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FICTION
STUDIES
READER

EDITED BY KAREN HELLEKSON
AND KRISTINA BUSSE

The Fan Fiction Studies Reader

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Edited by Karen Hellekson and Kristina Busse

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The Fan Fiction Studies Reader

Introduction

Why a Fan Fiction Studies Reader Now?

A fan fiction studies reader is overdue: fan fiction studies as a field is still in its early stages—as is fan studies. Both are increasingly gaining widespread appeal, however, and the field is quickly growing as an academic interdisciplinary subdiscipline. Fan studies offers a theoretical apparatus that explains much of the appeal of current audience responses and user-generated content. Anyone who has ever fantasized about an alternate ending to a favorite book or imagined the back story of a minor character in a favorite film has engaged in creating a form of fan fiction. Anyone who has ever recommended a YouTube mash-up, shared a cat macro, or reposted a GIF set has participated in the online culture of audience-generated texts. These more ephemeral artifacts are not available for purchase at Amazon.com but instead are often subjected to takedowns for either supposed terms of service or DMCA copyright violation—accusations that are difficult to fight and are therefore often successful even when not warranted. Yet these ephemeral artifacts are important traces of a culture where the producer has learned to use freely available tools to rip, record, and disseminate derivative creative artworks based on another media source. Studying them, and even creating them, can tell us much about our culture, and such study is worth our time.

The earliest works in the academic literature in the field of fan studies date only from the mid-1980s, but since then, fan studies has emerged as a truly interdisciplinary field, one that has adopted and adapted ideas from various other disciplines, particularly audience and cultural studies. The disciplines of English and communications interpret fan artifacts, their creation, and the rhetorical strategies they use to make meaning; anthropology and ethnography analyze the fan subculture; media, film, and television studies assess the integration of media into fan practice and artworks; psychology examines fans' pleasure and motivation; and law analyzes the underlying problems

related to the derivative nature of the artworks, including concerns related to copyright, parody, and fair use. The goal of these disciplines is to provide various modes of analysis, which might usefully be divided according to the classic rhetorical situation: What is the focus of the mode of analysis—the creator, the text, the text’s consumer, or some combination of these?

In *The Fan Fiction Studies Reader*, we gather together in one place some of the foundational texts of the fan fiction studies corpus. An increasing number of scholars are turning to fan studies to engage their students as a result of the overlap between fan studies and other disciplines related to popular and cultural studies, including social, digital, and transmedia studies. Fan fiction is certainly not the only aspect of fan works and fan engagement important for classroom use, but it is the most extensively studied, and this extensive research can often serve as a base for addressing other aspects of fan studies.

We are well aware of the myriad and important aspects of fan studies that focus on (1) other creative fan works (fan art, fan vids, podcasts, cosplay), (2) other sources (games, music, sports), (3) other forms of engagement (collecting, celebrity studies, official fan clubs), (4) fans of texts produced outside Western Anglophone media (anime, J-Pop, K-Pop; the reception of Western texts in non-Western cultures). We have nevertheless chosen to restrict our collection to transformative written works of Western media texts in order to provide a cogent history of one particular strand of fan studies research that has been prolific and influential to both fan and media studies.

Even given these restrictions, it is our hope that this volume will be a resource for teaching fandom in the classroom: fan works are readily accessible online, and they often engage students more easily than the professionally produced short stories, novels, TV shows, and films that tend to fill academic courses. Fan fiction studies provides a useful, accessible, and student-friendly site of interrogation for many concerns about producer-consumer relations and resistance, individual and community identity, performativity and online construction of personas, and audience responses and media transformations.

Finally, there is the importance of intertextuality within current literature in general and the rising role of fan fiction in particular: Jean Rhys’s *Wide Sargasso Sea* is taught as regularly in college classrooms as Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre*; Tom Stoppard’s *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* may not be performed as often as *Hamlet*, but it remains an important stage play; and the musical *Wicked*, based on Gregory Maguire’s book, may be as familiar to today’s teen generation as *The Wizard of Oz* was to an earlier

generation. Yet none of these texts has been read as often as has E. L. James's *Fifty Shades of Grey*, a *Twilight* fan fiction turned New York Times best seller. The unprecedented success of the Fifty Shades trilogy, and the media attention it has prompted, might single-handedly justify a need to critically and comprehensively theorize fan fiction studies.

The Scholarly Field of Fan Studies

The year 2012 marked the twentieth anniversary not only of Henry Jenkins's groundbreaking work *Textual Poachers* but also of Camille Bacon-Smith's *Enterprising Women*, Lisa Lewis's essay collection *The Adoring Audience*, and Constance Penley's "Feminism, Psychoanalysis, and the Study of Popular Culture." These were not the first academic discussions of fan fiction, but together, these texts would define the focal points and circumscribe the boundaries of what fan studies was to become. These fan studies texts came from a variety of different disciplines and used various methodologies, presaging the multidisciplinary nature of the field. These texts remain important to scholars of fan studies today. Even though much has changed within the field of fan studies since their publication—in large part as a result of the rise of the Internet, which changed the faces of both fandom and academic studies—many of the approaches and concerns remain similar today.

Fan studies as a discipline is old enough to have its required-reading scholarship and leaders in the field. Determining what and who these texts and authors are is a collective decision within the field and a function of collections such as ours. In fact, the term *fan fiction studies* already defines itself restrictively, with its focus on English-language scholarship and its strong emphasis on textual artifacts. By creating this collection, we are actively engaging in a form of canon formation, foregrounding certain texts and not others. Within the introductory headnotes to each of this book's four sections, we therefore not only explain our reasoning for including these specific texts but also provide further context: we elaborate on the texts that form the backdrop to the anthologized essays, and we survey the work that builds on and responds to this scholarship.

Although fans enact their interest, fascination, and even obsession with their beloved object in many ways, academic discussions have often chosen to look at transformative rather than affirmative fans. Affirmative fans tend to collect, view, and play, to discuss, analyze, and critique. Transformative

fans, however, take a creative step to make the worlds and characters their own, be it by telling stories, cosplaying the characters, creating artworks, or engaging in any of the many other forms active fan participation can take. Part of the academic interest in transformative fans is that there exist actual artifacts that can be studied and analyzed; another is that affirmative fans can range from casual viewer to aficionado, but transformative fans are always strongly emotionally invested. Further, transformative fans are often critical of the texts (both of the texts they consume and the texts they create), so they present an active audience that not only disproves the passive-audience models favored in early audience studies but also creates artifacts that can be analyzed and that exist to provide proof of that discontent.

Fan studies brings together various strands of media studies (particularly TV and film), cultural studies, and literary theory, drawing from ethnography, the social sciences, the languages, communication studies, Internet/Web 2.0 studies, and the humanities. All these strategies are brought to bear to study a field that encompasses subcultural communities and the works they create. The tensions within the academic work on fans and the artifacts they create include determining the actual object of study (should fan fiction be read as authored texts or as fan utterances to be anonymized and protected?) and the role of the academic (disinterested outside observer or involved participant?). Likewise, the roles that fan-created artifacts play can vary from scholar to scholar. A fan-created text functions as an artistic object for literary scholars, but media scholars may regard it as an important insight into the reception of the commercial text on which it is based, and sociologists may read it as one data point in the vast amount of texts within that particular fandom. Most academic work on fans and fan works often exists at the intersection of these disciplines, negotiating different theoretical approaches and methodologies.

Moreover, within the last twenty years, the relationships between fans and public media as well as between fans and academia have shifted. Fan fiction is one example. Whereas Jenkins and Bacon-Smith in the 1980s and early 1990s had to find a way into the community, go to conventions, and mail-order hard-copy fanzines that collected fan-written stories and artwork, college students today have grown up with fan fiction easily available on the Internet. They readily survey and analyze their fan friends and the stories they write. Fan fiction is even mentioned in scripted television shows; most people at least know what it is, even if they haven't read any. Although most of the essays in this collection were written after the rise of the Internet and

the mainstreaming of fan cultures, 2012 may indeed mark the conclusion of this slow shift from nearly unknown and indecipherable subculture to mainstream behavior: the year's surprise hit novel, E. L. James's *Fifty Shades of Grey*, originally a *Twilight* fan fiction, headed the *New York Times* Best Seller list and outsold the series on which it was originally based.

This volume collects a variety of essays that showcase the different modes and approaches as well as the theoretical shifts and changes of the last two decades. The introduction presents the current state of the field and lays out the book's organization in broad terms. Each of the four sections contains several important texts of fan studies by well-established scholars. The sections' titles and division indicate how certain ideas have been central to fan studies at various times, and the essays within each section indicate the changes and theoretical developments in the field. We contextualize the essays in each section by providing an overview of foundational texts that influenced them and the discipline as a whole, and we explain the relevance of the selections in terms of the argument we wish to make about their importance to the field. This situates the essays in such a way as to allow readers to understand their roles and the ways they intersect and communicate with one another and with the larger scholarship. Each section also contains a suggested reading list that expands the general discussion begun in the essays and showcases the different directions scholarship is taking, but we know that these reading lists will date quickly, and we encourage readers to expand them on their own.

What Is Fan Fiction?

Although we have talked about fan texts and fan artworks to emphasize the diversity of forms that fan works can take, this volume will focus primarily on fan fiction. Fan fiction was the first sort of fan-created text to be analyzed. The concept of fan fiction as derivative amateur writing—that is, texts written based on another text, and not for professional publication—can be traced at least to the Holmesian pastiche or extensions of Jane Austen's universe, although of course fans have always played with texts, rewritten endings, and in general created texts. Fan fiction as a term didn't appear until 1944 (Speer 1944). Moreover, it was coined for an entirely different purpose: to describe fiction about fans, which would appear in science fiction fanzines. This meaning fell out of use in favor of the notion of fan fiction as the imaginative

interpolations and extrapolations by fans of existing literary worlds. But even with this current understanding of fan fiction, a wide variety of texts may be included or excluded, depending on how one defines the term.

These inclusions or exclusions relate to how one thinks of fan fiction. If we think of it as a form of collective storytelling, then the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* might be tagged as the earliest versions of fan fiction. If we think of fan fiction as a response to specific written texts, we can trace fan fiction back to the Middle Ages (Keller 2011; Simonova 2012). If the term is understood to include a legal component, then fan fiction could not have existed before the development of authorial copyright, so the first fan fiction could, for example, be some of the rewrites of Jane Austen by her readers. If the term requires an actual community of fans who share an interest, then Sherlock Holmes would easily qualify as the first fandom, with fan-written Holmes pastiches serving as the beginnings of fan fiction. Finally, if we look at it as a (sometimes purposefully critical) rewriting of shared media, in particular TV texts, then media fan fiction, starting in the 1960s with its base in science fiction fandom and its consequent zine culture, would start fan fiction proper.

Following most academics working on fan fiction studies, we use the last of these definitions, which is also the most narrowly defined. This definition places the beginnings of media fan fiction in the late 1960s. The 1960s saw the rise of the television program *Star Trek*, fans of which followed existing science fiction fandom infrastructure, with its vibrant convention and fanzine culture, to create media fandom, the self-adopted term by transformative fans of Western media products (Coppa 2006a). This—especially in the beginning—primarily female fan community started with *Star Trek*, but it soon came to include a variety of television shows with genres ranging from cop and spy shows to romance and mystery; besides *Star Trek*, other early notable media fandoms arose around *The Professionals* and *The Man from U.N.C.L.E.* From the beginning, the *Star Trek* zines not only included theoretical musings and critical reflections but also creative responses to the show: *Spockanalalia* (1967), the very first *Star Trek* fanzine, contained the first creative piece, Dorothy Jones's "The Territory of Rigel," which Francesca Coppa analyzes in her essay in this collection.

Through the 1970s and 1980s, fans connected via cons and zines as well as via traditional postal mail and circulating texts known as apas (amateur press associations). Sometimes zines and cons were focused on particular TV shows or films, but soon fan fiction began to create its own fandom

with its own infrastructure. Zines might include fan fiction from a variety of shows and cons, such as Media*West, held in Lansing, Michigan, which even today brings together media fans of a wide variety of film and TV texts to celebrate and share fan creations, including fan fiction, filk, cosplay, vids, art, and crafts. Although there are many different forms of derivative and transformative fiction based on other media texts, the term *fan fiction* as the majority of fan scholars use it mostly tends to adhere to this tradition. As a result, other developing traditions, such as yaoi/boys' love, Sherlockian published pastiches, fantasies depicting fan relationships with music stars, or even fan-written soap opera scripts, often do not fit the generalizations put forth about fan fiction and media fandom.

Thus, we look here at fan fiction as historically situated in the last forty years, tending to respond to a specific form of media texts, and encompassing a specific amateur infrastructure for its creation, distribution, and reception. Within that definition, fan fiction is stories written about (Western live-action) TV shows that started with *Star Trek* and spawned con and zine culture, the form of which was borrowed from science fiction literary conferences. In the 1970s, fandom began spreading to include fans of other TV shows—and, in time, to other media. TV series such as *Starsky and Hutch* and *Doctor Who*, and the *Star Wars* films began to create their own zines, and by the 1980s, multimedia zines (composed of fan fiction for a variety of shows or films, rather than focusing on a single text) had become popular. This development suggests that readers were interested in the stories themselves, so that one might read a story for a show one wasn't necessarily fannish about simply because the story was enjoyable or because the reader liked the author. In effect, fan fiction had established its own fandom. This admittedly narrow focus offers a well-defined group of readers and writers who readily share their stories and their thoughts about them, among themselves and with scholars. As a result, many early scholars focused on these groups, and others followed their lead, including Henry Jenkins, Camille Bacon-Smith, and Constance Penley.

Fan Texts and Scholarly Responses

The rise of the Internet in the mid-1990s has led to a variety of interfaces: Usenet and shared mailing lists (Listservs, Yahoo! groups), archives and journaling platforms, Tumblr and Twitter. All have changed modes of dis-

tribution and consumption, and with it the demographics of fan fiction fans. No longer did fans have to learn about fandom through personal engagement with other fans; the Internet handed it to them, and they could engage alone or within a group. Scholarship has changed to incorporate changes in stories and communities, even addressing the ways interfaces have shaped both of these. Our 2006 collection, *Fan Fiction and Fan Communities in the Age of the Internet*, is a good example of a type of scholarship that places fan fiction studies firmly within the procedural and formal contexts of online infrastructures. Moreover, like its contemporary collection, Gray, Sandvoss, and Harrington's 2007 *Fandom: Identities and Communities in a Mediated World*, it acknowledges the dual role of academic as fan and fan as academic; it also highlights the multidisciplinary, multivocal approaches that connect the social to the textual and the literary to the historical.

The central directions in fan fiction research may be divided into a variety of approaches that loosely correspond to the different essays we have chosen for this collection.

1. *Fan fiction as interpretation of the source text.* Essays following this approach regard fan fiction as an interpretive gesture, so fan fiction is studied to gain insight into what it says about the primary text, the characters, or both. Practically, they focus on the source text and often use particular fan stories as examples. Often such essays can be found in source text-specific collections, with a study of fan fiction used a mode of interpreting and analyzing a given show, film, or book (Tulloch and Jenkins 1995; Lancaster 2001; Brooker 2002). Because this collection is interested in fan fiction as a general and theoretical subject, the essays here focus mostly on fan works and the communities that surround them rather than specific source texts.

2. *Fan fiction as a communal gesture.* Essays that focus on the fan community and its internal relationships often use fan fiction to gain further insight into such community structures. In this collection, an excerpt from Camille Bacon-Smith's 1992 book about *Star Trek* fandom, *Enterprising Women*, closely analyzes various Mary Sue stories, but she is ultimately interested in how these stories function within the fan community. Likewise, Roberta Pearson's (1997) discussion of online Sherlock Holmes fandom showcases the similarities in organizing and retrieving information for the nineteenth-century sleuth and his erstwhile followers.

3. *Fan fiction as a sociopolitical argument.* In this approach, sometimes connected with close readings, the fan community is analyzed, often in terms of feminist and/or queer reappropriations of the primary texts. This approach is among the most common in fan fiction studies, often underlying and supplementing others. In our collection, Lamb and Veith (1986), Russ (1985), and Penley (1997) all use this contextual community approach, as does Jones (2002), albeit more critically.

4. *Fan fiction as individual engagement and identificatory practice.* This approach explores collective sexual dynamics and with it invites a focus on more individual psychological motivations and effects. In reaction to the community-centered focus prevalent in the 1990s, academics like Matt Hills (2002), Steven Bailey (2005), and Cornel Sandvoss (2005) have moved away from studying media fandom as a particularly interesting case study. Instead, they have widened the field of research and the definition of fan. In so doing, the research foregrounds the specific emotional investment of individual fans and the relationship between their investment in their fannish objects of desire and their psychological and cultural identity construction. In these approaches, fan fiction becomes just one way that fans interact with their fandom.

5. *Fan fiction as one element of audience response.* Fan studies is greatly indebted to early cultural studies and in particular to Stuart Hall's (1980) incorporation/resistance paradigm. Abercrombie and Longhurst (1998) suggest an alternative model they call the spectacle/performance paradigm, which they hope lacks the confrontational quality of Hall's initial concept. According to this model, media invites complex and diverse audience responses that should not be simplified into a binary division of viewers who fully incorporate the intended message and ideology and those who choose to subvert it. In its stead, they suggest a model where viewers engage with the programs on multiple levels, negotiating its myriad messages and responding with interpretations and performative responses of their own. In addition to an excerpt from Abercrombie and Longhurst, Jones's (2002) essay explicitly uses this model.

6. *Fan fiction as a pedagogical tool.* With the increase of ever-younger readers and writers, fan fiction has become an important aspect of teaching literacy, basic language, and writing skills. Henry Jenkins (2008) establishes the importance of fan fiction as a pedagogical device. Indeed, research has fo-

cused on the various ways fan fiction can be used in the classroom: from fan fiction writing assignments as interpretive exercises to fan fiction used to help foreign-language acquisition (Black 2008; Larsen and Zubernis 2012).

Reader Overview

The reader is divided into four broad sections, though—as with any such arbitrary division—many of the essays could fit thematically in more than one section. The fan fiction directions we just outlined run throughout all the sections, though certain sections may rely more strongly on one of the approaches than others.

Fan Fiction as Literature

The essays in part 1 focus on the creation of fan artifacts, mostly fan fiction, as a form of textual tension and poaching. Although we see fan fiction as a textual phenomenon as well as one with important social and cultural ties (that is, it creates a group of people invested in a particular source text known as a fandom), the three texts we have chosen all focus on the relationship between literary studies and fan fiction. These essays set the stage for the more communally focused essays that follow in parts 2 to 4, exploring the fraught relationship between the fan creator of derivative artworks and the producer of the originary text, as well as the status of fan fiction as literature.

We begin with an excerpt from Henry Jenkins's 1992 discipline-defining work, *Textual Poachers*, in which he introduces the world of media fans and the expansive worlds they create in their stories. He uses Michel de Certeau's term *poaching* to describe the active reading strategies of fans, who steal something that belongs to someone else, here the producer, and make it their own. Jenkins discusses the aesthetic and the political implications of fan works and analyzes in depth the myriad intertextual dimensions any fan text contains—not just with the source text but also with other texts, like TV shows or films featuring the actors, other fan-created texts, other literary texts, and specific cultural contexts. This early work on fan fiction already features the complex intertextuality, the strong cultural component, and the complicated relationship with the media industry that characterize later studies.

Although most fan fiction scholarship deals with fandoms based on film and television, Roberta Pearson's 1997 essay focuses on one of the largest

literary fandoms: Sherlock Holmes. Pearson discusses the confrontation of old media and new, of book fandom and the Internet, of analytic and interpretive approaches to the source texts. “It’s Always 1895: Sherlock Holmes in Cyberspace” testifies to the immense changes the Internet brought to fan fiction. Pearson draws connections between content and form of the fandom as she discusses Sherlock Holmes’s amazing deductive powers and his extensive collection of facts alongside the memory power of the Internet. Her essay serves a historical function, just as Jenkins’s does: he observes late zine and con fandom, whereas Pearson describes the very early stages of the Internet. Both demonstrate which aspects of fan fiction fandom have changed little and which have been completely altered.

The final essay in part 1 is Cornel Sandvoss’s 2007 “The Death of the Reader? Literary Theory and the Study of Texts in Popular Culture.” Sandvoss writes back to several decades of media and cultural studies, and his essay provides ways to usefully engage literary theory to escape the disciplinary criticism that has been leveled against the field. Sandvoss, by situating fan studies clearly within a historical-political and literary-theoretical context, showcases how a more philosophically influenced approach to fan studies can benefit both fan studies and literary theory. His essay focuses on the similarities of approach among the texts rather than the differences of content.

Fan Identity and Feminism

Whereas in part 1 we focus on fan fiction as literature, in part 2 we look at the community surrounding the production, dissemination, and reception of fan fiction, both online and off. In particular, the essays included here assess how fan fiction has often been read as a way for its writers to explore feminist and/or queer identity issues. Early academic work in particular was faced with an almost entirely female fan community, which invited questions of gender and sexual identity when discussing the fan texts in terms of identification with a source text. Slash, a fan artwork genre that focuses on homoeroticism, resulted in academic scrutiny particularly in the 1980s and 1990s, and scholars remain interested in it.

In Patricia Frazer Lamb and Diana L. Veith’s 1986 essay “Romantic Myth, Transcendence, and *Star Trek* Zines,” the authors provide a complex explanation as to why male-male slash fan fiction might be so appealing to women fans. They conclude that slash depicts transcendent romantic love in a way that traditional heterosexual love cannot: as a love between true equals of equal

power. Arguing that neither reality nor its televisual representation permits true equality between genders, they trace the gendering of the male-male pairings. Both of the men in such a pairing, they argue, contain male and female stereotypical characteristics, furthering the sense of equality between them and allowing identification of female readers with either and both.

In contrast, Joanna Russ's 1985 "Pornography by Women for Women, with Love" passionately defends sexually explicit fiction by and for women. She acknowledges Lamb and Veith's argument, but instead of focusing on the emotional subtext, she concentrates on the explicit sexuality explored in many of the stories. As the title suggests, Russ celebrates slash fan fiction as possibly the only noncommercial pornography produced specifically by and for women—a fact that deserved note in the middle of a struggle of the relationship between pornography and feminism through the 1980s.

Concluding part 2 is Sara Gwenllian Jones's 2002 "The Sex Lives of Cult Television Characters," an important rejoinder to these earlier essays, whose arguments had all but become generally accepted truth in the intervening fifteen years. Rather than celebrating the political or sexual subversiveness of slash, Jones focuses on the plot elements of both the source text and the stories based on it. She finds that the source texts prevent heterosexual romance from taking place—or rather, that the settings are all too often hostile to traditional romance. The homosocial nature of many of the shows thus invites slash pairings, but in fiction, these pairings often are situated in domestic settings. Most slash scholars posit that fan fiction subverts and resists the sources, but Jones argues that the slash stories often reinforce heteronormative notions, albeit within a same-sex pairing.

Fan Communities and Affect

Part 3's focus is analysis of fans in particular, both as affective agents and as enthusiasts. The three essays included here interrogate the impetus to engage in fan activities, and they investigate the community practices for welcoming new members and establishing hierarchy. Beyond the textual analyses of fan works, two approaches have always existed in fan studies: one that focuses on the psychology of the fan, and one that centers on the sociology of the community. The essays look at both of these and the way they intersect and play out within the history of fan studies.

Camille Bacon-Smith's 1992 *Enterprising Women* is a central text in fan studies. It showcases the slow initiation of an outsider into a fan community

before the rise of the Internet, when fan communities were created in person. The chapter excerpted here, “Training New Members,” follows Bacon-Smith’s steps to her first *Star Trek* conventions and offers an analysis of the zines she encounters there. She focuses on fan stories with central female characters that either are originally created by the author or that expand on minor canon characters. Her close reading of the stories brings together textual, psychological, and sociological analyses as she explores the phenomenon of the Mary Sue, a genre of story that features an idealized, perfect author stand-in, and the criticism that these stories generate within the fan community.

Nicholas Abercrombie and Brian Longhurst’s 1998 *Audiences: A Sociological Theory of Performance and Imagination* provides a concerted and comprehensive look at audience studies, where the authors discuss spectacle and performance in an attempt to better describe the complexity of fans and fandoms. “Fans and Enthusiasts” provides a model in which audiences have a wide variety of subject positions in terms of identity and in terms of relationship to the fan object. Abercrombie and Longhurst describe a continuum of intensity, identity, and productivity. The essay adds an important sociological look at fan cultures and the diverse individual performances scholars of fans encounter.

Constance Penley’s *NASA/Trek* reflects a different methodological and disciplinary tradition. The work is a fascinating look at the relationship between fandom—in particular science fiction fandom—and technological developments, including the space program. In “Future Men,” Penley engages with the slash theories posited in the previous section by Lamb and Veith as well as by Russ to show how fan collectives reshape not just the male psyche but the male body as well. Connecting fandom with both feminist practices and theories of technology, Penley suggests that writers of slash attempt to imagine a more feminist public sphere by utilizing technologies of the present and future. This essay is an early example of a text that addresses the limitations of fandom, in particular how the focus on feminist issues tends to push aside any concerns of race and class.

Fan Creativity and Performance

Part 4 focuses on the way fandom creates identity and the associated role of performativity in fan studies. The two essays in this section discuss place, identity, and performance as enacted by fans and their texts. Rather than limiting texts to fan fiction, these essays discuss all textual utterances that, online, often can function as specific performances of identity.

Kurt Lancaster's 2001 book *Interacting with "Babylon 5": Fan Performances in a Media Universe* uses performance theory to discuss the way fans interact with the text and one another. "Performing in Babylon—Performing in Everyday Life" addresses the way fan culture fails to exist outside of the often quite purposeful performative acts of its practitioners. Focusing on *Babylon 5* show runner J. Michael Straczynski in particular, Lancaster shows how different self-presentations and self-representations are required when facing journalistic critics and fans of the show. Lancaster analyzes the famous B5 message board, where Straczynski simultaneously performed the roles of fellow fan and adored show runner, thus modeling show runner–fan interactions.

The final selection, Francesca Coppa's "Writing Bodies in Space: Media Fan Fiction as Theatrical Performance" (2006b) explores the theme of the fan self as gendered performance. Coppa explores the way fan culture itself has gendered different forms of fannish engagement, with the less valued fan practices both being focused on the body and gendered as female. She suggests that fan fiction is a dramatic performance rather than a literary engagement: its repetitive qualities and its focus on the body situate fan fiction closer to theatre and its communal, endlessly replicated performances.

A Note on the Editing

As a general rule, the essays in this volume appear exactly as they did in their original publications, with the following exceptions:

- Some pieces were cut for length, in which case we have added ellipses and in some cases bracketed words to fill in the context.
- Some illustrations that appeared with the original essays were deleted.
- Some standardizing of the format of in-text references, endnotes, and bibliography entries has been applied.

In addition, all bibliography and works cited entries were combined (with duplicates removed) and moved to the back of the book. Where bracketed ellipses [. . .] appear in the book, these are copied from the original essays and do not indicate where we, as editors, removed textual material. We made no attempt to standardize such things as use of British versus American spelling, stylistic treatment of numbers, and capitalization.

Conclusion

This collection of essays, which covers twenty-five years and a variety of disciplinary approaches and theoretical shifts, only hints at the proliferation of fan studies in recent years. As fan fiction has moved from a mostly subcultural hobby of a few committed fans to an advertising tool for media companies—and even as a commercial juggernaut for publishing companies—discussions of writers and stories must change. Yet many of the analyses here remain central to studying the online discourses surrounding fan communities.

Many more intersections with other disciplines exist than could be provided in this volume, including law, economics, and new media. We could just as easily have grouped legal concerns and the status of authorship, the economy of transmedia fan texts, or identity and online fan communities as additional sections. Especially because fan fiction can become a valuable property and fan affect has been recognized by media makers as a valued commodity, with producers using fans as free labor to generate buzz and interest, many scholars have shifted from a focus on fans to an interest in fan-friendly production and fan interpellation. In other words, significant academic focus has moved to concerns of authorship and creation of commercial transmedial networks in their attempts to create and reward loyal fans as well as the dangers of exploitation such use of fan labor may entail.

Nowhere is this move more obvious than in the development of Henry Jenkins's work. Having studied, in *Textual Poachers* (1992), the primarily female media fan communities, which he understood as independent from, if not in opposition to, media industries and the fan works they produce, in *Convergence Culture* (2005), he focused on the relationship between media producers and audiences and their converging cultures. With the term *convergence culture*, Jenkins describes how different media forms work together, often in response to the ever more prevalent transmedia elements, where one franchise engages within a variety of interfaces (print, TV show, Web, comic book) and in a variety of different forms.

