

[0.2] *Keywords*—BDSM; Comic book; Fan fiction; Fan vid; Gender; Masochism

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[0.3] *"Puddin',"* she sobs helplessly. He looks so mean. Harley's almost scared to approach him. Everything she once recognized is gone now…he has gone beyond her understanding into a religious agony of perfection. Harley Quinn imagines she can see radioactive light spilling from her Saint, her Joker, from his ears and eyes.

—Grant Morrison, *The Clown at Midnight*

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1. Harley Quinn in canon and fanon

[1.1] Harley Quinn is the off-again, on-again "hench wench" and girlfriend of the Joker and the best friend of Poison Ivy. She is a relatively recent addition to Batman canon, making her first appearance in *Batman: The Animated Series* (1992–95). In 1994 the character was given a canon backstory, first in the one-shot comic *Mad Love* and then in an animated episode of the same name. It emerges that Harley was once Dr. Harleen Quinzel, an ambitious young intern at Arkham Asylum, determined to

interview the Joker in order to write a tell-all book about the villain and advance her fledgling career. Seduced by him during a series of interviews, she comes to believe that he has affection for her and that he is a troubled soul who can be rehabilitated through her loving care. Her moment of crisis comes when the Batman returns a visibly injured Joker to Arkham. Outraged on her beloved's behalf, she raids a costume store for an outfit and props, becoming "Harley Quinn" in order to break the Joker out of the asylum. They enjoy a crime-spree honeymoon, and the rest is history.

[1.2] This prequel reinforced what was already a running joke of the animated series, perpetuated in subsequent comics and fan works: that of Harley's obsession with her lover, "Mistah J," and her readiness to endure his (often violent) mistreatment of her. Her submissiveness is remarked upon in a 1993 animated episode, "Harley and Ivy," when Harley appeals to her best friend, "I am not a doormat…am I?" Poison Ivy's acerbic reply is, "If you had a middle name it would be 'welcome'!"

[1.3] In *Mad Love*'s most recent reissue (Dini and Timm [1994] 2009), both of Harley's creators speak about their inspirations for the character. Writer Paul Dini says in the preface,

> [1.4] It's happened to me, it's probably happened to you, and if it hasn't happened yet, rest assured that it will…Mad love is when you fall so passionately for a person (particularly the *wrong* person) that nothing else in the world matters…Through Harley's tragicomic experiences, we catch a glimpse of ourselves in a funhouse mirror, distorted and all too willing to play the fool for someone we'd be much better off without. (6, 7)

[1.5] And in an epilogue, producer Bruce Timm writes,

> [1.6] Another instance of "art imitating life"—a mutual friend of ours was stuck in a stormy (but nonviolent) relationship with a guy whose personal obsessions precluded him from returning her unconditional love. (73)

[1.7] Here Dini proposes a purely allegorical interpretation: Harley as every(wo)man, donning the harlequin costume as a visual signifier of the foolish nature of her quest. However, Timm hints at a more gender-specific paradigm. Although attempting to sidestep the darker implications of his model by insisting that it is "nonviolent," Timm acknowledges that Harley's story is that of a nurturing woman in a relationship with a self-centered and abusive man.

[1.8] Perhaps significantly, fan meta does not focus on the motives or agendas of the male writers (primarily Dini) who have been instrumental in shaping the Harley character in canon. Instead of viewing Harley Quinn as a product of gender ventriloquism, fans consider her to be a persona that is fully formed and already fan

property, and they tend to produce psychologically realistic readings of her. For example, lovedatjoker, zhinxy, itlcometome, and benicio127, the authors of a two-part fan essay entitled "Cartwheel of Contradictions: Who Is Harley Quinn?," ask not "why have the (male) writers made the Joker and Harley's relationship so long-lasting?" but "why does Harley stay?" (2010). This phrasing points to a strongly appropriative relationship with the character; while canon is respected, Harley is not absolutely delineated by it. What is more definitive is the reading agreed on by the fans themselves, constructed through fic and meta.

[1.9] This desire among female fans to create online spaces where they can discuss and define their own Harley may be in no small measure because mainstream comic book fandom is still unwelcoming to female readers. As Karen Healey observes,

> [1.10] Overwhelmingly…superhero comics themselves support "male" as the default gender for their readers…[but] despite these metaphorical "NO GURLS" signs on the comics clubhouse door, superhero comics culture contains many female participants…Especially in cyberspace, female superhero comics fans have established clubhouses of their own, and there they vigorously perform and articulate feminine comics fandom as they explore the rocky terrain of self-definition. (2009, 147)

[1.11] Lovedatjoker, zhinxy, itlcometome, and benicio127 are keen to acknowledge the gender bias evident within comic book fandom and the need for more nuanced portrayals of female characters, writing, "It is with good reason that depictions of women [in comics] are harshly examined and assessed" (2010). They go on to delineate the particular problems associated with the characterization of Harley Quinn as follows:

> [1.12] Harley Quinn, being a character entwined within an abusive relationship, is often the subject of discourse around the use of misogynistic tropes in comics: her relationship with the Joker is seen as something she must escape from, lest DC [Comics] be sending "bad messages" to "female comic book readers"—often described as "young," to boot. (2010)

[1.13] The Harley Quinn character inspires fan art, videos, fiction, and cosplay, and there are numerous LiveJournal communities and archives dedicated to fan fic featuring her (often focusing on her relationship with the Joker). As the above quotation shows, fans are conscious of the potential pitfalls: these stories—which are often tagged "darkfic," "BDSM," or "ECP" (extreme corporal punishment)—could be read as glamorizing abusive relationships, and their authors could be accused of rejecting feminist values by championing submissive, even self-negating feminine behavior. I urge an alternative, altogether more positive reading of the Harley Quinn

of fanon: fans' responses to the character, far from valorizing abuse or repudiating feminism, evince a complex engagement with issues of gender and subjectivity.

[1.14] I first place the concerns surrounding female masochism within their medical, psychoanalytic, and feminist contexts to demonstrate both how and why sexual submission became seen as an unhealthy practice. I use the writings of BDSM (note 1) practitioners themselves to challenge outsider assumptions about the nature and function of sexual masochism. Finally, I show that fan authors' incorporation of BDSM tropes into their stories aids the construction of a deeply ambiguous subjectivity, and thus helps to shift responsibility for character motivation from writer to reader.

2. Women and masochism

[2.1] As early as 1986, Patricia Frazer Lamb and Diane Veith argued that slash fan fiction is a cry for gender equality (see Busse and Hellekson 2006, 17), an argument developed in Constance Penley's "Feminism, Psychoanalysis and the Study of Popular Culture" (1992). Penley proposes that slash can be viewed as liberating because it allows the author to write about sex and relationships without having to deal with the power dynamics of heterosexuality. To this she adds a keen observation concerning the apparent reluctance of heterosexual women within slash fandom to include female characters in their erotic stories:

> [2.2] I think there's another reason why the slash characters have to be male, and this has to do with the fans' rejection of the female body. The fans do indeed reject the female body as a terrain of fantasy or utopian thinking, but the female body they are rejecting is the body of the woman as it has been constituted in this culture: a body that is a legal, moral, and religious battleground. (498)

[2.3] The rejection of this culturally constructed female body, Penley argues, leads slash authors to "write their sexual and social fantasies across male bodies" (498). That women may find it necessary to write their desires onto male characters is an idea that has been interrogated and developed by numerous critics of slash fiction, including Henry Jenkins (1992, 188–200), Anne Kustritz (2003), Susanne Jung (2004), Elizabeth Woledge (2005), Robin Anne Reid (2009), and Monica Flegel and Jenny Roth (2010) (note 2). Although het and femslash have increased in popularity since the time of the Star Trek fanzines that Penley describes, the continued prevalence of slash attests to the fact that the fictionalized female body remains a battleground in popular culture.

[2.4] What exactly constitutes a compelling female character, and whether such a character can be compelling if she does not have agency, are hotly contested

questions. The dominant "strong woman" type perpetuated in comics and action films has been derided for its two-dimensionality and appeal to the male gaze (Brown 2004; Mlawski 2008), while similarly idealized, assertive female characters in fan fiction are likely to be derided as "Mary Sues" or "self-inserts" (note 3). Yet although portraying a female character as dominant is not sufficient to ensure an audience's engagement, there is also considerable discomfort with her opposite number, the submissive female. The relative scarcity of submissive female characters in fan fiction points to a profound unease among a predominantly female writing public. It is my experience that while dom and sub play is a common feature of slash and femslash erotica—and there are plenty of female dominants in het fics—the prevailing sentiment among fan writers is that "fem!sub" is considered "triggery" and needs to be listed as a warning in the story header, supplementing indications of graphic sexual content rather than being a natural part of them.

[2.5] This strong negative response to depictions of female masochism point to its long history as a subject of medical and psychoanalytic writing, going back to the 19th and early 20th centuries. The coiner of the term *masochist* was the self-styled sexologist Dr. Richard von Krafft-Ebing, author of a compendium of sexual dysfunctions, *Psychopathia sexualis* (first published in 1886). Krafft-Ebing defines masochism as "the association of passively endured cruelty and violence with lust" (1899, 115), naming the phenomenon after Leopold von Sacher-Masoch, author of *Venus in Furs* (1870). Krafft-Ebing describes masochism as a predominantly male phenomenon; his description would be followed by Sigmund Freud and Magnus Hirschfeld, among others. Because women are both biologically and psychologically conditioned to be submissive, submissiveness constitutes masochism, a perversion, only when it appears in men, who are naturally dominant:

> [2.6] In woman, voluntary submission to the opposite sex is a psychological phenomenon. Owing to her passive role in procreation and long-existent social conditions, ideas of subjection are, in woman, normally connected with the idea of sexual relations. They form, so to speak, the harmonics which determine the tone-quality of feminine feeling…Under the veneer of polite society the instinct of feminine servitude is everywhere discernible. (Krafft-Ebing 1899, 187)

[2.7] Krafft-Ebing here makes the essentialist argument that submissiveness is a defining characteristic of the female, and he elsewhere uses the example of the "love tap" among "all Slavs of the lower classes" as evidence that women are reassured of their femininity and value by violent mistreatment at the hands of their male partners (188). It was an important task of second-wave feminism to refute such pronouncements. In *The Myth of Women's Masochism* (1985), Paula Caplan sets out to

dispel the fallacy of women's inherent "moral masochism," that is, their alleged self-defeating enjoyment of suffering, often used as a justification for rape and domestic abuse (140). Caplan exposes this fallacy as a product of a patriarchy that wants both to subjugate women and to make them responsible for the pain it inflicts upon them:

> [2.8] At the turn of the century, when the theory was first formally proposed, women led lives that were so constricted and repressed that one way to rationalize their unequal status was to assume that they must enjoy suffering. Furthermore, espousing the theory that women "enjoy" pain makes the espouser feel important. (30)

[2.9] The sexologists and psychoanalysts seemed to be unaware that they were operating under "the unquestioned assumption that to be a normal human is to be male and sadistic," as John Noyes puts it (1997, 169), and to lack an appreciation of the embeddedness of "masochistic" practices within society and culture. Highlighting society's role in the forming of masochistic behaviors, Judith Butler observes that "the attachment to subjection is produced through the workings of power" and that the same mechanisms by which a child is disciplined are later appropriated by the state: "this situation of primary dependency conditions the political formation and regulation of subjects and becomes the means of their subjection" (1997, 6, 7). These late 20th-century critics have shown masochism to be not a spontaneous perversion of nature, but rather a product of society's machinations against the individual.

[2.10] With moral masochism seemingly defeated, feminists turned their attention to the subject of sexual masochism. A bitter schism emerged in the second wave between the liberal, "sex-positive" theorists (some of whom, like Pat Califia, supported and participated in BDSM), and the staunch antipornography campaigners such as Susan Brownmiller and Andrea Dworkin. Female interest in sexual submission began to be treated by some as another myth in need of debunking. Caplan uses anecdotal evidence to portray sexual masochism as a "grotesque" (1985, 158) kink that is inherently male and that women avow a complete lack of interest in. In dealing with so-called rape fantasies (a term that she rightly points out to be a misnomer), she adopts the staid, even Freudian explanation that the idea of being overpowered allows women to experience sexual release without guilt because within the fantasy itself, the sex act is not instigated by the woman (155).

[2.11] The view that women are not interested in sexual submission came to be perpetuated by sex-positive texts too: Nancy Friday's third follow-up to her influential 1973 collection of women's sexual fantasies, *My Secret Garden,* is entitled *Women on Top: How Real Life Has Changed Women's Sexual Fantasies* (1991). Friday also dismisses fantasies of sexual submission as guilt avoidance devices (1991, 4), and the fantasies that she selects to appear in *Women on Top,* as the title suggests, center on

female dominance. She sees this emphasis as progressive, and a reflection of women's increasing social empowerment:

> [2.12] I have chosen to arrange the fantasies in three chapters which denote the themes that most frequently turned up in the thousands of letters and interviews I collected since my earlier books: women in control, women with women, and sexually insatiable women. I've arranged them in chronological order so that we could see how changes in the real world influence the erotic imagination. (6)

[2.13] Friday claims to chronicle women's desires in all their variety, but her emphasis on expressions of dominant sexuality ("women in control…insatiable women") betrays an ideological bias that obscures submissive fantasies. This attempt to sweep female sexual submissives under the rug implies a value judgment no less censorious than Krafft-Ebing's. Both Friday's and Caplan's texts hold that sexual masochism is for the guilt-ridden, a symptom of neurosis. Only sexuality that is assertive can be considered healthy.

[2.14] Yet the assumption that emancipated modern women are not interested in submissive sexual play is not borne out by the writings of BDSMers, or studies in which they are participants. A recent empirical study is Megan Yost's "Sexual Fantasies of S/M Practitioners: The Impact of Gender and S/M Role on Fantasy Content" (2007). Of Yost's 264 participants, just over half (138) are women, and 20 of them express a preference for the dominant role, 82 prefer the submissive, and 36 identify as switch (that is, capable of switching between the roles) (note 4). Yost also notes that "the sample was highly educated: 33% had completed higher education beyond the bachelor's degree, 25% had a bachelor's degree, 19% had attended some college, and all but one participant had at least a high school education" (139). Yost's research implies that there is considerable female interest in sexual submission and that BDSMers are likely to be well educated, and therefore (we may assume) articulate and self-aware. It is a truism of BDSM writings that those interested in submission tend to be professionally successful, highly driven individuals who use sexual play to experience what Noyes calls a "pleasurable abandonment of identity" (1997, 4).