Associated with this is the way fan cultures have moved from being a tolerated or ignored unruly fan response to an important and sought-after audience of engaged leaders. Fans used to be a small, easily mockable subculture, but changes in distribution models, audience interaction, and cultural acceptance have mainstreamed the term and behavior, with media industries

trying to model fannish modes of engagement to ensure engaged, positive, and active audiences.

This volume looks back on historical approaches as we have entered an age of convergence. Engaged viewers are now actively invited and courted by producers, including even the previously marginalized fans. This doesn't mean that sexual content (for example) is necessarily welcome, or that many of the less conventional romantic fan pairings will suddenly become canon on the shows. However, it does mean that producers are now paying attention to fans and their online reactions, as on bulletin boards. The anxieties surrounding fan productions have eased for various reasons: (1) mores regarding sexualities and sexual identities have changed in the West, in particular, making both sexually explicit writing and gay themes more acceptable; (2) fans and geeks have entered the mainstream, thus changing the media-presented image, so it is easier to identify and know that a community exists out there and for fans to consider becoming active; (3) media producers are consciously inviting fans to contribute and actively participate; and (4) fans are self-consciously organizing and establishing their rights to create transformative works.

This collection shows the historical roots of fan studies, and even as fan studies is expanding and moving in new directions it remains vital to know where we came from in order to understand where we are headed. Many current ideas continue the approaches that have successfully served the study of early Internet and pre-Internet fan studies, and it is crucial to see these connections. At the same time, it is important not to assume that the current status quo was always such and to look at the developments, both fannish and academic, that have gotten us here. Fundamental shifts have occurred in reaction to the changing fan-producer relations, the changing demographics of fans, and the wider accessibility of texts, in large part as a result of technological shifts but also as a result of the changing theoretical frameworks of media and cultural studies. We argue, however, that it is exactly because the field has changed and the discipline is growing that this collection is important. It shows the historical roots of fan studies, indicating both similarities and differences from the work that is being done right now—and in the future.

The overview preceding each section traces the central ideas of the articles that follow, including identification of the texts that have influenced—and that have been influenced by—related essays, as well as a summary of intersections with other essays addressing similar concerns. We thus situate

the essays historically and thematically. But we also point toward the various trajectories of their central ideas. Literary and cultural phenomena are important to consider together in order to contextualize events, but it requires an approach that shows how ideas have developed and evolved over time to fully understand the fannish and academic moments that have led to this present. By showcasing a selection of the central texts of fan fiction studies and introducing readers to the academic scholars who have founded and continue to add to the discipline, we offer the necessary context to understand what fan studies offers today—a world that has changed entirely, but one that is not all that different than that of the *Star Trek*-loving scribbling ladies of nearly half a century ago.



FAN FICTION AS LITERATURE

As noted in the introduction, the three essays in this section all address fan-created works as literary artifacts. Although the high-low culture divide continues to be challenged, with scholars now willing to seriously treat such formerly disdained texts as science fiction, comic books, video games, and pornography, fan-created texts have only rarely been the focus of analysis. As the following essays show, fan texts—and here we use fan fiction as an exemplar for all sorts of fan texts, which may include other forms of artwork, like fan-made videos—may be addressed in terms of the impetus of their creation, the medium of their transmission, and the modes of analysis used to study them. One subgenre of academic literary analysis is not included here: a close reading of a fan-written text.

It may not be coincidental that the specter of authorial intention, cast out with the rise of poststructuralism and postmodernism, coincides with fan fiction's beginnings. The interpretive power shifted away from the author and even the text. Instead, it resides in the process of reading and interpretation.

Roland Barthes's "The Death of the Author" (1977) and Michel Foucault's "What Is an Author?" (1977) theorized a literature in which meaning always exceeded the author's intent; often meaning was coproduced between author and reader. In a way, fan fiction might be read as a fictional embodiment of this collaborative reading process, although it is also a creative text in its own right. From its inception, fan fiction has always been multiple: entertainment and analysis, original and derivative.

Henry Jenkins, in *Textual Poachers*, introduces the world of media fans and the expansive worlds they create in their stories, particularly those who are both academics and fans—*acafans*. Using Michel de Certeau's term *poaching*, Jenkins describes the active reading strategies of fans who "create" fan works by co-opting what belongs to someone else. He continues his discussion of the aesthetic and political implications of fan works by analyzing the numerous intertextual dimensions contained in any fan text—not just with the source text, but also with other TV shows or films featuring the actors, other literary texts, other fan-created texts, and specific cultural contexts. It is notable that Jenkins's early work on fan fiction already features the complex intertextuality, the strong cultural component, and the complicated relationship with the media industry that suffuse later studies.

The majority of fan fiction scholarship deals with film and television fandoms, but Roberta Pearson's 1997 essay "It's Always 1895: Sherlock Holmes in Cyberspace" focuses on literary fandom. In her discussion of Sherlock Holmes fans, she introduces the subject of the immense changes to fan fiction brought about by the early stages of the Internet. Like Jenkins's essay, Pearson's demonstrates which aspects of fan fiction fandom have remained relatively stable and which have been completely altered.

In "The Death of the Reader? Literary Theory and the Study of Texts in Popular Culture" (2007), Cornel Sandvoss focuses on similarities of approach within the field of fan studies rather than on differences of content. By harking back to several decades of media and cultural studies, Sandvoss suggests a "synthesis between cultural studies and literary theory" in order for the field of fan studies to escape the disciplinary criticism that has been leveled against it.

The literary approach to fan fiction has always taken several routes, each addressed by one of the essays included here, and which we address in turn: (1) texts are read collectively, harking back to oral storytelling and folkloristic narratives; (2) texts are read as critical analyses of the source texts; and (3)

texts are read as literary works in their own right. Central to our analysis is an understanding of an author-fan as embedded in a community of other fans, to whom she disseminates her work and with whom she continually engages.

Reading Collectively

If we compare fan fiction to mythological and folkloric retellings, we can see how it functions as the cultural equivalent of collective storytelling. Fan fiction often retells the same events and scenes, but from different points of view, with myriad extensions and elaborations. Other versions of the same story may be just as important to the fan artwork as the primary source. Henry Jenkins (in Harmon 1997) argues that the main difference is not in method or style but in the legal and economic contexts in which the storytelling occurs. He notes that fan fiction “is a way of the culture repairing the damage done in a system where contemporary myths are owned by corporations instead of owned by the folk.” The theme of the fan community creating a popular myth has been a central facet of fan studies, reflected in the subtitle of Camille Bacon-Smith’s 1992 study, *Enterprising Women: Television Fandom and the Creation of Popular Myth*, and is frequently revisited.

Many popular shows with large fandoms rely on mythology for their content; the *Stargate*, *Supernatural* (Tosenberger 2010), *Hercules/Xena*, and *Buffy* universes spring immediately to mind. Myth may also be used metaphorically to structure seasons or even entire runs of television programs. For example, *The X-Files* divides episodes between two kinds of stories: stand-alone stories and myth arc stories—that is, stories with serial elements that span the entire show’s run. These themes and structuring elements illustrate how embedded mythological characters, themes, and story lines are in contemporary popular culture. They invite audiences to creatively engage with these modern myths.

Fan fiction adds to this mythological story line. However, even more crucial is the relationship it offers between media industry and audiences and among fans themselves. As Jenkins (in Harmon 1997) points out, current culture is overwhelmingly populated with copyrighted and trademarked images (Tushnet 1997), where even folk figures such as Snow White and Sleeping Beauty can be owned by the Walt Disney corporation. In turn, fan fiction allows fans to populate shared worlds and redefine shared characters. Sabine Metzger’s 2012 essay on fan fiction as myth offers a good overview

of this approach. Reclaiming these popular myths often creates a shared community and builds friendship ties.

By beginning this anthology with Henry Jenkins's discussion of textual poachers, we not only introduce the role Jenkins as a scholar, mentor, teacher, and public intellectual has played for the development of fan fiction studies as a field, but we also foreground the specific theoretical aspects he brings into play in this chapter that resonate to this day. Jenkins's book is fundamentally important because it offers both a literary and an ethnographic approach, categorizing and describing different forms of fan creations and explaining them within an accessible theoretical framework. The essay included here shows that range as it describes, with many examples, the contentious relationship between fans and producers, a topic that will become more and more central for Jenkins through his work on transmedia and convergence culture. Whereas Jenkins's early work suggests that fans are an ideal audience and that producers should pay attention to them, his later work on media convergence addresses how producers mobilize fans and simulate fan spaces (Jenkins 2006, 2008). However, as his scope has grown, his focus has shifted away from the writing and transforming fan, who had been the focal point of *Textual Poachers*, toward the role of the Internet and its "spreadable media" interfaces for transmedial production and reception with important cultural and pedagogical impact (Jenkins 2009; Jenkins, Ford, and Green 2012). Returning to this foundational text, then, not only offers us an important historical document but also showcases a text that puts literary transformation front and center.

Reading Analytically

Fan writers perform interpretive functions when redefining characters, retelling story lines differently, and changing points of view. They also interpret when they perform any of the other multitudes of transformative processes that make up the world of fan writings. To study the interpretive, analytical aspect of fan fiction, we might compare fan fiction to its literary counterpart: professionally published derivative texts. These texts resemble fan fiction in *modus operandi*. They use settings, characters, and scenes from well-known texts while telling a fundamentally different story, be it an expansion, subversion, or counternarrative. Margaret Atwood's *The Penelopiad* (2005), Christa Wolf's *Cassandra* (1984), and Ursula K. Le Guin's *Lavinia* (2008) all retell

classic male-focused tales by foregrounding the female protagonists of *The Odyssey*, *The Iliad*, and *The Aeneid*, respectively. These retellings parallel the feminist focus of fan fiction: the authors all seek to modify and correct the vast number of texts still clearly geared to white men.

In addition to author-fans, who use fiction to generate critiques and justify their fictions, there are acafans, whose work may return to earlier literary periods to show how the mechanisms of reading or writing fan fiction can illuminate classic texts. Abigail Derecho (2006) argues that all of fan fiction is a form of literary fiction with a specific archival twist. Natasha Simonova (2012) and Elizabeth F. Judge (2009) look at seventeenth- and eighteenth-century texts as fan fiction, reading the discussions surrounding these earlier sequels within the framework of current fan studies theory.

Two special cases in the relationship between literary and fan studies are the Jane Austen and Sherlock Holmes fandoms. Both Austen and Holmes's creator, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, created characters beloved by generations of readers, and both have an extensive corpus of professionally published derivative literature as well as large fandoms, which may be based on the written texts or any of the many TV shows, miniseries and broadcast specials, and films derived from the source texts. The lines between fan and literary fiction are particularly fuzzy here. Sheenagh Pugh (2005) discusses Austen fan fiction in detail, Veerle Van Steenhuyse (2011) offers a close reading of one piece of fan fiction within the context of Austen fandom, and Roberta Pearson (2007, 2012) has written extensively on the Sherlockians.

Pearson's essay in this volume describes the shifting way in which varying interfaces affect fan interactions through her focus on one of the oldest literature fandoms. With Sherlock Holmes fandom, she offers us a slice of a fandom that not only creates literary texts but also uses a literary text as its source text. Moreover, she focuses on the shifts and changes the Internet has brought to this old and established fandom. While the work of Jenkins, Bacon-Smith, and Constance Penley (1992) were primarily created before the Internet and focus on hard-copy zines, conventions, and postal mail dissemination, Pearson quite consciously addresses the changes that occur when fandom moves online. Much of the essay now seems fascinatingly arcane, even though it's barely fifteen years old: newsgroups and the small amount of fans and traffic seem quaint compared with today, when some fandoms create thousands of Tumblr posts and hundreds of stories every single day.

Reading Literarily

The first two models of reading focus more on community and source text. The last approach is concerned with the actual literary artwork itself. This academic take on fan fiction is the most recent one for historical reasons: even though postmodernist theory and popular culture studies should have removed any literary hierarchies as it questioned and then shattered any sense of qualitative objective judgment, fan fiction studies rarely analyzed fan fiction for its own sake. Instead, it sought to explain its value as a cultural artifact. In addition, treating a fan story as only a singular literary text may obscure the complex intertextuality that tends to embed stories in an economy of collectively shared production, distribution, and reception that together create a more complex intertextual meaning.

Close readings and literary analyses of a particular fan text remain rare, however. Anik LaChev (2005, 85) notes that “Literature Studies has, so far, not given fan fiction as a literary genre any considerable attention at all,” and not much has changed since, with close readings such as those by Deborah Kaplan (2006) and Anne Kustritz (2008) more the exception than the rule. One interesting case is Ika Willis’s (2006) close reading of one of her own stories, thus combining authorial and readerly responses. In general, in fan studies, even novel-length stories have yet to be addressed as proper literary texts.

Cornel Sandvoss revisits the question of fan fiction as literature when he looks at the way literary theory could usefully be used to study fan works. What drives his essay (just as it does Jenkins’s) is the ideological analysis that underlies the project of cultural studies, and in particular the influential Birmingham School’s Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, which was one of the first cultural studies departments and which was known for its interdisciplinarity. The entire project of studying popular texts is connected to a politically motivated critique of academic scholarship in general and canon creation in particular. Sandvoss rebuts a conflation of popular objects of study with simplistic modes of analyses, instead looking for theoretical models that can offer new insights into the cultural relevance of popular and beloved texts.

In so doing, Sandvoss not only addresses some of the central debates surrounding fan studies as a discipline but also connects this question to a variety of other debates in media studies that are revisiting the question of quality and legitimation within the field. Michael Z. Newman and Elana

Levine's *Legitimizing Television* (2011) is just one example of a conversation within the field of television and media studies that focuses on the roles of politics and aesthetics. Michael Kackman's (2010) critique of an ahistorical legitimization stands next to Jason Mittell's (2006) attempt to create aesthetic categories with the concept of narrative complexity as an aesthetic value. Sandvoss's essay thus connects the question of fan fiction and literature to the larger question of theoretical frameworks that we may choose to use when analyzing fan fiction as literary texts, as well as to the ideological questions that are raised when deciding on one framework over another.

Textual Poachers

HENRY JENKINS

Michel de Certeau (1984) . . . [characterizes] . . . active reading as “poaching,” an impertinent raid on the literary preserve that takes away only those things that are useful or pleasurable to the reader: “Far from being writers . . . readers are travellers; they move across lands belonging to someone else, like nomads poaching their way across fields they did not write, despoiling the wealth of Egypt to enjoy it themselves” (174). De Certeau’s “poaching” analogy characterizes the relationship between readers and writers as an ongoing struggle for possession of the text and for control over its meanings. De Certeau speaks of a “scriptural economy” dominated by textual producers and institutionally sanctioned interpreters and working to restrain the “multiple voices” of popular orality, to regulate the production and circulation of meanings. The “mastery of language” becomes, for de Certeau, emblematic of the cultural authority and social power exercised by the dominant classes within the social formation. School children are taught to read for authorial meaning, to consume the narrative without leaving their own marks upon it: “This fiction condemns consumers to subjection because they are always going to be guilty of infidelity or ignorance. . . . The text becomes a cultural weapon, a private hunting reserve” (171).

Under this familiar model, the reader is supposed to serve as the more-or-less passive recipient of authorial meaning while any deviation from meanings clearly marked forth within the text is viewed negatively, as a failure to successfully understand what the author was trying to say. The teacher’s red pen rewards those who “correctly” decipher the text and penalizes those who “get it wrong,” while the student’s personal feelings and associations are rated “irrelevant” to the task of literary analysis (according to the “affective

fallacy"). Such judgments, in turn, require proper respect for the expertise of specially trained and sanctioned interpreters over the street knowledge of the everyday reader; the teacher's authority becomes vitally linked to the authority which readers grant to textual producers. As popular texts have been adopted into the academy, similar claims about their "authorship" have been constructed to allow them to be studied and taught in essentially similar terms to traditional literary works; the price of being taken seriously as an academic subject has been the acceptance of certain assumptions common to other forms of scholarship, assumptions that link the interests of the academy with the interests of producers rather than with the interests of consumers. Both social and legal practice preserves the privilege of "socially authorized professionals and intellectuals" over the interests of popular readers and textual consumers. (Jane Gaines [1990], for example, shows the ways that the primary focus of trademark law has shifted from protecting consumers from commercial fraud toward protecting the exclusive interests of capital for control over marketable images.) The expertise of the academy allows its members to determine which interpretive claims are consistent with authorial meaning (whether implicit or explicit), which fall beyond its scope. Since many segments of the population lack access to the means of cultural production and distribution, to the multiplexes, the broadcast airwaves or the chain bookstore shelves, this respect for the "integrity" of the produced message often has the effect of silencing or marginalizing oppositional voices. The exclusion of those voices at the moment of reception simply mirrors their exclusion at the moment of production; their cultural interests are delegitimized in favor of the commercial interests of authorized authors.

De Certeau's account of academic and economic practice is a highly polemical one; he offers a partial and certainly partisan version of certain traditional beliefs and attitudes. One does not have to abolish all reverence for authorial meaning in order to recognize the potential benefits of alternative forms of interpretation and consumption. Yet de Certeau poses questions that we as scholars and teachers need to consider—the ways we justify our own positions as critics, the interests served by our expertise, the degree to which our instruction may hinder rather than encourage the development of popular criticism. Education can be a force for the democratization of cultural life. If it couldn't be, there would be no purpose in writing this book for an academic audience or committing oneself to a classroom. Often, however, education is too preoccupied with protecting its own status to successfully fulfill such

a role. All too often, teachers promote their own authority at the expense of their students' ability to form alternative interpretations. De Certeau invites us to reconsider the place of popular response, of personal speculations and nonauthorized meanings in the reception of artworks and to overcome professional training that prepares us to reject meanings falling outside our frame of reference and interpretive practice.

De Certeau (1984) acknowledges the economic and social barriers that block popular access to the means of cultural production, speaking of a culture in which "marginality is becoming universal" and most segments of the population remain "unsigned, unreadable and unsymbolized" within dominant forms of representation (xvii). Yet de Certeau seeks to document not the strategies employed by this hegemonic power to restrict the circulation of popular meaning or to marginalize oppositional voices but rather to theorize the various tactics of popular resistance. De Certeau gives us terms for discussing ways that the subordinate classes elude or escape institutional control, for analyzing locations where popular meanings are produced outside of official interpretive practice. De Certeau perceives popular reading as a series of "advances and retreats, tactics and games played with the text," as a type of cultural bricolage through which readers fragment texts and reassemble the broken shards according to their own blueprints, salvaging bits and pieces of the found material in making sense of their own social experience (175).

Like the poachers of old, fans operate from a position of cultural marginality and social weakness. Like other popular readers, fans lack direct access to the means of commercial cultural production and have only the most limited resources with which to influence the entertainment industry's decisions. Fans must beg with the networks to keep their favorite shows on the air, must lobby producers to provide desired plot developments or to protect the integrity of favorite characters. Within the cultural economy, fans are peasants, not proprietors, a recognition which must contextualize our celebration of strategies of popular resistance. As Mike Budd, Robert Entman, and Clay Steinman (1990) note, nomadic readers "may actually be powerless and dependent" rather than "uncontainable, restless and free." They continue, "People who are nomads cannot settle down; they are at the mercy of natural forces they cannot control" (176). As these writers are quick to note, controlling the means of cultural reception, while an important step, does not provide an adequate substitute for access to the means of cultural production and distribution. In one sense, then, that of economic control over the means of production, these

nomadic viewers truly are “powerless and dependent” in their relationship to the culture industries. Yet, on another level, that of symbolic interpretation and appropriation, de Certeau would suggest they still retain a degree of autonomy. Their economic dependence may not be linked directly to notions of passive acceptance of ideological messages, as these critical writers might suggest; consumers are not governed by “a subjectivity that must, perforce, wander here, then wander there, as the media spotlight beckons” as these writers characterize them (Budd, Entman, and Steinman 1990, 176). Rather, consumers are selective users of a vast media culture whose treasures, though corrupt, hold wealth that can be mined and refined for alternative uses. Some of the strategies fans adopt in response to this situation are open to all popular readers, others are specific to fandom as a particular subcultural community. What is significant about fans in relation to de Certeau’s model is that they constitute a particularly active and vocal community of consumers whose activities direct attention onto this process of cultural appropriation. As such, they enjoy a contemporary status not unlike the members of the “pit” in 19th-century theatre who asserted their authority over the performance, not unlike the readers of Dickens and other serial writers who wrote their own suggestions for possible plot developments, not unlike the fans of Sherlock Holmes who demanded the character’s return even when the author sought to retire him. Fans are not unique in their status as textual poachers, yet, they have developed poaching to an art form. . . .

Reading and Misreading

A few clarifications need to be introduced at this time. First, de Certeau’s notion of “poaching” is a theory of appropriation, not of “misreading.” The term “misreading” is necessarily evaluative and preserves the traditional hierarchy bestowing privileged status to authorial meanings over reader’s meanings. A conception of “misreading” also implies that there are proper strategies of reading (i.e., those taught by the academy) which if followed produce legitimate meanings and that there are improper strategies (i.e., those of popular interpretation) which, even in the most charitable version of this formulation, produce less worthy results. Finally, a notion of “misreading” implies that the scholar, not the popular reader, is in the position to adjudicate claims about textual meanings and suggests that academic interpretation is somehow more “objective,” made outside of a historical and social context

that shapes our own sense of what a text means. (This problem remains, for example, in David Morley's *Nationwide* study [1980] which constructs a scholarly reading of the program against which to understand the deviations of various groups of popular readers.) De Certeau's model remains agnostic about the nature of textual meaning, allows for the validity of competing and contradictory interpretations. De Certeau's formulation does not necessarily reject the value of authorial meaning or academic interpretive strategies; such approaches offer their own pleasures and rewards which cannot easily be dismissed. A model of reading derived from de Certeau would simply include these interpretive goals and strategies within a broader range of more-or-less equally acceptable ways of making meaning and finding pleasure within popular texts; it questions the institutional power that values one type of meaning over all others.

Secondly, de Certeau's notion of "poaching" differs in important ways from Stuart Hall's more widely known "Encoding and Decoding" formulation (1980). First, as it has been applied, Hall's model of dominant, negotiated, and oppositional readings tends to imply that each reader has a stable position from which to make sense of a text rather than having access to multiple sets of discursive competencies by virtue of more complex and contradictory place within the social formation. Hall's model, at least as it has been applied, suggests that popular meanings are fixed and classifiable, while de Certeau's "poaching" model emphasizes the process of making meaning and the fluidity of popular interpretation. To say that fans promote their own meanings over those of producers is not to suggest that the meanings fans produce are always oppositional ones or that those meanings are made in isolation from other social factors. Fans have chosen these media products from the total range of available texts precisely because they seem to hold special potential as vehicles for expressing the fans' pre-existing social commitments and cultural interests; there is already some degree of compatibility between the ideological construction of the text and the ideological commitments of the fans and therefore, some degree of affinity will exist between the meanings fans produce and those which might be located through a critical analysis of the original story. What one fan says about *Beauty and the Beast* holds for the relationship many fans seek with favorite programs: "It was as if someone had scanned our minds, searched our hearts, and presented us with the images that were found there" (Elaine Landman, "The Beauty and the Beast Experience," undated fan flier). Yet . . . the *Beauty and the Beast* fans moved in

and out of harmony with the producers, came to feel progressively less satisfied with the program narratives, and finally, many, though not all, of them rejected certain plot developments in favor of their own right to determine the outcome of the story.

Such a situation should warn us against absolute statements of the type that appear all too frequently within the polemical rhetoric of cultural studies. Readers are not *always* resistant; *all* resistant readings are not necessarily progressive readings; the “people” do not *always* recognize their conditions of alienation and subordination. As Stuart Hall (1981) has noted, popular culture is “neither wholly corrupt [n]or wholly authentic” but rather “deeply contradictory,” characterized by “the double movement of containment and resistance, which is always inevitably inside it” (228). Similarly, Hall suggests, popular reception is also “full of very contradictory elements—progressive elements and stone-age elements.” Such claims argue against a world of dominant, negotiating, and oppositional readers in favor of one where each reader is continuously re-evaluating his or her relationship to the fiction and reconstructing its meanings according to more immediate interests.

In fact, much of the interest of fans and their texts for cultural studies lies precisely in the ways the ambiguities of popularly produced meanings mirror fault lines within the dominant ideology, as popular readers attempt to build their culture within the gaps and margins of commercially circulating texts. To cite only one example, Lynn Spigel and Henry Jenkins (1991) interviewed a number of “thirtysomethings” about their childhood memories of watching *Batman* on television. Our study sought not so much to reconstruct actual viewing conditions as to gain a better sense of the roles those memories played in the construction of their personal identities. The memories we gathered could not have been fit into ideologically pure categories, but rather suggested complex and contradictory attitudes towards childhood and children’s culture. Remembering *Batman* evoked images of a personal past and also of the intertextual network of 1960s popular culture. Remembering the series provided a basis for a progressive critique of contemporary political apathy and cynicism, suggesting a time when social issues were more sharply defined and fiercely fought. Participants’ memories also centered on moments when they resisted adult authority and asserted their right to their own cultural choices. For female fans, Catwoman became a way of exploring issues of feminine empowerment, of resistance to male constraints and to the requirement to be a “good little girl.” Yet remembering *Batman* also evoked

a more reactionary response—an attempt to police contemporary children’s culture and to regulate popular pleasures. The adults, no longer nostalgic for childhood rebellion, used the 1960s series as the yardstick for what would constitute a more innocent style of entertainment. The same person would shift between these progressive and reactionary modes of thinking in the course of a single conversation, celebrating childhood resistance in one breath and demanding the regulation of childish pleasures in the next. These very mixed responses to the series content suggest the contradictory conceptions of childhood that circulate within popular discourse and mirror in interesting ways the competing discourses surrounding the television series when it was first aired.

As this study suggests, we must be careful to attend to the particularities of specific instances of critical reception, cultural appropriation, and popular pleasure—their precise historical context, their concrete social and cultural circumstances, for it is the specifics of lived experience and not simply the abstractions of theory which illuminate the process of hegemonic struggle. For that reason, among others, this book is primarily a succession of specific case studies designed to document particular uses of the media within concrete social and historical contexts rather than a larger theoretical argument which would necessarily trade such specificity for abstraction and generalization. Having established in this chapter some general concepts regarding fan culture and its relationship to the dominant media, I want to illustrate these concepts in action, show how fan culture responds to actual historical and social contexts, and trace some of the complex negotiations of meanings characterizing this cultural community’s relationship to its favored texts.

Nomadic Readers

De Certeau offers us another key insight into fan culture: readers are not simply poachers; they are also “nomads,” always in movement, “not here or there,” not constrained by permanent property ownership but rather constantly advancing upon another text, appropriating new materials, making new meanings (174). Drawing on de Certeau, Janice Radway (1988) has criticized the tendency of academies to regard audiences as constituted by a particular text or genre rather than as “free-floating” agents who “fashion narratives, stories, objects and practices from myriad bits and pieces of prior cultural productions” (363). While acknowledging the methodological advantages

and institutional pressures that promote localized research, Radway wants to resist the urge to “cordon” viewers for study, to isolate one particular set of reader-text relationships from its larger cultural context. Instead, she calls for investigations of “the multitude of concrete connections which ever-changing, fluid subjects forge between ideological fragments, discourses, and practices” (365).

Both academic and popular discourse adopt labels for fans—“Trekkies,” “Beastie Girls,” “Deadheads”—that identify them through their association with particular programs or stars. Such identifications, while not totally inaccurate, are often highly misleading. Media fan culture, like other forms of popular reading, may be understood not in terms of an exclusive interest in any one series or genre; rather, media fans take pleasure in making intertextual connections across a broad range of media texts. The female *Star Trek* fans discussed earlier understood the show not simply within its own terms but in relationship to a variety of other texts circulated at the time (*Lost in Space*, say, or NASA footage on television) and since (the feminist science fiction novels of Ursula Le Guin, Joanna Russ, Marion Zimmer Bradley, and others). Moreover, their participation within fandom often extends beyond an interest in any single text to encompass many others within the same genre—other science fiction texts, other stories of male bonding, other narratives which explore the relationship of the outsider to the community. The *Batman* fans Spigel and I interviewed likewise found that they could not remain focused on a single television series but persistently fit it within a broader intertextual grid, linking the Catwoman across program boundaries to figures like *The Avengers*’ Emma Peel or the *Girl from U.N.C.L.E.*, comparing the campy pop-art look of the series to *Mad* or *Laugh In*. Fans, like other consumers of popular culture, read intertextually as well as textually and their pleasure comes through the particular juxtapositions that they create between specific program content and other cultural materials.

On the wall of my office hangs a print by fan artist Jean Kluge—a pastiche of a pre-Raphaelite painting depicting characters from *Star Trek: The Next Generation*: Jean-Luc Picard, adopting a contemplative pose atop a throne, evokes the traditional image of King Arthur; Beverly Crusher, her red hair hanging long and flowing, substitutes for Queen Guinevere; while in the center panel, Data and Yar, clad as knights in armor, gallop off on a quest. Visitors to my literature department office often do a double-take in response to this picture, which offers a somewhat jarring mixture of elements from a

contemporary science fiction series with those drawn from chivalric romance. Yet, this print suggests something about the ways in which *Star Trek* and other fan texts get embedded within a broader range of cultural interests, indicating a number of different interpretive strategies. The print could be read in relation to the primary series, recalling equally idiosyncratic juxtapositions during the holodeck sequences, as when Picard plays at being a tough-guy detective, when Data performs *Henry V* or studies borscht-belt comedy, or when the characters dash about as Musketeers in the midst of a crewmember's elaborate fantasy. Indeed, Kluge's "The Quest" was part of a series of "holodeck fantasies" which pictured various *Star Trek* characters at play. The combinations of characters foreground two sets of couples—Picard and Crusher, Yar and Data—which were suggested by program subplots and have formed the focus for a great deal of fan speculation. Such an interpretation of the print would be grounded in the text and yet, at the same time, make selective use of the program materials to foreground aspects of particular interest to the fan community. Ironically, spokesmen for *Star Trek* have recently appeared at fan conventions seeking to deny that Data has emotions and that Picard and Crusher have a romantic history together, positions fans have rejected as inconsistent with the series events and incompatible with their own perceptions of the characters.

The image could also invite us to think of *Star Trek* transgenerically, reading the characters and situations in relation to tradition of quest stories and in relation to generic expectations formed through fannish readings of popular retellings of the Arthurian saga, such as Marion Zimmer Bradley's *Mists of Avalon* (1983), Mary Stewart's *The Crystal Cave* (1970), T. H. White's *The Once and Future King* (1939), or John Boorman's *Excalibur*. Such an interpretation evokes strong connections between the conventional formula of "space opera" and older quest myths and hero sagas.

The print can also be read extratextually, reminding us of actor Patrick Stewart's career as a Shakespearean actor and his previous screen roles in sword and sorcery adventures like *Excalibur*, *Beast Master*, and *Dune*. Fans often track favored performer's careers, adding to their video collections not simply series episodes but also other works featuring its stars, works which may draw into the primary text's orbit a wide range of generic traditions, including those of high culture.

A fan reader might also interpret the Kluge print subculturally, looking at it in relation to traditions within fan writing which situate series characters in

alternate universes, including those set in the historical past or in the realm of fantasy, or which cross media universes to have characters from different television series interacting in the same narrative.

Finally, a fan reader might read this print in relation to Kluge's own oeuvre as an artist; Kluge's works often juxtapose media materials and historical fantasies, and encompass not only her own fannish interests in *Star Trek* but a variety of other series popular with fans (*Blake's 7*, *Beauty and the Beast*, *Alien Nation*, among others).

Contemplating this one print, then, opens a range of intertextual networks within which its imagery might be understood. All available to *Trek* fans and active components of their cultural experience, these networks link the original series both to other commercially produced works and to the cultural traditions of the fan community. Not every fan would make each of these sets of associations in reading the print, yet most fans would have access to more than one interpretive framework for positioning these specific images. Thinking of the print simply as an artifact of a *Star Trek*-fixated fan culture would blind us to these other potential interpretations that are central to the fans' pleasure in Kluge's art.

Approaching fans as cultural nomads would potentially draw scholars back toward some of the earliest work to emerge from the British cultural studies tradition. As Stuart Hall and Tony Jefferson's *Resistance through Rituals* (1976) or Dick Hebdidge's *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (1979) document, British youth groups formed an alternative culture not simply through their relationship to specific musical texts but also through a broader range of goods appropriated from the dominant culture and assigned new meanings within this oppositional context. The essays assembled by Hall and Jefferson recorded ways symbolic objects—dress, appearance, language, ritual occasions, styles of interaction, music—formed a unified signifying system in which borrowed materials were made to reflect, express, and resonate aspects of group life. Examining the stylistic bricolage of punk culture, Hebdidge concluded that the meaning of appropriated symbols, such as the swastika or the safety pin, lay not in their inherent meanings but rather in the logic of their use, in the ways they expressed opposition to the dominant culture.

Feminist writers, such as Angela McRobbie (1980), Dorothy Hobson (1982, 1989), Charlotte Brunsdon (1981), and Mica Nava (1981), criticized these initial studies for their silence about the misogynistic quality of such youth cultures and their exclusive focus on the masculine public sphere rather than

on the domestic sphere which was a primary locus for feminine cultural experience. Yet their own work continued to focus on subcultural appropriation and cultural use. Their research emphasized ways women define their identities through their association with a range of media texts. McRobbie's "Dance and Social Fantasy" (1984), for example, offers a far-reaching analysis of the roles dance plays in the life of young women, discussing cultural materials ranging from a children's book about Anna Pavlova to films like *Fame* and *Flashdance* and fashion magazines. Like Hebdidge, McRobbie is less interested in individual texts than in the contexts in which they are inserted; McRobbie shows how those texts are fit into the total social experience of their consumers, are discussed at work or consumed in the home, and provide models for social behavior and personal identity.

These British feminist writers provide useful models for recent work by younger feminists (on both sides of the Atlantic) who are attempting to understand the place of media texts in women's cultural experiences (for useful overviews of this work, see Long 1989; Roman, Christian-Smith, and Ellsworth 1988; Schwichtenberg 1989; Woman's Studies Group 1978). Drawing on McRobbie's research, Lisa Lewis (1987), for example, has explored what she describes as "consumer girl culture," a culture which converges around the shopping mall as a specifically female sphere. Lewis links the "woman-identified" music videos of Cyndi Lauper and Madonna to the concerns of this "consumer girl culture," suggesting that these pop stars provide symbolic materials expressing the pleasure female adolescents take in entering male domains of activity. The young women, in turn, adapt these symbolic materials and weave them back into their everyday lives, imitating the performers' idiosyncratic styles, and posterizing their walls with their images. Images appropriated from MTV are linked to images drawn from elsewhere in consumer culture and form the basis for communication among female fans about topics common to their social experience as young women.

Following in this same tradition, I want to focus on media fandom as a discursive logic that knits together interests across textual and generic boundaries. While some fans remain exclusively committed to a single show or star, many others use individual series as points of entry into a broader fan community, linking to an intertextual network composed of many programs, films, books, comics, and other popular materials. Fans often find it difficult to discuss single programs except through references and comparisons to this broader network; fans may also drift from one series commitment to

another through an extended period of involvement within “fandom.” As longtime fan editor Susan M. Garrett explains: “A majority of fans don’t simply burn out of one fandom and disappear. . . . In fact, I’ve found that after the initial break into fandom through a single series, fans tend to follow other people into various fandoms, rather than stumble upon programs themselves” (personal correspondence, July 1991). Garrett describes how fans incorporate more and more programs into their interests in order to facilitate greater communication with friends who share common interests or possess compatible tastes: “Well, if she likes what I like and she tends to like good shows, then I’ll like this new show too” (personal correspondence, July 1991). To focus on any one media product—be it *Star Trek* or “Material Girl”—is to miss the larger cultural context within which that material gets embedded as it is integrated back into the life of the individual fan.

Fans often form uneasy alliances with others who have related but superficially distinctive commitments, finding their overlapping interests in the media a basis for discussion and fellowship. Panels at Media West, an important media fan convention held each year in Lansing, Michigan, combine speakers from different fandoms to address topics of common interest, such as “series romances,” “disguised romantic heroes,” “heroes outside the law,” or “Harrison Ford and his roles.” Letterzines like *Comlink*, which publish letters from fans, and computer net interest groups such as Rec.Arts.TV, which offer electronic mail “conversation” between contributors, facilitate fan discussion and debate concerning a broad range of popular texts. Genzines (amateur publications aiming at a general fan interest rather than focused on a specific program or star) such as *The Sonic Screwdriver*, *Rerun*, *Everything But . . . The Kitchen Sink*, *Primetime*, or *What You Fancy* offer unusual configurations of fannish tastes that typically reflect the coalition of fandoms represented by their editors; these publications focus not on individual series but on a number of different and loosely connected texts. *Fireside Tales* “encompasses the genre of cops, spies and private eyes,” running stories based on such series as *Hunter*, *I Spy*, *Adderly*, *Riptide*, and *Dempsey and Makepeace* while *Undercover* treats the same material with a homoerotic inflection. *Walkabout* centers around the film roles of Mel Gibson including stories based on his characters in *Lethal Weapon*, *Year of Living Dangerously*, *Tim*, *Tequila Sunrise*, and *The Road Warrior*. *Faded Roses* focuses on the unlikely combination of *Beauty and the Beast*, *Phantom of the Opera*, and *Amadeus*, “three of the most romantic universes of all time.” *Animazine* centers on children’s cartoons,

The Temporal Times on time-travel series, *The Cannell Files* on the series of a particular producer, *Tuesday Night* on two shows (*Remington Steele* and *Riptide*) which were once part of NBC's Tuesday night line-up, and *Nightbeat* on stories in which the primary narrative action occurs at night, "anything from vampires to detectives." . . .

What Do Poachers Keep?

If I find de Certeau's notions of textual poaching and nomadic reading particularly useful concepts for thinking about media consumption and fan culture, I want to identify at least one important way in which my position differs from his. (Other differences will surface throughout the discussion.) De Certeau draws a sharp separation between writers and readers: "Writing accumulates, stocks up, resists time by the establishment of a place and multiplies its production through the expansionism of reproduction. Reading takes no measures against the erosion of time (one forgets oneself *and* also forgets), it does not keep what it acquires, or it does so poorly" (174). Writing, for de Certeau, has a materiality and permanence which the poached culture of the reader is unable to match; the readers meaning-production remains temporary and transient, made on the run, as the reader moves nomadically from place to place; the reader's meanings originate in response to immediate concerns and are discarded when they are no longer useful. De Certeau draws a useful distinction between strategies and tactics: strategies are operations performed from a position of strength, employing the property and authority that belong exclusively to literary "landowners," while tactics belong to the mobile population of the dispossessed and the powerless, gaining in speed and mobility what they lack in stability. The tactical strength and the strategic vulnerability of reading, he contends, lie in its inability to form the basis for a stable or permanent culture; readers maintain a freedom of movement at the expense of acquiring resources which might allow them to fight from a position of power and authority. Tactics can never fully overcome strategy; yet, the strategist cannot prevent the tactician from striking again.

While this claim may be broadly applicable to the transient meaning-production which generally characterizes popular reading, it seems false to the specific phenomenon of media fandom for two reasons. First, de Certeau describes readers who are essentially isolated from each other; the meanings they "poach" from the primary text serve only their own interests and are the

object of only limited intellectual investment. They are meanings made for the moment and discarded as soon as they are no longer desirable or useful. Fan reading, however, is a social process through which individual interpretations are shaped and reinforced through ongoing discussions with other readers. Such discussions expand the experience of the text beyond its initial consumption. The produced meanings are thus more fully integrated into the readers' lives and are of a fundamentally different character from meanings generated through a casual and fleeting encounter with an otherwise unremarkable (and unremarked upon) text. For the fan, these previously "poached" meanings provide a foundation for future encounters with the fiction, shaping how it will be perceived, defining how it will be used.

Second, fandom does not preserve a radical separation between readers and writers. Fans do not simply consume preproduced stories; they manufacture their own fanzine stories and novels, art prints, songs, videos, performances, etc. In fan writer Jean Lorrain's words (1984), "Trek fandom . . . is friends and letters and crafts and fanzines and trivia and costumes and artwork and filksongs and buttons and film clips and conventions—something for everybody who has in common the inspiration of a television show which grew far beyond its TV and film incarnations to become a living part of world culture" (n.p.). Lorrain's description blurs the boundaries between producers and consumers, spectators and participants, the commercial and the homecrafted, to construct an image of fandom as a cultural and social network that spans the globe. Fandom here becomes a participatory culture which transforms the experience of media consumption into the production of new texts, indeed of a new culture and a new community.

Howard Becker (1982) has adopted the term "Art World" to describe "an established network of cooperative links" (34) between institutions of artistic production, distribution, consumption, interpretation, and evaluation: "Art Worlds produce works and also give them aesthetic values" (39). An expansive term, "Art World" refers to systems of aesthetic norms and generic conventions, systems of professional training and reputation building, systems for the circulation, exhibition, sale, and critical evaluation of artworks. In one sense, fandom constitutes one component of the mass media Art World, something like the "serious audience" which Becker locates around the symphony, the ballet, or the art gallery. Not only do "serious audience members" provide a stable base of support for artistic creation, Becker suggests, they also function as arbiters of potential change and development. Their knowledge of

and commitment to the art insures that they “can collaborate more fully with artists in the joint effort which produces the work” (48). Historically, science fiction fandom may be traced back to the letter columns of Hugo Gernsback’s *Amazing Stories*, which provided a public forum by which fans could communicate with each other and with the writers their reactions to published stories; critics suggest that it was the rich interplay of writers, editors, and fans which allowed science fiction to emerge as a distinctive literary genre in the 1930s and 1940s (Ross 1991; Del Rey 1979; Warner 1969; Moskowitz 1954; Carter 1978). Since Gernsback and other editors also included addresses for all correspondents, the pulps provided a means by which fans could contact each other, enabling a small but dedicated community of loyal science fiction readers to emerge. Fans, under the approving eye of Gernsback and the other pulp editors, organized local clubs and later, regional science fiction conventions to provide an arena where they could exchange their ideas about their favorite genre. By 1939, fandom had grown to such a scale that it could ambitiously host a world science fiction convention, a tradition which has continued to the present day.

So, from its initiation, science fiction fandom has maintained close ties to the professional science fiction writing community and has provided intelligent user criticism of published narratives. Fan conventions play a central role in the distribution of knowledge about new releases and in the promotion of comic books, science fiction novels, and new media productions. They offer a space where writers and producers may speak directly with readers and develop a firmer sense of audience expectations. Fan awards, such as the Hugo, presented each year at the World Science Fiction Convention, play a key role in building the reputations of emerging writers and in recognizing outstanding accomplishment by established figures. Fan publishing has represented an important training ground for professional writers and editors, a nurturing space in which to develop skills, styles, themes, and perhaps most importantly, self confidence before entering the commercial marketplace. Marion Zimmer Bradley (1985) has noted the especially importance of fandom in the development of female science fiction writers at a time when professional science fiction was still male-dominated and male-oriented; fanzines, she suggests, were a supportive environment within which women writers could establish and polish their skills.

Yet media fandom constitutes as well its own distinctive Art World, operating beyond direct control by media producers, founded less upon the

consumption of pre-existing texts than on the production of fan texts. Much as science fiction conventions provide a market for commercially produced goods associated with media stories and as a showcase for professional writers, illustrators, and performers, the conventions are also a marketplace for fan produced artworks and a showcase for fan artists. Fan paintings are auctioned, zines are sold, performances staged, videos screened, and awards are given in recognition of outstanding accomplishments. Semiprofessional companies are emerging to assist in the production and distribution of fan goods—song tapes, zines, etc.—and publications are appearing whose primary function is to provide technical information and commentary on fan art (*Apa-Filk* for fan music, *Art Forum* for fan artists, *Treklink* and *On the Double* for fan writers, etc.) or to publicize and market fan writing (*Datazine*). Convention panels discuss zine publishing, art materials, or costume design, focusing entirely on information needed by fan artists rather than by fan consumers. MediaWest, in particular, has prided itself on being fan-run and fan-centered with no celebrity guests and programing; its activities range from fan video screenings and fanzine reading rooms to workshops with noted fan artists, focused around providing support for the emergence of fan culture. These institutions are the infrastructure for a self-sufficient fan culture.

From its initiation in the 1960s in the wake of excitement about *Star Trek*, media fandom has developed a more distant relationship to textual producers than that traditionally enjoyed within literary science fiction fandom. If literary fans constituted, especially in the early years, a sizeable segment of the potential market for science fiction books, active media fans represent a small and insignificant segment of the audience required to sustain a network television series or to support a blockbuster movie. Media producers and stars have, thus, looked upon organized fandom less as a source of feedback than as, at best, an ancillary market for specialized spin-off goods. The long autograph lines that surround media stars often prohibit the close interaction that fans maintain with science fiction writers and editors.

Indeed, the largely female composition of media fandom repeats a historical split within the science fiction fan community between the traditionally male-dominated literary fans and the newer, more feminine style of media fandom. Women, drawn to the genre in the 1960s, discovered that the close ties between male fans and male writers created barriers to female fans and this fandom's traditions resisted inflection or redefinition. The emergence of media fandom can be seen, at least in part, as an effort to create a fan culture

more open to women, within which female fans could make a contribution without encountering the entrenched power of long-time male fans; these fans bought freedom at the expense of proximity to writers and editors. Where this closeness has developed, as in the early years of American *Blake's* 7 fandom, it has proven short-lived, since too many institutional pressures separate media professionals and fans.

Moreover, since copyright laws prohibit the commercial distribution of media fan materials and only a small but growing number of fans have gone on to become professional writers of media texts, these fan artists have a more limited chance of gaining entry into the professional media art world and thus have come to regard fandom less as a training ground than as a permanent outlet for their creative expression. (A growing number of media fans have "turned pro," writing professional *Trek* novels, contributing to commercial publications, pursuing careers as science fiction writers, or submitting scripts to television programs, a fact that offers inspiration to many current fan writers who have similar aspirations, yet, I would argue that the importance of media fan cultural production far exceeds its role as a training ground for professional publishing.) Some fanzine stories and novels, such as the writing of Jean Lorrain, Jacqueline Lichtenberg, Leslie Fish, and Alexis Fagin Black, have remained in print since the late 1960s while others continue to circulate in mangled second-hand editions or faded photocopies. Works by some respected fan artists, such as Jean Kluge, Karen River, Suzan Lovett, and Barbara Fister-Liltz, may fetch several hundred dollars in convention auctions. There are a sizeable number of people who have been active in fandom for most or all of their adult lives and who are now raising children who are active fans. (Perhaps even a few have grandchildren in fandom.)

Media fandom gives every sign of becoming a permanent culture, one which has survived and evolved for more than twenty-five years and has produced material artifacts of enduring interest to that community. Unlike the readers de Certeau describes, fans get to keep what they produce from the materials they "poach" from mass culture, and these materials sometimes become a limited source of economic profit for them as well. Few fans earn enough through the sale of their artworks to see fandom as a primary source of personal income, yet, many earn enough to pay for their expenses and to finance their fan activities. This materiality makes fan culture a fruitful site for studying the tactics of popular appropriation and textual poaching. Yet, it must be acknowledged that the material goods produced by fans are not

simply the tangible traces of transient meanings produced by other reading practices. To read them in such a fashion is to offer an impoverished account of fan cultural production. Fan texts, be they fan writing, art, song, or video, are shaped through the social norms, aesthetic conventions, interpretive protocols, technological resources, and technical competence of the larger fan community. Fans possess not simply borrowed remnants snatched from mass culture, but their own culture built from the semiotic raw materials the media provides.

It's Always 1895

Sherlock Holmes in Cyberspace

ROBERTA PEARSON

"Make a long arm Watson, and see what V has to say."

I leaned back and took down the great index volume to which [Holmes] referred. Holmes' . . . eyes moved slowly and lovingly over the record of old cases, mixed with the accumulated information of a lifetime.

"Voyage of the *Gloria Scott* . . . Victor Lynch, the forger. Venomous lizard or gila . . . Vittoria, the circus belle. Vanderbilt and the Yeggman. Vipers. Vigor, the Hammersmith wonder. Hullo! Hullo! Good old index. You can't beat it. Vampirism in Hungary."

SIR ARTHUR CONAN DOYLE, "The Adventure of the Sussex Vampire" (1924)

Although Holmes exclaimed in delight at finding an entry on vampires, one wonders how the great detective ever managed to locate anything in the commonplace books that he so assiduously constructed and cross-indexed. A cataloguing method that included both the voyage of the *Gloria Scott* and Victor Lynch under the letter V does not seem conducive to the quick retrieval of information. In fact, despite Holmes' nod to linearity through alphabetisation, the grouping seems a potentially hypertextual one. Were Holmes still in practice today, one warrants that a high-powered PC, a collection of CD-ROMs and a modem would beat the good old index hands down. Such electronic marvels are, of course, the descendants and latter-day equivalents of the commonplace books—all devices intended for the storage, access-

ing and processing of knowledge. Modern policemen, or, for that matter, modern fictional crimefighters, with their huge databases and connections to the World Wide Web, still engage in the same search for relevant data as their nineteenth-century predecessor, but can now trade information with colleagues round the world.

Sherlock Holmes fans, known as Sherlockians in the US and Holmesians in Britain, also engage in a detective process, priding themselves on emulating the Master's methods, as they seek to solve textual and other riddles: where was Watson's war wound; why did Holmes never marry; who first played Holmes on the stage? Once primarily dependent on cumbersome reference volumes that equalled the commonplace books in size and inclusiveness, but were much more insistently linear in their organisation, Sherlockians now also use computers in their search for and trading of information on the life and times of the great detective and the man who created him, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. If one views computers as the logical extension of Holmes' own practices and habits of mind, the use of the latest twentieth-century technology by a readership that defines itself through affinity with a nineteenth-century popular hero appears reasonable. But, from another perspective, it seems rather puzzling that Sherlockians, who proudly proclaim that "It's always 1895," can wholeheartedly embrace a technology that is so emphatically Windows 95.

This chapter explores that paradox, focusing on the Sherlockian bulletin board service, the Hounds of the Internet, or Hounds-L. I will suggest that a tension exists between the mythic and the historic in the Hounds' discussions of Victorian history in relation to the Holmesian canon. In addition, I will speculate that the Hounds' experience of history may be qualitatively transformed by their participation in computer mediated communication (CMC), as the historical, mediated through the latest technology, becomes a constant factor in their everyday lives.¹ The argument constructs itself at the intersection of several ongoing scholarly inquiries concerning fandom, computer mediated communication and the mediated representation of history. It is also part of a larger project concerning the diachronic and synchronic ideological appropriation of popular heroes. Before returning to the central topic of the Hounds and history, then, permit me to digress somewhat in order to provide what scriptwriters refer to as "backstory."

This chapter is part of a larger project on popular heroes and their ideological appropriations, following work by Bennett and Woollacott on James

Bond and by Pearson and Uricchio on Batman.² Both Bond and Batman owe their longevity partially to their mutability; the characters are shifting signifiers relatively easily reconfigured to suit different ideological formations. Holmes shares this mutability. During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Sherlock Holmes apotheosised the scientific rationalism on which the period predicated its notions of progressive history as well as its domination over “lesser breeds without the law.” Since his first appearance in the pages of the 1887 *Beeton's Christmas Annual*, Holmes has been appropriated for various ideological projects: a 1940s Holmes worked for the Allies; a 1970s Holmes uncovered a monstrous royal conspiracy in the film *Murder by Decree* (1979); and a 1980s Holmes featured in a series of heritage television programmes produced by Granada.

Conformity to broad ideological trajectories, however, precludes neither contradictions within single texts nor contradictory representations across multiple texts produced at the same time. In the original fifty-six short stories and four short novels that constitute what Sherlockians refer to as “the canon” or “the sacred writings,” Holmes upholds bourgeois order but is himself a bohemian, drug-taking and eccentric bachelor without much tolerance for social conventions or for the less useful members of the upper classes, Her Majesty's Government and the Metropolitan Police. Among many examples of roughly contemporaneous yet contradictory portrayals, the playful nostalgia of Billy Wilder's *The Private Life of Sherlock Holmes* (1970) balanced the dark cynicism of the 1979 *Murder by Decree*.

Contradictions such as those seen in these two texts will remain a general condition of Holmes texts, but computers will certainly inevitably affect both access to historical representations and the ideological appropriations of popular heroes. This is not to take a technologically determinist position, for, of course, information technologies are both produced by and productive of the widespread social/cultural forces of modernity and postmodernity. But rejecting technological determinism does not preclude the intuitive recognition that computer mediated communications may entail effects that remain hard to articulate within available language structures. Deborah Lupton has written a very provocative article about computer use and the sense of self that touches on this issue:

Users invest certain aspects of themselves and their cultures when “making sense” of their computers and their use of computers may be viewed

as contributing to individuals' images and experiences of their selves and their bodies. Our interactions with PCs inscribe our bodies, so that, for example, pens start to feel awkward as writing instruments.³

Most of us would probably agree that learning to write with a word processor affected, if not our sense of self, at least our writing style, and, extrapolating from this, might be willing to speculate that CMC might produce similar, and perhaps, more far-reaching consequences. Yet many commentators, such as the guru of CMC, Howard Rheingold, take a curiously traditionalist perspective that extends even to the old metaphors they use to characterise the new technology. Rheingold claims that CMC has proven so attractive to so many because of

the hunger for community that grows in the breasts of people around the world as more and more informal public spaces disappear from our real lives. I also suspect that those new media attract colonies of enthusiasts because CMC enables people to do things with each other in new ways, and to do altogether new kinds of things—just as telegraphs, telephones and televisions did.⁴

Despite the technologically determinist assertion that CMC will produce new behaviour patterns, the title of Rheingold's book, *The Virtual Community: Homesteading on the Electronic Frontier*, harks back to behaviour patterns more than a century old; the ruggedly individualist "pioneers" of CMC are seen as metaphorically building new communities in newly tamed regions of cyberspace. Here the members will establish electronic public spheres that will serve the same functions as the eighteenth-century coffee houses beloved of Jürgen Habermas.

Questions of community are central to many of the scholars studying the new medium. In fact there is at least one recently published book wholly devoted to the topic and students, from undergraduates to postgraduates, seem obsessed by the topic.⁵ It matters not what subjects initially bring people together or what they subsequently discuss as long as they can be said to have formed a virtual community. This focus on community causes many scholars to seem more concerned with the form of CMC than with the content. We learn about the substitution of "emoticons" for the facial expressions and gestures of f-t-f (face-to-face) communication or about free speech versus netiquette or about the conventions of community maintenance. But while

we might know a great deal about how people talk on the Net we do not yet know much concerning what it is that they actually talk about or how the experience of this talk might differ from the experience of more conventional modes of interaction.

In this chapter I want to explore the proposition that computer mediated communication may change the nature of historical memory. Alison Landsberg speaks of “prosthetic memories,” by which she means:

memories which do not come from a person’s lived experience in any strict sense. These are implanted memories, and the unsettled boundaries between real and simulated ones are frequently accompanied by another disruption: of the human body, its flesh, its subjective autonomy, its difference from both animal and technological.⁶

The term “prosthetic memory” is unfortunately as imprecise as it is intriguing. Landsberg initially derives the idea from the science fiction films *Total Recall* (1990) and *Johnny Mnemonic* (1995), whose heroes literally have foreign memories implanted in their brains, films which in turn derived their plots from science fiction writers such as Philip K. Dick and William Gibson. As Landsberg acknowledges, however, from a perspective which sees media consumption as divorced from “real life” experience, the ubiquitous mass media threaten entirely to replace “real” memories with “prosthetic” memories. I would like to suggest that, as more and more people go on-line, computer mediated communication may also play a large role in the construction of “prosthetic memories.” The interactive nature of the Internet, where it is possible to construct/link to homepages, subscribe/post to bulletin board services and lurk on/post to newsgroups, results in the same users simultaneously constructing “prosthetic memories” for others while downloading “prosthetic memories” constructed by others. In a metaphorical sense, then, Sherlockians in cyberspace may then be said both to produce and consume prosthetic memories of history, even though Internet communication does not result in the literal implantation of memories in their “wetware.”

This chapter deals with differences between appropriations of Holmes in popular prosthetic memories constructed in computer mediated communication. I want to argue that members of one discursive community, the Hounds of the Internet, can produce very different appropriations of the same popular hero at the same historical moment. The appropriation shared by the majority of the Hounds seems congruent with the majority of

representations of Holmes; a nostalgia for the Victorian past coupled with a conventional historiography of “facts” and great men. The less prevalent, but perhaps more interesting, appropriation contests both nostalgia for the Victorian age and conventional notions of the historiographic.