[2.15] If male masochists are "successful politicians, judges and other important and influential men" (Baumeister 1989, 9) who are drawn toward experiencing unfamiliar moments of surrender and powerlessness, then this model also holds true for women. Thus, female interest in sexual submission may signify not that women are slow to shake off the patriarchal superego, but that they are increasingly socially empowered. To put it another way: fantasies of dominance may come from anger and disenfranchisement, fantasies of submission from a position of privilege.

[2.16] While it is not my purpose to explore the correlation between BDSM practices in fan fiction and in real life or to ask what proportion of writers are also practitioners, it is important to note that a preference for BDSM (whether in reality, fantasy, or fiction) does not indicate an unreconstructed attitude toward gender issues, but rather a thoughtful engagement with both gender and desire.

[2.17] As a final note on the history of women and masochism, one area that is in need of further research is the possible correlation between contemporary BDSM and feminist writings. Although no work of third-wave or postfeminist scholarship has so far engaged substantially with the politics of BDSM, all three arenas can be observed to have common interests. The first of these is an investment in "female pleasure and (sexualized) agency" (Genz 2009, 83), a move away from the second wave's perceived censoriousness as it appeared in the antipornography and political correctness movements (Siegel 2007, 109) and from what key postfeminist texts refer to as "victim feminism" (Roiphe 1993; Wolf 1993). The second is an engagement with subjectivity, particularly in considering the "notion of the self…as an autonomous and self-actuating agent," in opposition to "an alienated female subjectivity…determined socially, linguistically and biologically by patriarchy" (Gamble 2001, s.v. "Subjectivity"). Linked to these explorations of subjectivity are notions of the performativity and role-playing of gender: as Stephanie Genz writes, women can be "self-conscious social actors rather than passive objects of the male gaze" (2009, 92).

[2.18] Perhaps the strongest tie between all three is their championing of pluralism, of individual and minority group choices over the assumption of common goals and what Jacob and Licona term a "false sense of unity" (2005, 200). As Heywood and Drake observe, "We know that what oppresses me may not oppress you, that what oppresses you may be something I participate in, and that what oppresses me may be something you participate in" (1997, 3). The right to choose what others may deem oppressive has obvious resonances for BDSMers, and, as I demonstrate in section 4 below, BDSM theory engages with all these issues of pleasure, agency, subjectivity, and individual choice. Fan discourse, too, addresses the need for pluralism; lovedatjoker et al. write,

> [2.19] When we call for more feminist depictions of character, do we simply mean that these depictions be true to the ultimate objective in media: that women be considered whole and actual people, are depicted as three-dimensional, complex, full developed beings with a wide scope of human experience and behaviour?…[Harley] is a real character, three-dimensional and rounded out…In this way, she embodies the ultimate objective of feminism: that women be seen as human beings. (2010)

[2.20] Although the essayists here do not specify a form of feminism, their question highlights the particularly third-wave and postfeminist preoccupation with the need to produce varied, individual representations of women rather than a unified conception of Woman. Writers of Harley Quinn fan fiction use the character to reflect women's experiences in the aftermath of the second wave and thus take an approach that may properly be termed postfeminist.

3. Shadow selves

[3.1] Having acknowledged the feminist struggle to dismiss the notion that women neurotically enjoy suffering and bring abusive relationships upon themselves, we can certainly see why a character like Harley Quinn—the ambitious career woman who gives up her autonomy to become an abused sidekick—can be construed as a troubling subject of fannish attention. But what is the effect of denying and distancing oneself from unacceptable traits like self-effacement and submissiveness, once considered womanly? Natasha Walter has commented that these rejected qualities go toward forming a feminist "shadow self": a haunting figure of the obedient housewife and mother, like Virginia Woolf's troublesome Angel in the House (1998, 77). The shadow is the name given by Carl Jung to "the inferior part of the personality" (1960, 208), composed of qualities that the ego rejects and that it often projects onto disliked others as part of a process of disassociation and repression. According to some Jungian analysts, the shadow is "diabolic" and "subversive" (Solomon 2007, 159, 229), and if left unchecked, it has the potential to subdue the true self, the ego (Hart 2008, 98).

[3.2] Comic book heroes and villains alike appear to illustrate the principle that the shadow self must be acknowledged or it will burst out. This tension between the true and shadow selves is especially appropriate within Batman fandom, which naturally lends itself to Jungian paradigms. The clearest illustration of this is the character of Two-Face, who is both physically and psychologically bifurcated; the ego, Harvey Dent, struggling against the malign influence of his shadow, "Big Bad Harv," an introjected, negative father complex.

[3.3] Yet some analysts stress the positive aspects of the shadow. Lyn Cowan describes it as a "psychopomp or guide" (1982, 38) to the deepest recesses of the psyche. The shadow can also be a refuge for the shattered or frustrated ego: the Batman is Bruce Wayne's animal avatar, which enables him to inspire fear and fight crime in a way that his public persona cannot. Picking up on this idea, a large number of Harley Quinn fan fics portray her transformation from shrink to harlequin positively —not as a catastrophic psychological breakdown, but as a liberation. Fan fic writers give Dr. Harleen Quinzel an internal monologue that expresses anxiety, loneliness, and

a lack of self-confidence, which are belied by her cool, professional exterior. In Apheliongirl's *Maelstrom* (2010), Harley's divided nature is reflected in the alternating tones of an (ultimately unsent) letter.

> [3.4] *Dear Mom,*
>
> [3.5] *Thanks for trying to arrange a blind date with that airline pilot, but please don't worry about me—I'm a big girl now* (Bullshit—I'm afraid of the dark and still sleep with my old Barney doll).
>
> [3.6] *I don't mind being alone* (I hate hate *hate* it)…
>
> [3.7] *No, I don't think I want to join a dating service* (I'd die of embarrassment admitting I'm such a FREAK that I have to pay to find a date).
>
> [3.8] *My job is really great* (I find it so depressing—the inmates are all hopeless cases, scarred from childhood, write-offs every one).
>
> [3.9] (Really, mom. Don't worry. I'll probably end up a crazy cat lady dying alone in my apartment, no one noticing until the meowing of my cats drives the neighbours crazy and the police break down the door to find my rotting bloated corpse…)"
>
> [3.10] Harley crumpled it back up and dropped it in the wastebasket. (chapter 1)

[3.11] In donning the checkerboard costume, Harley becomes confident and free of the restrictions of society. It is also important to note that heroes and villains alike in Batman comics have usually adopted their personae in response to a personal trauma, be it the death of their parents or a dunk in a vat of toxic chemicals. That Harley adopts hers volitionally—even cheerfully—is in itself a radical break with tradition. The transformation scene therefore constitutes a pivotal moment in many origin fics, as here in shallots's *All My Balloons* (2008):

> [3.12] Harley came home from work. She tossed her things on to the counter top and headed for the bathroom to put some face paint on. The doctor in her knew this was crazy…[but] what she did after work was her business. No one needed to know that she went home and painted her face like a clown.
>
> [3.13] Everything that had happened at work just melted away. She completely forgot about her boss and Jonathan Crane. After finishing her face she danced to her closet and pulled out a Halloween costume.

> [3.14] She had bought it this morning. While she was looking at cosmetics, trying to find something similar to her clown make up she spotted it. The isle across from the make up section was filled with costumes for Halloween, at its end was a jester's costume. She had to have it.

[3.15] Putting on the mask of makeup is portrayed here as simultaneously cathartic and thrilling. There is a suggestion of sexual taboo in Harley's admiration of herself in the mirror: her costuming is an act of cross-dressing that violates not gender stereotypes but the more risky barrier between sane and insane. The text also subverts a teen pop culture trope, the makeover scene. In this case, the dowdy bookworm descends the staircase not as a princess in taffeta, but as a villainous clown.

[3.16] Leaving aside knowing parody, these fics are both concerned with the pressures that women's advances in the workplace and society (as a result of second-wave feminist activism) generated, and how the drive to be autonomous and career focused can in itself become imprisoning, even alienating. Apheliongirl's Harley recognizes the impossibility of the fabled work/life balance, as her feverish struggle to maintain and advance her professional status means she has no social life. Although Harley's mother is vaguely pleased by her daughter's academic success, she tactlessly pressures Harley to find a man, leaving her with visions of herself as an isolated cat lady and "FREAK." As a safety valve to relieve these maddening pressures, she becomes the shadow self, embracing the feared alternative to normalcy. In this reading, Harley therefore represents rebellion, not submission.

[3.17] Genre and tone must also play a role in dictating how Harley is perceived. In both canon and fanon it is a major function of the Joker and Harley's relationship to serve as a biting commentary on heterosexual conventions. They are, in the words of one community dedicated to the pairing, "the George and Gracie from Hell" (http://www.jokerxharley.com/evolution/partthree.html), a nightmarish celebrity couple who subvert every romantic cliché they touch. Take, for instance, the following depiction of one of Harley's daydreams:

Figure 1. *"Play nice, kids!" Paul Dini and Bruce Timm, Mad Love ([1994] 2009, 44). [View larger image.]*

[3.18] The scenario is very much like a Charles Addams creation, as the humor comes from the juxtaposition of the mundane and the grotesque. Harley's fantasy future contains a vision of herself as housewife and mother, alongside a contented husband with pipe and slippers—but just as importantly, Batman's stuffed head mounted on the wall, and children who roughhouse with deadly weapons. Joker/Harley fan fiction abounds with fluff or comedy stories in this vein, which often make use of familiar romantic comedy plot devices like "Valentine's Day," "date night," or, in the following example, the Bridget Jonesian convention of the romantic minibreak:

> [3.19] "I want you to take me to Metropolis."
>
> [3.20] "What on earth for?"
>
> [3.21] "I've never been! I want to go and do all the touristy shtick—see the view from the top of the Daily Planet building, go shoppin' on Fifth Avenue, share a midnight carriage ride in Centennial Park…it'd be so romantic! […] Oh please, Puddin'! Pretty please? Pretty, pretty, pretty please?" […]
>
> [3.22] "To Metropolis it is! And don't forget to pack my thicker socks—it gets pretty nippy there this time of year."
>
> [3.23] "Okay Mistah J."
>
> [3.24] "And some plastic explosive and fuses."
>
> [3.25] "We're not gonna go on a midnight carriage ride, are we Mistah J?"

> [3.26] "That depends on whether the Big Blue Buffoon is in town, what the police response time is like and if you can find a horse that doesn't mind explosions." (alocin 2008) (note 5)

[3.27] This constant tension between the macabre and the mundane, and the opportunities it affords for generic subversion and play, go a long way toward explaining fan artists' and writers' interest in the character. In this mode, we do not have to be concerned with Harley's well-being, or what she represents, because it is decidedly nonnaturalistic. We may borrow Dini's metaphor of the funhouse mirror: it distorts rather than reflects.

[3.28] The appropriation and subversion of stereotypes is very much in tune with the conventions of BDSM play. As Noyes notes, masochism is a device for the performance or fictionalization of power structures, gender, and the self (1997, 5, 73, 31). Thus, like the characters of the commedia dell'arte from which Harley Quinn takes her persona (Harlequin), BDSMers belong to the world of Bakhtin's carnivalesque. I therefore move away from medical and psychiatric discourses to consider masochism not as a mindless reenactment of social and gender hierarchies, but as a satirical commentary on them.

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4. The masochist as machiavel

[4.1] The second edition of the *Oxford English Dictionary* (1989) still defines *masochism* in Krafft-Ebing's sense: "the urge to derive pleasure, especially sexual gratification, from one's own pain or humiliation." The most recent edition of the *Dictionary of Psychology* (Coleman 2009) describes sexual masochism as one of the "paraphilias," "a group of mental disorders characterized by recurrent sexually arousing fantasies." The effect of classifying it in this way is that masochism becomes not an activity but an identity—one that sets those with masochistic desires apart from those with "normal" sexual lives, implying deviancy, sickness, and compulsion.

[4.2] Yet those who write from a position of familiarity with actual BDSM practices do not take kindly to being pathologized. The most vehement repudiation of conventional wisdom on the subject is Anita Phillips's *A Defence of Masochism* (1998). On the basis of her own experiences with BDSM play, Phillips rejects the negativistic dictionary definition of masochism as a search for "pain" and "humiliation" to offer this one instead: "It is the agreement between two people to explore the roles of master and slave by acting them out for a specified time period" (25). Phillips suggests two main changes to how masochism should be understood. First, she insists on its fundamentally fictive and creative nature, calling it "the offspring of art abducted and operated on by science" (24). Second, and perhaps more importantly, she argues that

"masochists are not a complementary breed to sadists" (13). While the conventional binary dualism of sadist and masochist is "bright and shiny…attractively user-friendly" (13), it is also misrepresentative of both the masochist's character and the power dynamics involved in BDSM encounters:

> [4.3] Highly autonomous, the masochist's faults are vanity and posturing. While the sadist seeks a victim, and is repelled by the masochist's capacity for pleasure, which diminishes his own, the masochist wants to find a playmate. The opposite number is someone who can be convinced or charmed into acting the role of torturer, not a brutal heavyweight…The perfect choice may be another masochist. (12)

[4.4] In Phillips's scheme, masochists are not passive victims but cunning manipulators. They seek people who can be persuaded or cajoled into participating in sexual games. We may note that in Sacher-Masoch's *Venus in Furs,* it is the submissive Severin who entices his lover, Wanda, into the dominatrix role, describing his lifelong fascination with cruel women in fur coats to encourage her to step into his imaginative world. First-person accounts by BDSMers collected in *Different Loving: The World of Sexual Dominance and Submission* (Brame, Brame, and Jacobs 1997) confirm the submissive's power and dominant's biddability; the editors note that "most dominants seem specifically aroused by their partner's pleasure" and that "many of our interviewees…felt that in the final analysis, the submissive runs a D&S relationship." One such participant, Marie-Constance, states that "dominants are generally submissive to the will of submissives" (78).