One more digression for relevant backstory before proceeding to this argument. While media fandom has elicited an ever-growing body of literature⁷ and while the Sherlock Holmes texts have been studied by semioticians and literary theorists,⁸ Sherlock Holmes fans have remained blissfully untroubled by academics (until now, that is). A few words about Sherlockians are in order. The first official Sherlockians, those readers who successfully responded to a quiz in Christopher Morley’s column in *The Saturday Review*, gathered at a New York City drinking establishment in 1934. There they formed the Baker Street Irregulars (BSI), the first and most famous of Sherlockian societies, named after the street urchins whom Holmes occasionally employed to assist him. Holmes fandom remains primarily an Anglo-American phenomenon, with more than a hundred of the so-called “scion societies” in the US and several in Britain, including the premiere English organisation, the Sherlock Holmes Society of London. But Holmes societies flourish in what might seem unlikely venues; there are several in the Scandinavian countries and my Sherlockian informants tell me that there are close to 6000 Japanese Sherlockians.

While other fan clubs, certainly those devoted to Hollywood stars for example, may predate the BSI, the organisation and its subsequent scion societies around the US and around the world may constitute the first truly bottom-up fandom. Although admittedly instigated by a column in an elite journal of the New York literary establishment and initially composed of members of that same establishment, Sherlockian fandom has never been hijacked by a media megaglomerate. Sherlockians participate in the mass commodification of their popular hero but on a sporadic basis as various corporations, large and small, see fit to market various Sherlockian commodities—books, films, games and so forth—Sherlockians, however, have never been subjected to the same media blitz as *Star Trek* or *Batman* fans.⁹ Despite these distinctions between Sherlock Holmes fandom and media fandoms such as that surrounding *Star Trek*, Sherlockians engage in similar activities to other fans.¹⁰ Members of scion societies meet on a regular basis to eat, drink, take quizzes, listen to talks, engage in theatrical presentations, sing, play games and, most importantly, escape into a world where all the inhabitants share a similar passion. Individual Sherlockians produce Sher-

lockian “art”—ranging from paintings to hand-painted T-shirts—for their own pleasure or for sale.

But the activity that most concerns me here is Sherlockian writing, which takes three main forms. The founding members of the Baker Street Irregulars, together with English authors such as Ronald Knox and Dorothy Sayers, began the tradition of Sherlockian scholarship, at its best a parody of the academic tradition, employing the techniques of textual hermeneutics to clarify the contradictions and lacunae that stemmed from Conan Doyle’s writing in the serial format. These “writings on the writings” are based upon the premise that Holmes and Watson really lived and that Conan Doyle was merely the “literary agent” who facilitated the publication of stories actually authored by Watson. Other Sherlockians have engaged in a more traditional auteurism, accepting Conan Doyle as the writer and explicating the stories by reference to his biography and other works. Both the whimsical and the serious writings draw upon the social/cultural context of Victorian Britain to elucidate textual conundrums, a tendency which seems even more pronounced in CMC than in print. For example, in a debate concerning Conan Doyle’s knowledge of the proper forms of address for titled nobility, a member of the Hounds of the Internet, “The Hon. Ronald Adair” wrote, “I’m certainly not titled but I believe forms of address were very important in the Victorian era, not only among the British but those of British stock who were scattered around the world” (21 February 1996). Sherlockians also produce pastiches, both serious and parodic, that attempt to replicate Watson/Doyle’s style and plotting, but I will not deal with this aspect of fan writing here. Rather I wish to investigate the ways in which the Hounds of the Internet resort to historical arguments in their discussions of the Holmesian canon.

First, however, who are the Hounds and what do they generally talk about? Let us begin with a geographic profile. As of February 1996, 475 users subscribed to the list-server, the majority of these, 401, having e-mail addresses in the US, a number consistent with the greater penetration of the Internet in that country.¹¹ The other users resided in the following countries: Argentina, 1; Australia, 6; Brazil, 2; Canada, 25; Denmark, 3; France, 1; Germany, 1; Great Britain, 16; India, 1; Ireland, 2; Israel, 1; Italy, 1; Japan, 6; Malta, 1; Netherlands, 1; New Zealand, 1; South Africa, 2; and Sweden, 3. Without actually having counted, my impression is that postings to the bulletin board come primarily from the US, Canada and Britain, as might be expected given the geographic distribution.

Although I do not subscribe to the truism that entering cyberspace frees one from all demographic determinants, I do admit that, without extensive analysis of actual postings, it is extremely difficult to determine such characteristics as the race and class of the bulletin board users. However, one can safely assume that the Hounds, like most Internet users, are predominantly white and middle-class. I have done a rough calculation of the Hounds' gender: 284 men, 124 women (including the author) and 67 posters whose gender I cannot identify.¹² These numbers are consistent with figures concerning the gendered use of the Internet, but even splitting the unknowns evenly between men and women results in 317 men and 157 women, or 67 per cent male and 33 per cent female. The frequency of postings by gender conforms to this distribution. Of the 81 postings that form the data for this article, 35 per cent originated from women.¹³

More important than these admittedly crude demographics is the following categorisation of the most frequently discussed topics, which is, I admit, impressionistic rather than statistical and is listed in no particular order of frequency:

- 1) Sherlockian scholarship of both the serious and the parodic kind; Conan Doyle scholarship.
- 2) "Psycho-biographical" speculations about the characters—why did Holmes never marry? What was the relationship between Holmes and Watson?
- 3) Pastiches posted to the list.
- 4) Comments about screen versions of the canon and the actors portraying the characters.
- 5) Personal connections to the canon—a relative named John Watson, for instance, or considerations of why Holmes might be an attractive romantic partner.
- 6) Trivia questions.
- 7) "Real" community maintenance—announcements of events or reports of scion societies.
- 8) "Virtual" community maintenance—routine subscribe and unsubscribe messages as well as more personal

messages—"I've been sick but now I'm back."

9) Discussions of related fictional characters.

10) Sherlockian commodities—"I have this for sale"; "Where can I purchase this?"

11) Computer queries—where to find Sherlockian information on the World Wide Web.

12) Reviews of recently released films, television programmes, books, and so forth.

Sherlockians in cyberspace, then, most likely roughly conform to the demographic profile of other Internet fan groups and seem to discuss much the same topics. But unlike cyberspace Trekkies and the fans of other media products such as soap operas, they make frequent references to a "real" historical past in their discussions.¹⁴ Let us begin this discussion of the historiographic assumptions and historical experience of the Hounds through reference to other computerised representations of history.

Many text-based computer games, including *Adventure*, the progenitor of them all that gave rise to the now ubiquitous MUDs, are set in a mythical, that is eternally static, rather than a historical, that is evolving and changing, past. Players in games of this type enter lands that derive characters and plots from fairy tales and legends—magicians, dragons, searches for hidden treasures and rescues of imperilled princesses. Even the most popular of home video games, such as *Super Mario Brothers*, are simply variants on ancient quest narratives.¹⁵ More "sophisticated" CD-ROM games, such as *Civilisation* or *SimCity*, are seemingly predicated upon the historical, upon evolution and change, as players attempt to lead their virtual charges from nomadic tribes to city states or from small town to thriving metropolis. But the historical here remains at a high level of abstraction: leading the "Babylonians" does not require detailed knowledge of Babylonian history while your particular *SimCity* could in fact be any city, or at least any American city. Sherlockians on the Internet, indeed Sherlockians generally, maintain a complex, and sometimes contradictory, balance between the mythical and the historical. The Holmes stories appeal to many Sherlockians precisely because of their setting in a bygone age that seems in many respects preferable to their own. Consider some key lines from the sonnet "221B," penned by Vincent Starrett,

one of the founding Baker Street Irregulars, during the darkest days of the Second World War when it seemed as if Holmes' England might succumb to the Nazi dreadnought:

Here dwell together still two men of note
Who never lived and so can never die:
How very near they seem, yet how remote
That age before the world went all awry . . .
Here, though the world explode, these two survive,
And it is always eighteen ninety five.¹⁶

The sonnet's last line provides a Sherlockian rallying cry and the title for this article, as well as the foundational principle for the game of Sherlockian scholarship the Hounds of the Internet play. Contributing to a thread concerning the proper form of address for widows, "John Scott Eccles" wrote: "As a new contributor, I assumed that the Hounds work on the basic Holmesian premise that it 'is always 1895' and I was describing the proper usage that was current in this country (i.e. the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland) towards the end of the reign of Her late Majesty Queen Victoria" (29 February 1996).

The stories' settings of gaslights, hansom cabs and pea soupers are as mythical to denizens of the late twentieth century as dragons' caves and enchanted castles, while Holmes himself functions as a legendary hero of sorts, setting right wrongs that resist the intervention of mere mortals. Many commentators on the so-called "classical" detective story, which includes Conan Doyle as well as practitioners of the country-house mystery such as Agatha Christie, have noted that the detective serves as the guardian of the status quo by defeating a villain associated with the forces of disruption. Professor James Moriarty is, of course, the archetypal villain and some commentators as well as writers of pastiches, have drawn a connection between the great detective and his nemesis, speculating that he represents an out-of-control and antisocial Holmes. Despite his bohemian tendencies, however, Holmes adhered to and employed in his work a nineteenth-century scientific rationalism, descended from the Enlightenment, whose proponents' limitless optimism believed that such an epistemology could be employed only for good. Having found vampires in his commonplace book, Holmes commented, "Are we to give serious attention to such things? This agency stands flat-footed upon the ground, and there it must remain. The world is

big enough for us. No ghosts need apply.”¹⁷ The horrors of a world war and the loss of a son had driven his creator to seek solace in spiritualism, but Holmes still firmly rejected the paranormal in favour of the “world.” But in our post-Enlightenment, postmodern world, such faith in scientific rationalism seems touchingly old-fashioned. In the late twentieth century, ghosts may not only apply but are often provided with gainful employment, as witness the phenomenal success of *The X-Files* and other mass media products of a supernatural nature.

In our millennial era, the appropriation of Holmes as a hero of nineteenth-century rationalism may be motivated by a longing for a mythic and reassuring age, albeit one that has little relevance for contemporary life except by contrast. I want to go further by suggesting that a “virtual community” may be the perfect forum for such an appropriation. Like Howard Rheingold, many “blue skies” commentators on the “information superhighway” extol its potential for rebuilding community in a world where community no longer exists. Kevin Robins, however, takes a refreshingly sceptical view. “You might think of cyberspace as a utopian vision for postmodern times. Utopia is nowhere and at the same time it is also somewhere good. Cyberspace is projected as the same kind of nowhere somewhere.”¹⁸ Some pages later, drawing an analogy between Disneyland and the Internet, Robins suggests that those seeking community in cyberspace have the desire to “control exposure and to create security and order. . . . Cyberspace and virtual reality have seemed to offer some kind of technological fix for a world gone wrong, promising the restoration of a sense of community and communitarian order.”¹⁹ One can hear echoes of the Starrett lines: “Here, though the world explode, these two survive, / And it is always eighteen ninety five.” The commonalities between the utopian reassurance provided by an Internet bulletin board service and by the mythical study at 221B Baker Street might make 1895 and Windows 95 more akin to each other than one might initially suppose.

This discussion of the mythic aspects of Sherlockian appropriation on the Internet does not, however, exhaust the contradictory and complex relationship of the Hounds of the Internet to historiography and the experience of history. Robins also comments that “the technological imaginary is driven by the fantasy of rational mastery of humans over nature and their own nature.”²⁰ Or, as Holmes said, “The world is big enough for us,” the subtext here being that he and Watson, as late nineteenth-century upper-middle-class white men privileged to live at the hub of Empire exercised mastery over the social and

the natural world. For Holmes, technology, science and rapid access to copious information were the foundations of this mastery. Holmes and his creator lived in the period which saw criminal detection evolve from a haphazard system predicated largely upon luck and informants to a methodical science that employed the new techniques of chemical analysis, the mugshot and the forerunner of the fingerprint, the Bertillon system of bodily measurements. As Holmes said to Watson, chiding him for the romantic tone of his stories, "Detection is, or ought to be, an exact science, and should be treated in the same cold and unemotional manner. You have attempted to tinge it with romanticism, which produces much the same effect as if you worked a love-story or an elopement into the fifth proposition of Euclid."²¹ Even lacking Holmes' native brilliance, one could amass facts, apply logical principles of deduction, and solve any puzzle, no matter how baffling. "You know my method. It is founded upon the observation of trifles," said Holmes, urging Watson to engage in his own deductions.²²

Sherlockians pride themselves on following the Master's methods, not only as they attempt to solve his cases along with him, but as they play at the game of Sherlockian scholarship, attempting to impose a coherence upon stories written hurriedly and out of chronological sequence. The amassing of facts concerning the Victorian period aids in both tasks. Take, for example, the thorny question of Watson's wound. During his service as an Army doctor in the Second Afghan War, Watson was wounded by a jezail bullet. But precisely where? With maddening inconsistency the good doctor sometimes speaks of a wound in the shoulder and sometimes of a wound in the leg. Discovering that Afghan snipers often hid on rocky ledges and that Watson may thus have been shot from above enables one to plot a bullet trajectory that could have traversed both his shoulder and his leg.

As I suggested at the outset of this article, computers and the Internet constitute the modern equivalent of Holmes' commonplace books, enabling immediate access to massive compendiums of facts. But such reliance upon facts has implications for the Hounds' historiographic assumptions. Many of the Hounds of the Internet implicitly accept a nineteenth-century scientific rational/conventional historiography. Like a detective, the hardworking historian needs to compile and analyse facts, in his case using them to recover and reconstruct an objective past that constitutes history "as it really was," in von Ranke's words. In keeping with this historiographic epistemology, the majority of the Hounds' historical discussions consist of recitations of

facts, references to “accepted” historical sources and requests for further information—more facts and more sources.

Consider the following extract from the daily interchanges on the Hounds list-server, taken from a thread about the British army in the nineteenth century:

Lord Raglan was the overall British commander in the Crimea, while the Earls Lucan and Cardigan were the feuding brothers-in-law. Major General Lord Lucan, commander of the Cavalry Division, of which the Light Brigade was a part, was blamed for the misinterpretation of Lord Raglan’s order, that sent Brigadier Lord Cardigan and his Light Brigade charging into the valley. . . . When the others came home and told of the confusion, the losses, and the folly of it all, Cardigan became a figure of public mockery. However, the heroism of the individual cavalymen in that battle, is still a very proud moment in British history. (“The Persian Slipper,” 4 March 1996)²³

The poster relays information to his fellow Sherlockians through the cutting-edge technology of computer mediated communication, but the version of the past that he constructs is the historiographical counterpart to Holmes’ commonplace books, with their records of old cases and accumulated information. In other words, “The Persian Slipper” conceives of history as facts, and primarily facts about “great men,” be they army commanders or heroic soldiers. This fact-driven history initially seems at odds with a mythic appropriation of Holmes, but the poster manages to reconcile conventional historiography with mythic reassurance by providing an interpretation of the “facts.” The Charge of the Light Brigade may have been a grand military cock-up but we (that is, white males of British descent or affiliation) can still take pride in an individual heroism that he seems to imply represents the best aspects of Victorian imperialism. “The Persian Slipper”’s interest in Holmes and in history is strongly past-oriented: beyond the reflected glory that we may enjoy from historical events, they have little resonance with the present or the future. A history which remains eternal and unchanging, and which has little or no implications for the present has become myth.

Contrast “The Persian Slipper”’s posting with another taken from a thread concerning the economic position of women in Victorian times:

I was quite aware of the fact that [“A Case of Identity”] involved a woman living at home, but I have also read other sources where respectable women

NOT living at home (i.e., shop girls, etc., who lived in boarding houses b/c their families lived in the country) were making about that amount and trying to live on it, too, so the 60 pound/yr figure is not simply for women living at home. Yes, I, too, deplore the "female tax." It is more expensive to be female in any age (not just the 20th century), and the thought that I might be paid EVEN LESS is appalling, to say the least!! ("Edith Presbury," 27 February 1996) (whose grandmother lost her job when she got married, b/c it was illegal for a married woman to teach, regardless of her age or whether or not she ever had children, and whose great-aunt faced the same problem.)

As does "The Persian Slipper," "Edith Presbury" dispenses factual information, gleaned from "other sources," to her fellow Hounds of the Internet: many women survived on £60 a year. There the similarity between the two posts ends. The further "facts" that the poster conveys come not from traditional historical "sources," but from her family's oral history. And while "Edith Presbury" also provides an interpretation of the "facts," in her case the link that she forges between the annual income figure and the ongoing oppression of women has present-day resonance with her own experiences and those of other women: "It is more expensive to be female in any age." Implicit in this sentiment may be a future-orientation: such inequality should not continue. The linking of such discriminatory attitudes to the Victorians reveals their inappropriateness for the late twentieth century.

"Edith Presbury"'s historiographic approach is the antithesis of "The Persian Slipper"'s. On the basis of his post, he might be characterised as an adherent of traditional, narrative history. He accumulates "facts" from authoritative sources, is concerned with the exploits of "great men" and keeps his history firmly in the past. On the basis of her post, she might be characterised as an adherent of the new social history that has revolutionised the academy within the past three decades or so. Some of her "facts" come from the non-traditional source of oral history, she is concerned with the everyday lives of ordinary people and her history resonates with the present and the future, in keeping with many social historians' contemporary political commitments. In short, "Edith Presbury" engages in a historical rather than a mythic appropriation of Holmes.

These two postings reveal a striking difference between the two Hounds' appropriation of the same popular hero. Yet while "The Persian Slipper"'s and

“Edith Presbury”’s historiography may differ markedly, I want to conclude by suggesting that their involvement in the Hounds of the Internet may affect their experience of history in similar fashion. Here we tread on speculative ground, entailing consideration of those effects of computers upon everyday lived experience that might be hard to articulate within available language structures. A Sherlockian going on-line may find a qualitative as well as a quantitative difference in terms of her interactions with fellow fans and thus in terms of her experience of history. Avid Sherlockians who live in densely populated areas, such as the north-eastern United States, can attend scion society meetings practically on a weekly basis, and, failing this, certainly have informal contacts with other Sherlockians who form part of their friendship network. A subscription to the Hounds list-server brings with it the potential for daily, indeed practically constant, virtual contact with one’s fellow fans, who devote a great deal of their time to the discussion of Victorian history. Even for “The Persian Slipper,” and the other Hounds who engage in a mythic appropriation of Holmes, the past in this sense is no longer cordoned off from the present and future. For the Hounds, and perhaps for others who discuss history on the Internet, there may be a postmodern blurring of boundaries between past, present and future, as history becomes a less objective, less fixed entity, an ongoing practice that structures the experience of both the present and the future. The technology which facilitates this everyday experience is represented as having the potential to become ever more powerful, promising an ever greater immersion in a past made more and more tangible through computer wizardry. Sherlockians must view with envy, but perhaps also with a certain amount of anticipation, those episodes of *Star Trek: The Next Generation* in which Data and Geordi re-create Victorian London, Holmes and Moriarty on the *Enterprise* holodeck. When we too can enter that holodeck the past will truly have become present and our prosthetic memories, even though still not literally implanted in our “wetware,” hard to distinguish from “the real.”

Notes

The epigraph is from Conan Doyle, *The Complete Sherlock Holmes* (Garden City, N.Y.: Garden City Publishing Company, 1938), 1219.

1. A few definitions are perhaps in order for the non-computer literate. Computer mediated communication, or CMC for short, entails several categories: e-mail—

one to one correspondence; bulletin board services, known as BBSs, which entail posting to a central server and the dissemination of posts to all the subscribers; and Usenet—the “chat” groups now often accessed through Web browsers such as Netscape. Also important to networked Sherlockians are the various Holmes homepages on the World Wide Web. I shall discuss these in the larger project of which this article is a component but will not have space to discuss it here.

2. Tony Bennett and Janet Woollacott, *Bond and Beyond: The Political Career of a Popular Hero* (London: Macmillan, 1987), and William Uricchio and Roberta E. Pearson, eds., *The Many Lives of the Batman: Critical Approaches to a Superhero and His Media* (New York: Routledge, 1991).

3. Deborah Lupton, “The Embodied Computer/User,” in *Cyberspace, Cyberbodies, Cyberpunk: Cultures of Technological Embodiment*, ed. Mike Featherstone and Roger Burrows (London: Sage, 1995), 99.

4. Howard Rheingold, *The Virtual Community: Homesteading on the Electronic Frontier* (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley, 1993), 6.

5. Steven G. Jones, ed., *Cybersociety: Computer-Mediated Communication and Community* (Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage, 1995).

6. Alison Landsberg, “Prosthetic Memory: *Total Recall* and *Blade Runner*,” in Featherstone and Burrows, *Cyberspace*, 175.

7. See, for example, Camille Bacon-Smith, *Enterprising Women: Television Fandom and the Creation of Popular Myth* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1992), and Henry Jenkins, *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1992).

8. See, for example, John A. Hodgson, ed., *Sherlock Holmes: The Major Stories with Contemporary Critical Essays* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994).

9. The fact that no one company holds copyright to the Sherlock Holmes novels/stories is certainly a factor.

10. I should note that many of my friends within the Sherlockian world would contest the appellations of “fan” and “fandom,” their resistance to these labels stemming from an implicit hierarchisation of the print media over the moving image media. Were this an “ethnographic” study of the kind undertaken by Jenkins or Bacon-Smith, this viewpoint would be more fully articulated within this article. I should also note that I am myself a “lapsed” Sherlockian, who for many years participated in Holmes fandom and count many of my best friends among those whom I met in Sherlockian circles.

11. To join the Hounds of the Internet send a subscribe message to listserv@listserv.kent.edu saying “subscribe hounds-l [your full name].” To send messages to the list itself the URL is hounds-l@listserv.kent.edu.

12. This calculation is hampered by several factors. Some posters use initials

and some use pseudonyms. Some foreign names are not readily assigned to a gender. Some posters might be listed twice at different addresses. Posters are not obligated to use their “real names.” And some posters may be using partners’ or friends’ accounts.

13. Again, these are very rough figures. Many of the 81 postings concerned the place of women in Victorian society or Victorian sexuality, topics which may have elicited more interest from the female Hounds. It is also not possible to determine, without longer monitoring and more number crunching than I care to do, how many of these postings come from “regulars” and how many from occasional “drop-ins.”

14. It would be interesting in this regard to compare the Hounds to discussion groups devoted to other well-known authors and fictional characters from the past such as, for example, Jane Austen.

15. Mary Fuller and Henry Jenkins, “Nintendo and New World Travel Writing: A Dialogue,” in Jones, *Cybersociety*, 57–72.

16. Vincent Starrett, “221B,” in *Profile by Gaslight: An Irregular Reader About the Private Life of Sherlock Holmes*, ed. Edgar W. Smith (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1944), 290.

17. Doyle, *Complete Sherlock Holmes*, 1219.

18. Kevin Robins, “Cyberspace and the World We Live In,” in Featherstone and Burrows, *Cyberspace*, 135.

19. *Ibid.*, 152.

20. *Ibid.*, 137.

21. Doyle, *Complete Sherlock Holmes*, 92.

22. *Ibid.*, 240.

23. I admit to some confusion as to the proper citation form for an e-mail communication, a confusion compounded by the fact that I have been “lurking” on the BBS without revealing my gathering of data for this article. Since the private or public status of these BBS communications is probably subject to legal debate and I have neither informed my subjects of my study nor asked their permission to quote their posts, I have decided to provide only Sherlockian pseudonyms, not names as they appear in e-mail addresses.

The Death of the Reader?

Literary Theory and the Study of Texts in Popular Culture

CORNEL SANDVOSS

Concerns over meaning and aesthetic value have continually haunted media and cultural studies. In many ways the field of fan studies epitomizes these concerns. The relative neglect of the question of aesthetic value (see also Hills 2007) has made the field of media and cultural studies (hereafter cultural studies) a popular target as a “Mickey Mouse” subject. On the one hand, this is, quite literally, true: fan studies have focused on popular texts from horror films via sports events to, indeed, comics. Beyond this, however, the notion of a “Mickey Mouse” subject implies a lack of depth and theoretical rigor. It is on this level that it remains most hurtful, especially when such criticism is reiterated by those in neighboring disciplines such as literary theory. Echoing such themes and pointing to structuralism paving the way for the rise of cultural studies, Eagleton accuses the new discipline of taking advantage of the fact that,

methodologically speaking, nobody quite knew where *Coriolanus* ended and *Coronation Street* began and constructed an entirely fresh field of enquiry which would gratify the anti-elitist iconoclasm of the sixty-eighters. [. . .] It was, in its academicist way, the latest version of the traditional avant-garde project of leaping barriers between art and society, and was bound to make its appeal to those who found, rather like an apprentice chef cooking his evening meal, that it linked classroom and leisure time with wonderful economy. (Eagleton 1996, 192)

If Eagleton's words were addressed to the discipline as a whole, nowhere do they reverberate more loudly than in fan studies. Fan studies have indeed eroded the boundaries between audiences and scholars, between fan and academic more than any other field (see Hills 2002; Tulloch 2000). To Eagleton, the blurring of these formerly distinct categories has led to a decline in analytic depth and an ideological stagnation: "what happened in the event was not a defeat for this project, which has indeed been gaining institutional strength ever since, but a defeat for the political forces which originally underpinned the new evolutions in literary theory" (1996, 192). Eagleton's critique raises a number of important questions: have fan studies unduly neglected aesthetic value and thus become complicit in the decline of literary quality and theory alike? Have sociological studies of fan audiences in their emphasis on the micro over the macro, on fans in their subcultural context over wider social relations, undermined progressive traditions and forms of radical enquiry, as Bryan Turner (2005) has recently suggested? Are fan studies unwittingly part of a revisionist wave that has suffocated the final sparks of 1960s radicalism? Or is Eagleton's critique just the bitter *réplique* of a scholar who in the shifting sands of history sees the scholarly foundations of his discipline running through his hands, witnessing the dunes of social, cultural, economic, and technological relations upon which all intellectual projects are built shifting from his field of inquiry to another?

In order to answer these questions by comparing the traditions and aims of literary theory with those of fan studies, we need to find a point of—if not compatibility—convertibility between these two fields. This point is found in the shared essence of both disciplines: the analysis and interpretation of meaning in the study of texts and their readings.

Texts and Textuality

While both disciplines share a focus on texts and the meanings that evolve around them, they already diverge in their definition of what actually constitutes a "text." Our common understanding of texts is rooted in the idealization and imagination of closed forms of textuality that have shaped the study of written texts from the rise of modern aesthetics in Enlightenment philosophy via the Romantics, who "denied any influence from previous writers and asserted the text's utter uniqueness" (Gray 2006, 20), to Edmund Husserl's phenomenological search for the author's pure intent in literary texts.

“Textual studies” have thus, as Gray notes, “a long history of fetishizing the text as a solitary, pristinely autonomous object, and this notion of textuality has exerted considerable pressure, particularly on literary and film studies” (2006, 19–20). In fan studies, however, the task of defining the text has been rather more complex. To understand the origin of this difficulty, we need to briefly draw the admittedly crude distinction between form and content. Take the following textual fragment or statement: “My name is Dr. Serenus Zeitblom, Ph.D.” To those who share English as a common language, the content of this brief sentence appears clear, but it is quite impossible for anyone, myself included, to describe its content in any form other than its meaning or, even if I could, to communicate this content to others. When I summarize the content of this statement as “someone is called Serenus Zeitblom, and he has a doctorate in philosophy,” I am already describing the *meaning* I have generated in the act of the reading. All encounters with textual structures thus require ideational activity that inherently ties the text to its reader. No text (and content) exists independently (see Fish 1981; Holub 1992; Iser 1978).

This is, of course, hardly news. Yet, while we cannot separate content from meaning, we can observe how meaning changes in different forms of communication. If we set the same utterance or textual fragment into different contexts, its meaning, or at least its possible meanings, change. In the case of face-to-face interaction—let’s say we meet someone on the street who introduces himself with the above words—the *someone* who is or claims to be Serenus Zeitblom is effectively limited to the person who has been seen or heard to make this statement. Here, the reciprocity of the text limits its possible meanings. The reader of this chapter in contrast will have found it more difficult to identify who the name points to when reading the above statement. The utterer of these words does not correspond with the author, leaving you with countless possibilities as to who the possessive pronoun in “my name” refers to. It is this fundamental difference in form between written and spoken texts that Paul Ricoeur accredits with what he labels as “difficulties of interpretation”: “in face-to-face interaction problems [of interpretation] are solved through a form of exchange we call conversation. In written texts discourse has to speak for itself” (1996, 56). Our observation that texts change meaning through their form, in conjunction with Ricoeur’s assessment of the changing role of authorial intent in written texts, points to two important differences between fan texts and literary texts. First, in study-

ing media audiences, we are confronted with a variety of different textual forms around which fandom evolves: alongside written texts, these include audio and sound, visual texts, audiovisual texts, and hypertexts.

The second difference concerns the way fan texts are formed across these media. Here, I owe the reader three belated definitions of “fans,” “texts,” and “fan texts.” In my earlier work, I defined “fandom as the regular, emotionally involved consumption of a given popular narrative or text” (Sandvoss 2005a, 8). In its inclusion of both texts and narratives, this definition mirrored a level of uncertainty. While we all have a sense of who fans are, conceptualizing the textual basis of their fandom seems far more difficult. Hills (1999) distinguishes between popular texts (fictional) and popular icons (factual) as possible fan objects. On the level of the author, this distinction is of course correct. In the cases of literary fandom (see Brooker 2005) or fandom based on television shows, texts are written or controlled by copyright and license holders; they are in one form or another authored. In contrast, we do not describe popular icons such as musicians, actors, or athletes, or other fan objects such as sport teams, as deliberately authored texts. Even where those in the center of the public gaze aim to maintain a public and hence staged persona, fans’ interests often focus on what lies behind the public facade, as is exemplified in the title of celebrity biographies from *The Real David Beckham* (Morgan 2004) to Albert Goldman’s ([1988] 2001) notorious *The Lives of John Lennon*. However, the popularity of such biographies already signals that we cannot rely on authorship as a defining element of textuality; indeed, the success of these books is often not based on their actual author, who may be unknown to readers, but on the subject—the object of fandom. Whether a given fan object is found in a novel, a television program, or a popular icon, fan objects are read as texts on the level of the fan/reader. They all constitute a set of signs and symbols that fans encounter in their frames of representation and mediation, and from which they create meaning in the process of reading. Consequently, what is needed is a broad definition of texts that is not based on authorship, but on texts as frames of realizable meanings that span across single or multiple communicative acts, including visual, sound-based, and written communication. Yet, what the example of celebrity biographies shows is that we need to reflect on textual boundaries too. As we remove authorship as the essence of textuality, the notion of the single text that can be distinguished from other texts becomes impossible to maintain, as it is now not by the producer but by the reader that the boundaries of texts are set (Sandvoss 2005a, 2005b).

The capability of media audiences to define textual boundaries is inextricably linked with their media of delivery. The home-based and mobile media through which most fan texts are consumed—television, radio, magazines, walkmen and iPods, the Internet—are firmly entrenched in the structure of everyday life in late industrialism, embedding the act of reading in a social and technological context that is not only nonreciprocal (Thompson 1995), but in which textual boundaries at the point of production are evaded through the technological essence of such media as spaces of flow (see Williams 1974; see also Corner 1999). Television finds its true narrative form in seriality (Eco 1994), while the hypertextuality of the Internet forces the reader/user into the active construction of the text's boundaries. Moreover, through notions of genre and the capitalist imperative of market enlargements that drives them, textual motives from narratives to fictional characters and popular icons are constituted and reconstituted across different media. A sports fan will read and watch texts in reference to his or her favorite team on television, on the radio, in newspapers, in sport magazines, and, increasingly, on the Internet; soap fans (Baym 2000) turn to the World Wide Web and entertainment magazines as part of their fandom; the fan of a given actress will watch her in different films but also follow further coverage in newspapers or read the abovementioned celebrity biographies. Fan objects thus form a *field of gravity*, which may or may not have an *urtext* in its epicenter, but which in any case corresponds with the fundamental meaning structure through which all these texts are read. The fan text is thus constituted through a multiplicity of textual elements; it is by definition intertextual and formed between and across texts as defined at the point of production.

The single "episodes" that fans patch together to form a fan text are usefully described by Gray, drawing on Genette, as "paratext" that "infringes upon the text, and invades its meaning-making process" (2006, 36). As the fan text takes different forms among different fan groups—namely, the audience sections "fans," "cultists," and "enthusiasts," with their different use of mass media, which Abercrombie and Longhurst (1998) describe—the balance between *urtext* and paratexts changes. In Gray's words, to the degree that "we actually consume some texts through paratexts and supportive intertexts, the text itself becoming expendable" (2006, 37). What follows is a radically different conceptualization of "texts" than in literary theory. Individual texts at the point of production are part of a wider web of textual occurrences and the meanings derived from them. These textual elements are read in the

context of other texts. Intertextuality is thus the essence of all texts. While many contemporary fan texts such as *The Simpsons*, on which Gray focuses, or *South Park* are based on parody and thus more ostensibly intertextual than others, meaning construction through text *and* context does not by itself allow us to distinguish between literary and mediated texts. The field of comparative literature, for instance, draws on the long-standing tradition of motive and theme research. Yet in each and every case, the textual field in which the individual text is positioned will allow the reader to construct different meanings.

On a most obvious level, this relates to existing knowledge. Those readers with an interest in twentieth-century German literature will not have been quite as clueless about who the abovementioned Serenus Zeitblom was. They will have recognized the sentence “My name is Dr. Serenus Zeitblom, Ph.D.,” as the opening sentence of the second chapter of Thomas Mann’s *Doktor Faustus*, in which the narrator, Serenus Zeitblom, apologizes for his belated introduction. It is then a form of preexisting interest or what we might call an object of fandom (the work of Thomas Mann) that allows us to create meaning through contextualization that will have remained hidden to other readers—just as if the sentence in question had been “My name is Slim Shady,” different paratexts would have come into play for different fan groups. Beyond this, Mann’s *Doktor Faustus* serves as a lucid example of intertextuality in literary works in their literary and multimediated context: “the life of the German composer Adrian Leverkühn as told by a friend,” as the subtitle of its English translations goes, is an adaptation of the Faust motive—the selling of one’s soul to the devil for earthly talents, powers, or knowledge—that spans through all forms of textuality in European literature and storytelling, beginning with the late medieval German myth via Goethe’s *Urfaust* to Bulgakov’s *Macmep u Mapzapuma*, poetry (Heine’s *Der Doctor Faust*), theatre such as Paul Valéry’s fragment *Mon Faust*, music by Berlioz, Wagner, Liszt, and the *Einstürzenden Neubauten*, filmic adaptations, including Murnau’s *Faust: Eine Deutsche Volkssage*, to comic supervillains such as DC Comics’s *Felix Faust*, to name only a few.¹ Beyond such direct adaptations, the Faust motive resurfaces in a plethora of popular texts including George Lucas’s *Star Wars*. Yet, Mann’s *Doktor Faustus* is not only part of an intertextual web; it also, like Mann’s preceding work, is based on an ironic gesture of the narrator, the by now familiar Serenus Zeitblom, which takes back the narrative and the pretense of representing the real; a gesture

in Mann's work that according to Adorno (1991) reflects the crisis of the narrator in the modern novel as a direct consequence of the proliferation of new modes and media of representation, namely, film (see also Benjamin 1983). The difference between intertextuality in mediated and literary texts is thus one of degree rather than kind. For both sets of textuality, the crisis of the text (in its boundaries at the point of production) is thus the crisis of the narrator as literary and actual figure: the author him- or herself.

The fan scholar, coincidentally, is thus no more or less an "apprentice chef" than the philologist. Both rely on intertextual knowledge to interpret text and context. To the degree that the fan text is constituted on the level of consumption, the reading position of the fan is actually the premise for identifying the text and its boundaries—rather than to an apprentice chef, the fan scholar compares to a restaurant critic, who to do his job also needs to know how to cook.

On a wider point, our reflections of what constitutes a text coincide with the critical reflections on authorship and textuality in structuralism and post-structuralism. The study of fans further underlines a process of growing intertextuality, multimediatic narrative figures, and multiple authorship that has eroded the concept of the author that, as Barthes (1977) notes, reached its zenith in the formation of high modernity as the culmination of a rationalist, positivist capitalist system. It is indeed Barthes's analysis of Balzac's *Sarrasine* that accurately prefigures the condition of textuality as decentered and refocused on the level of the fan/reader I have sought to describe here:

A text is not a line of words releasing a single "theological" meaning [. . .] but a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash[. . .] A text is made of multiple writings, drawn from many cultures and entering into mutual relations, dialogue, parody, contestation, but there is one place where this multiplicity is focused and that place is the reader, not, as was hitherto said, the author. The reader is the space on which all the quotations that make up a writing are inscribed without any of them being lost; a text's unity lies not in its origin but in its destination. (Barthes 1977, 146–48)

If the poststructuralist turn in Barthes's work furnishes us with a conceptual basis for the study and analysis of fandom, it is his earlier work and structuralism in general that allowed cultural studies to extend the study of interpretation and meaning beyond literary texts. As Eagleton notes re-

sentfully (1996, 192), “structuralism had apparently revealed that the same codes and conventions traversed both ‘high’ and ‘low’ cultures, with scant regard for the classical distinction of value.” When Eagleton laments the disappearing boundaries between *Coriolanus* and *Coronation Street*, he has thus already identified the guilty party. Eagleton’s critique of course fails to acknowledge that the formation of structuralism was itself a reaction to changing forms of textuality that much of literary theory had been unable to address, continuing the study of literary texts as if they existed in splendid isolation. This, however, is not to dismiss Eagleton’s concern over value out of hand. Many studies illustrate how fans themselves—from Tulloch and Jenkins’s (1995) and McKee’s (2001) *Doctor Who* to Cavicchi’s (1998) Springsteen and Thomas’s (2002) *The Archers* fans—are concerned with value. Yet, if Eagleton’s comparison between cultural studies and literary theory is ill judged for lacking recognition of the multiple methodological grounds for the rise of the former and the inability to address new forms of textuality of the latter, his warning that in its heightened emphasis on structuralist and poststructuralist approaches cultural studies has lost the vocabulary to evaluate texts is less easily dismissed.

The Death of the Author and Audience Activity

The notion of intertextuality has been pivotal to fan studies from their very beginning. Jenkins (1992, 67), in the context of new technological developments such as VCRs, explored the notion of “rereading.” Jenkins differed from Barthes’s description of the irregularity of rereadings, noting that they are commercially attractive to the television industry. This distinction between reading and rereading belongs to the less widely recognized aspects of Jenkins’s work, not least because he admits that it is difficult to maintain, since in an intertextual-structuralist approach, reading and rereading are the same phenomenon. However, terminology aside, Jenkins finds himself in fundamental agreement with Barthes’s model of reading. In his canonical work of the first wave of fan studies, a basic model of fan textuality thus emerges that has come to prevail until today. As fan studies found new conceptual grounds throughout the 1990s describing fandom as a form of spectacle and performance (Abercrombie and Longhurst 1998; see also Lancaster 2001), as a manifestation of subcultural hierarchies (Jancovich 2002; Thornton 1995), or as a transitional space (Harrington and Bielby 1995; Hills 2002),

the implicit assumption remained a model of textuality that distinguished between “exceptional texts” and “exceptional readings” and that allocated the specificities of fandom on the side of the fan reader rather than the text. With few exceptions, studies of fan audiences have challenged the idea of “correct” or even dominant readings. Hence, fan studies with their critical attention to the power of meaning construction not only underline Barthes’s pronouncement of the terminal state of the modern author but also inherit its inherent ideological stance:

Once the author is removed, the claim to decipher a text becomes quite futile. To give a text an Author is to impose a limit on the text [. . .], literature by refusing to assign a “secret,” an ultimate meaning to the text (and to the world as text), liberates what may be called an anti-theological activity that is truly revolutionary since to refuse to fix meaning is in the end, to refuse God and his hypostases—reason, science, law. [. . .] [T]he birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the author. (Barthes 1977, 147–48)

This self-proclaimed radicalism, which has marked poststructuralism and fan studies alike, fostering relativism in aesthetic judgment as radical rejection of positivism and science, is, according to Eagleton (1996), based on “straw targets.” Eagleton sees poststructuralism as rooted in the specific historic moment of disillusionment, as 1960s oppositional movements were uncovered as complicit in the very structures they set out to overthrow, hence leading to a total rejection of all structures and thus the concept of truth: “an invulnerable position, and the fact it is also purely empty is simply the price one has to pay for this” (Eagleton 1996, 125).

Here, Eagleton has a point, not least because if all that fan studies can do is to highlight the relative value of all texts and the inherent supremacy of the reader over the text, the field has reached its conceptual and empirical frontiers. What, however, are the alternatives? Fan studies drawing on the work of Pierre Bourdieu (1984) have too convincingly unmasked forms of judgment based on authenticity and originality—which persist among fans as well as scholars—as means of social and cultural distinction (and domination) for a return to textual critique on such grounds to be considered a possibility. If it is only in these terms that we can maintain a distinction between *Coriolanus* and *Coronation Street*, it is a distinction not worth making.

The Death of the Reader

If we cannot locate aesthetic value of texts in themselves—and Eagleton's (1996) discussion of hermeneutics admits as much—yet do not want to abolish questions of value altogether, it needs to be located elsewhere. The author, pronounced dead in post-structuralism, and in any case conspicuously absent in most mass-mediated forms of textuality, has proven an unsuitable basis for textual interpretation and evaluation. However, if we can distinguish texts and meaning creation as radically as Jenkins's (1992) distinction between exceptional texts and exceptional readings suggests, the reader appears to be a no-better indicator of the aesthetic value of texts, since exceptional readings would thus appear to be based upon forms of audience activity quite independent of texts themselves. If we cannot locate aesthetic value in the author, text, or reader alone, it is in the process of interaction between these that aesthetic value is manifested. Hence, we need to define the act of reading in a manner that may appear obvious but has profound normative consequences. By defining the act of reading as a form of dialogue between text and reader (see Sandvoss 2005b), in fandom and elsewhere, we enter into a wider social and cultural commitment as to what texts are for and what we believe the uses of reading to be.

In doing so, I want to turn to Wolfgang Iser (1971, 1978), who, like other reception theorists (see Jauss 1982; Vodička 1975), moves the focus of literary theory from the text to the processes of reading. The premise of Iser's argument is that texts only acquire meaning when they are being read. The process of reading, however, is no simple realization of prepacked meanings controlled by the author, but rather an interaction in which the structures and figures of the text collide with the reader's (subjective) knowledge, experiences, and expectations, all in turn formed, we may add, in an intertextual field. In this process of dialogue between text and reader, meaning is created as the reader "concretizes" the text. Hence Iser focuses on textual elements of indeterminacy that only come to life through the interaction with the reader: textual gaps and blanks. In contrast to hermeneutical approaches, including the work of Ingarden (1973), who similarly speaks of "spots of indeterminacy," textual gaps have no theological, metaphysical function but are constituted and filled in each individual act of reading. In their recognition of the absence of inherent meanings and universal aesthetic value, Iser and fellow reception theorists thus actually share fundamental assumptions with Barthes's

work. Yet, in contrast to the poststructuralist approaches to textuality that have given birth to fan studies, Iser establishes a firm basis on which the aesthetic value of a given text can be assessed. According to Iser, the act of concretization is underscored by readers' inherent striving to "normalize" texts. The notion of normalization is in turn linked to textual gaps: in their attempt to concretize textual gaps, readers are required to draw on their own knowledge and experiences—on what Jauss (1982) has described as "horizon of expectation." It is therefore an inherent aspect of all ideational activity to align the Otherness encountered in the text, its alien elements, as closely with our past experience as possible. If we are successful, the text is fully normalized and "appears to be nothing more than a mirror-reflection" of the reader and his or her schemes of perception (Iser 1971, 9).

We must not, as Eagleton does, confuse Iser's observations with normative claims. Eagleton denounces normalization as a "revealingly authoritarian term," suggesting that a text should be "tamed and subdued to some firm sense of structure" as readers struggle to pin down "its anarchic 'polysemantic' potential" (1996, 71). Eagleton's adventurous reading itself tests the boundaries of polysemy, as in fact, Iser argues the opposite: normalization is an inherent aspect of cognition and all ideational activity, but one that the text can evade. It is precisely the ability of a text to avoid normalization in which its aesthetic value lies. While readers strive to normalize texts, the question is to what extent texts will let them do so. If a text is readily normalized, it "seems trivial, because it merely echoes our own" experience (Iser 1978, 109). Conversely, those texts that profoundly contradict readers' experiences and thus challenge our expectations require a reflexive engagement that reveals "aspects (e.g. of social norms) which had remained hidden as long as the frame of reference remained intact" (Iser 1978, 109).

In this formulation of aesthetic value as defamiliarization lies a profound challenge to mediated textuality and fan texts in particular. The obstacles to normalization in literary texts, such as *Doktor Faustus*, are rooted in a range of narrative and metaphorical techniques that depend on defined boundaries at the point of production—and hence the persistence of, if not the author, then at least his or her chosen narrative form. In mediated texts, as I have argued above; these boundaries are eroded. As the object of fandom corresponds with a textual field of gravity, rather than a text in its classical sense, readers gain new tools to normalize texts and to reconcile their object of fandom with their expectations, beliefs, and sense of self. As

the fan's semiotic power extends beyond the bridging of textual gaps to the inclusion and exclusion of textual episodes, fan readers exclude those textual elements that impede the normalization of the text and fail to correspond with their horizon of expectation (see Scodari 2007; Johnson 2007). It is thus that Elvis can be claimed as an object of fandom by white supremacists and black soul singers alike (see Rodman 1996), that sport teams serve as spaces of self-projection to fans with varying habitus, beliefs, and convictions (Sandvoss 2003), and that Springsteen fans find themselves in his lyrics (Cavicchi 1998). These fan texts are void of inherent meaning and thus no longer polysemic, but what I have described elsewhere as "neutrosemic" (Sandvoss 2005a)—in other words, they are polysemic to the degree that the endless multiplicity of meaning has collapsed into complete absence of intersubjective meaning.

In all conceptualizations of fandom spanning from the early work of Fiske to the present day, fandom as a form of audienceship has been defined by its use: as a tool of pleasurable subversion, as the rallying point of communities, as focus of audiences' own textual activities or performances, serving a range of psychological functions or as semiotic space of narcissistic self-reflection. Yet, in this emphasis on audience activity, fan studies have neglected the act of reading as the interface between micro (reader) and macro (the text and its systems of production).

If aesthetic value is based on transgression and estrangement, the reading of fan texts strives for the opposite: familiarity and the fulfillment of expectations. Iser's work translates thus into a fundamental question in the study of fan texts: can the reader survive the death of the author? The fate of the author and reader are rather more intertwined than Barthes suggests; the process of reading as an act of communication spans like a line between two poles—one depends on the other. When the author is eradicated from the text, when all gaps disappear, the meaning that fans create is no longer based on reading but on audience activity. However, the disappearance of the author and fundamental redrawing of textual boundaries at the point of consumption are rarely complete, as is evident in fans' frequent sense of disappointment with their fan texts. Most texts—mediated or literary—can neither be fully normalized and thus emptied of all alien elements, nor truly fantastic, evading all forms of concretization. The extent to which (fan) texts thus reflexively challenge our perception is a matter of degree and one that requires a different answer in each and every case of text-reader interaction.

Two conclusions follow. First, fandom as a mode of reading sits uneasily with the aesthetic principles of reception theory. It constitutes a particular form of engagement with the text that presupposes familiarity and in which our expectations are more rigid, our determination to construct meaning in reference to the function of fandom greater than in other processes of reading. However, it does so in relation to no specific texts, but applies across the spectrum of textuality from romantic poetry to television cartoon programs. We can judge a text's aesthetic value thus only in relation to its reader.

In turn, this means that manifested in the act of reading, aesthetic value nevertheless persists and remains a category worthy of exploration in all forms of textuality from literary to fan texts. It is admittedly a functionalist definition of value and one that Eagleton (1996) dismisses with the same vigor as he attacks poststructuralism. While the latter is disregarded for its hollow political gesture, the functionalism of Iser faces the opposite charge: according to Eagleton (1996, 71), the value of estrangement is rooted in a "definite attitude to the social and cultural systems [. . .] which amounts to suspecting thought-systems as such" and is thus embedded in liberalism. This much is true—and it is equally true that those who do not share such a broad vision of emancipation through communication, those who do not share a belief in the necessity of reflexive engagement with our social, economic, and cultural norms and conditions may quickly dismiss such aesthetics, however curious a position this may be for anyone with the loosest affiliation to the Enlightenment project, not least those drawing their conceptual and ethical inspiration from Marxism—cultural studies and Eagleton included.

Yet this is precisely the lesson that emerges from the study of fan texts and my attempted synthesis between cultural studies and literary theory: the empirical study of fan audiences over the past two decades has indisputably documented the absence of universal and inherent aesthetic values of texts. However, to remain true to its own roots, our discipline needs to find new vocabulary and concepts to analyze aesthetic value in its function: the process of reading. Here, studies of fan audiences can learn as much from literary theory as vice versa: in a state of constant audienceship in which we consume mediated and fragmented texts and reconstitute textual boundaries in the act of reading in an intertextual field, we need to formulate aesthetic categories that avoid the absolutism of traditional textual interpretation as much as the relativism of poststructuralism and deconstructionism. Aesthetic value can thus neither be an objective category with what have been unmasked to

be subjective criteria; nor can we afford the aesthetic (and ultimately social and cultural) indifference of conveniently abolishing aesthetics by relegating them to a subjective category with subjective criteria. Instead, the synthesis of fan studies and reception aesthetics enables us to explore aesthetics as a *subjective* category with *objective* criteria. In doing so, fan studies will not avoid ridicule for analyzing texts and their audiences that to some appear trivial; but it will move further towards exploring why fan texts mean so much to so many people and the meaning of this affective bond between text and reader in a mediated world.

Note

1. For a critique of intertextuality, and Kristeva's work in particular, see Stierle (1996).



FAN IDENTITY AND FEMINISM

From its very beginnings, media fan fiction has been a female, if not feminist, undertaking. We place the beginnings of media fan fiction with the 1967 mimeographed fan zine *Spockanalia*, edited by and containing fiction and nonfiction by women (Coppa 2006a). Joan Marie Verba's ([1996] 2003) history of *Star Trek* zine fandom documents these zines, which originally grew out of a male tradition of science fiction literature fandom but quickly found their own audience and style. Fan fiction became an important contribution and later the principal focus of many zines. As Jacqueline Lichtenberg, Sondra Marshak, and Joan Winston pointed out in 1975, "One of the most immediately striking things about *Star Trek* fan fiction . . . is that most of it is written by women" (222). Although this overwhelming majority of women writers has been changing since at least the beginnings of Internet fandom and especially in the last decade, many fandoms still comprise mostly women. Whereas fan fiction could be explained as literary explorations, imaginative expansions, and creative interpretations, its increasingly popular subset of

slash—that is, homoerotic fan fiction—raised fans' ire and academics' interest nearly from the get-go.

Given slash's mostly female community of readers and writers and its same-sex romance narratives, discussions of gender, sex, and sexuality have always been central when this genre is discussed. Not all fan fiction is slash and not all slash is explicit, but most discussions of fan fiction focus on explicit homoerotic fan writings. There are many reasons for this, including titillation and sensationalism, which draw journalists and the popular press to the more explicit writings and which have resulted in an outsized popular culture focus on homoeroticism. At the same time, the genre invites scholars to engage with it: stories that address gender and sexuality and that aggressively rewrite the source text are ideal examples of subversive readings that media scholars like to showcase. In addition, the communities surrounding slash fandoms are often self-aware as creators of transformative works. As a result, in both popular and academic work, fan fiction often gets reduced to its erotic aspects, but these erotic aspects also tend to present fan fiction's engagement with gender, sex, and sexuality at its fullest.

At the center of many theoretical debates on literary interpretations is the question as to how much an interpretation is subtextual versus how much it is a misreading. Alexander Doty's (1993) influential study of queer subtext in film easily extends and transfers to fannish readings that posit or uncover homoerotic and homosexual subtexts, thus laying the foundations for slash fan fiction. Rather than viewing the media sources as heteronormative texts that are consequently queered by imposing same-sex romance, many fan writers regard their reading as simply teasing out the subtext—that is, rather than interpreting the absence of romantic entanglements as heteronormativity, fans often appropriate and redefine the empty spaces and read the text against its industrial and historical context. An example: the characters of Starsky and Hutch wouldn't be out in the TV show because they are police partners in 1970s America, and the series was shot and shown on a U.S. network station in the 1970s. The cultural contexts of the setting and the place of dissemination both indicate that homoeroticism between Starsky and Hutch must be subtextual, not overt.

Discussions of slash have been central to fan studies scholarship focusing on fan identity, feminism, and the role of women within a creative community. Early slash often consciously used male protagonists and male bodies to envision ideal relationships and fantasize about sexual experimentations

within often deeply committed relationships. This was followed by a strongly realistic and often politically self-aware movement, which confronted these fantasy men with the realities of male bodies and sexualities as well as with the cultural realities of gay lives. The essays in this section focus on pleasure, power, and subversion, three areas that may also be taken to transcend the genre of slash, to be applied to fan-created texts more generally.

Pleasure

Joanna Russ's 1985 essay "Pornography by Women for Women, with Love" encompasses its entire argument in the title. Her provocative use of the word *pornography* is noteworthy in the context of the passionate debates on pornography fought within the feminist movement during the 1980s (Duggan and Hunte 2006). In addition to her overt pleasure in the text ("I love the stuff, I love the way it turns me on"), she emphasizes the empowering nature of sexual fantasy, especially when combined with a community of women—women as writers, editors, and readers—free from commercial restrictions. In so doing, she supplements a mere textual analysis with the cultural force that is slash fandom: a community by women, for women.

Russ comments on the heavily cultured implementation that celebrates delayed gratification, monogamy, service, and suffering. By turning cultural expectations of women into virtues projected onto (alien) men, writers of the classic *Star Trek* Kirk/Spock slash she discusses carve out a space for sexual fantasy even as they fail to ultimately escape patriarchal ideology. Yet, Russ suggests, the cultural work that slash writers perform is important, not only in its all-female process but also by introducing explicit sexuality into a realm that used to fade to black just when things got interesting. Slash may have similarities with the genre of romance in the emotional gratification it offers its women readers, but it supplements this with a healthy dose of explicit sex.

Reading the essay today, Russ's explanation of women's identification with and projection onto male characters in same-sex romantic and sexual relationships is surprising in its insight and its limitations, particularly because of her own sexual orientation, an out lesbian. She acknowledges the desire for equality and the ability to desire men, yet she is stuck within a heteronormative framework, both in her oversight of nonheterosexual fans and her easy objectification of gay men. The essay remains important because of its overt discussion of pleasure, its focus on community, and its stance, so often seen

in writings about slash, that slash is a way to rewrite or reconfigure cultural needs that goes against the grain of mainstream culture.

Power

Patricia Frazer Lamb and Diana L. Veith's 1986 "Romantic Myth, Transcendence, and *Star Trek* Zines," like Russ's essay, considers Kirk/Spock slash. Lamb and Veith directly reference Leslie Fiedler's important and influential *Love and Death in the American Novel* (1960). Fiedler focuses on a subsection of American literature that features homosocial interracial pairings, where the couple explores the frontier together, yet the homosexual threat is often mitigated by the feminization of the nonwhite subject.

Lamb and Veith expand Fiedler's argument by showing how in slash both characters take turns displaying supposedly feminine characteristics. In so doing, they argue, female slash writers use and subvert the traditional gender paradigms, thus allowing female readers and writers to identify with both characters as they are writing a pairing of equals. Heterosexual romance can only occur between people who are inherently not equals, they argue, with woman as the weaker partner. Slash focuses on two men of equal power, both with what might be termed masculine and feminine aspects. Because heterosexual women can never have a truly equal love relationship with a man, they write their desires onto Kirk and Spock, and onto their both desired and desiring bodies.

In the fan-written slash stories that Lamb and Veith discuss, Kirk and Spock are both work and life partners. Often they are bonded; they explore the galaxy together and rely on and support one another unquestioningly. They are androgynous in their characteristics and their (intimately) close friendship. At the same time, they are all male in their sexual representation, thus allowing women to desire both of them sexually while creating an ideal relationship that they themselves might desire but cannot reach in a patriarchal universe. The authors discuss in detail Kirk and Spock's bond, a suggestion made in the *Star Trek* canon and expanded and idealized in many fan stories.