[4.5] This conception of masochism as playful has filtered through to fan fiction, which makes increasing use of BDSM tropes. Sex scenes involving bondage and spanking are now panfandom in their popularity, and writers often manage issues of consent by including safe words and verbal contracts in their stories: Jenny Alexander observes that "a clear majority of sadomasochistic fan fics follow BDSM IRL [in real life] codes and involve consensual scenarios" (2008, 126). Fan authors also make use of the kind of subversive BDSM logic discussed above, where self-proclaimed submissives are actually the architects of the fantasies, who then lure others into fulfilling them. Thus, a character like Harley can be constructed as what I have rather archaically termed a machiavel, after the self-serving trickster figure of the Elizabethan stage, whose gift is that of deftly manipulating others while giving them the impression that they are in control (note 6). Their shared conception of this literary-historical character is, I believe, what yokes fan fic writers and BDSMers together. That things (and people) are not always what they seem, and that identity is only a series of masks to be worn for one's own ends, is a philosophy that unifies characters like Harley with Sacher-Masoch's Severin and Shakespeare's Iago.

[4.6] In a PWP (porn without plot, or plot? what plot?) or sex comedy format, the machiavel can be seen enticing a lover to participate in sex or a specific fantasy. In princessbee's short character study, "Quick Learner," for instance, the distracted Joker —busy with plans for foiling Batman—is dragged away by a Harley who knows just how to catch his attention:

> [4.7] "Oh, Mistah J!" she swooned, "You're sooooo sexy when you're bustin' the Bat! No one does it like you, Puddin'! Your genius makes me *hot.*"
>
> [4.8] Joker's eyes bulged a little and he leant to give his infatuated moll a vicious, nipping kiss that had her reeling with bliss.
>
> [4.9] "Oh Harley," he sighed, tearing her pretty new panties aside with a lascivious grin, not even looking at them. "You *really* know how to push my buttons."
>
> [4.10] She squealed in delight.
>
> [4.11] No, she wasn't used to this sort of thing but she was a quick learner.
>
> [4.12] In the end, it was all about getting what she wanted and doing what it took to get it.
>
> [4.13] Maybe Harleen Quinzel only knew one way of being desired and exerting control.
>
> [4.14] Harley Quinn just found another way.

[4.15] Yet fan fiction's genre savviness and ability to perform complex intertextual negotiations increase its capabilities beyond those of BDSM fantasy novellas such as *Venus in Furs* or *The Story of O* (1954). In engaging with postmodernism's questioning of both subjectivity and textuality, fan fiction adds new dimensions to the debate about the meaning of masochism.

[4.16] While the early modern stage machiavel's true intentions are revealed in first-person asides, the postmodern text no longer allows us to implicitly trust the words of the narrator, omniscient or otherwise. Flashes of insight are enabled by other means—for instance, a fic's use of multiple points of view to create simultaneous, conflicting versions of events, or to highlight characters' blind spots and supply missing details. Apheliongirl's *Maelstrom* is a novel-length work from Harley's point of view, but it also has a companion piece called *Fugue,* which retells the same events as described by the Joker, with understandably different emphases. Placed side by side, these competing narratives become a game in which Harley and the Joker second-guess one another's

motivations, and the reader stands as referee. Whether this Harley is timid or a tease, submissive or manipulative, depends largely on whose account you choose to believe.

[4.17] Visual media like comic books and film can further muddy the waters of a character's intentions by seeming to offer external, unmediated views. In the case of Harley's canon, we might contrast her apparently straightforward backstory, *Mad Love* with a different version, which appeared in a more recent trade paperback collection, *Preludes and Knock-Knock Jokes* (Kesel, Dodson, and Dodson 2007). *Mad Love* is told by Harley herself in first person, but *Preludes* appeals to our belief that the camera never lies by offering footage from a long-lost videotape of Dr. Quinzel's Arkham sessions with the Joker. The work presumes that the reader is familiar with *Mad Love* and sets up some obvious clashes between events as Harley has previously described them, and as we now see them.

[4.18] In the original story, Harley states that the Joker bestows upon her the identity of Harley Quinn as an act of Adamic naming, yet here we see her urging him in their first meeting, "You can call me Harley Quinn, like Harlequin, the medieval jester." In *Mad Love,* Harley tells us that she was gradually seduced, against her better instincts, but in *Preludes,* we see her approach him in a predatory fashion. We are never expected to take her plan to write a tell-all book as an enduring or serious goal, and yet when she is captured on film being returned to Arkham as a patient, she triumphantly proclaims the success of her mission to gain full access to the Joker and understand the nature of his psychosis by observing him outside of the confines of the asylum.

Figure 2. *"One of Us," Karl Kesel, Terry Dodson, and Rachel Dodson, Preludes and Knock-Knock Jokes (2007, 131). [View larger image.]*

[4.19] All our fundamental assumptions about the character are called into question: is she a true disciple of the Joker's, or is this persona merely a deep cover? Is she his creation, or is he hers?

[4.20] A fan-made work that similarly utilizes the camera's external eye in order to generate narrative ambiguity is the live-action miniseries *The Joker Blogs* (2008–10). Here the audience is supposed to believe that they are watching genuine patient interview tapes that have been smuggled out of Arkham and broadcast on YouTube by an accomplice of the Joker; the channel's information tab reads, "The following recordings are for the expressed purpose of medical research and is the sole ownership of Gotham City's Arkham Asylum Psychiatric Rehabilitation Program staff and facilities." During the first story arc (episodes 1–8), the single fixed camera is always trained on "Patient 4479" (aka the Joker), while other characters remain off-camera, or are half-glimpsed as passing torsos. Harley's off-screen presence is a voice; we see her face only in a painting the Joker does, which bears only a dubious resemblance to her: "I'm out of brown paint, so I'm using yellow for your hair. It looks good. You should go blonde. It suits you" (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A23OBqmvlVU)—a comment that either hints at his agenda to remodel her or reveals his lack of perception and inability to see her as she really is. Similarly, he reads her revelation of details of her personal life as evidence of his hold over her, yet the audience also receives hints that Dr. Quinzel is using her close relationship with the high-profile patient to drum up media acclaim and funding. He says to her, "I like the attention. You do too, I noticed your picture in the paper a couple of times as well. Went a little heavy on the eyeliner, if you ask me. Is that my influence?" (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RWVwr6WJlsc). She does not provide him with an answer.

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5. Conclusion

[5.1] I have chosen to focus on fan reactions to a single character, but the points I have made about Harley Quinn could be made about any fictional female submissive, and thus they have important ramifications for our understanding of fans' negotiations of both BDSM tropes and gender stereotypes.

[5.2] Female masochism has a complex heritage in Western culture, and it has been the victim of medical anatomizing. Because moral and sexual masochism became confused in the popular imagination during the 19th and early 20th centuries, later feminist critics seeking to dispel the myth that women naturally enjoy suffering

clashed with those pushing for sexual liberation and the positive portrayal of BDSM. That female interest in sexual masochism erroneously came to be seen as a patriarchal invention is, I have argued, the root of female fans' reluctance to write women as sexual submissives.

[5.3] Yet what can be achieved with characters like Harley Quinn suggests that there is a great deal to be said on the subject when fans do choose to engage with it. While a submissive female character may appear at first glance to represent values antithetical to feminism, fan fiction's incorporation of the subversive logic of BDSM culture makes it possible to read Harley (and her analogues in other fandoms) in a different light. She does not have to be read as a victim, because it is entirely possible that she is a Machiavellian masochist, the architect of the whole scenario.

[5.4] Furthermore, fan works' engagement with postmodernism's ambiguous subjectivity means that we can no longer tell what apparent submissiveness signifies, or even if it is submissiveness at all. The burden of representation is deflected away from the creator and onto the reader or viewer: in a work like *The Joker Blogs,* whether Harley is a victim or manipulator depends entirely on what you want to see. The effect is like staring at a Rorschach test card. This is a move from passive to active reading strategies—where creators refuse to inscribe the characters with definite intentions, the reader must supply them in order to generate meaning. By inviting the reader to participate in the text instead of merely consuming it, these works show fan media at its most challenging and creative. A given character may or may not be submissive, but the reader certainly is not.

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7. Notes

1. I use the inclusive term *BDSM,* following the definition of Robert Westerfelhaus: "The acronym can be interpreted thus: BD = bondage and discipline, DS = dominance and submission, and SM = sadism and masochism (the two middle letters do double duty)" (2007, 274n1).

2. For an overview of scholarship on slash fan fiction, see Busse and Hellekson (2006, 17–24).

3. On the term *Mary Sue,* see Pflieger (1999).

4. Of the 126 male participants, 48 identified as dominant, 42 as submissive, and 36 as switch. Six genderqueer respondents were excluded from the analysis because its subject was "the impact of gender on sexual fantasy content" (Yost 2007, 139).

5. Ellipses in square brackets in this passage indicate authorial elisions; the one outside of them is original.

6. On the convention of the stage machiavel and its basis in Tudor interpretations of the realpolitik writings of Niccolò Machiavelli, see Richmond (2002, 280) and Raab (1965, 56, 70).

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Textual Echoes: Praxis

One true threesome: Reconciling canon and fan desire in *Star Trek: Voyager*

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[0.1] *Abstract*—Fan-written stories that involve three-way relationships among the characters Tom Paris, Harry Kim, and B'Elanna Torres from *Star Trek: Voyager* capitalize on the homosocial bond between Paris and Kim and the canonical relationship between Paris and Torres to create a queer triangular relationship in which characterization, sexuality, and desire are all reoriented from the canon. Some of these stories relegate the nontraditional relationship to something approximating heteronormativity; in these instances, the story mirrors the canon in its often undesirable depiction of domesticity. In other stories, the triad moves away from dominant cultural expectations like marriage and children; in these stories, the triad seems to endure happily. The key to the stability of the erotic triangle therefore shifts the relationship or relationships away from the burden of hegemonic values, both in canon and in fan fiction.

[0.2] *Keywords*—Fan fiction; Gender; TV

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1. Introduction

[1.1] The writing (or rewriting) of romance by fans has long been a major focus of research among fan studies scholars. Foundational studies by Patricia Frazer Lamb and Diane Veith (1986), Constance Penley (1991a, 1992), Camille Bacon-Smith (1992), and Henry Jenkins (1992) have investigated the development of slash as fans of the original *Star Trek* (1966–1969) exploited the source text for its emotional intimacy. The model they used was that of a resistant reading of the source text, in which fans reclaim their favorite characters from producers.

[1.2] In spite of seemingly radical reinterpretations of characters who are typically heterosexual in the canon, more recent studies have shifted away from the resistant model. Christine Scodari (2003) has called attention to the tendency of slash to reaffirm the hegemonic, rather than resisting it; Sara Gwenllian Jones (2002) has argued that slash is a reading of the canon's own homoerotic subtext. Elizabeth

Woledge (2006) has observed that slash is at its core concerned with the intimacy between the characters, regardless of larger genre classifications. What these scholars have in common and what has been the principal rhetoric of fan fiction studies is the extent to which slash is compelling in its formulation of romance between two men.

[1.3] Fan studies scholars are just beginning to write about fan fiction involving other kinds of nontraditional situations and relationships, such as male pregnancy (mpreg) and incest. These stories receive much less academic attention than slash, yet they are equally important to understanding how fans negotiate intertextuality. In this vein, I will concentrate on another kind of unconventional relationship that is seldom written about, though quite abundant in fan fiction archives: the threesome.

[1.4] Because much of fan fiction discourse has been about the ways fans dissect the canon, I concentrate on the friction between the canon's homoerotic message (intended or not) and its typical romance subplot between the hero and heroine. This friction often forces fan fiction writers to make a conscious choice to support the slash pairing or the heterosexual one, which may be more explicit in the canon. Catherine Driscoll observes that "pairing and rating function as more important generic markers than terms like comedy or angst, and are more usual search categories for fan fiction archives" (2006, 84). Indeed, many archives are devoted exclusively to one particular pairing. However, this emphasis limits possibilities and has the potential to pit fans against each other.

[1.5] Fans who compromise between a text's latent and manifest romances have a third option: to write about a three-way relationship, which I will refer to as a triad. Assume for a moment that a fan wants to remain relatively faithful to the canon in his or her fan fiction because, as Driscoll points out, "only by characterization, setting, and plot can a story enter the web of canon and become part of the community that will circulate it" (2006, 91). Fan fiction stories involving a triad can merge established canonical elements like the heterosexual romance plot with the interpretation of latent homoeroticism; these stories have the potential to queer characters and relationships in a way that calls into question dominant cultural values.

[1.6] Writing about queer readings of Harry Potter, Ika Willis argues for an analysis of fan fiction that operates outside the paradigm of either resisting the canon or incorporating its latent elements. Instead, she suggests considering the manner in which fan fiction "*reorients* a canonical text, opening its fictional world onto a set of demands determined by the individual reader and her knowledge of the (fictional and nonfictional) world(s)" (2006, 155). Willis's concept of reorientation is particularly helpful in shaping a discussion about stories of the triad, which reorient desire and identification, characterization, and genre.

[1.7] The formulation of the triad is an erotic triangle, which Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (1985) explains is a common theme in literature, television, and film of two rivals competing for their beloved. The homosocial bond the rivals share, Sedgwick notes, may shift the trajectories of desire among the participants. Lincoln Geraghty (2003, 456) and Jenkins (1992, 186) have analyzed the erotic triangle among the characters Kirk, Spock, and McCoy of the original *Star Trek.* McCoy and Spock are both close to Kirk, but he values different qualities in them: emotion from McCoy and reason from Spock. Any jealousy either McCoy or Spock might feel over the other's friendship with Kirk serves as a powerful bond that connects them as much as it pits them against each other as rivals. Given that this triangle does not include a female sexual object of desire, the tension between Spock and McCoy is ultimately resolved with all three men sharing in the friendship. Geraghty has also examined the subtextual erotic triangle among the characters Garak, Bashir, and O'Brien from *Deep Space Nine* (1993–1999), the third Trek series, noting that although Garak and O'Brien do not have much, if any, of a canonical association, they are bound to each other in their mutual desire to share more of Bashir's time and attention (2003, 457). There is yet another triangle among O'Brien, Bashir, and O'Brien's wife, Keiko. In the episode "Extreme Measures" (1999), Bashir even suggests that O'Brien likes him better than Keiko.