Although Lamb and Veith do not fully acknowledge the ideologies underlying a desire for a love that erases all boundaries between two subjects and also erases one's sense of self, they describe how such a perfect union can only be imagined by the female *Star Trek* fans through two men, both as a

result of cultural constraints and the way these constraints affect the representation of women on TV. Like Russ, they include notions of subversion in their argument: by writing Kirk/Spock slash stories, women are working against the patriarchal grain and imagining a utopian, truly equal world.

Subversion

Russ foregrounds slash's often explicit nature and its pornographic aspects, and Lamb and Veith emphasize the focus on romance between friends and equals. Together, these two texts sketch out the most commonly repeated arguments as to why and how slash is a powerful cultural textual tool that allows women to imagine sexual fantasies of equality. The last essay in this section, Sara Gwenllian Jones's "The Sex Lives of Cult Television Characters" (2002), calls into question the notion of subversion inherent in Russ's and Lamb and Veith's writings, and also inherent in the academic readings of slash published in the 1990s and beyond (Jenkins 1992; Penley 1992; Ciccione 1998; Saxey 2001; Kustritz 2003). Jones's argument, situated in a postzine moment, also acknowledges male as well as gay and lesbian slash writers. Jones complicates the idealized description of slash fiction and its cultural role by arguing that the source text actually prevents the heterosexual pairing and invites the homosexual one, so we can't then conclude that the stories are all that subversive.

According to Jones, the implicit effect of the textual impossibility of heterosexual relations is that the text all but invites the viewer to expand the homosocial into the homosexual. The same-sex partners—be they *Star Trek*'s Kirk and Spock or *Xena: Warrior Princess*'s Xena and Gabrielle—are already working and living and fighting side by side, so a sexual relationship is all but an extension of the canon. And if it is inherent in the canon, then a slash reading is not resistant. Just as Alexander Doty argues in *Making Things Perfectly Queer* (1993), the text does not need to be queered because the queer subtext is already a potential reading. As a result, slash fan fiction may indeed be more textual and bound to the possibilities presented in the canonical source, and far less subversive than slash theorists have wanted to claim.

Jones's work is theoretically located in what we might call the second wave of fan studies. The first wave was heavily influenced by the incorporation/resistance paradigm, drawing from the Birmingham School, and in particular the work of Stuart Hall (1997). Jones follows Abercrombie and Longhurst

(1998, also collected in this volume) in suggesting that audience interactions are more complicated and also often more complicit. In her discussion of cult television and its world building (where show runners and the show's audiences collaborate), Jones suggests that slash fiction may describe the only form of relationships that make sense within this cult universe: any heterosexual relationship is bound to short-circuit the adventures and fantastic explorations that are the center of many cult series. In effect, domesticity cannot be allowed in these universes, and within a heteronormative ideology, heterosexual relations will eventually lead to domesticity—which leaves homosexual relations. White picket fences have no place on space stations.

Slash Today

Concerns of pleasure, power, and subversion remain important to readings of fan fiction in general and slash in particular. Yet as the time between these essays' publication dates shows, our culture has changed, making some of the arguments in work published in the 1980s and 1990s now seem quaint and outdated. In particular, the increased visibility of queer spaces and bodies, as well as the systemic critiques of race and gender in postcolonial and queer theories (Said 1978; Nandy 1983; Sedgwick 1985; Butler 1990), has greatly changed the landscape. The rise of the Internet has also played a huge role. No longer do fans learn about slash face-to-face with fellow fans at conventions, with hard-copy slash zines sold under the table. Gay, lesbian, bi, and trans fans, fans of color, queer fans—all are now vocal and visible, and fan fiction, particularly slash, can no longer be considered the aegis of straight white women.

In addition to an increased awareness of the realities of male gay experiences, fan fiction now directly addresses its own online spaces and their queer components—not just in the stories but also in the readers, the writers, and their interactions. Nowadays, slash can be deeply embedded within a self-defined queer space, neither fantastically creating nor idealizing yet othering gay men but rather writing multiple genders and sexualities as reflections and fantasies of the complex, diverse community of readers and writers. Beyond debates whether slash is indeed homophobic in its othering of gay men or misogynist in its ignoring of female characters, fans have started to pay more attention to other forms of sexual identities, including queer, trans, and male (Griffin 2005; Lothian and Busse 2009; Reid 2009; Hayes

and Ball 2010). Moreover, the political aspects of slash texts themselves get challenged when their romance aspects culminate in an outcome of happy, loving, even domestic heteronormative monogamy (Scodari and Felder 2000; Driscoll 2006; Flegel and Roth 2010; Hunting 2012). As slash fan fiction has become all but mainstream and is getting ever more diverse, the entire genre becomes even more difficult to essentialize or explain. Scholarship is shifting from one-size-fits-all explanations to ever more specific analyses of particular fandoms and subgenres, or to detailed analyses of individual stories.

Pornography by Women for Women, with Love

JOANNA RUSS

Yes, there is pornography written 100% by women for a 100% female readership.

Surely I mean erotic?

Well, let's just say that to call something by one name when you like it and another when you don't is like those married ladies we all know who call what they do "making love" while what is done at singles bars is "shallow and trivial sex," and what homosexuals do is "perversion." (There are also those folks who call a work of art that supports the status quo "art" and works that question it "political.")

I tend to get restive at such honorifics, yet in the anti-pornography/anti-anti-pornography fight, "pornography" has become a loaded word, so for the purpose of this discussion we need a neutral one. Now that the title has caught your eye, and made some of you bristle, I'm going to talk about neither erotica nor pornography, but "sexual fantasy."

But first I must tell you about *Star Trek*.

In the late '60s, *Star Trek* brought into science fiction fandom a large number of women. Science fiction readers are very often amateur printers who publish their own non-profit fan magazines, or "zines," who attend science fiction conventions (and run them), and who know each other via all sorts of friendship networks, amateur press associations, and discussion groups. Pre-*Star Trek* fandom was roughly ninety percent male; *Star Trek* has moved the sex ratio much closer to equity, though nobody seems to know the exact figures. This influx of women is surprising in view of the fact that the *Star Trek* television show focused on the work relationship and friendship of

three male characters: James T. Kirk, the ambitious, sometimes impulsive and emotional, rather *macho* Captain of the starship *Enterprise*; Spock, his First Officer and Science Officer, who is half human and half alien (from the planet Vulcan) and who is almost completely unemotional, logical, and self-controlled; and the ship's doctor, Leonard McCoy, a peppery, outspoken cuss, who serves as a foil to the other two, who (because of their very different personalities) serve as foils to each other. While the usual science fiction fanzine consists of personal essays, letters, gossip, Amateur Press Association news, book reviews, and philosophical or scientific speculation, the *Star Trek* zines (certainly the ones I'm going to consider) specialize in the fan writers' own stories and poems, which are based (often very minimally) on the TV show and now the two *Star Trek* movies. Within the *Star Trek* fan world lies a specialized sub-group of writers, editors, and readers who edit, write, and read fanzines called "K/S."

"K/S" zines are anthologies of fan-written stories about the relationship between Kirk and Spock. The authors rate their own stories G, R, or X, and their premise is that Spock and his Captain are lovers. This fact is often assumed in the G-rated work, very often talked about in the R-rated poems and stories, and the X-rated work shows sex between the two characters again and again and again. (And again. Ditto the illustrations.)

And all of the editors, writers, and readers are women.¹

If your autonomic nervous system does the nip-ups mine does upon reading merely the premise of this material, it's quite irrelevant to talk about the beauty of friendship or the necessity of empathic compassion in human affairs. These are sexual fantasies. I've shared this material with eight women I know who like science fiction and *Star Trek*; they all shrieked with delight and turned bright red with embarrassment upon hearing only the *premise* of the K/S zines.

Briefly: not only are the two characters (Kirk and Spock) lovers (or in the process of becoming so; many of these are "first time" stories), they are usually bonded telepathically in what amounts to a life-long, monogamous marriage, which is often literally impossible for either party to dissolve. Sometimes the union of minds lasts only until death (often the death of one bondmate precipitates that of the other) but often it is assumed to last after it. Like Tristan and Iseult, the two are fated to love; even stories that don't specifically state this fact assume it. Anyone who knows the K/S literature knows that in a sense this love already exists—an assumption which imposes a kind of

retroactive inevitability on the K/S “marriage,” no matter whether the story chooses to comment on the inevitability of the relationship or not. Sometimes the stories show the death of one or the other or both, or separations (either final or temporary) or the impossibility of combining love with career. Moreover, even in the stories that end happily there is an extraordinary amount of frustration and delay; in these tales Spock’s Vulcan notions of propriety (emotionlessness and pure logic) are used to postpone the declaration and consummation of the love, or the conflict between Spock’s Vulcan and Human natures, or Kirk’s pride, or everybody’s scrupulousness and doubts and reasons not to—which sometimes go on for sixty or seventy pages. These endless hesitations and yearnings resemble the manufactured misunderstandings of the female romance books (themselves sexual fantasies for women). In fact, so paralyzing are these worries and scruples and hesitations to the two characters involved that over and over again the lovers must be pushed together by some force outside themselves. Somebody is always bleeding or feverish or concussed or mutilated or amnesiac or what-have-you in these tales. Either both are starving to death on a strange planet, in which case they can at least die in each others’ arms, or they are (temporarily) immured in a cave and Spock, concussed, thinks he’s dreaming and acts on his passion for Kirk, or Kirk is suffering from brain burn and is reduced, mentally, to childhood, in which condition he innocently makes sexual advances to Spock, who is horrified, not by Kirk’s innocent actions, but by his own response.

In short, the stories, over and over, set up situations in which the two are not responsible. Other (R- and G-rated) stories present various beatings, blindings, and mutilations which necessitate not only intense emotional intimacy, but also one character’s touching and holding the other with an eroticism only lightly veiled in the story (and probably not veiled at all in the readers).

So far the material sounds like the irreverent description by two of my friends: “Barbara Cartland in drag.”² But if that’s all K/S stories are, why don’t the women who read them and write them simply read romances and be done with it? Why the “drag”? Why project the whole process on to two male science fiction characters?

First of all, K/S is not about two men. Kirk is a man, to be sure, but Spock isn’t; he’s a half-human alien. Susan Gubar has speculated in a recent essay³ that when women s.f. writers write about aliens they are very often writing about women. Patricia Frazer Lamb and Diana Veith also suggest (brilliantly,

I think) that although Spock is not literally female, his alienness is a way of “coding” into the K/S fantasies that their subject is not a homosexual love affair between two men, but love and sex as women want them, whether with a man or with another woman. Lamb and Veith cite many more details which support this view: briefly, that Spock’s reproductive biology is cyclical and uncontrollable, that although “a prince among his own people,” Spock is just another Fleet officer in a Federation ruled by Human men, that he is isolated both from Vulcans and from Humans (as non-traditional women are alienated from both traditional women and from men), that he has no command ambitions, that he often gets Kirk out of difficulties caused by Kirk’s impulsiveness and rashness (qualities Spock does not and cannot afford to display), that his Vulcan and Human sides are at war, that Vulcan is matrilineal, that he must be self-controlled and guarded, and so on. (The argument is much more detailed and convincing than I can mention here.) I would add that the lovers come from literally different worlds (the stories constantly emphasize the difference in their natures and backgrounds), and that the sexuality in the stories is only nominally male. (There are betraying details: the characters leap into anal intercourse with a blithe lack of lubrication that makes it clear that the authors are thinking of vaginal penetration, both approach orgasm with a speeded-up intensity of pelvic thrusting, and in many stories there is multiple orgasm.)

Although Spock encodes many female characteristics, what is striking in these stories (again I agree with Lamb and Veith) is the androgyny of both characters, the way responsibility, initiative, activity, passivity, strength and weakness shift constantly from one to the other. Spock, for example, is the “female” alien, but he is also physically stronger than Kirk, and is unemotional and an expert in scientific logic, all characteristics we associate with masculinity—while Kirk, his superior in the Federation hierarchy of command, and also the “tomcat” many-times lover, has the emotionality and impulsivity we consider “feminine.” And so on.

As Lamb and Veith point out, the “marriage” of these two is in many ways ideal: neither has to give up “his” work in the world; both have adventure and love; telepathy provides lifelong commitment and the means of making such a union unbreakable and extremely intimate; and while both partners are “masculine” in the sense of being active in the world, they yet provide tenderness and nurturance for each other in a very “feminine” way. And the sex is marvelous.⁴

And yet—

If you ask “Why two males?” I think the answer is that of eighteenth-century grammarians to questions about the masculine-preferred pronoun: “Because it is more noble.” Certainly the TV series made the Kirk-Spock friendship a matter of real respect and real love, in contrast with Kirk’s absolutely *pro forma* affairs with various women. Lamb and Veith simply state that no one (including themselves) can imagine a man and woman having the same multiplex, worthy, androgynous relationship, or the same completely intimate commitment.

Camilla Decarnin’s “Interviews with Five Fagghagging Women” in *Heresies* No. 12 have almost the same point to make. “A faghag is a woman, whether lesbian, bisexual, or heterosexual, who devotes an important part of her social, affectional, or sexual attention . . . to homosexual men and who finds them erotically interesting because of their homosexuality. This attention need not be overt; it can take the form of fantasies.” Decarnin’s explanation of the motive for this behavior is almost identical with my explanation of K/S: “the woman recognizes in the faggot a socio-erotic position she herself would like to hold, as the recognized peer and the lover of a male, a position impossible for women in sexist culture to secure.”⁵

One of K/S’s best writers says, “The problem is [women who] don’t like their own bodies enough, they can’t see themselves saving the universe once a week, they can’t let their own sexuality out without becoming dependents or victims. So Kirk and Spock do it for them.” She notes also, “the sex in Trek fiction (written by women for women) is female sexuality. . . . The readers . . . want to be strong, beautiful, complete adults who choose to love without limits, to trust utterly and never have their trust betrayed. . . .”⁶

I agree with both writers. It’s very, very difficult even for art, with its complexity and thoughtfulness, its inevitable alloy of reflection, its complicated evocations of emotion, to transcend the culture’s givens. To do so in sexual fantasy (necessarily pretty primitive) is, I think, totally impossible. The K/S sex scenes are usually just as thin, just as repetitive, just as stylish, just as interchangeable, just as full of magic words, as those of male pornography, and just as anti-art.

What! (says the reader). All that tenderness and empathy and commitment and nurturance and scrupulous delay merely pornographic? On the contrary, the superiority of female sexual fantasy is proved by precisely those things: The lovers’ personal interest in each others’ minds, not only each others’

bodies, the tenderness, the refusal to rush into a relationship, the exclusive commitment one to the other. Is all this merely a sexual turn-on?

The subject gets very difficult here, but what I'm trying to make clear is that fantasy isn't simply an attenuated version of reality, and the same imagination that provides the tender loving care (in the extremely common "hurt-comfort" scenes for instance) also provides the battering, mutilation, and torture that are the pretexts for the nurturance.⁷ In fact, the nurturance in these stories is quite unreal, just as the misunderstandings, the scrupulousnesses, and the worries that keep the lovers from declaring themselves, are pure ritual, manufactured for the occasion. By "unreal" I don't mean simply glamorized or idealized but *totally unlike reality*; if your beloved appears at your door bleeding and battered in real life, you probably don't feel a rush of erotic *tendresse*. In fact, once you've called for an ambulance, covered said beloved with a blanket, made sure the patient's head is lower than the patient's feet, and administered what medical help you can, you are far more likely to go into your bathroom and throw up. The nurturance in these tales is like Bette Davis's resolution in *Jezebel* to care for Henry Fonda, who has yellow fever, while she looks heavenward (in a very becoming gown) and the sweetness of a thousand violins swells up on the sound-track. Nowhere do you see, for example, Fonda vomiting blood or Davis ugly with sleep or resentful of her never-ending, gruelling contact with such romantic objects as full bedpans.

I do not believe that the supposed female virtues of the K/S material (and that of similar female fantasy, like the romances) are morally privileged—though some feminists talk as if this were so. Rather we have—ingeniously, tenaciously, and very creatively—sexualized our female situation and training, and made out of the restrictions of the patriarchy our own sexual cues.

For example, women wait. Women are (quite realistically) wary of heterosexual activity. Thus the endless analyses of motives and scruples for pages and pages, a delay that is in itself erotically arousing, since it's a sexualization of what is or was presented to us as "the real thing" for women. (Decarnin has suggested, in correspondence, that this waiting be taken metaphorically, as related to women's need for long "foreplay" in order to achieve orgasm.) Women must not initiate sexual activity. Thus the enormous plot conventions which finally free the lovers to be sexual, in which that lack of responsibility is itself exciting, an intensifier of arousal, vulnerability, and emotion made out of condition. Thus the "hurt-comfort" material, which pictures nurturance as a lot of open sexual touching and strong emotional intimacy (generally in

the stories which lack explicit sex) is (again) something that has become a sexual cue, not anything resembling real help or real illness. Thus also the material about the death of one or the other or both (so ubiquitous, I'm told, that editors now refuse to accept it), the meditations at the graveside, the grief that is somehow beautiful and exciting, not painful, all of it delicious. And let's not pride ourselves on the monogamy, either; this is another patriarchal imposition which women have sexualized—in fact, I believe it can be seen in the K/S material (as in the romances) as a metaphor for intensity, and can so be read as a way of expressing intensity and completeness, not duration, but here too sexual expression waits on “love” while desire, by itself, is not enough. Again I think we're dealing with a sexualization of the feminine condition. What was, historically, the female terror of unmarried pregnancy, the main enforcer of women's anti-sexual training, has here been made into something sexually arousing in itself. That is, in the K/S world, *the myth of romantic love works*.

But that's not all that's in the material. In many ways the K/S world is a great advance over the standard romances. For one thing, there is explicit sexuality instead of the old Romances' one-kiss-in-the-moonlight. And I believe Lamb and Veith see rightly when they describe the androgyny of the relationship, the impossibility (despite the coding into the Spock character of so many female traits) of assigning gender roles to either partner, ever—obviously this is very different from the romances, in which a woman's problems in life are solved for her by a dominant male. The K/S insistence that the characters be first-class human beings is inevitably compromised by the social necessity of awarding that V.I.P. status only to men.

To me one important conclusion we can draw from these stories is that sexual fantasy can't be taken at face value. Another is that no sexual cues are morally privileged (though some kinds of sexual *behavior* certainly are) since sexualizing any kind of behavior drastically changes the meaning of that behavior. Translated into real life, the “hurt-comfort” theme of K/S would simply be pernicious, from the woman who can do sex only under the guise of pity, to the lover who wants to keep her beloved dependent and powerless, in which condition she can then “love” the beloved. What excites in fantasy is both far more exaggerated than real life and not the same as in real life; that is, fantasy isn't just a vicarious substitute for real experience; its meaning as experience becomes changed when it's made into fantasy. Without understanding the rather complicated context of the fantasy, one “reads” it

literally—like the woman friend of mine (new to *Star Trek*) who said in disgust that K/S was about rape and power games. This is simply not true in terms of the genre. In fact, the story that evoked this response is a classic K/S tale in which Spock goes into *pon farr*⁸ again after pages and pages of agonized misunderstandings, thus (thank goodness!) providing a way for the lovers finally to declare themselves and make out like crazy.

What seems to be happening in sexual fantasy is that any condition imposed on or learned with sexuality is capable of becoming sexualized, either as sex or a substitute for sex or as an indispensable condition of it. Such a process is certainly at work in the K/S universe. Yet it's perfectly clear to me that K/S writers and readers don't literally wish to become male any more than they literally want their dear ones to bleed and die in their arms or to die with their lovers. What they do want is sexual intensity, sexual enjoyment, the freedom to choose, a love that is entirely free of the culture's whole discourse of gender and sex roles, and a situation in which it is safe to let go and allow oneself to become emotionally and sexually vulnerable. The literal conditions and cues of the K/S world, far from being impeccably moral, are sexualizations of situations and behavior K/S fans did not choose and quite likely wouldn't want in reality. Moreover they are situations and behavior that are absolutely antithetical to getting sexual and emotional satisfaction in the real world, which fact at least some of the K/S readers and writers know perfectly well.

I'm convinced, after reading through more than fifty volumes of K/S material (most of it "X-rated") that only those for whom a sexual fantasy "works," that is, those who are aroused by it, have a chance of telling us to what particular set of conditions that fantasy speaks, and can analyze how and why it works and for whom. Sexual fantasy materials are like icebergs; the one-tenth that shows above the surface is no reliable indicator of the size or significance of the whole thing. Sexual fantasy that doesn't arouse is boring, funny, or repellent, and unsympathetic outsiders trying to decode these fantasies (or any others) will make all sorts of mistakes.

I've spent so much time on this material partly because it's the only sexual fantasy I know of written without the interposition of interests that are political or commercial.⁹ In some ways these stories stick to the old Romance formula (I find this aspect of K/S destructive, although it too can be read metaphorically) but in others they put forth an emphatic claim to experience that radically transcends the conventional. These readers and writers want a sexual

relationship that does not require their abandoning freedom, adventure, and first-class humanity (these are points I've taken from Lamb and Veith), they want sexual enjoyment that is intense, whole, and satisfying, and they want intense emotionality. They also want (and I find this absolutely fascinating and aesthetically very valuable) to create images of male bodies as objects of desire. One of the worst things forced on us in the name of "femininity" is passivity, a distortion created by the heterosexual institution and a guarantee of sexual and human paralysis. The writers and readers of these fantasies can do what most of us can't do in reality (certainly not heterosexual reality), that is they can act sexually at their own pace and under conditions they themselves have chosen. The K/S stories, ritualized as they are, are the only literature I've ever seen in which women do describe male beauty—not masculinity, mind you, but the passive, acted-upon glories of male flesh. Some of this is very well done, *e.g.*, the lovely convention that Spock, when sexually aroused, *purrs* like a giant cat, and Kirk praising his lover's alien genitals as a beautiful flower, an orchid. (Shades of Judy Chicago!)

Until recently I assumed, along with many other feminists, that "art" is better than "pornography" just as "erotica" is one thing and "pornography" another; and just as "erotica" surpasses "pornography," so "art" surpasses "erotica." I think we ought to be very suspicious of these distinctions insofar as they are put forward as moral distinctions. I've said elsewhere that material presented outright as a sexual turn-on and nothing else can be a lot less harmful than material that is presented as if it were a thoughtful and complex depiction of real life. One of the great virtues of the K/S stories is that there is far less misery and death in the X-rated stories, by and large, than there is in the G- and R-rated ones. I think we are probably right in seeing sexual repression as a very important source of violence in the patriarchy—though we must at once remember that we're talking about all spontaneous pleasure, not just sex, and about quality, not just quantity. (Elizabeth Fisher puts forward this idea in *Woman's Creation*.¹⁰) Wilhelm Reich (with whom Fisher agrees) also said flatly that if you lift sexual inhibitions part-way (which is certainly the situation today, with the mass media force-feeding us plastic sex which is not only limited as to color, age, gender, and "flawless" personal appearance, but which is still very rigid about tactility and the real nature of real human sexuality and emotionality), you get sadism—by which Reich did not mean S&M (he did not discuss it at all in *The Sexual Revolution*) but rape, violence, brutality, and callousness.¹¹

If female sex fantasies can't be taken at face value, maybe male fantasies can't either. Books like *Punished Slut*¹² (I have fifteen S&M paperbacks on my desk and am wading through them) don't excite me, so perhaps I shouldn't speculate about them. But it seems to me that such fantasies may be a kind of half-way house *out of* violence rather than into it. This isn't the common feminist view, but I think the comparison holds: if female K/S fantasies are complex and multi-dimensional and if one of their achievements is the reversal of women's substitution of romance for explicit sexuality, then (if I read them correctly) male fantasies of violence, either accompanying sexual activity, serving as a precondition for it, or as a cue to it, are attempts to partly undo the violence in the "respectable" part of the culture, where violence has been *substituted* for sexual enjoyment. I believe that movies like "A Clockwork Orange" or "Apocalypse Now" are far more dangerous than *The Sadistic Sisters of Saxony*.¹³ The latter are *at least* sexual. I agree with Fisher and Reich that quality counts, and by "sex" I mean pleasure that isn't joyless, furtive, perfunctory, unspontaneous, forced, guilty, partial, or trivialized (or made into a plastic goodie, either). I'm convinced now that the patriarchy damages male sexuality just as it does ours, though perhaps less than ours and certainly not in the same way. (Gay men don't seem to me exempt from the process; they're raised in the same culture and educated much the same.) Feminists who live apart from men (as one heterosexual feminist told me) forget how limited and foolish most of them are, and how thoroughly they are controlled by the culture's expectations. From the viewpoint of the female situation, I think we sometimes see men's sexual freedom as greater than it is, because it is in fact greater than our own. If you see male freedom as absolute, or close to absolute, then male fantasies of sexual violence will look, in a sense, worse than they are. We know that women don't want to be raped; episodes in female fantasies that look like rapes really are something else, *i.e.*, Will somebody, something, for heaven's sake, enable me to *act*? I think male pornography in which a woman is "raped" (*i.e.*, made to experience sexual pleasure against her will) may be struggling with a similar problem of permission—not that the man can't initiate sexual activity, but that he can't let go while doing it. And without letting go, self-abandonment, whatever you call the opposite of self-controlled and rigid behavior, sexual activity will be minimal and partial.

I've always thought that patriarchal male sexuality must be a rather difficult business. To over-simplify: A partner's hostility or boredom is ordinarily a

real turn-off—and yet this is exactly the situation under patriarchy, where so many women are not interested, not excited, not participants, and not happy. Yet men must penetrate and ejaculate if there are to be any babies—and so the problem for patriarchy (whether you think of this as a one-time invention or a constant process) is to construct a male sexuality which can function in the face of a woman's noncooperation or outright fear and hostility. Of course such a sexuality is, in fact, common. It is also furtive, guilty, miserable, unspontaneous, forced, unfree, and minimally sensual. No wonder Philip Slater writes about the perfunctoriness of sex for so many men ("the quicker it is done with, the better") and maintains that women's complaints ("he's only interested in sex, in my body") are missing the point: A man who behaves this way is not interested "in sex, either. . . he is interested only in releasing tension." Slater interprets male fantasies of rape as twofold: "First, it expresses the common masculine wish for some kind of superpotency" (notice: not superreactivity!) and "it is *men* who have bottled up feelings and long to burst their controls. But since this yearning endangers the whole of our culture it cannot be allowed direct expression and is projected onto women . . . the emotional specialists in our society."¹⁴

It sounds odd to say that men's fantasies of rape have their roots in a desire to be overwhelmed and acted on, but I think this may be at least part of the truth. Women, after all, fantasize "rape" as the solution to issues of permission and forced passivity; why shouldn't men (who must deal with the issues of forced activity) use the other side of the same fantasy?

What frightens me is not those sleazies on my desk (in one of which a woman puts needles through a man's nipples). It's the mainstream American habit of substituting violence for sex and presenting the result as "real life" and, even, Heaven help us!, "decency." In the one *Star Trek* TV show in which Spock went into *pon farr*, the first twenty minutes titillated female America with the promise of the controlled, logical Vulcan engaging in uncontrolled sexual behavior (a consummation greatly to be wished). But the second twenty minutes gave us, not sexuality (which the K/S writers know perfectly well ought to be there and which they do put in their stories) but a good old (and very disappointing) American fight—between Kirk and Spock! I certainly prefer sex. Think also of "Klute" in which Jane Fonda as a call-girl (aha! bad) is threatened by one man and saved by another. And for a particularly nasty example, try the Hitchcock Hour's 30-second advertisement of a few years ago: a montage of different women screaming in terror. Or the plastic cheese-

cake of *Playboy*, as dreadfully fake as the expensive stereos and fancy cars the readers probably don't have either. Get stuck on those photos of women and your sexual failure is assured; for one thing, women don't come airbrushed.

Well, I'm speculating. What I'm sure of is that we do not have nearly enough knowledge about female sexuality. For example, "masochistic" rape fantasies have bedevilled the women's movement for a decade *as if they were a literal representation of what women want*, when they are quite obviously nothing of the kind. I'm sure there are female S&M "tops" who like S&M because they're into power over others—but I also have two friends, one of whom still does S&M and one who dropped it non-traumatically, and they like(d) it because they found it a *sexual* (not characterological) turn-on. Similarly, there may be women in the K/S network who are really turned on by a lover's illness or mutilation—but I doubt it, since what the writers obviously want is not twenty-four-hour-a-day nurse duty or people really bleeding and dying in their arms, but the sexual turn-on that the fantasy of touching and holding the lover gives them.