[1.8] *Star Trek: Voyager* (1995–2001) clearly presents erotic triangles that fan fiction writers enjoy manipulating. Captain Janeway and her first officer Chakotay struggle with their sexual tension until the arrival of Seven of Nine in the fourth season upsets the status quo of their relationship. The canonical (if remarkably undeveloped) relationship between Seven of Nine and Chakotay, combined with Janeway and Seven's relationship (read by fans as alternately maternal or lesbian) results in a powerful Janeway/Chakotay/Seven triangle. David Greven (2008) also argues that there is a "stirring allegory of same-sex desire" as Janeway and the Borg queen compete for Seven of Nine's loyalties and affection in another, all-female triangle. I have chosen to concentrate on the erotic triangle of Tom Paris, Harry Kim, and B'Elanna Torres. This triad contains *Voyager*'s primary male pair-bond (Paris and Kim), which often echoes the famed Kirk/Spock relationship. It is one of few canonical, lasting romantic relationships in the Star Trek universe (Paris and Torres), and sufficient canonical evidence as well as fan support exist for the third pairing (Kim and Torres). Additionally, there are abundant fan fiction stories containing this triad.

[1.9] Paris/Kim/Torres fan fiction investigates the ways in which the three characters struggle with varying degrees of attraction and rivalry. Among the stories I have studied, the characters have different initial responses to the idea of the triad, and different characters are portrayed as the sexual aggressor. The stability of the erotic triangle is linked to the emphasis on certain hegemonic values in the story. In stories in which the triad is reoriented toward an approximation of heterosexuality, the

relationship does not last, or the characters suffer. In other stories, the triad is oriented away from certain cultural expectations, such as marriage and children, and tends to endure, with the three characters happy.

2. "If I didn't know better, I'd say those two are in love"

[2.1] Before explaining the triangular relationship of Paris/Kim/Torres, I want to briefly introduce Paris/Kim and Paris/Torres to show how writers of the triad are drawing on these pairings. Before the narrative arc of the Paris/Torres romance, the friendship between Paris and Kim was extensively portrayed on *Voyager.* Paris and Kim are mismatched opposites in the series pilot: young, naive Kim is fresh out of school, but Paris is a world-savvy, only slightly reformed criminal. The two spend vast quantities of recreational time together: playing pool, receiving massages from scantily clad women, and saving the Earth in a 1930s science fiction holoprogram (a kind of virtual reality) called *Captain Proton.* As Woledge observes, slash writers often capitalize on homosociality by "isolating their characters alone on alien planets, or in historical or futuristic eras, thus creating an intimate bond of two" (2006, 101). The exclusive homosocial environment of Paris and Kim's recreation provides ample subtextual evidence for Paris/Kim slash. Although the characters' recreational pursuits attempt to flaunt their heterosexuality and hypermasculinity, they are also full of homoerotic subtext: bondage, captivity, and, most importantly, separation from others.

[2.2] In addition to the amount of time Paris and Kim spend together, Kim's hapless love life is a running joke in the series. He is frequently depicted as asexual, virginal, or simply unlucky, and his lack of success in heterosexual relationships leads slash fans to assume Harry Kim's desire for Paris. The fan Web site P/K All the Way cheekily asks, "Why *does* Harry only pursue unattainable women? I have my theory" (figure 1). The comment is punctuated by an emoticon of a winking smile (2003a). In his examination of Kirk/Spock slash, Henry Jenkins notes that in the series and movie sequels, "Kirk consistently renounces romantic ties that might interfere with his professional duties, while he has just as persistently been prepared to disobey orders and put his job at risk to protect his 'friend'" (1992, 216). Although Kirk has a plethora of "alien babes of the week," his loyalty is ultimately to the *Enterprise*—and to Spock. Likewise, many Paris/Kim slash writers assume that Kim sabotages his chances at having a successful relationship because his true love is Tom Paris.

The conversation in the elevator was delicious. Why *does* Harry only pursue unattainable women? I have my theory. ;-)

Figure 1. *Fan Web sites like P/K All the Way use screen caps of episodes to analyze scenes between Paris and Kim for their homoerotic content. [View larger image.]*

[2.3] Perhaps the most significant episode in a slash reading of the series is "The Chute" (1996). Imprisoned together and injured, the two men reveal their dependence on each other, like Kirk and Spock before them. In the few seconds before Spock's sacrificial death to save the *Enterprise* in the 1982 film *Star Trek II: The Wrath of Khan,* he and Kirk press their hands against a glass separating them in a gesture that bespeaks their pain and their intimacy. Similarly, in "The Chute," as Paris and Kim face imminent danger together, they hold hands and sleep with their heads on the same pillow. In a telephone interview in July 2009, Anneinchicago, the archivist of the PKSP (Paris/Kim Slash Party) asked rhetorically, "Could there be a slashier episode?" Michelle Erica Green writes in her review of the episode, "If I didn't know any better, I'd say those two are in love."

[2.4] The homosociality of episodes like "The Chute" helps the series avoid what Jones calls a "trajectory toward domestic stasis" (2002, 88). In spite of the slashy subtext of "The Chute," *Voyager* soon moved into domestic stasis: the narrative arc of the Paris/Torres romance began shortly after the episode and continued to the series finale. Constance Penley notes that one recipe for heterosexual romance in science fiction must include the threat of death, which awakens desire (1991b, 74). Following this formula, all the milestones in the Paris/Torres romance occur in various life-or-death scenarios: revelation of initial sexual attraction, profession of love, and the marriage proposal. In the final season, Torres and Paris are expecting a child and thus enter the realm of domestic stasis, promulgating family values.

[2.5] Geraghty observes that the changing American political landscape of the late 1990s shifted Star Trek from a world of individuals fulfilling their own desires while leaving loved ones behind to a world full of committed relationships and children. "What this pattern of long-term relationships indicates," he writes, "is that [Star Trek] believes in the fundamental need for marriage as part of American society. In the future the need to live with the person you love and commit to is the most important feature in a balanced and loving relationship" (2003, 447). *Voyager*'s contemporary, *Deep Space Nine,* features many heterosexual, if interspecies, relationships; however, by the series' conclusion, several of these relationships suffer as a result of one partner's death or disappearance. While Paris and Torres may be the only canonical couple on *Voyager,* they remain alive and married to each other at the conclusion of the series and even have a child. The Paris/Torres relationship therefore reaffirms heteronormativity (that we should all seek to marry a person of the opposite sex and have a child together) and attests to the possibility of long-term, committed relationships for Star Trek characters in spite of their space-faring lifestyles.

[2.6] Geraghty cautions that this "reassertion of so-called family values, communicated through the bond of marriage, promotes a very heterosexual version of social relations" that "does not accurately reflect the true nature of America's diverse society" (2003, 449). Additionally, the family values and marriage depicted between Paris and Torres present a grim version of heterosexual domesticity. Jones describes heterosexuality as "antithetical to the exoticism and adventure that characterize the fictional worlds of cult television series" (2003, 87). For this reason, she argues, the portrayal of long-term romance or marriage in the canon can cause "both the cult fiction and its fans [to be] unceremoniously returned to the structures, realities, and stresses of everyday life" (87). The Paris/Torres marriage is only seen sporadically and often in crisis mode. After the announcement of Torres's pregnancy, nearly all subsequent Paris/Torres scenes focus on it, with the couple bickering over names and ethnic heritage. Torres, an action hero in the previous seasons, is frustrated that she can no longer participate in away missions because of her condition. In addition, the marriage affects their relationships with others. Paris is not seen spending as much time with Harry Kim, and in the series finale, Kim approaches Paris to have "one last adventure," suggesting that the birth of the child will mark the end of their friendship. In an analysis of the portrayal of relationships in Star Trek, Elspeth Kydd writes that the franchise "regularly introduces sexuality within the framework of reproduction and the conventions of romantic love" (1998). Indeed, the Paris/Torres relationship seems to follow this convention: boy meets girl, boy and girl must get married, girl must have baby. Presumably the completion of this sequence allows them to live happily ever after, yet that happiness is not prevalent in the canon.

[2.7] The source text thus establishes heterosexual domesticity as the preferred lifestyle, even as it depicts it negatively, simply because it offers little alternative. Part of the friction in the Paris/Torres relationship is, of course, intended to allow sufficient narrative tension for continued story lines. Fans capitalize on this tension to produce both Paris/Torres and Paris/Kim fan fiction. Paris/Torres stories are often in the form of episode additions, with Paris openly professing his love to compensate for his canonical silence. Paris/Kim stories, on the other hand, often have Paris break up with Torres and turn to Kim for comfort. Paris/Kim writers often point to the fact that Paris and Torres are frequently seen fighting, though they are infrequently seen making up. For example, in "Memorial" (2000), Paris has been implanted with memories of participating in a bloody alien war and rejects Torres's offer to help him through the trauma. P/K All the Way observes in a review of "Memorial" that, in spite of the problems between Torres and Paris, Paris and Kim have no trouble managing their relationship:

> [2.8] On the good side, [Paris/Torres] is certainly no threat to [Paris/Kim]. What an awful relationship. He takes her for granted. And once again, he

> gets possessed and abuses her. (That excuse is getting old, Tommy-boy.) And once again, Tom and B'Elanna have a huge fight…and there's no real reconciliation on-screen.
>
> [2.9] Tom and Harry, on the other hand, were great in this episode…Harry is very grumpy in the opening scene, but the way Tom keeps looking at him…there's more chemistry there than in the kiss he gives B'Elanna as they exit the hangar. (2003b)

[2.10] Each possible pairing—Paris/Torres, Paris/Kim, and Kim/Torres—has potential obstacles that must be overcome, as well as commonalities that unite the two characters. In spite of Star Trek's long history of snubbing same-sex couples, which Kydd (1998) and Jenkins and Campbell (2006, 89–112) have written about, more recent writings by David Greven (2009) and Stephen Kerry (2009) have proposed that the franchise presents fluidity in gender and sexual identity in the later series. Stories involving the triad capitalize on that fluidity to perform a queer reading of the series. Rather than attempting to determine which relationship in the erotic triangle of Paris/Kim/Torres is the "one true pairing," fans may choose to eliminate that tension by writing instead of the "one true threesome."

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3. "Interesting and varied ways"

[3.1] Much of what is considered problematic about slash, such as its lack of strong female characters or the phallic identification as a complacent acknowledgment of woman's inferiority, is eradicated in stories of triads. Green, Jenkins, and Jenkins quote fan fiction readers and writers giving a number of reasons why they prefer slash rather than romances between male and female characters: the heroine is a more minor character while the hero gets to enjoy the adventures, the female romantic interest is a "screaming ninny," or there simply is no female character in the canon and one fears writing a loathsome Mary Sue (2006, 66–71). Scodari rightly notes that recent science fiction series, however, do present strong female characters (2003). *Voyager* has three—one of whom is the captain and therefore the hero(ine) of the show.

[3.2] Mirna Cicioni describes slash as "a fantasy of authentic love which can only exist between equals; specifically, people who are strong and share adventures as well as emotions" (1998, 69). The argument that a man and woman cannot be equals is contradicted in the canon by strong female characters, and this is reinforced in a Paris/Kim/Torres triad. A primary reason for this is that Torres is an atypical female love interest: as a half Klingon, she is canonically stronger than the men and prone to aggressive behavior. Her biracial identity therefore makes her bigendered (Roberts

2000, 207). Clearly, she meets Cicioni's definition of an equal. Paris is initially the tortured hero, and therefore brusque but misunderstood, yet his relentless pursuit of Torres shows his emotional fidelity. Kim is often sensitive (he plays the clarinet and frequently talks about missing his mother), but he is also physically strong. Among these three characters we see a variety of gender characteristics that make for a triangular relationship in which no one is the clear inferior "female" object of desire and no one the clear "male" lover. Equality, then, is not established by a pairing of complementary equals but rather by an assemblage of personalities that mix traditional gender roles in various combinations.

[3.3] The triangular relationship is often viewed as oedipal, with the third party as the taboo parental object of love and therefore unhealthy. Moving away from the oedipal model, Jessica Benjamin's notion of the Other is a part of a triadic relationship with the self and the object of desire, which she calls "the music of the third to which both [partners] can attune" (1998, 24). Judith Butler notes that Benjamin's triangle allows for "several coexisting identifications…and the notion that we might live such apparently inconsistent identifications in a state of creative tension" (2004, 136). Tracing through possible formulations of triangular desire and citing Sedgwick's (1985) analysis of homosociality, Butler reminds us that "the point is not that the phallus is had by one and not by another, but that it is circulated along a heterosexual and homosexual circuit at once, thus confounding the identificatory positions for every 'actor' in the scene" (138). Butler and Benjamin's arguments have interesting implications for a reading of fan fiction as neither resistant to the source text nor merely incorporative of its latent homoeroticism but, as Willis argues, invested in reorienting the characters and their world.

[3.4] The idea of shifting identificatory positions is abundantly clear in several stories of the triad. In Nyani-Iisha Martin's fan fiction story "In Triplicate," for instance, Paris has erotic dreams with a phantom lover who morphs from Kim to Torres and back. Although he notices anatomical differences as the lover's body changes, Paris seems unfazed by larger matters of sexual identity. Paris therefore enjoys sex with a man, a woman, and something in between as the changes occur. In "Triptych," Merri Todd Webster has Harry Kim contemplate his preferences: "He had always liked being penetrated, being fucked; he'd discovered that years ago, with his first male lover. He liked fucking, too, it really didn't matter who did what." The philosophy of "it doesn't matter who does what" in both of these stories demonstrates fluid, complex sexual identity.

[3.5] Multiple, complex identifications are not just for the characters of these stories but also for readers. Penley comments that in the reading and writing of Kirk/Spock slash there are "multiple possibilities of identification and numerous pleasures" (1992,

480). A reader can identify with either man and thus experience having the other; she can also position herself on the receiving end and imagine being had by either character. The triad only increases the possibilities: identification with any of the three characters or switching among them within a given story as they kiss, top, penetrate, are penetrated, perform any of these acts simultaneously, or watch the others perform these acts.

[3.6] In particular, the inclusion of Torres into the triad queers the possible readings of the story, as Torres is often described as being as much as an object of desire as Paris and Kim. Victoria Somogyi remarks that in fan fiction stories involving Captain Janeway, readers get "both the experience of being a woman having sex and the experience of desiring and making love to a woman" (2002, 401). Likewise, Paris/Kim/Torres stories often capitalize on the simultaneous desire of wanting to be B'Elanna Torres and wanting to have her through discussions of her reactions to the scenario, physical and emotional, and through vivid, erotic descriptions of her body. In Emma Woodhouse's "B'Elanna's Reward," for instance, the reader watches Torres during the sex act from Paris's point of view: "Her head was thrown back and her eyes were closed, her breasts swayed enticingly" (2002b). Similarly, Kim catalogs the more sensual parts of Torres's body during their first sexual encounter together in the same author's "Epiphany": "Slim shoulders and unusual collarbone and those wonderful breasts with the sharp chocolate-colored nipples" (2002a). In both of these stories, the reader is given one of the men's point of view in order to admire Torres's body and become as aroused by her as he is. Switching perspective also allows the reader to be Torres remarking on the men; in this way, these stories allow the reader to both desire and identify with her at once.

[3.7] Because of the complexity of identifications and desire in erotic triangles, Butler notes that there are "profound and perhaps inescapable ways that heterosexuality and homosexuality are defined through one another" (2004, 139). Tom Paris's desire for Harry Kim, for instance, must be defined in relation to his simultaneous desire for B'Elanna Torres—the homosexual defined through the heterosexual—and vice versa. The simultaneity of these desires makes it difficult to call Paris and Kim in the triad simply heterosexual or homosexual; even bisexual would not describe the manner in which they appreciate two lovers at the same time. It is similarly difficult to label Torres a heterosexual; although in the triad she is only having sex with men, this limited term does not encompass the pleasure she derives in watching the two men perform without her. The diverse ways in which the characters in the triad can express desire and perform sexual acts thus reorients their sexuality as understood within the canon.

[3.8] The reorienting of the characters' sexuality is a shift in their characterization, particularly for Harry Kim. Where Kim is canonically asexual, virginal, or cursed, in Paris/Kim/Torres stories, he gains two lovers at the same time. He is frequently described toweling off in front of Paris and/or Torres after a shower, revealing more of his muscular frame than necessary. Writer CKC extends that boldness in the story "Triangulation." Here, Kim is not only a participant in the triad but actually orchestrates it. This reorienting of established characterization does not, however, cause the stories to diverge so wildly from the canon as to be unbelievable. Among the stories I have studied, writers are quick to note, like Paris/Kim slash writers, that Kim's canonical failures are simply the result of his awaiting his true love (or loves) and that his newfound confidence is a testament to the positive effect the triad has had on him.

[3.9] The complex identifications and desires created by the triad also reorient the genre of the stories. When Torres watches Paris and Kim, the story closely resembles traditional slash in that the relationship between the two men is at the forefront. That many of the triad stories come from writers of Paris/Kim slash and are housed on Paris/Kim archives is unsurprising because the sex between the two men is often described in loving terms typical of slash. In "B'Elanna's Reward," for instance, Paris declares, "I'm yours" to Kim during the sex act, Kim promises that he will never leave Paris, and Torres is so moved by the scene that she cries. Sex in the triad or between either man and Torres, however, is described with less romance and more eroticism. In such cases, Torres serves as an avatar for the slash fan, able to have both Paris and Kim (and watch them) without intruding on the special bond they have with each other. Here, traditional slash is reoriented with the addition of Torres; it draws upon slash conventions but suffuses het (heterosexual romance or erotica) into the scenario. In other stories, what resembles traditional het is complicated by the additional relationship between the two men. In "Party of Three," for example, Paris and Torres are an established couple when they invite Kim to join them. Kim hesitates at first and ultimately leaves the triad; in the interim, however, writer DianeB reorients the genre to something beyond either slash or het, queering the genre of the story as much as she queers the sexual identity of the characters.

[3.10] The ability of the triad to endure is directly linked to the story's transcendence of the slash/het genre binary and the characters' transgression of traditional sexual identities. A regression to traditional gender roles and domestic themes as well as unequal desire across the erotic triangle can upset the relationship or relationships. In these instances, there is no longer a triad but rather a more traditional erotic triangle of two rivals and one beloved in the form of two simultaneous heterosexual relationships.

[3.11] The primary mode for the collapse of the triad is unbalanced desire. When the relationship on one side of the triangle is weaker than the others, the triad does not last. In the case of "Party of Three," the Paris/Kim and Kim/Torres sides of the triangle are weaker than Paris/Torres, leaving that to be the only remaining relationship at the conclusion of the story. In Tonica's "Never Be the Same," Paris is willing to allow Kim to have a relationship with his girlfriend Torres because he knows he cannot provide for all of her emotional needs, but he tells Kim, "You have to know that I wouldn't want anything more." Kim is likewise willing to share Torres but tells Paris in equally vague terms that he is "not into any of that either." Readers can interpret "that" as sex between the two men or among all three. Regardless, it is interesting that they are willing to sleep in the same bed with their shared lover but quick to denounce other nontraditional relationships. This arrangement raises questions about Torres's role as the principal erotic figure: is she a powerful seductress who claims both rivals, or is she merely a sexual object that the men pass back and forth? Either way, because there is a clear shift away from the homosocial bond between the rival lovers that Sedgwick describes as a critical part of the erotic triangle (1985), it is perhaps no wonder then that Paris departs from the triad later in Tonica's series.

[3.12] Although marriage legally cements the bonds among the three characters, stories involving marriage tend to perpetuate certain restrictive moral conventions surrounding relationships and children. Often in slash the bond between the two male characters "develops into a virtual marriage: The partners make an explicit commitment to each other, promise to forsake all others of either gender, and decide to live together" (Cicioni 1998, 165). This virtual marriage continues Woledge's (2006) claim that most slash is primarily about the intimacy between the characters, regardless of how explicitly the sex may be written. Some slash, of course, assumes the legality of same-sex marriage in the canon. In several Paris/Kim/Torres stories, the writers have established the legality of a trio marriage. Their characters are therefore given the chance at "happily ever after" with a wedding. While this move is generally supportive of the triad, it reinforces the notion from the canon that a legal marriage is the preferred, or natural, outcome of a relationship, and consequently causes the triad to lapse into the same domestic stasis as the canon it is trying to subvert.

[3.13] Marriage is also frequently a prerequisite for pregnancy, or at least the birth of children. In the story "Bombshell," written by Rose, A. Kite, and T'Lin, Paris and Torres are married, but Harry Kim has secretly been part of their relationship for several years. When Torres becomes pregnant with twins, the three conclude that Kim must marry into the relationship before the babies are born. Similarly, in T'Lin's "Commitments," Torres asks Paris to be the father of her child, and he agrees on the condition that she and Kim marry him first. The message of these stories is that it is

wrong to have children out of wedlock, even if wedlock occurs in the unconventional triad setting.

[3.14] The common plot development of pregnancy aligns the unconventional triad with quite conventional and unflattering depictions of parenthood. In all of the stories I read involving pregnancy, Torres has two simultaneous pregnancies, one by each man, and this relegates the queer triad to the two heterosexual relationships of Paris/Torres and Kim/Torres. In Tonica's "Baby Boom," Torres becomes injured, leaving Kim and Paris to each carry his own child to term. The story becomes mpreg here, queering its genre identification but usurping stereotypical narrative conventions: the two men exhibit wild mood swings and fret about body issues, and Torres is afraid to have sex with them. Additionally, Torres's accident may be read as a critique of the working mother who, by nature of her selfish desire to have a career, has risked her babies' lives. Likewise, in "Bombshell," the two expectant fathers essentially function as one character, with their attention devoted exclusively toward Torres (and away from each other) and her mood swings directed equally at both of them.

[3.15] These stories borrow certain values and narrative stereotypes from more conventional stories, but the fact that the marriages and pregnancies occur in the unconventional triadic setting shows a reorienting away from traditional heterosexual romance narratives. The announcement of Harry Kim's involvement in the relationship in "Bombshell," for instance, can be read as an allegory for coming out. When a crew member harasses Torres for her part in the relationship, Paris scoffs, "I thought he would be a bit more enlightened than that." Tellingly, both the law and Captain Janeway, the ultimate authority on the ship, are on the trio's side. Janeway at first makes a joke that co-opts the ideology of premarital sex as immoral, asking if Paris and Kim are going to "make an honest woman" of Torres by marrying her. Nonetheless, she is only joking, and she insists that the three have a public wedding ceremony so that the crew will understand her support of their relationship. Here, Janeway and the law serve as surrogates for "real" fans who understand Star Trek's celebration of "infinite diversity in infinite combination" (note 1), while Paris's dismissal of the harassing crew member could be a comment aimed at a reader who might flame the authors. In spite of the heteronormative overtones to the triad as the story moves into pregnancy and domestic themes, the triad is in the position of the minority battling for acceptance, supported by law if not yet by public opinion.

[3.16] When the triad distances itself from marriage and pregnancy as preferred outcomes to the established relationship, it tends to endure more happily. After the first three-way sexual encounter in Nyani-Iisha Martin's "In Triplicate," Paris asks, "OK, what the hell did we *do* tonight?" Torres answers that they "had sex in interesting and varied ways." Kim seems less concerned with the physical than the emotional; he

says they showed how much they care for each other. Paris, satisfied with both answers, concludes, "And we started something I hope lasts." Although Torres jokes that they could take the Klingon marriage oath, the three do not make their arrangement permanent in a formal or legal way, and thus commitment to the triad is purely voluntary. The story (and the series to which it belongs) demonstrates that marriage does not need to be the conclusion after finding the one or ones you love. Furthermore, the three never share quarters or have children together. That the series does not result in the same domestic stasis as the canon itself eventually opens up possibilities for what it means to be in a committed relationship—and how a committed relationship may be defined.

[3.17] The stability of the triad in Martin's series stems at least partly from the fact that the characters frequently discuss their relationship, unlike the characters in DianeB's "Party of Three." For instance, in Martin's "Remembrances," Kim seeks permission from Torres and Paris to have a fling with the "alien of the week." The incident doesn't seem to affect the triad once the alien is gone; if anything, it invigorates their desire for each other. The characters' continued questioning of the relationship assures readers that it is not something into which the characters have leapt without looking.

[3.18] Additionally, desire on any one side of the erotic triangle is equal to the other two sides. Martin demonstrates this with a series of vignettes detailing sexual encounters between Paris/Torres, Paris/Kim, and Kim/Torres. These vignettes help to stabilize the erotic triangle by highlighting the distinctiveness of each pairing. In scenes that are set after various episodes, each character has an opportunity to profess his or her love to the other two (separately). Martin capitalizes on moments in the canon that have taken an emotional toll but were not resolved on screen with her complementary unseen narrative of the triad (though, admittedly, her series does not extend as far as season 7, when Paris and Torres marry in the canon). As she writes the triad, all are equally desired and equally desire, and they maintain commitment only through demonstration of their feelings for each other. While many of the other Paris/Kim/Torres stories I have analyzed align in certain ways with hegemonic values, Nyani-Iisha Martin's series allows the queer relationships to endure without wild distortion of events and characterizations in the canon.

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4. Conclusion

[4.1] Fan fiction studies have historically focused on slash, either as resisting and rewriting the canon (Lamb and Veith 1986; Bacon-Smith 1992; Jenkins 1992), as working with its homoerotic latency (Jones 2002), or as reproducing hegemony (Scodari 2003). More recent writing, however, notes that fan fiction is not monolithic

and often attempts to do many different things at once. The application of queer theory thus allows for a reading of fan fiction outside the traditional paradigm, a reorienting of the canon and its characters (Willis 2006). I have chosen to concentrate on stories of triads, which often attempt to reconcile canon with latent textual elements. These stories queer the characters' sexual and gender identity and desire, and they also queer the genre into which they are written.

[4.2] The erotic triangle between Paris, Torres, and Kim loses its stability when the triad attempts to align itself with heteronormativity and remains stable as it distances itself from certain hegemonic values. Marriage and pregnancy cause the triad to lapse into the same domestic stasis as the canon, in spite of the unconventional relationship in which these events occur. Other stories, however, do not alter events of the canon but capitalize on them to demonstrate how the three characters maintain their triadic relationship without acquiescing to the same domestic stasis as the canon. *Voyager* fans who write these stories have managed to do what the producers have not: put all three characters into an equitable, erotic, loving relationship.

[4.3] Stories of triads can thus be telling in examining how fans negotiate their own desires for characters in a series with the canon and in how fans write and read relationships. Given that many narratives draw upon the convention of a heterosexual romance subplot but also make use of a homosocial male pair-bond, it seems fitting to devote more attention to this largely ignored subgenre of fan fiction.

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6. Note

1. The Vulcan IDIC (meaning "infinite diversity in infinite combination") was first introduced in the original series. Fans have long pointed toward this concept as emblematic of Star Trek's commitment to tolerance and diversity, which they often use in their fan fiction.

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Textual Echoes: Symposium

Transmedial texts and serialized narratives

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[0.1] *Abstract*—Transmedia storytelling is connected to story worlds, which provide fans and users with different points of entry, as illustrated using the example of *The Vampire Diaries*.

[0.2] *Keywords*—Fan fiction; Storytelling; *The Vampire Diaries*

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[1] With the emergence of new media in contemporary participatory culture comes an increased focus on modalities such as transmediality: the notion that (parts of) stories are told in or dispersed across several different media. Transmediality is most often discussed in connection with gaming, interactive story worlds, and ergodic hypertexts, where the term *text* is used in a wide sense (note 1). But what are the affordances of transmedia storytelling when it comes to the as yet fairly traditional text form of fan fiction? In what follows, I will reflect on some of the characteristics of transmedial texts and see these in relation to tendencies in the production of fan fic connected to *The Vampire Diaries* (TVD) (note 2). In both its written and visual formats, TVD can be defined as a serialized narrative, a form of storytelling that demands and produces various forms of sustained audience engagement. I will consider ways in which transmediality and seriality at times pull in the same direction, and at other times illustrate differing tendencies.