Fifteen S&M paperbacks is probably no representative sample, nor have I read all the K/S fanzines. Women probably read romances in much greater numbers than the K/S readers anyway. (About 125 zines have been published since 1975–76, in editions of 500–1500.) Yet in all these stories I've found a lot less to complain about than I can find simply by turning on my TV at random on any evening at all. I don't believe that men are taught to be violent by commercialized sexual fantasy; there are far too many worse teachers around. If anything, commercial, male-oriented sexual fantasy is (I suspect) a half-assed attempt to undo masculinity training, rather than the reverse. I don't want to idealize it, but it's certainly less offensive to me than (for example) "The Short and Happy Life of Francis Macomber," Hemingway's macho-misogynist short story which was taught to me (to us!) as "great literature," full of "eternal truth," and so on.

Many feminist women seem only to be following their gut reactions in hating male sexual fantasy and spending so much of their energies on it. I agree that it's important to know one's gut reactions, but before we make the jump from "It offends me" to "Therefore it is bad," to "Therefore we must fight it," we need to know a lot more than we do.

I hope I haven't offended anyone by calling K/S "sexual fantasy." *If it weren't, I wouldn't pay any attention to it.* I love the stuff, I love the way it turns me on, and I love its writers. So many feminist creations of Amazons and

Goddess-worshippers and so on simply don't work—most are very thin—but *K/S works*, if you know and like *Star Trek*, and (as I mentioned) it is the only sexual fantasy by women for women that's produced without the control or interposition of censorship by commercial booksellers or the interposition of political intent by writers or editors. It's also a labor of love for the women involved, since it is (and must be, because of the possibility of lawsuit) non-profit, I find it raw, blatantly female, and very valuable and exciting, a judgment I owe to Lamb and Veith, since they had the courage of their reactions and continued to study this material for close to six months, while I merely got embarrassed (because, I think, the stuff was so female and my response to it so intense) and hid it away—in the closet, of all places! I know now that it does not mean what it seems to mean—that we don't like sex except in committed relationships, that we think about “love” all the time, that we are sentimental, that we are altruistic, or any other sexist litany of our supposed virtues. What is so striking in *K/S* is the raw sexual and emotional starvation the writers are expressing so openly—and the attempt to picture a totally androgynous situation, *not* “Brigitte Bardot scotch-taped to John Wayne” (as I once called “androgyny”) but a situation in which questions about who is the man and who is the woman, who's active and who's passive, even who's who, *cannot even be asked*. This is very heady stuff. Instead of presenting us with a couple who are of different sexes but the same species, *K/S* creates a couple who are of different species, but the same sex. I've already mentioned why that sex is pictured as “male”—and what subverts that “maleness” and makes it ambiguous—but the stuff works (at least on some of us) as fantasy. Such statements cannot be made in realistic literature, and one of the crucial things the *K/S* material has done for me is to make me glad I write science fiction and fantasy. And now—if you will excuse me—I must go back to my ancient Vulcan castle with the carved bedposts where I have left my two characters, Guess Who and Guess Which, in a very dramatic and painful situation. In fact, I left Spock preparing to beat Kirk, whom he has bought as a slave in an alternate universe in which violent Vulcan (Spock's planet) never reformed. Of course the point of the whole scene is that Spock can't bear to do any such thing because he is madly in love with Kirk. So he smites his forehead with his hand (or some similar gesture) and rushes out to agonize.

Meanwhile Kirk (who's of course in love with Spock) agonizes too, but in the opposite direction, so to speak.

They will do this for as long as I can contrive, and then they will make great music together, also as long as I can stretch the scene out.

Yum.

And so on.

Author's Notes

An editor: "It is pornography for women produced by women." Another notes that readers "fear their own interest in K/S will be interpreted as lesbian by friends and family."

About the "hurt-comfort theme," a writer friend of mine writes, about her playing at adventure with a friend (both were preadolescent): "An increasingly regular feature of this business was that characters who were sworn and bitter enemies were continually forced into situations in which one would be wounded in some specifically painful manner and the other would grudgingly but lovingly, take care of him."

In "Big Brother Is Trekking You" by James Wolcott (*Village Voice*, 2/2/76) Wolcott describes "Star Trek Lives!" by Jacqueline Lichtenberg, Sondra Marshak, and Joan Winston (a commercially published book): "... these women have their libidinal thermostats turned up pretty high. . . . [Fans'] stories . . . are sexually charged-up . . . the return of the runaway boys on the biggest damn raft you can imagine. . . . 'Star Trek' also hooks the women by the sexual tension beneath that buddy-buddiness. . . . Spock becomes a parody of the unreachable woman. He's practically an extra-terrestrial Garbo." (Wolcott's "raft" refers to Leslie Fiedler's *Love and Death in the American Novel*, in which Fiedler derives a theory of American fiction from American novelists' male pair-bonding. Lamb and Veith also begin their first paper by citing Fiedler.)

A newspaper-catalogue of media fiction *in toto* (of which *Star Trek* is only a part) lists twenty-two kinds of media fiction, from *The Chronicles of Amber* to *The Wild Wild West*. The list includes *Dracula*, *Battle Star Galactica*, *Sherlock Holmes* (!), *M*A*S*H*, and *Hill Street Blues*. One story I have read from *Starsky and Hutch* media fiction, as well as one story I've managed to find from *Magnum, P.I.*, media fiction both treat the male pair as Spock and Kirk are treated in K/S fiction, *i.e.*, the two are lovers, yet somehow without being homosexuals. (There is no homosexual sub-culture presented, no awareness of being derogated, no friends or family, absolutely no gay friends, no gay politics, and so on. The men are masculine, even macho figures—and some-

how they are lovers without ever thinking of what they do as “homosexuality.” I would guess that other male-bonding pairs are treated in the same way in other media fiction.)

Notes

1. Several K/S editors give these statistics. Moreover, only one piece of fiction or poetry out of forty volumes bears the statement that it was written by a man. They themselves always refer to writers, readers, or editors as “she.”

2. Patricia Frazier Lamb and Diana L. Veith, “The Romantic Myth and Transcendence: A Feminist Interpretation of the Kirk/Spock Bond,” Conference on Fantasy, Boca Raton, Fla., 1982.

3. Susan Gubar, “C. L. Moore and the Conventions of Wonder’s Science Fiction,” *Science-Fiction Studies* 7, no. 1 (March 1980): 16–25.

4. Lamb and Veith, unpublished.

5. Camilla Decarnin, “Interviews with Five Faghagging Women,” *Heresies*, No. 12 3, no. 4 (1981): 10.

6. For legal reasons these writers and editors are open to legal action for violation of copyright, even though their work is very different from the TV and movie plays of *Star Trek*—I will not name any of the names of the women quoted or list their fanzines. I am quoting real people, though. Honest.

7. In one self-parody (K/S writers enjoy such pieces and write them surprisingly often) the two alternately beat each other in the head with a shovel, and then say, “Let me be with you in your hour of pain,” and similar statements. The self-parody seems to me to be a tongue-in-cheek recognition of the necessity for hurt in order to show comfort.

8. I am thinking of Samois, *Coming to Power: Writings and Graphics on Lesbian S/M* (Palo Alto, Calif.: Up Press, 1981). The purpose of the book, stated in several places, is explicitly political, as well as erotic.

9. A state of heat in which he must mate or die. Kirk must, of course, offer himself to save Spock’s life.

10. Elizabeth Fisher, *Woman’s Creation* (New York: Doubleday, 1980).

11. Wilhelm Reich, *The Sexual Revolution: Toward a Self-Governing Character Structure*, 4th ed., rev. 1969 (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1971).

12. *Punished Slut* (n.p.: Dame, 1980).

13. *The Sadistic Sisters of Saxony*, Monks Secret Library (New York: Dame Distributors, 1980).

14. Philip Slater, “Sexual Adequacy in America,” *Intellectual Digest*, November 1973, 17–20.

Romantic Myth, Transcendence, and *Star Trek* Zines

PATRICIA FRAZER LAMB
AND DIANA L. VEITH

An archetypal relationship . . . haunts the American psyche: two lonely men, one dark-skinned, one white, band together over a carefully guarded fire in the virgin heart of the American wilderness; they have forsaken all others for the sake of the austere, almost inarticulate, but unquestioned love which binds them to each other and to the world of nature which they have preferred to civilization.

LESLIE FIEDLER, *Love and Death in the American Novel*

The waters of your world,
Soft, blue and light;
The fires of my world,
Harsh, red and dried,
Bring us together
Forged in cooling waves, burning flames
In a union—
As endless as oceans
Bordered by space's limitless horizon-line;
As all-consuming as fire
Feeding on oxygen, the fabric of life.
Come—
For as I am mine, I am yours,
And you, being yours, are mine;

For as we are one, we are separate,
 Free, yet bonded for all time;
 Never and always touching and touched
 In a tie for life, death and beyond.

SUSAN K. JAMES AND CAROL A. FRISBIE, *Nightvisions*

Freud asked, “What do women want?” These quotations point to one possible answer. The first states Leslie Fiedler’s thesis in *Love and Death in the American Novel* that a mythic quality imbues the male-male bonding often found in American literature, especially between men of different races. The second is from *Nightvisions*, an *ST K/S* zine and thus a story of the love between Captain James T. Kirk and his half-Vulcan first officer, Mr. Spock.¹ This love culminates in a truly “bonded” relationship sanctioned by a Vulcan ceremony. These lines of verse are Spock’s bonding vows to Kirk. The women writers and editors of *K/S* zines have extrapolated from the television series and subsequent G-rated fan literature the archetypal relationship and setting described in Fiedler’s theory, applied it to *Star Trek*’s two principal characters, and developed a new, sometimes X-rated subgenre. Through a blending of fantasy and science fiction—Vulcan bonding and twenty-third-century galactic exploration—the female writer-reader of the *K/S* zine creates a universe that contains androgynous heroism and transcendent romantic love.

The *K/S* stories constitute an extension of the American literary tradition as described by Fiedler and also possess as defining characteristics an intense romanticism, science fiction settings, and the explicitly sexual union of the two protagonists. Thus, they develop to its ultimate logical conclusion the male-male bonding theme in a way that subverts the original intent of such novelists as Cooper or Twain—as well, no doubt, as that of such producer-creators as Gene Roddenberry. The *Star Trek* television series precipitated a fan magazine phenomenon, now almost twenty years old, that produced not only numerous narratives detailing the further adventures of the Starship *Enterprise*, but also other zines devoted wholly to only one of the series’ crew members and complex descriptions of worlds created from references made or settings used in only one or two of the television episodes. The zines can be rated G, R, or X; overt sexuality is

absent in most, but the most explicit descriptions of both heterosexual and homosexual activity abound in some. K/S zines extend the friendship between Kirk and Spock to a romantic sexual relationship approximating marriage. As with all other zines, the writing is uneven, but a surprising proportion of the K/S zines are of good literary quality.

Although a few isolated K/S stories appeared in earlier, general *ST* zines, the K/S zines as a distinct subgenre exploded onto the fan market around 1976–1977. Anthologies in 1984 number approximately 300, some of which are serial issues. There are also about 100 K/S zine novels, some produced in other English-speaking countries; the British zine publishers are particularly prolific. Most zines issue first printings of 200 to 600 copies and sell for \$8 to \$18 a copy; some have been reprinted. A few well-known editors can publish an edition of 1,000 copies with a reasonable certainty of selling out within six months to a year. Notices of private zine auctions and sales appear regularly in the fanzine newsletters, and the prices for out-of-print classic K/S zines range from \$25 to \$100. Thousands of *ST* “genzines” (nonerotic, non-K/S zines) have also been published. Significantly, the K/S zine editorship, authorship, and readership is so close to 100 percent female that the editors consistently use the feminine pronoun in discussing their readers and writers.

As in the popular, commercial romance novel, the consistent theme of K/S is love: a psychological, emotional, and physical intimacy that includes passionate sharing of sexuality and a giving of self. But unlike the romance novel, the message of K/S is that true love and authentic intimacy can exist only between equals. The K/S zines are thus similar to, yet a radical departure from, the feminine romantic novel, just as they mirror, yet diverge from, more mainstream treatments of the white male–black male relationship Fiedler finds “haunting the American psyche.” They are in the stream of both literary antecedents yet distinct from both because the psychic bond and sexual relationship between two apparently ultramasculine figures exist in a world almost devoid of female characters and because the traditional elements of the romantic story are here intensified by an admixture of mystical transcendence and existentialism.

Observers of American popular culture are familiar with the relationship between Kirk and Spock depicted in the *ST* television series. This is but a science fiction variation on Fiedler’s thesis: The white hero and his nonwhite male partner leave-escape-reject “feminine” civilization to seek their destiny

in the dangerous frontier; in doing so, they unwittingly push back the frontier; and women, bourgeois conventionality, law and order, and civilization follow close behind them. The frontier here, “the final frontier,” is space. Kirk, the white male hero, has taken flight both figuratively and literally. Spock, like Chingachgook in Cooper’s *The Last of the Mohicans*, is a prince among his own people, but his being half-alien, which is underscored by his color as well as his other Vulcan attributes, ensures that he will never “pass” in a Federation still dominated by Human (analogically, white) males. His loyalty to his father’s culture and his own integrity, moreover, preclude a full commitment to the Federation, whose use of violence is antithetical to Vulcan values. But he does commit himself to Kirk, who exemplifies in his character (as Spock does genetically) and carries with him, like a missionary, the “vision of a future in which the best of both Vulcan and human are joined, of a universe governed by reason and compassion.”

Theirs is a union of strengths, a partnership rarely possible between men and women today and just as unlikely—if not more so—between men and women in the *ST* television universe. Although reminiscent of the bond formed between two men in combat or sharing a dangerous occupation, situations in which each must rely on the other for his survival, their bond is deeper than this. Yet the zines assume that the basis of Kirk’s and Spock’s mutual commitment is their unquestioning reliance on one another’s courage, strength, and wits. Competition between them, however, is never a threat. In zines as in the television series, Spock has no command ambitions; he is content to be second in command and to remain at Kirk’s side. This lack of competition between two strong, heroic men is part of what makes their deep friendship possible and is firmly established in the television series on a number of occasions when Kirk is missing, sometimes believed dead, and Spock must temporarily assume command. Spock reiterates during these brief periods of command that he does not wish to be captain but only wants to get the “real” captain back. In one episode, “City on the Edge of Forever,” a 1930s American woman who has fallen in love with Kirk but knows nothing of his true identity is asked by Spock where she would estimate they belong. She replies, “You, Spock, at Jim Kirk’s side: it’s as if you have always been there and always will.”

Studies of middle-class American men note the absence of psychologically close friendships among them. It is not solely, or even primarily, the fear of homosexuality that keeps such men at a distance from one another, however.

Intimate friendships require a willingness to reveal one's deepest anxieties and greatest weaknesses. To be close psychologically is to be vulnerable. Trying to make a close friend of another man entails stripping oneself of one's defenses, risking the appearance of weakness before a potential competitor. Middle-class men forge their closest relationships with women. They turn to their wives and lovers for psychological and sexual intimacy. Women can be trusted to know their men's weaknesses because they are not perceived as being in competition with them. Yet the bonding and telepathic melding that occur between Kirk and Spock automatically reveal each to the other, their weaknesses and vulnerabilities as well as their strengths.

Nevertheless, however romantic the K/S zines may be, Kirk's and Spock's relationship is not analogous to the relationship between a man and a woman. The *ST* universe as defined by NBC and Paramount is ruled by men. Only one woman (in "The Enterprise Incident") ever held command, and she is a Romulan. A human woman and Kirk's former lover, Janice Lester, is even driven mad by her frustrated aspirations, in the "Turnabout Intruder" episode, because she cannot reconcile the limitations still imposed on her gender in the twenty-third century with her "unnatural" ambitions for command. Women are stereotypically portrayed in the *ST* television episodes as being less competent and less trustworthy than men; more sentimental, fearful, and gullible; and more often moved by their feelings and petty personal desires.

Yet the K/S zine reader feels that Kirk and Spock deserve to be loved, but only by their equals. And while there can be no woman to equal them, their own equality is a basic premise. Whereas Kirk, as the captain, has greater authority and does insist on Spock's obedience on occasion, he does not appear to dominate Spock for two important reasons: Spock, as a Vulcan, is physically stronger and is also more knowledgeable and analytical; thus, Kirk must often rely on Spock's attributes in life-threatening situations and in order to make important decisions. This insistence on equality between lovers is reminiscent of novels by Charlotte Brontë in which equality is imposed by the author on her male and female characters: in *Shirley*, for instance, the woman is given wealth, and in *Jane Eyre* the man, Rochester, is blinded and maimed.

Women's current aspirations include a desire for true equality with men and reciprocity in their intimate relationships. Many feminists despair of ever achieving an equal, reciprocal relationship with a man, however. Certainly

in a universe in which women as a rule have lower status than men, this is unlikely. Moreover, even if it were more likely, true equality in heterosexual relationships is most seriously threatened by the arrival of children. The mother is still viewed as the primary caretaker, and the child is seen as her first responsibility, taking precedence before all else. An obviously sterile, homosexual relationship neatly evades this issue. Perhaps one of the greatest appeals K/S zines have for their female readers is that neither protagonist is required to sacrifice the work that brought them together. In fact, their relationship is usually portrayed as enhancing the competence of each in his work role and is often presented as a reward for their successful achievements. Intimacy and achievement are not antithetical in K/S zines, as they so often are in the lives of real women.

But why are such characters, who are appealing because they love one another as their female readership wishes to love and be loved, male and not female? If the writer pairs two women to avoid the heterosexual problem of male dominance, she must still overcome the cultural dictum of female passivity. There is a singular absence in mainstream literature of free, loving, exciting sexuality between women who are in charge of their lives, who are heroic. The popularity of Mary Renault's homoerotic novels set in classical Greece demonstrates, however, that the reading public can accept the possibility of a sexual relationship between two men, if not between two women. The myth of female passivity makes it difficult for the reader to imagine or accept two strong women who are equally in love and who can be erotically active and mutually interactive, just as it makes it difficult to envision a truly equal heterosexual relationship. And possibly the K/S writers and readers are more comfortable as women with the idea of two men attempting to work out the ideal love relationship rather than two women, given the assumption that such a relationship is apparently impossible between a woman and a man.

In fact, K/S removes the question of romantic love and the difficulties of a committed lifelong relationship from the arena of gender discourse altogether. Psychologically androgynous, the lovers are both heroic and sexual, strong yet vulnerable, altruistic but concerned with their individual lives. Columnist Ellen Goodman, in an essay titled "TV's Hunks—Isn't Something Missing," muses that "most women are less interested in *the man* as something they want than in *the relationship* as something they want to have."² And a recent article analyzing the *ST* television series' enduring appeal acknowledges that

“there is one deep abiding love which pervades the whole series—the love between human and alien. And the most obvious example is the relationship between Kirk and Spock.”³ It is the nature of the relationship they share, not their gender or even so much their specific identities as unique characters, that K/S aficionados find appealing and engaging.

K/S writers have created women who are the equals of Kirk and Spock—but not many—and these few powerful women usually exist to test Kirk’s and Spock’s loyalty to one another. They reassure the reader that, even when confronted with a heterosexual alternative, each will still choose the relationship with his comrade—that their relationship endures not because they fear women or are repelled by them or view them as inferior but because each has found in the other his ideal life’s partner. Kirk and Spock are soulmates. They complete each other. Their partnership is based on a complementarity—Spock is reflective and unemotional while Kirk is impulsive and passionate—strengthened by a high degree of similarity. Gene Roddenberry has stated that he took the elements of both characters from his own personality.⁴

One of the first K/S writers, Jane Aumerle, notes that the two are doubles:

Their faults and virtues, weaknesses and strengths, sometimes reflect, sometimes counterbalance each other. The doppelgänger relationship is much stronger and clearer here than it is in either the Arthur or the Roland stories; indeed, it is possible to see Kirk and Spock, like Achilles and Patroclus of the *Iliad*, as aspects of a single persona. The repeated use of the mind meld in fan fiction emphasizes this tendency; and the extrapolation to a love affair between Kirk and Spock is similar in origin and purpose. Each man gives us a perspective on the other.⁵

Examples of their completing one another run through all the K/S stories. Where one is vulnerable, the other is strong. When one hesitates, the other takes action.

The androgynous qualities of each have been extrapolated from the television series characterizations and given more substance in the K/S zines. Following is a list of the “feminine” and “masculine” qualities each possesses that pairs their contrasting characteristics. In many alternate universe K/S stories, these qualities are reversed, but the fact of this diametric reversal underscores the existence of this masculine-feminine balance. The more “feminine” aspects of each personality are evident, at least in embryo, in the television series and developed further in the zines.

KIRK

SPOCK

"Feminine" qualities:

Femininely "beautiful"

Shorter, physically weaker

Emotional

Intuitive

Sensuous, engages in much physical touching

Verbal

Evokes powerful emotional responses from others

"Masculine" qualities:

Masculinely rugged

Taller, more powerful

Logical

Rational

Controlled, physically distant

Reticent

Keeps others at a distance

"Masculine" qualities:

Sexually ready at all times

Is undisputed leader, initiator of action

Is the "real" or "norm," always at home

Is fulfilled prior to Spock, only with acceptance of the bond is he finally united with Spock

Spock complements his "at-homeness"

Is sexually promiscuous (bond assures his fidelity)

Is usually the seducer

"Feminine" qualities:

Sexually controlled (except during his Vulcan mating cycle)

Needs to be led, follows Kirk into action

Is the "alien" or "other," always the "outsider"

Is fulfilled only with Kirk; felt one-sided fidelity to Kirk even before the bond

Needs Kirk for full identity

A virgin until marriage, he exhibits absolute monogamy after marriage

Is usually seduced, but once unleashed his sexuality is very powerful

A primary appeal of K/S is the often-explicit message that it is best to have equality in a love relationship. Kirk usually discovers this. K/S writers reject the polarities defining the male-female personality myths. Unlike a female Henry Higgins, the K/S writer does not cry, "Why can't a man be more like a woman?" She asks instead, "Why can't we all just be human?" By being themselves, Kirk and Spock each completes, enhances, enriches the other. Kirk discovers that it is better to have an equal relationship with Spock than always to be the captain, and Spock learns that it is better to give of the self and not to be locked in isolation.

Kirk must be taught and shown and led into the bond by Spock. The reader thus sees in Spock the "feminine" possessor of the keys to emotional closeness: the Vulcan gifts of telepathy, the meld, and bonding. And Kirk represents the human male who must be led across the threshold to emotional fulfillment. In the television series Spock is initiated over and over again into his "human" adulthood. He is made to feel and suffer emotions. Conversely, in the K/S zines, Kirk must be initiated into the total vulnerability that is the Vulcan bond. He then must suffer the overwhelming force of Vulcan sexuality once it is freed through bonding.

Many people believe they have found the ideal love relationship when they marry. The greatest adventure for the majority of women today, as in the past, is to find their mates—not because women are as economically dependent on marriage as before but because, as Carol Gilligan writes, women "see a world comprised of relationships rather than of people standing alone, a world that coheres through human connection rather than through systems of rules."⁶ The K/S zines repeatedly rework the possibilities inherent in this process of discovering the "mate," which is fraught with greater difficulty and consequently more drawn out because the two protagonists are of the same sex and of alien species. Kirk and Spock are like Romeo and Juliet: They should not love each other, but they do.

K/S differs from the contemporary romance novel in its concept of a radically different kind of permanent relationship. The romance novel insists that marriage and romantic love are the desirable norm. It suggests to the reader longing for such love in her own life that "it's out there; you just haven't found Mr. Right yet." All such narratives end at the altar.

K/S zine narratives, although they diverge from the pattern of the romance novel, are set firmly in the tradition of the romantic love story, whose components include forbidden love, the seeming impossibility of either lover's

taking the initiative, and many threats to their union and even to their lives. Kirk's and Spock's is a forbidden love for three reasons: first, they are both male; second, one is an outsider, an alien, the other; and third, a committed sexual relationship between them is taboo because it could endanger the ship and crew should either lover be forced to choose between saving the other or the ship. The television series, in fact, employs this third conflict in several episodes in which Kirk or Spock imperils the ship to save the other. In "The Tholian Web," for example, Spock ignores the advice of other senior officers and remains in a dangerous area to rescue Kirk, who is trapped in a "spatial interphase." This episode is often referred to in zines to illustrate Spock's early awareness of how much Kirk means to him. In "Amok Time" Kirk is prepared to sacrifice his own career in order to return Spock to Vulcan, in defiance of Starfleet's orders, for the marriage that will save Spock's life.

In one of the most professionally crafted K/S novels, *Nightvisions*, Kirk has been blinded and is in constant danger of sudden death from the continuing alien attack that has cost him his sight. For 235 pages the reader suffers through various unsuccessful attempts to restore Kirk's vision. Meanwhile, Spock takes leave from Starfleet to be Kirk's eyes and companion. Their physical proximity and Kirk's needs draw them together, they realize their love for one another, and at length they become lovers and join in the Vulcan bonding. After one last, very dangerous operation also fails to restore Kirk's eyesight, the lovers commiserate;

[Kirk's] voice was very gentle. "Spock, we still have a lifetime together. I want you—that hasn't changed. . . . Don't cry . . . not for me. I'm lucky—I've got you. And maybe," his voice grew wistful, "if it weren't for the darkness, we wouldn't have found each other. . . ."

"I would . . . have," Spock said finally, his voice breaking, muffled. "I have loved you . . . from the first day we met."⁷

Again and again one of them, usually Spock, articulates the knowledge that the other is "half his soul." Admiral Kirk acknowledges this at the beginning of *Star Trek III: The Search for Spock*, the film that opens with Spock presumed to be dead.

In "The Brothel," an alternate universe K/S story in which Vulcan, not Earth, is the dominant planet, Kirk has been captured and sold into prostitution. Spock then discovers and, much against his will, falls in love with Kirk. For Spock, an aristocrat, to buy Kirk out of sexual bondage and cede him equal

status in his household is to violate Vulcan tradition, but Spock reasons, "I see the questions in your eyes, and see you are too proud to ask. You close them and smile, keeping what we have shared. Accepting the parting I can no longer endure. I have spent too long in the darkness of myself. . . . Whatever the price I will pay it."⁸ Spock's reference to "the darkness of myself" conveys his sense that he is uncompleted, unilluminated without the missing "other half of the soul." The search for the soulmate is a constant of K/S narratives.

How to bring Kirk and Spock to a realization of their need and love for each other is a question of enduring interest to K/S writers. These "first time" stories pour out in an endless stream, possibly because women in Western culture are socialized not to initiate sexual relationships and thus are intrigued by the problem of moving a relationship beyond the plateau of camaraderie and deep friendship. These numerous plots almost always contain one underlying element, an empathetic compassion that seems to invite the depiction of sadomasochism, what K/S editors call the "hurt/comfort" theme. The usual plot involves Kirk and Spock in an adventure in which one of them is seriously hurt. The other then has the opportunity to touch, comfort, and care for his wounded partner. The adventure itself is merely a mechanism to get the two protagonists alone (or off with a few others, who then conveniently die) so that they can explore their relationship as it truly is—or deepen it. It provides them the opportunity to be physically close and to recognize the inevitability of their physical love.

This formula is so established that one writer has successfully parodied it in a K/S novella. In "This Deadly Innocence, or 'The End of the Hurt/Comfort Syndrome,'" Dr. McCoy, fed up with endlessly repairing Kirk and Spock, surmises that they constantly overexpose themselves to danger to acquire injuries that will give each an excuse to touch or hold—or to be touched and held by—the other and thus to offer or receive comfort and love within the strict limits imposed by the masculine buddy system. To cure them of their rashness, McCoy sends them off on a shore leave camping trip with strict instructions to look after each other. To preclude any possible guilt, he has told each separately that the other needs special care and attention: Thus, neither need feel he would be forcing his attentions on the other without a reason. After a great many convoluted conversations, a few massages to soothe a healing limb, and a few confrontations with dangers that turn out to be false alarms, they at last realize that they love each other and need no other excuse to fulfill that love. Spock says, "You have controlled yourself far

better than I have in this matter, far better than any Vulcan. . . .’ He shook his head in a very human gesture of amazement. . . . ‘I have indeed loved you for an immeasurable time.’”⁹ Finally, again, all is well.