[2] Several critics have noted the confusion surrounding the concept of transmediality, among them Carlos Alberto Scolari, who adds "cross media," "multimodality," "multiplatform," and "enhanced storytelling" to the mix (2009, 586). When we investigate academic discussions of transmediality, the question of the chicken and the egg comes to mind. What came first: the story or the idea of transmediality? Henry Jenkins, for example, draws attention to "the economics of media consolidation" (2011), arguing that transmediality is the likely result when media conglomerates calculate how to earn the best financial result from a certain narrative. Jenkins exemplifies this by using the Wachowski siblings' Matrix trilogy as

an ideal, if "flawed experiment" where snippets of the story told in different media (such as games and animated short films) add pieces to a complex puzzle and, in effect, are necessary for a complete understanding of, particularly, the last film (2006, 97, 93–130). In this case, it can reasonably be argued that the Wachowskis' media savvy combined with the media industry's desire for synergistic effects before the story of the Matrix trilogy was realized (even though it is also thematically eminently suited to be told in different media formats). In a discussion of cyberworld design and ludology, Lisbeth Klastrup and Susana Tosca (2004) discuss the development of J. R. R. Tolkien's The Lord of the Rings novels into a complex and transmedial narrative that offers a variety of different interactions. In this case, it can be maintained that Tolkien did not envisage transmediality when writing his novels. Rather, the world he created is highly adaptable to a number of media expressions.

[3] Both examples connect transmedia storytelling to larger ontological structures: story worlds, which provide fans and users with different points of entry. Naturally, story worlds of these kinds are also attractive to writers of fan fiction, as they give ample opportunities for reworkings of various kinds. As Sheenagh Pugh argues, fan fiction "happens in the gaps," and authors of canons and creators of story worlds "must not spell too much out" (2005, 92). Story worlds with complex ontologies and large casts of characters contain numerous gaps, and each instantiation can spell some things out, but not others. Within a fandom, an encyclopedic drive is often triggered to chart all possible outcomes and to fill in all the gaps. Jenkins notes that "consumption has become a collective process…None of us can know everything; each of us knows something; and we can put the pieces together if we pool our resources and combine our skills" (2006, 4). The figurative size of the story world, its narrative complexity and large cast of characters, demands this pulling together of resources, and fan fiction is a good example of fans' desire to contribute pieces to the puzzle.

[4] The story world of *The Vampire Diaries* started out as a quartet of novels written by L. J. Smith and published in the 1990s: *The Awakening, The Struggle, The Fury,* and *The Reunion.* Smith has since continued her narrative in a trilogy with the umbrella title The Return: *Nightfall, Shadow Souls,* and *Midnight,* published in 2010–11. She had announced plans for two additional trilogies featuring the central characters, but those plans have been withdrawn because she has been fired by Alloy Entertainment, who owns the intellectual rights to the series, and any new novels will be authored by a ghostwriter (Smith 2011) (note 3). The television series *The Vampire Diaries* premiered in September 2009; as of September 2011, it is moving into its third season. An additional trilogy of novels, with the umbrella title Stefan's Diaries, focuses on the central vampire character's backstory. The novels in this trilogy, *Origins, Bloodlust,* and *The Craving,* feature Smith's name on the covers, along with the names

of two of the series's executive producers (Kevin Williamson and Julie Plec), but Smith does not include them in the bibliography on her Web site.

[5] Whereas the original novel quartet arguably started out as story rather than transmedial franchise, the TV series and later novels are more consistent with the drive to tap into an already existing story world and fans' involvement with it. The different instantiations, however, represent very different takes on the story and contribute different pieces of information. The theme of vampires, the characters' names, and, to a point, their basic functions in the narrative are recognizable, but Smith's own novels take plotlines, character development, and the vampires' backstory in very different directions than do the TV series and the Stefan's Diaries novels. According to Jenkins's logic, TVD is not ideally transmedial. The TV series's puzzle cannot be solved by turning to the novels and vice versa; snippets of the story do not necessarily complement each other. Rather, although each novel and each season provides a certain closure, each instantiation contains a number of gaps and presents multilayered stories that can be developed and explored in fan fiction.

[6] The authority of the canon has steadily diminished in today's participatory media climate, and transmediality puts additional layers between the original work and the writing fan. Each story has a plethora of instantiations, and it is increasingly difficult to say who the story's originator is: is it the author of the novel or the producer of the TV series? The answer may depend on which instantiation one encounters first. The many media formats in which each story is told seem to destabilize the boundaries between producers and consumers of fiction, a destabilization that weakens the authority traditionally associated with originality and that gives authors of fan fiction increased license to add to the ever expanding archive.

[7] What happens, then, if we turn to ways in which ways fan fiction may have affinities with the story worlds described by Klastrup and Tosca? They argue that each transmedial world contains three core features. Mythos is "the backstory of all backstories—the central knowledge one needs to have in order *to interact with or interpret events in the world* accordingly"; topos is "the setting of the world" and "knowing *what is to be expected from the physics and navigation in the world";* and ethos is "the explicit and implicit ethics of the world" and "the knowledge required in order to know *how to behave* in the world" (Klastrup and Tosca 2004). Fan fiction generally shares a number of these features, but it may also veer away from them. The canon sets up all three core features, and studying it gives the fan fic author the necessary knowledge to intertextually position herself in relation to the main narrative, or the main strands of the narrative in the case of TVD. A certain amount of fidelity to the canon is necessary, since readers of the fan fic otherwise will not recognize the mythos and hence will not interpret the story along its lines. Although many fan fic

authors are also faithful to the topos, others play with and change the setting. This is particularly apparent in crossover fan fic, which combines two or more canons and is faithful to only one topos, and in fan fiction that utilizes the canon's protagonists but either changes the temporal setting completely or removes some essential elements. An example of the latter is fan fiction based on vampire canons that does away with the vampire element altogether; such stories are categorized as All Human or AU-human. They also abandon the ethos of the canon, since all bets concerning the behavior of both humans and (canonical) vampires are off.

[8] In TVD, the mythos in Smith's original quartet is, as noted, different from the mythos of the TV series, but both texts deal with human/vampire interaction, a central love story between Elena and Stefan, the antagonistic relationship between the vampire brothers Stefan and Damon, and threats to Elena and her friends. But the many narrative details that separate the texts, ranging from vampire mythology and the brothers' background to strengths, weaknesses, and transformations of the human characters, make it difficult to grasp their topos and ethos. It is difficult to know what to expect when moving from one instantiation to another. Their ethics are similarly confused: characters and actions may be evil in one text but not in the other. Collective online fan fic archives such as FanFiction.net and An Archive of Our Own, as well as TVD-specific sites such as Fell's Church Library (http://fanfic.vampire-diaries.net/), allow authors of TVD fan fic to signal whether their stories are set in the TV series's narrative arc or are connected to the novels (note 4). Filing itself, that is, tells the reader what mythos, topos, and ethos to expect, which is necessary within this particular story world.

[9] The mythos, ethos, and topos are also in a state of flux because of TVD's serialized nature and the lack of closure in both written and visual instantiations. Although Smith in each novel introduces some kind of threat to the protagonists, which is then dealt with in the prolonged middle, new threats are always on the horizon, and the books typically end with a cliffhanger. Each season of the TV series charts a battle with a main antagonist, but each episode also includes subplots and minor threats, which are sometimes averted. In a discussion of the appeal of extended story arcs to Buffyverse fan writers, Esther Saxey contends that the boundaries between action and closure are similarly blurred and that there is a "general…interest in the middle of shows over their closure" (2004, 206). That is, fans seize these middles as starting points for their own stories and are either uninterested in the closure of the overall story arc or reluctant to provide closure within their own fictions. Structural repetition within an open-ended story world thus seems conducive to the production of fan fic. TVD has thematic similarities to the Buffyverse, and the TV episodes in particular provide fan writers with a ready-made structure. Writers need provide little or no background or exposition to invent a threat and depict characters

dealing with it, since the reader of the story is presumably used to seeing major and minor antagonists continually introduced.

[10] The serialized narrative also has potential for "shifting perspectives and extended middles [that] contribute to the moral complications that surround characters" (Williamson 2005, 48). TVD readers and viewers have ample opportunities to react to the characters' development and the shifts of moral standpoints. The two vampire brothers, Stefan and Damon, are initially depicted as good and evil, respectively. Although both Smith's novels and the TV series humanize Damon as the narrative progresses, the initial division into good and evil is sustained throughout the first four novels and the first two seasons of the TV series, in the suggestion that Damon relishes his vampire existence and the power it gives him over life and death. In Stefan's Diaries, a different image appears, partially mirrored by flashbacks in the TV series. Stefan is shown to have initially embraced the vampire state and forced a reluctant Damon to transform as well. That is, the initial designations of good and evil shift and change both within the larger story arc and in individual episodes, so that a viewer may empathize with either Damon or Stefan, depending on what threat is being dealt with or where the viewer is in the development of the narrative.

[11] The moral complications and character development induced by serialization mean limitless possibilities for fan fic authors to create AUs exploring alternatives without forsaking fidelity to the canon material, but the lack of closure in the serialized narrative may also complicate fan fic authors' drive to fill the gaps. With each new novel published in the series, and with each new episode in the TV series, new gaps are added and new inconsistencies with earlier (published or aired) material may be found. These complications, however, like many others, do not preclude inventive fan fic alternatives. If anything, they show how fluctuating, open texts engage consumers of story worlds and posit new challenges for fan fic authors to negotiate.

[12] Transmediality and seriality push and pull in different directions. Jenkins's main argument is that "redundancy burns up fan interest," which is why each instantiation of the ideal transmedial text should "offer new insights and new experiences" (2006, 96, 105). Transmedia storytelling, then, offers (parts of) a story in different media, and thus the tantalizing prospect of fully understanding the story world by exploring each instantiation. The hope of attaining a coherent grasp of the transmedial story world is undermined by the shifts, changes, and alternatives offered by seriality. Yet the conjunction of content-based and structural repetition, the redundancy of seriality, has proven remarkably conducive to fan activities, with fan fiction as the clearest example. TVD fan fiction evidences, as does fan fiction produced in connection with similarly simultaneously transmedial and serialized story worlds, that fans may become engaged with the story in different media, but they are not willing to sit back

and wait until all pieces are in place. Rather, they dive in and take an active part in an ongoing meaning-making process.

Notes

1. See, for example, the narratological analyses of transmediality and media specificity in Marie-Laure Ryan's *Avatars of Story* (2006).

2. Even within a specific fandom, the vast field that is fan fiction does not lend itself well to generalizations of any kind; therefore I will restrict myself to suggestions only.

3. Information about Alloy Entertainment's firing of Smith is gleaned mainly from heated blog posts (see, for example, http://www.vampire-diaries.net/books/regarding-l-j-smiths-alleged-firing) and corroborated by statements on Smith's own Web site.

4. Twilight fandom provides a contrast. On Twilighted (http://twilighted.net/), fan fic authors can file their stories in sections connected to the novels' and films' titles (ranging from pre-*Twilight* to post–*Breaking Dawn*), but no distinction is made between the media formats. This may be because the film adaptations are faithful to the books.

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Textual Echoes: Symposium

Why we should talk about commodifying fan work

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[0.1] *Abstract*—Fan work's potential role in the cultural economy is an issue that has received little attention from fans and fan scholars. It is time to consider how we can ensure that commodification of fan work ends up benefiting fans first.

[0.2] *Keywords*—Commodification; Copyright; Economy; Fan Community

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1. Introduction

[1.1] Up to now, attempts to support fans and their fan works have focused on trying to obtain social and especially legal recognition. I would like to think beyond that goal and imagine how legalizing fan works would influence the answer to a loaded question: should fan work be free?

[1.2] Fan work's potential role in the cultural economy—in other words, its commodification—is an issue that has received little attention from fans and fan scholars. Social, legal, and economic circumstances have kept commercial economies and sharing economies (such as the fannish gift economy) firmly apart. However, now that new technologies allow individuals to create media of a quality that makes them economically viable, one of the main reasons for any sharp separation between sharing and commercial economies is steadily losing its significance. At the same time, fan works worldwide are becoming more visible to copyright holders, policy makers, and the general public (De Kosnik 2009, 119). There are already companies whose income partly relies on fan work, such as online community sites like deviantART (http://www.deviantart.com/).

[1.3] For quite a few years now, scholars have been debating how derivative work such as fan work could and should be integrated into the commercial cultural economy (Fisher [2004] 2007; Hughes et al. 2007; Lang, Di Shang, and Zicklin 2007; Lessig 2008, De Kosnik 2009; Arai and Kinukawa 2010; Pearson 2010). Once fan work achieves some form of legal recognition, this will no longer be just an academic exercise. Any degree of legalization, even a fairly limited one that doesn't technically allow for commodification, will set people thinking. How long will it be before enterprising fans or companies ask themselves why creators of this massively popular and newly legalized cultural product should not be allowed to play in the same commercial sandbox as those companies?

[1.4] Is it realistic to ask for legal recognition while trying to keeping commodification at bay? Is it realistic (or fair) to expect that all fans will stick to exchanging works in a gift economy when they also have the option to cross back and forth between that gift economy and other economies, even money-based ones? I believe the answer to both of these questions is no, and that it is time to consider how we can ensure that commodification of fan work ends up benefiting fans first.

2. A "hybrid economy" for fan work?

[2.1] There is nothing new to the idea that it might be better for fans to preemptively push for a commodification of fan works on their own terms before outsiders who are unconcerned with the particular needs and desires of fans do it for them. This idea will only become more relevant as fandom and commodity culture continue to encounter each other in new ways, particularly in the common space of the Internet. Abigail De Kosnik argues that female fans should not leave the economic playing field entirely to male creators; rather, she insists that typically female derivative works such as fan fic are equally worthy of compensation (2009, 124). Suzanne Scott warns that "fandom (and those who study it) continue to construct gift and commercial economic models as discrete economic spheres,"

but that this strategy may be causing fans and fan scholars to stick their heads in the sand while "commodity culture begins selectively appropriating the gift economy's ethos for its own economic gain" (2009). Others evaluate signs of rapprochement between fans and companies with less concern. Roberta Pearson suggests that the new digital economy has empowered fans to such a degree that "fan practices may provide the model for the reconfigured industry-consumer relationship of the digital era as a negotiated sharing of productive power" (2010, 91).

[2.2] Pearson's description interests me because it is reminiscent of how some law and economics researchers not involved with fan studies have imagined the increased interweaving of sharing economies of all kinds with the commercial cultural economy. Lawrence Lessig, for instance, explains this interweaving as follows:

> [2.3] Commercial economies build value with money at their core. Sharing economies build value, ignoring money…[And] between these two economies, there is an increasingly important third economy: one that builds upon both the sharing and commercial economies, one that adds value to each. This third type—the hybrid—will dominate the architecture for commerce on the Web. It will also radically change the way sharing economies function. The hybrid is either a commercial entity that aims to leverage value from a sharing economy, or it is a sharing economy that builds a commercial entity to better support its sharing aims. (2008, loc. 2680–86)

[2.4] I single out Lessig's idea for a number of reasons. The conditions for the hybrid economy he describes fit contemporary media fandom exceptionally well. The hybrid economy is also a realistic option that comes with a number of tried real-world examples, including fannish ones. The best known of these is probably the system in which Japanese and other Asian fan communities exchange dōjinshi, or fan-made manga (Lam 2010). A hybrid economy also leaves the core functioning of commercial and sharing economies intact, which is relevant to fannish interests: although some fans may like getting more options to exchange their fan work, nobody would want the gift economy to go away. Several other ways of commodifying derivative works have been suggested, some more feasible than others (Fisher [2004] 2007; Hughes et al. 2007).

[2.5] The question of how to give derivative works a proper place in cultural production seems to be a common thread in discussions about how copyright legislation should be adapted to fit contemporary industry-consumer relations. Clearly, the way in which derivative works will end up being commodified will greatly influence other areas in which industry and consumer relations need to find a new balance. If we can imagine commodifying fan work within a system like the hybrid economy, and I believe we can, Pearson's suggestion about the model function of fan practices may turn out to be prescient (note 1).

[2.6] The idea of a hybrid economy for fan work is, for now, little more than a suggestion. It skips over many practical issues that come with reorganizing economic and legal systems so that creators of derivative works can receive compensation for their work if they wish it. Numerous researchers, companies, and creators are still grappling with these issues. However, we can definitely say that the moment that the creation and dissemination of fan works becomes legal (within whatever limits), the realm of possibility for fan works will have broadened to include forms of creativity and distribution that were previously closed to fan creators. It will also have broadened to include forms of commodification that we probably can't even imagine right now. Commodification will suddenly seem a lot less unimaginable once fan works get legal recognition, and enterprising fans and businesses will start exploring their options.

3. If it's inevitable, why isn't it here yet?

[3.1] Regardless of whether or not some kind of hybrid economy for fan work is desirable, it isn't very likely to come about soon. A variety of unfavorable legal, economic, and social circumstances are in the way. What conditions would need to change to bring a hybrid economy for fan work within the realm of possibility?

[3.2] Legal restrictions come to mind first, restrictions that are well known and don't need to be described here. However, we should probably remind ourselves that legal restrictions also have a powerful chilling effect on the mind-set of those who would need to cooperate to make a hybrid economy a reality. Fears of offending powerful, litigation-happy corporations keep fans from experimenting with certain forms of media creation and distribution. They also keep companies from experimenting with business models that involve fan work in radically innovative ways. No hybrid economy will come about if everyone involved is afraid to make the first move or is so impressed

with the current copyright system that other options are barely even conceivable. Some form of legal recognition is probably the most essential condition for a hybrid economy for fan work to be viable.

[3.3] Another serious hurdle is formed by the current economic practices of the cultural industry, practices that—among other problematic things—favor large company actors over individual creators. However, commodity culture can and must adapt to the changed realities of cultural production in an economy where technological change has drastically and permanently expanded consumers' options. This kind of change may not be as unlikely as it sounds. Commodity culture has some significant incentives to let a hybrid economy for fan work emerge. Although much research into a possible hybrid for cultural goods is still theoretical, it suggests that the industries in question would reap considerable economic benefit from some form of a hybrid economy as well (Lang, Di Shang, and Zicklin 2007, 291; Arai and Kinukawa 2010, 17). And existing hybrid economies for fan work can show companies how allowing fan work to be sold can make consumers open their wallets. The value of the Japanese dōjinshi market was estimated at somewhere between US$320 to 593 million for the year 2007 (Noppe 2010, 126). The possibility of capturing even part of this kind of cash flow might well make companies think hard about the benefits of letting fans monetize derivative works based on the companies' intellectual property.

[3.4] A final reason why a viable hybrid economy for fan work is unlikely to emerge soon is that many of the fans who would power it may not be prepared to imagine the possibilities, advantages, and disadvantages of such a system. Up to now, fans and fan scholars have rarely even speculated about the potential inherent in linking fan work to commodity culture. Several concerns lie at the basis of this reluctance to consider any form of commodification. One concern is that commodification will open the doors to more meddling in fannish business by the media industry—an industry that is intent only on profit and has frequently shown itself hostile to female creators and the content they favor. A second reason why fans tend to resist the idea of commodifying fan works is that fan works continue to exist in a legal gray zone, one that causes the chilling effect I alluded to earlier. A third reason is that commodification is perceived by many to be fundamentally unsuited to gift economy–based fannish interactions. According to this idea, involving money in fandom could ruin or corrupt the social interactions between fans that are key to that gift economy.

[3.5] The first two concerns are entirely valid, and, of course, are far more complex than I can describe here. However, they are solvable, especially because a hybrid economy gains its strength precisely from empowering individual creators. The third concern, that commodification may be simply antithetical to (female) fan communities, is not convincing to me. I will return to this point in a moment. Suffice it to say that fannish practices and mind-sets are just as susceptible to change as those of companies, so the fact that certain concerns have been dominant among fans up to now doesn't mean that they will always remain so.

4. Could commodification harm fandom as a community?

[4.1] Fans work within a gift economy not just because the commercial economy has been inaccessible to them up to now, but also because they simply prefer the gift economy and dislike various aspects of the commercial system of cultural production. The frequently used definition of creative fandom as a predominantly female space that makes use of a gift economy is a powerful framework: it carries great real-world significance as well as great personal meaning for many fans, myself included. However, it isn't the only realistic framing of fandom. There are many fans who don't find this definition extremely meaningful or relevant to their interests. Plenty of fans don't have many problems with closer industry involvement in fandom (Scott 2009; Pearson 2010). The example of the Japanese system of dōjinshi production also shows that the gift economy model is not necessarily the norm for fannish production systems everywhere. Most likely, it would be impossible to describe fandom in such a way that the definition accommodates every fannish experience and is also open-ended enough to accommodate future kinds of fannish experience that have yet to develop. However, we can ensure that our framing of fandom doesn't exclude practices (such as commodification) that are merely untried and unfamiliar, not necessarily harmful or antithetical to fandom.

[4.2] The potential value of involving money in fandom may be unclear now, but we have no way of knowing what opportunities will arise if legal, economic, and social conditions change to allow for more commodification of fan work. There would be mishaps and attempts to exploit fannish labor, and any sort of commodification of fan works would cause schisms and strife within the fan community. However, these risks should not be overdramatized. Fan works have always been created and exchanged, regardless of which options were available to fans for doing so and

regardless of the legality of any of those options. Fandom is also a hotbed of strife and profound disagreements, often over topics related to legal issues or commodification; "Lexicongate" would be a prime example (Fanlore 2011). If fandom can flourish under such conditions, surely it can withstand being confronted with a tricky new way for fans to exchange their work.

[4.3] It will probably help that there is no need for any kind of trade-off between fannish and commercial activities. A hybrid economy straddles the commercial and sharing sphere without harming or erasing either. The Japanese dōjinshi system shows that this is not mere theory. Different economic systems that prioritize different values can coexist and reinforce each other, and any individual's participation in one system doesn't disqualify that person from participating in another. A hybrid economy creates more options without taking away any that are available now.

5. Conclusion

[5.1] I question whether it makes sense for fans and fan scholars to focus debates about commodification on whether commodifying fan work is in any way desirable. It will most likely happen, in some form, at some point in the future. The most important question here is not whether fans will at some point be given the option to commodify and monetize their works, but how the fan community in general will deal with new modes of fannish production emerging alongside the traditional gift economy. Will fans benefit from this commodification, or will companies seize the initiative toward commodification at the expense of fans and end up writing their own rules for a hybrid economy for fan work? Will female fans in particular manage to benefit from this commodification? Or will a hybrid economy for fan work privilege "fanboy specific" (Scott 2009) production and once more relegate female fans' efforts to another kind of periphery, this time the periphery of the category of "derivative works"? Perhaps it is time for fans and fan scholars to start considering what a hybrid economy for derivative works should, and could, be like.

6. Acknowledgment

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7. Notes

1. The best-known and most developed hybrid economy currently in existence is that of open source software. In fact, one way to make the commodification of fan works easier to envision for all parties involved is to imagine fan work as a sort of "open source cultural good" (Hughes et al. 2007) that could be exchanged in a hybrid economy comparable to the hybrid economy surrounding open source software. Fannish production practices share many key characteristics with open source software production. For instance, the fan community has a history of sharing and collaboration, with common values about the aims and workings of that collaboration (Hellekson 2009, 115), which are qualities that make a community exceptionally suited for open source production of goods. In more practical terms, open source and fannish production practices are similar enough that the vocabulary, problems, and solutions from one can help us articulate similar problems and find possible solutions in the area of the other. The complicated matter of copyright regulations is one obvious example in which insights from and developments in open source production can support the growth of a hybrid economy for fan work. On the economic side of things, business models crafted for open source software production can provide inspiration for the concrete ways in which fan works could be commodified so that fans receive sufficient benefits and control over their creations. Last but not least, given the exemplary function of the well-known and successful hybrid economy of open source software (Benkler 2007, loc. 883), casting fan work as an open source cultural good and drawing comparisons with open source may go a long way toward explaining to nonfans how and why an integration of fan work into the broader cultural economy could be both socially and economically desirable. I explore these possibilities in more depth in an essay written for the Asian Workshop on Cultural Economics (forthcoming).

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Book review

The young and the digital: What migration to social-networking sites, games, and anytime, anywhere media means for our future, by S. Craig Watkins

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[0.1] *Abstract*—S. Craig Watkins. *The Young and the Digital: What Migration to Social-Networking Sites, Games, and Anytime, Anywhere Media Means for Our Future*. Boston: Beacon Press, 2009, paperback, $18 (272p) ISBN 978-0807006160.

[0.2] *Keywords*—Facebook; Fan communities; Fandom; Gaming; MySpace; Race; Social media; *World of Warcraft*

Kohnen, Melanie E. S. 2011. *The Young and the Digital: What Migration to Social-Networking Sites, Games, and Anytime, Anywhere Media Means for Our Future,* by S. Craig Watkins [book review]. *Transformative Works and Cultures,* no. 8. http://dx.doi.org/10.3983/twc.2011.0357.

S. Craig Watkins. *The Young and the Digital: What Migration to Social-Networking Sites, Games, and Anytime, Anywhere Media Means for Our Future*. Boston: Beacon Press, 2009, paperback, $18 (272p) ISBN 978-0807006160.

[1] In *The Young and the Digital,* S. Craig Watkins examines young people's use of social media, especially Facebook, MySpace, and *World of Warcraft.* This focus on the place of online communities and social networks in contemporary culture makes *The Young and the Digital* a useful resource for scholars interested in fan communities, even though Watkins doesn't directly address fandom. The central argument of *The Young and the Digital* will certainly resonate with fan studies scholars: Watkins challenges the idea that increasing use of social media leads to social isolation. Instead, he argues, teenagers and college-age adults go online to maintain existing relationships with their peers. A multiyear study of social media use among young people provides compelling evidence to back up Watkins's claim. Indeed, Watkins's vivid description and analysis of research participants' social media usage constitutes one of the most successful aspects of *The Young and the Digital.*

[2] *The Young and the Digital* consists of nine chapters and a conclusion. The chapters fall into two broad categories: first, an examination of how Facebook,

MySpace, and *World of Warcraft* shape young people's everyday life and relationships, and second, an analysis of how social media use challenges traditional ideas about education. The book concludes with a chapter that highlights the crucial part social media played in the campaign and election of Barack Obama. The appendix provides an overview of the study that forms the basis of the book, including information about surveys, long-form interviews, and range of participants. The book addresses a popular audience, which makes it a useful text in the undergraduate classroom. *The Young and the Digital* works well as an introductory text for many key issues surrounding social media, including privacy and ownership of information, and the formation of race, gender, and class identities in digital media.

[3] While Watkins make a compelling case for the value of online social networks that mirror off-line relationships, such as Facebook, he neglects to engage with online communities that draw a distinct line between online and off-line relationships, as many fandom communities do. Indeed, it seems that Watkins is, at best, ambivalent about the value of communities and relationships that exist primarily online. This oversight is both disconcerting and useful, because it demonstrates how research methods and objects of study shape scholarly investments and conclusions. The absence of an engagement with fan communities and practices in *The Young and the Digital* can serve as inspiration to fan studies scholars—an encouragement to look beyond one's own scholarly scope of interest to recognize the diverse use of digital media in contemporary culture.

[4] Scholars researching online communities and participatory culture will find Watkins's analysis of Facebook, MySpace and *World of Warcraft* (in chapters 1, 3, 4, and 5) most useful. In these chapters, Watkins lays out his argument about the ways in which social media strengthen already existing relationships among young people. With the help of numerous examples and quotes from long-form interviews, Watkins dismantles the persistent idea that participation in online communities necessarily leads to social isolation. The exact opposite is happening, Watkins argues: social media extend and complement off-line relationships.

[5] Watkins tackles the contrast between perceptions and practices of social media use most overtly in chapter 3, "The Very Well Connected." At numerous points, he makes statements like the following: "While it is common to describe young people as more comfortable in front of a screen rather than a real person, we simply do not see enough evidence to substantiate that claim…Our findings are consistent with those of other researchers: young people use the Web as a tool to engage and maintain real-world friendship and connections" (60). While most of the evidence supporting Watkins's claim that social media strengthen young people's connections with one another stems from interviews and surveys, he also includes compelling historical

evidence. He compares the spread of social media to the introduction of the telephone into American households. Watkins convincingly demonstrates that anxieties about social media—loss of face-to-face interaction, for example—also surfaced when the telephone was still a new medium of communication. Watkins's historical contextualization of social media calls attention to the usefulness of linking contemporary and historical debates of media usage. For fan studies scholars, this model of looking to the past could help to connect current anxieties around fandom to long-standing patterns of concerns about female authorship, creativity, and engagement with media.

[6] Watkins also examines the racial and class differences that shape how young people use and imagine social media. As a key example, Watkins focuses on white college students' migration from MySpace to Facebook between 2004 and 2007. While MySpace used to be the most popular social networking site among high school and college students, Facebook gained popularity among young people because they perceived Facebook as more exclusive. By examining the language college students use to describe their perception of MySpace versus Facebook, Watkins finds they evaluate the differences between these social media platforms through a "racially colored lens" (99). He explains, "The frequent characterization of MySpace as 'trashy' and 'uneducated' underscores the widespread belief among collegians that MySpace is used chiefly by a community of digital undesirables—black, Latino, and angst-ridden teenagers—people they consistently describe as 'creepy'" (83). The comparison of young people's perception of MySpace and Facebook allows Watkins to challenge another Internet myth, namely, the idea that race, gender, class, and other markers of social identity don't matter online. In contrast to that perception, Watkins demonstrates these markers absolutely matter online: young people, especially white college students, maintain "digital gates" around their online spaces. The idea of "digital gates" might also be useful for fan studies scholars who study hierarchies within fan communities. Perhaps most importantly, Watkins's insights challenge the idea that fandom is for fun, and thus unrelated to the social divisions that shape both real life and the media texts with which fans interact.

[7] Throughout these chapters, one type of online community formation remains absent from Watkins's considerations: communities consisting of people who do not know or socialize with one another in their off-line lives. There are multiple possible reasons for this absence: perhaps the participants in Watkins's study didn't engage in those kinds of online communities in significant numbers; there is already a significant body of scholarship examining these types of communities, especially regarding online fandom; and a focus on Facebook and MySpace allows Watkins to drive home his point about the nonalienating effect of those social networks because of the overlap of online and off-line relationships. If Watkins did not encounter fandom communities on

Facebook and MySpace, a question (and possibility for further scholarly research) arises around this absence: do the networks and address constructed by Facebook and MySpace not sync with the needs and interests of fan communities? Conversely, one might want to investigate what kinds of overlaps exist between the use of digital media among fans and more mainstream users.

[8] Other chapters, especially the chapter on *World of Warcraft* and on Internet addiction, suggest Watkins doesn't ascribe as much value to online-only relationships and communities. While Watkins concedes that social bonding and intense relationships are possible among players in virtual worlds such as *World of Warcraft,* he ultimately deigns those relationships as temporary and fleeting. He also underlines that young people are most interested in online social networks that connect them to already existing friends, and only have a "lukewarm" interest in other virtual worlds and communities. At the end of his chapter on *World of Warcraft,* Watkins concludes, "For the majority of young people, the computer-mediated world is about being with real people rather than virtual personas, friends rather than strangers" (131). While this statement supports his earlier argument about the way in which social networks such as Facebook strengthen bonds among young people, it also implies that online-only communities don't consist of real people and real friendships.

[9] The chapter on Internet addiction allows Watkins's ambivalence about online-only communities to emerge to its fullest extent. Discussing the possibility of "Internet addiction" as a social and psychological phenomenon, Watkins only imagines two possibilities for online relationships that don't overlap closely with off-line relationships: either a detrimental engagement in which people are addicted to online worlds because they need to escape their miserable off-line lives, or a supposedly balanced engagement in which people recognize the value of off-line relationships and thus keep their online engagement to what Watkins considers a healthy degree (and possibly include friends or partners in their online explorations). The possibility of having close online ties without jeopardizing off-line relationships or neglecting school and work obligations does not seem to occur to Watkins. Considering how staunchly Watkins rejects the idea that online social networks lead to social isolation, Watkins's failure to recognize the intimate and lasting connections that can form in online-only communities is disappointing.

[10] Despite its shortcomings, *The Young and the Digital* offers a compelling picture of the many ways in which young people interact with digital media. The simultaneously wide and limited scope of the book demonstrates that the cultural practices and communities forming around digital media are plentiful and scattered, but that scholarship of digital cultures is often compartmentalized. In addition to providing a nuanced study of one culture, *The Young and the Digital* also serves as

inspiration to draw connections among seemingly disconnected or contradictory aspects of online communities and interactions.

Book review

Adolescents and online fan fiction, by Rebecca W. Black

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[0.1] *Abstract*—Rebecca W. Black. *Adolescents and Online Fan Fiction*. New York: Peter Lang, 2008, paperback, $29.95 (172p), ISBN 978-0820497389.

[0.2] *Keywords*—Anime; Card Captor Sakura; Community; Education; English as a second language; FanFiction.net; Language acquisition; Literacy; Nonnative English speaker

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Rebecca W. Black. *Adolescents and online fan fiction*. New York: Peter Lang, 2008, paperback, $29.95 (172p), ISBN 978-0820497389.

[1] Rebecca Black's *Adolescents and Online Fan Fiction* is published as a part of the New Literacies and Digital Epistemologies series, the volumes of which focus on literacy and popular culture and their relationship to education. The book's title implies a broader study than what is actually provided: a case study of three adolescents who are nonnative English speakers but who are posting fan fiction in English to the anime area of FanFiction.net (http://http://www.fanfiction.net/). Black uses this case study as a point from which to address second-language acquisition, literacy, and popular culture, arguing that sites like FanFiction.net provide a more empowering arena for students to develop their second-language skills than the classroom.

[2] A slim volume, *Adolescents and Online Fan Fiction* opens with a foreword from James Gee and an author's preface that forecasts the content of the book. Chapter 1 provides a literature review for scholarship into anime and manga as well as fan fiction. Chapters 2 and 3 establish the methodology, with the former discussing issues related to online ethnographies involving minors and the latter describing FanFiction.net as the research site. The next three chapters analyze the writing produced by the three main subjects of the study, with chapter 5 serving as a case study of one writer and chapter 6 discussing the functions of peer review and editing in improving the girls' English writing. In Black's conclusion in chapter 7, she compares

the literacy skills developed in online fan spaces to those developed in the classroom. The book's references and index are useful to other scholars in the area. The book contains no artwork, but Black does illustrate her analysis with excerpts from the girls' author's notes and stories.

[3] Black describes the technological and some of the social aspects of the community in her methodology section, contained in chapter 2. She states that she assumed a participant/observer role on FanFiction.net, concentrating on the anime section, with particular focus on the Card Captor Sakura category; this series was published in manga form and broadcast in anime form globally. Although the series is popular with a range of readers and viewers, the target audience consists of preadolescent girls. As a participant/observer, Black posted her own fan fiction to the site, "providing feedback for other writers' texts and interacting with a diverse group of fans" (22). Her data collection consisted of gathering fan fiction and reviews as well as fan art and contributions to communities devoted to "grammar, composition and the etiquette of peer review" (22). She also interviewed her participants via e-mail and instant messenger software. However, although she describes the functioning of the site well in chapter 3, what's missing is a sense of the overall social structure of the Card Captor Sakura community on FanFiction.net, such as the age range of writers and readers, the ratio of English-language learners to native English speakers, and the extent to which subcommunities form among different age groups or levels of English proficiency.

[4] In designing the study, Black's goal was an "inquiry into the ways in which many fannish activities are aligned with or have the potential to inform school-based literacy practices" (21). In choosing participants, she selected three English-language learners who compose in English and rely on the feedback of reviewers in order to improve their English literacy. As a former instructor of English as a second language, Black notes her surprise that students "who claimed to hate English class" (21) wrote and posted English-language fan fiction. She points out that FanFiction.net allows for posting in many different languages, including the participants' native languages, and so the participants made a specific choice to write in English.

[5] Researchers studying online spaces confront many ethical issues involved in their research, and Black is no exception. Even though the materials she analyzes are publicly available, the ethics of Black's research are complicated by the age of her participants, presenting issues common to fan studies research. She explains that even though FanFiction.net is inherently a public site accessible to any Internet user, she changed the usernames and titles of the writers and stories she references so that they would not easily surface in a Google search. In addition, she states, "When possible I shared all publishable pieces with participants for feedback and tried to

ensure that I was adequately representing their ideas about participation in fan spaces" (22).

[6] Black explains her theoretical approach to the research project as new literacy studies, using critical discourse analysis as her methodology. FanFiction.net and its Card Captor Sakura category are described as affinity spaces that allow for a number of literacies to be accessible to young writers and that provide them with the opportunity to express their own kinds of expertise and to contribute to the operation of FanFiction.net as a whole, contrasting these affinity spaces with the more rigid structure of the classroom that limits the ability of children to contribute to the functioning of the space. She sees FanFiction.net as fostering procedural knowledge among its young participants, in comparison to the propositional knowledge that is the focus of the school system. Thus the problem of disengagement with school among her participants is attributed to the difference in the level of engagement between school and online communities.

[7] While Black includes three participants, chapter 5 focuses primarily on Nanako, a girl who emigrated from Shanghai to Canada when she was 11. The other two participants, Grace and Cherry-chan, are presented as friends Nanako made while posting to FanFiction.net and who influenced her participation in the site. Grace in particular is described as a role model for Nanako as a nonnative English speaker composing in English. Grace, a native Filipino, is older than the other two girls and began writing in English in order to reach a larger audience than was available in her native language. Black points out that Grace's English education took place through her school in the Philippines, and that her English proficiency is written rather than oral. The other two subjects of the study are Chinese Canadian, and thus they are learning English in an immersive context.

[8] In describing the adolescents' writing, Black focuses less on the stories themselves and more on the ways in which the writers express themselves through story headers and author's notes. She points out Grace's function as a role model to the two younger subjects in terms of the ways she uses the author's notes to respond to reviews. Nanako is seen not only to develop as a writer of English but also to develop a greater understanding of the discourse conventions of fan writing. In contrast, Black notes that Cherry-chan's fan writing was more oriented toward socialization than developing as a writer or interacting with the canon text, as could be seen through her tendency toward hybrid forms of written and oral discourse in her introductory material.

[9] Black discusses the three girls specifically as English-language learners, noting that attention to global popular culture in relation to "the online literacy and social practices of ELL youth" (75) has been limited in research on English as a second

language. She reviews the research that has been done and identifies anime fandom as a discourse that is open to the non-Western cultural perspectives provided by English-language learners as "learners and users of multiple social languages and discourses" (79). Black argues that school discourses position English-language learners according to a deficit model, among other subject positions, but that spaces such as FanFiction.net open up possibilities for alternate subject positions that are more empowering. In chapter 5, Black considers the ways the girls' identity formation is influenced by their online literacy in English. She traces Nanako's references to her own ethnic identity as Chinese on some occasions and Asian on others, or as a "bad" or "lazy writer" (81) versus referring to English as her second language. Black observes that Nanako's construction of her popular culture discourses included not just anime, but also British music and American movies, but in a way that fosters a sense of her identity as Asian. Black points out that over time, as Nanako identified the lack of understanding among her readers of Asian culture, the themes of her fiction shifted away from school themes to Japanese and Chinese history. One issue that Black does not address is that *Card Captor Sakura* aired in an edited version on television in Canada and the United States as *Cardcaptors,* with many characters' names changed to Western names. It's not clear which version the participants had viewed, an issue that becomes more important given that Nanako begins using her fan fiction to explain aspects of Asian culture to readers who may have seen the Westernized version of the series.

[10] Black pays close attention to the ways that author's notes and reviews function on FanFiction.net as a way for users to negotiate the identities they wish to project. However, the author's notes not only allow the writers to negotiate their membership within the fan community as expert fans but novice writers, but also permit the writers to build a social group through the acknowledgement of regular readers and reviewers. Although none of the three subjects is Japanese, Black notes the incorporation of romanized Japanese into their introductory material, with the Japanese words serving to contribute to the fannish discourse of Card Captor Sakura fans. In discussing the author's notes, she also examines the types of reviews to which they respond. This examination of reviews is useful to other researchers into fan fiction, but I would have liked to have seen the reviewers included as participants in the study in order to gain a greater sense of the social discourse in which Grace, Nanako, and Cherry-chan participate.

[11] Given the more general implications of the book's title, I expected more attention to be paid to posts by native English speakers, even if only as reviewers of the writing by the three English-language learners. Although Black's conclusions contain useful insights for second-language acquisition in relation to online spaces, I found myself craving a larger study with more participants. This study examines the

ways that English-language learners use their developing literacy skills to make a place for themselves within a fan community, but it could have more fully described the discursive context of the community in which they must establish themselves as writers.

[12] In spite of the study's limitations, it is valuable for its attention to the role of recreational writing in literacy development, particularly for nonnative language users. Black argues that the structured subject positions of the classroom restrict the second language development of students like Nanako and Cherry-chan, but that a site like FanFiction.net opens up discourses in ways that provide these adolescents with greater possibilities for developing literacy skills.

[13] For fan studies researchers, one of the great strengths of the book is its literature review in chapter 1. Although the literature review is limited to scholarship available in English, it draws on research in a variety of areas, making her bibliography particularly useful to scholars working with anime and manga, fan studies, and literacy. Because this project looks at the writing of anime/manga fan fiction by adolescent English-language learners, Black opens with an overview of anime/manga research and research into anime/manga fan communities. The next section of her literature review recaps general research into fandom and fan fiction before moving on to discuss literacy scholarship in relation to the role of fan writing in the development of children's literacy skills. Noting that previous research in this area focuses on children's fan writing in the classroom or with readership limited to family and friends, Black identifies a lack of research into online fan fiction written and posted by adolescents to publicly available Web sites, a lack this study aims to fill. In her concluding chapter, Black expresses the intention to continue work in this area, and I expect her continued research to provide a significant contribution.