Each character has suffered, at the hands of different K/S writers, just about every disablement and malady known to human- (or Vulcan-) kind. This hurt-comfort theme, as it is a device to get them into one another’s arms, depends on Kirk’s and Spock’s “feminine” traits: compassion, tenderness, affection, gentleness, altruism, and, most important, the necessity for permission to initiate physical closeness. The television series, unlike most other television programming, firmly establishes altruism and self-sacrifice as traits expected of someone occupying a responsible position, at least in the twenty-third century. K/S zines simply extend these qualities into the realm of personal relationships.

Although a few K/S writers deal only superficially with the theme of the lifelong Vulcan bond (introduced in “Amok Time”), its importance to the K/S vision of a new kind of intimate relationship cannot be ignored. The bond obviates the possibility of infidelity or untruthfulness between partners. They cannot be anything but totally honest with one another since within the bond they know each other’s most intimate thoughts and feelings. The writers have grafted a typically feminine perception of the ideal marriage to the Vulcan bonding idea and thereby transformed it into an androgynous and firmly monogamous relationship.

To know and be known by another so intimately, but without loss of self, has great psychological appeal. Also, the bond is the vehicle for a mystical experience for each of them—but especially for Kirk, the human, since Vulcans are trained from childhood to explore and master the powers of the mind. This experience entails each of William James’s “four marks which, when an experience has them, may justify us in calling it mystical”: transiency, ineffability, passivity, and the noëtic quality.¹⁰ Thus, K/S writers appropriately use the indexes of religious mysticism to denote sexual ecstasy in much the same way that religious artists—such as Bernini in his statue *The Ecstasy of Saint Theresa*—have employed sexual imagery to denote religious or mystical states.

Although the bond is lifelong, Spock and Kirk experience it most intensely during sexual union: At its height it is transient. Just as their ecstasy is clothed in the language of mysticism, so too are the erotic descriptions of sexual acts between Spock and Kirk, in the best zines, a metaphor for the touching and merging of two minds joined by the bond. One of the best-known early

K/S short stories, "Desert Heat," illustrates the intense eroticism typical of Kirk's and Spock's first sexual unions. In this instance Spock uses the Vulcan mind-meld to enhance and ease the experience for Kirk:

So pure, so utterly simple touch of pure being to pure being beyond shame
 anger *your touch to me* Spock to Jim here *touch* share this moment flashing
 like drowning sinking in sweet pain pleasure *is this dying I will die with you*
who else should I die with you you a flame within black flame spiraling up
 within my pain pleasure pleasure melting burn away my flesh your arms
 around me dying then your body quivering spasms like death tremors
 shaking you us *take me* destroy me your voice or mine ours crying out *it*
*is more than I can endure.*¹¹

Love scenes in the best K/S stories also investigate with delight and wonder the processes of cognition and self-consciousness. The writer need not be content with describing erotic minutiae or with examining first how Kirk is enjoying it and then Spock but can describe in cosmic terms a communion that, though transient, is more ecstatic than any life offers the ordinary mortal, locked as she is inside her own being:

They traveled slowly, much more deeply; the galaxies around them dimmed
 and one by one their love-borne stars winked out, leaving them alone
 together in an infinite black void, a virgin vacuum that had waited eons
 for the coming of these two mortal souls; it flared to luminescence as they
 began to flow together, surrounding them with mystic glows of life, and
 love. Their touching brought them closer here than any kisses of the flesh
 could ever hope to bring them, for they were truly blending now, merging
 soft and changing as each unique and separate mind became also the
 other, repatterned, linked, bonded in completed knowing.¹²

Paradoxically, the sexual experience, presented as a necessary catalyst of the intense bonding ecstasy, is transcended by the psychic union it makes possible.

Through the bond, Spock and Kirk can absorb, without the need to articulate or understand, those indescribable emotions that exist between people who love one another: The content of the bonding experience, expressed metaphorically by K/S writers, is ineffable. Also, once each makes the decision to commit himself to the bond, he surrenders himself to it and becomes passive—in the romantic and the mystical traditions—just as Tristan and Isolde are passively bonded to one another by the love potion. This passivity is

akin to that of the mystic in union with God, not a mundane, sexual passivity associated with femininity. Spock and Kirk are passive in that neither can be, nor desires to be, alone or wholly self-directing again. In giving themselves to one another through the bond, they form a gestalt, something greater than the sum of its parts. Kirk in particular gains a freedom in this union that he had never before known:

Jim clung, melting against Spock. Wanting only to experience this new sensation. Letting Spock take him, shape him, mold him to his desire. Feeling his body as he had never felt it before, by surrendering it totally. Strangely free in his powerlessness, as if he had entered a whole new dimension, as if his insistent, everlasting need to control had denied him fullness of experience. Such luxury, the ultimate luxury, to be able to surrender. To share Spock's joy in him, in his yielding flesh. . . .

Jim woke to a new level of awareness, sensation. He was both more in control and more fiercely aroused. His passivity burned away in this new burst of flame. And he gloried in the awakening as he had gloried in the surrender. He laughed aloud with the incredible joy of this pleasure and power Spock was sharing with him.¹³

The most appealing mystic quality of the bond is the noëtic quality: Each experiences an illumination, a revelation, an awakening of the self within the bond that is unavailable in ordinary relationships. In *Nightvisions*,

Spock initiated the mindmeld, to complete their human lovemaking with Vulcan's gift. It was a blending Kirk had never fully understood—a knowing of the other beyond all limits of intimacy, above all shades of knowledge; yet without violation of the individual state of being, private realms of existence unbreached. A sharing, not capitulation.¹⁴

One compelling series of stories begins with Kirk's and Spock's demise, recounts their resurrection via the intervention of a super-race, and examines at detailed length the rebuilding of the bond, which is severed by their deaths. Their yearning memories of the bond's noëtic quality, and their determination to regain it, lead them to resolve the bitterness and guilt each has felt for having made the solitary decision to be reborn even though unaware of what the other's fate or choice might be. Although each is fearful that the other would not like what he would now encounter in the mind of his lover, they finally enter into the bond again:

The bonding was a subtle thing, indefinable, indescribable. It was not the words or thoughts which were important, but the intensity, the desire for oneness. The willingness to open oneself most fully. Trust. Love. The barriers dissolved in the deep yearning to know, to be known—to leave no secret or dark, forgotten place hidden from the soul of the other. Totally open. Totally revealing. Totally giving.¹⁵

A strong tradition of submitting to the willing loss of self through transcendent experience suffuses both romantic and mystical literature. In K/S stories transcendence is achieved through the bond and then affirmed through sexuality, but it is also a potentiality inherent in Kirk's and Spock's mutual adventures as outer space explorers. They must, in the mystical way of St. John of the Cross, live through the dark night of the soul, make the willing leap of faith into the unknown, and lose their separate lives in order to gain a union of self with the other. Only through such a union of souls can one truly know and be known:

Implicit trust, Jim thought dazedly . . . as his personality reassembled itself solidly within his own flesh once more, an utter confidence in another's acceptance of you just as you were, without evasions or tiny white lies or pretences. A sense of belonging filled him, a knowledge of Spock as profound as the painful self-knowledge he had so willingly laid bare for Spock to see.¹⁶

The trust in one another is absolute because the knowledge of one another (and of self through the other) within the bond is absolute. They can therefore rely absolutely on one another. Questions of morality and ethics external to their relationship provide the conflict in most post-bonding stories. Overall, K/S stories reverse the romantic myth of star-crossed heterosexual lovers who must deny or lose one another: They assert that Romeo and Juliet may stay together and live, that Tristan and Isolde may remove the sword between them, that no one can permanently separate Eloise and Abelard, that Catherine does not abandon Heathcliff even in death.

The thesis of Lillian Federman's *Surpassing the Love of Men* suggests that Kirk's and Spock's K/S zine relationship has another long tradition. While not as well documented as the tradition identified by Fiedler, it is one that some women would find more intrinsically attractive. Federman traces romantic, usually platonic friendships between women from the Renaissance to the

present. Her research leads her to agree with Simone de Beauvoir that men's and women's experiences are so different that each sex views the other as the "other"—and that, consequently, true psychological intimacy can be found only with someone of one's own sex. Psychological and sociological studies show that women's and men's perspectives are fundamentally different. While contrary in this respect to Roddenberry's original concept, the *ST* television series certainly projects into the twenty-third century the prevailing stereotypic view of women and men. Most important, a woman's intimate relationship with a man still usually requires her to sacrifice her personal identity and to take on a reflected identity. As Erik Erikson observes, a woman must define herself as a wife and mother. Romantic friendships between women do not require this. And the great appeal of the zines is that Kirk and Spock are loved precisely for who they are, not for what they can be for the other.

But why don't women write and read about women doing what Kirk and Spock do? The answer is that, given the historical and current limitations imposed on women, it stretches even the level of credibility required of science fiction to imagine believable female characters who, like Spock and Kirk, "can save the universe once a week," as one zine editor puts it. Traditionally, women have had little difficulty identifying with fictional male heroes. K/S zines are read by women because they present a new kind of relationship that a growing number of women see as ideal. The characters are male because this relationship between strong, heroic equals can be imagined more easily in a fictional male-male relationship. More crucial, experience has taught these readers that it is only with members of one's own sex that a relationship between two equals, valued for who they are, can exist. In particular, K/S narratives give women a fantasy vision of two people who can share everything that, according to Freud, gives meaning to life: love and work. Also, female readers find it satisfying to imagine men who are capable of loving totally and yet remaining culturally "masculine." Such men, while powerful and in command of their lives, are also tender and gentle—and eschew any desire to dominate or be dominated. K/S narratives are about two loving equals; within their relationship neither is "masculine" while the other is "feminine," stronger or weaker, "husband" or "wife." These stories are not about two gay males and should not be categorized as examples of homosexual literature—either male or female.

These stories recognize that even the most autonomous and competent individual needs to be loved and cared for and that loving and caring for an-

other can be deeply satisfying. Sensitivity to the needs of others, gentleness, tenderness, and compassion are traditionally viewed as feminine characteristics. K/S zines provide many opportunities for Kirk and Spock to exhibit these qualities, especially toward each other. Their special relationship is their only outlet for expressing some of these traits. Thus, Spock and Kirk emerge finally as complete human beings only in K/S zines, and are no longer mere macho caricatures. The zines reveal the anima, or feminine, in these two very masculine protagonists in a way that (if one sets aside prejudicial homosexual stereotypes that are never suggested in K/S) does not detract from their masculinity. Yet even the television Kirk and Spock are androgynous in important respects. Theirs is an ideal relationship between two equals who are valued for who they are, encouraged to express the widest possible range of positive human attributes, and supported morally and physically through the challenges and adventures of their shared lives.

In the K/S zines, Kirk is still an outstanding success in a patriarchal system. Beyond his enjoyment of battle, however, he appears at times almost to have a death wish, evident in the incredible personal risks he continually takes. Yet Spock must suppress his protectiveness, his temptations to domesticate or tame Kirk, which he recognizes would alienate his bondmate and reduce his effectiveness. Rather than attempt to make Kirk more cautious, Spock's solution always is to accompany his lover into danger, to be there to protect, save, or perish with him. Their adventures are shared. There are no wives. No one stays home to worry or do the laundry.

The fantasy of the bond ensures a love that will not fade with familiarity and domesticity. There is no need for the early death, sexual denial, or self-restraint that plagues classical lovers of Western myth and literature. The fear that love will die does not exist in K/S stories; the lovers may live their love in total trust and honesty. In the course of their galactic adventures, there is ample opportunity as well for revitalization of the bond.

The seeming peculiarity of a subgenre written and read by women but graphically and explicitly homosexual can be explained also by the fact that the authors view and present Kirk and Spock as whole people who are psychologically neither "masculine" nor "feminine." Moreover, masculine sexuality is appealing to most women, as are the physical and sexual attractions of the male body: After all, most women are heterosexual. Kirk's and Spock's loving behavior toward one another is a behavior many women presumably yearn to share with a man, to receive and reciprocate—for both partners to

be capable, independent; for each to contribute a loving strength and to be loved for that strength, not for weakness; for each to be permitted occasionally to be weaker and vulnerable without having to be passive, dominated, or afraid. The following passage illustrates the heterosexual appeal of Kirk's and Spock's relationship. Kirk has mind-melded with Spock as a preliminary to their lovemaking, and now

Spock was stroking his face with maddening deliberation. He traced the nerves in Kirk's temples, his forehead, his neck, his ears. Kirk had never realized that such nerves existed. His whole body was on fire, crying for possession. He felt his own vulnerability to Spock's physical strength, to his telepathic abilities. With that came the realization that he wanted it that way. It was a perfect fantasy, vulnerability to one who would never hurt him. In this time and place, he did not want to be in command.¹⁷

K/S stories remove gender as a governing and determining force in the love relationship. The lovers may have many problems to confront, but one problem common to contemporary women never arises: one partner's inferior sexual rank in a sexist society. Joanna Russ has commented, "The 'What if' behind K/S is: What if I Were Free?" These novels, stories, and poems are not about sex or gender; they are certainly not about male homosexuality as such; and, despite appearances, they are not even commentaries on the romantic love story. Rather, they provide a vision of a new way of loving and especially a vision of new possibilities for women. They are about the possibility of joining integrity to the self with fidelity to one's partner. This investigation of possibilities occurs in the vast arena of fantasy and science fiction, where anything is possible.

Notes

The epigraphs are from Leslie Fielder, *Love and Death in the American Novel*, rev. ed. (New York: Dell, 1966), 92; and Susan K. James and Carol A. Frisbie, *Nightvisions* (Arlington, Va.: Pulsar Press, 1979), 108.

1. This chapter uses the following abbreviations: "zines" for "amateur fan magazines"; *ST* for the *Star Trek* universe (television series, literature, and movies); and "K/S" for the sexual relationship between Kirk and Spock depicted in the zines discussed. In the literature of the *ST* fan world, "K/S" always indicates a sexual relationship, just as "S/H" (in the realm of zines) indicates a sexual relationship

between the characters of the 1970s television series *Starsky and Hutch*.

2. Ellen Goodman, "TV's Hunks—Isn't Something Missing?" *TV Guide*, July 16, 1983, 10.

3. Anonymous, "Star Trek: The Great American Love Story," *Twilight Zone* (October 1982): 47.

4. Jacqueline Lichtenberg, Sondra Marshak, and Joan Winston, *Star Trek Lives!* (New York: Bantam Books, 1975), 102.

5. Jane Aumerle, "Return from the Glass Isle: The Romantic Structure of *Star Trek*," *Menagerie* 11 (1976): 19.

6. Carol Gilligan, *In a Different Voice* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1982), 29.

7. James and Frisbie, *Nightvisions*, 235.

8. Gayle Feyrer, "The Brothel," in *The Price and the Prize*, ed. Gayle Feyrer (Eugene, Ore.: n.p., 1981), 13.

9. Leslie Fish, "This Deadly Innocence, or 'The End of the Hurt/Comfort Syndrome,'" *Naked Times* 3, ed. Della Van Hise (San Diego: n.p., 1979), 94.

10. William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (New York: Modern Library, 1902), 371.

11. Gayle Feyrer, "Desert Heat," in *Naked Times* 2, ed. Della Van Hise and Diane T. Jeffords (San Diego: n.p., 1979), 80.

12. Gerry Downs, *Alternative: The Epilog to Orion* (Anchorage: n.p., 1976), 12.

13. Gayle Feyrer, *Mirrors of Mind and Flesh* (Eugene, Ore.: n.p., 1979), 57–58.

14. James and Frisbie, *Nightvisions*, 137.

15. Pamela Rose, *Companion: The Rest of the Story* (Jersey City, N.J.: n.p., 1980), 144.

16. K. S. T'lan and D. Dubois, *T'Zad'U, Part 2* (Brackley, Northants., Eng.: n.p., 1982), 365.

17. Carol Shuttleworth, "On the Beach," in *Thrust*, ed. Carol Frisbie (Arlington, Va.: n.p., 1978), 51.

The Sex Lives of Cult Television Characters

SARA GWENLLIAN JONES

Two scenes from slash fiction:

Mulder gasped to see Krycek suddenly in front of him. "Alex?" he asked in near disbelief.

In answer Krycek braced himself on his arm, leaned over and kissed Mulder full on the mouth. The kiss was tender and desperate with loneliness that went soul-deep. When they finally broke apart to gasp for air, they looked into each other's eyes and let the song speak for them.¹

. . . The sight of Gabrielle kneeling before her was too close to her nightmarish thoughts. Xena pictured herself closing the distance between them. She watched, mesmerized, as her left hand reached down, wrapping itself in the young woman's hair as her body lowered itself onto the startled girl. Her mouth quickly descended onto Gabrielle's as her left hand firmly held the bard's head in check. Xena's free hand began to roam over the bard's body, quickly finding its way under the girl's skirt and straight to its goal.²

The erotic speculations of contemporary slash fiction authors extend in many directions. The sexual encounters described in slash stories may be tender, fiercely passionate, casual, masturbatory, voyeuristic, orgiastic, sadomasochistic or non-consensual. Almost every imaginable seduction scenario, narrative context, emotional import and sexual practice is somewhere described in slash fiction. Stories may be plotless pornographic tableaux, sexually explicit romances, comedies, tragedies or action adventures. If slash fiction may be described as a "genre," then its only convention is that it describes erotic

encounters between television characters (or, more rarely, film characters) of the same sex.

Slash fiction takes its name from the punctuating “slash” in the “Kirk/Spock” or “K/S” erotic fan fiction that appeared in the wake of the original *Star Trek* series (1966–1969). Slash emerged, Constance Penley suggests, from “regular” fandom, and seems to have arisen “spontaneously in various places beginning in the early to mid-seventies.”³ Until the early 1990s, it was published in print fanzines that were sold by mail order and at fan conventions; their circulation was, as this suggests, very small. But by the mid 1990s slash had moved onto the web along with much of the rest of fandom, a shift that increased both its visibility and accessibility. As fandom itself has become a mainstream activity online, with hundreds of thousands of participants, so too have the numbers of slash fiction authors and readers greatly increased. Tens of thousands of slash stories are archived on dedicated websites, they can be read online, printed out or, increasingly, are archived pre-formatted for downloading to palmtops. As in the early years of slash, the majority of slash writers are heterosexual women.⁴ However, a significant minority of male fans also write slash, and the male-to-female ratio varies across different fandoms; most *Star Trek* slash is written by women, while *X-Files* (1993–[2002]) slash tends to be more mixed. Lesbian and bisexual women dominate *Xena: Warrior Princess* (1995–2001) slash, but have much less presence in most other slash fandoms.

Scholarly studies of slash (most of which were published in the early 1990s and drew upon research done several years earlier) have tended to emphasize its romantic male/male manifestations.⁵ Usually authored by heterosexual women, such stories subvert or overturn conventional gender constructs as male bodies and male sexuality are described in terms of profound emotional connection and sensual surrender. Krycek looks into Mulder’s eyes and remarks “their changing seas of green darkened with despair”;⁶ Kirk “moans softly” under Spock’s caress.⁷ Compared with the romance novels whose style such stories emulate, these are unusual formulations. They play with the conventions of romantic love, cast men in the subordinate, yearning roles usually reserved for women, extend the logic of romance into extremes of abjection and domination, move from metaphors of desire to explicit descriptions of its fulfilment. It is no surprise, then, that studies of television fan cultures have often proposed slash fiction as a radical instance of resistant reading, one that counters the marginalization of female characters in much early cult

television by appropriating the bodies of men and reworking masculinity and male sexuality. Slash, argues Constance Penley in her study of *Star Trek*-inspired erotic fan writing, is a “guerrilla erotics”⁸ and a “project of retooling masculinity itself.”⁹ Henry Jenkins similarly proposes slash as “an explicit critique of masculinity” that attempts to “establish an homosocial-homoerotic continuum as an alternative to repressive and hierarchical male sexuality.”¹⁰

In such formulations, slash is interpreted as “resistant” or “subversive” because it seems deliberately to ignore or override clear textual messages indicating characters’ heterosexuality. Even where characters’ sexualities are not indicated in the television text, a wider cultural logic dictates that heterosexuality can be assumed while homosexuality must be proved. Against such uncomplicated assumptions of heterosexuality, slash fiction’s constructions of powerful homoerotic attractions seem wholly unfounded, even where homosociality is foregrounded in the source text. Reading “innocent” same-sex relationships between characters such as Kirk and Spock or Mulder and Krycek as homoerotic appears to directly contradict the explicit evidence and “preferred meaning” of the text, taking characters in “unauthorized” directions. But is slash really so distinctive and so oppositional? Do slash stories contradict and resist the texts that inspire them, or do they simply extend certain narrative logics into the realm of sexuality? In online fan fiction archives such as *The Wonderful World of Makebelieve*,¹¹ conventional male/male slash takes its place alongside other television-inspired erotic literature that spans every gender combination and almost every imaginable sexual practice. Here, male/male erotica represents one set of sexual preferences among many. Slash has innumerable permutations, and stories are often catalogued under headings that further describe their sexual content: group sex, male/male plus male/female, threesomes (two male, one female), female/female, nonconsensual male/male, and so on. That such variety of sexual fantasy, both within and outside the slash genre, attaches to cult television characters suggests that there is something about their construction that both invites and tolerates such diversity of use, and which is not adequately accounted for by the “incorporation/resistance paradigm”¹² that has dominated and conditioned studies of audiences, fans and slash fiction.

The incorporation/resistance paradigm rests upon an understanding of the text as an inviolable and discrete semiotic surface, its “preferred” or “dominant” textual meanings are accepted, negotiated or opposed by the reader. By this rationale, slash fiction, which contradicts the source text’s

preferred meaning of heterosexuality, must be the product of subversive or “deviant” reading. But the incorporation/resistance paradigm offers limited and clumsy models that do not account for the deeper textual strategies of cult television, for its engagements with the fantastic, its function as a species of virtual reality, its emphasis upon the implicit, or its invitation to immersive and interactive engagement. “Every act of reading constructs the text and actualizes its world in a different way,” writes Marie-Laure Ryan, discussing virtual realities, fictional worlds and reading processes that resonate powerfully with those of cult television:

The process of actualization involves such highly individualized operations as filling in the blanks with information drawn from the reader’s knowledge, memory and experience; visualizing in imagination the depicted scenes, characters and events; and spatializing the text by following the threads of various thematic webs, often against the directionality of the linear sequence.¹³

What happens when slash is considered not as “resistant” but instead as an actualization of latent textual elements? How does slash relate to the textual and metatextual operations of cult television? Is fantastic genre cult television perhaps inherently queer? In order to address these questions this essay will first investigate the narrative logics and fictional worlds of cult television, and its functions as a species of virtual reality.

In the episode “The Bitter Suite,” from the third season of *Xena: Warrior Princess* (XWP), a traumatized and psychotic Xena beats unconscious her beloved companion Gabrielle and attempts to murder her by hurling her from a cliff into a furious sea. At the last moment, Gabrielle wakes. The two women struggle and plunge together into the churning waters below. It’s a dramatic event, certainly, but little suspense attaches to its eventual outcome. Fans know very well that both characters will somehow survive this extreme moment, even if it requires a miraculous return from the dead. They know too that the pair’s ruptured relationship will eventually be repaired. And, in broad outline, this is exactly what happens in the episode. Instead of the finality of death, Xena and Gabrielle awake in the magical realm of Illusia where, after much soul-searching, enacted as scenes from a surreal and nightmarish musical, they reconcile and wash up safe and sound, wrapped in each other’s arms, on a sandy beach.

Regular viewers of any television series quickly learn to recognize its primary linear narrative patterns and to anticipate their repetition. As Umberto Eco remarks,

The series works upon a fixed situation and a restricted number of fixed pivotal characters, around whom the secondary and changing ones turn. The secondary characters give the impression that the new story is different from the preceding ones while in fact the narrative scheme does not change.¹⁴

Familiarity with a series produces in viewers a number of general expectations of any given episode (or of story-arcs extended across two or more episodes). *XWP* fans can reasonably assume that in any single episode Xena and Gabrielle will be confronted by a hostile force and will find themselves in one or more hazardous situations which they will somehow have overcome or escaped by the end of the story. Drawing upon knowledge of the characters that they have acquired from previous episodes, fans can also predict with some accuracy how Xena and Gabrielle are likely to respond in most situations. Above all, fans know that, although some primary plotlines may be left partially unresolved, all must conclude with Xena and Gabrielle surviving to battle on in the next episode.

If the pattern of major narrative events and outcomes in series such as *XWP*, *Star Trek* and *The X-Files* simply recurs, in different guises, in every episode, how do such series attract and maintain large audiences of regular and avid viewers? For Eco, the explanation for a series' popularity resides in this very quality of predictability. The series, he suggests, "Consoles us (the consumers) because it rewards our ability to foresee. We are happy because we discover our own ability to guess what will happen."¹⁵ But while this may be true for some series—Eco uses *Columbo* as his example—the fulfilment of audience expectations cannot alone account for the intensity and imaginative range of fans' engagements with cult television series. Furthermore, the predictability that Eco describes accrues only to the linear arrangement of major story events and their trajectory towards closure. It does not account for the metatextual operation of cult series.

Repetition ensures that the broad syntagmatic movements of cult series are inherently predictable, and this predictability is rendered absolute by the universal fan practice of recording and repeatedly re-viewing episodes. Paradoxically, the repetitive structure of cult television series and the repetitive

viewing structures of fans facilitate the series' lack of closure. The repetition of the already-known releases fans from the thrall of causality. It directs their imaginations towards the text's paradigmatic elements, inviting them to consider what story events reveal about characters, how they contribute to and interconnect with the metatextual backstory, what possibilities are opened up for future storylines, and what other stories haunt the hinterlands of the text. In this sense, the already-known of the series' linear narrative formula works like the already-known of the historical drama where, as Herbert Linderberger notes, "the historical past becomes a kind of closed book, one which is re-enacted as a religious ritual re-enacts a hallowed myth. . . . Our interest shifts from the *what* to the *how*."¹⁶

The predictability of the cult series decisively relocates the pleasure of viewing, shifting it away from the anticipation of major story events and towards the always-unfolding and unforecloseable *how* of the metatext. As science fiction author C. J. Cherryh says in an essay that dismisses "the entire concept of plot as significant literature," story events "work much more like a fist full of pebbles chucked at a pond. At one toss, one essential Event, concentric rings of action spread out from each impact, unsettling the entire mirror of What Is."¹⁷ This "What Is," in cult series, is the vast, elaborate and densely populated fictional world that is constructed episode by episode, extended and embellished by official secondary-level texts (episode guides, novelizations, comics, magazines) and fan-produced tertiary texts (fan fiction, cultural criticism essays, art, scratch videos). Cult television's serial and segmented forms, its familiar formulae, its accumulated multiple storylines, its metatextuality, its ubiquitous intertextuality and intratextuality, its extension across a variety of other media, its modes of self-reflexivity and constant play of interruption and excess, work together to overwhelm the processual order of cause and effect, enigma and resolution, extending story events and other narrative and textual elements across boundless networks of interconnected possibilities. Tellingly, these characteristic devices and operations of cult television are echoed by the few films—*Star Wars* (George Lucas, 1977), *The Crow* (Alex Proyas, 1994)—that have evolved and maintained substantial comparable fan cultures. Like cult television, such films both construct explicitly fantastic alternate realities and mimic the metatextual and accumulative effects of seriality through sequelization and through secondary-level texts that are released, as Will Brooker notes, not as "a single wave of spin-offs" but rather as "a constant ripple" of supplementary materials.¹⁸ Fans purchase posters, stills and models that function

as prompts to the imagination, overlaying material reality with the signs of the fictional world; they draw upon official secondary texts and fan-produced tertiary texts in order to further extend and embellish it. The appeal of these vast, transmedia fictions lies precisely in their invitations to immersion and interactivity; they are constructed, marketed, and used by fans not as “text” to be “read” but as cosmologies to be entered, experienced and imaginatively interacted with. Seriality, transmediality and explicitly fantastic diegetic worlds combine to effect a perceptual transparency that leads fans’ imaginations through the surface of the text and into the metatextual depth beyond, affording entry into a coherent but insubstantial virtual reality.

Crucially, the fictional worlds of cult television series are quite unlike the ordinary world of material reality. As John Thornton Caldwell points out,

Beauty and the Beast, The X-Files, Quantum Leap, Star Trek and *Max Headroom* all initiated fan activity not simply because they were visual, but because they also utilised self-contained and volatile narrative worlds, imaginary constructs more typical of science fiction.¹⁹

Cult television worlds are exotic and exciting. While a minority of series achieve cult status without explicitly engaging with the fantastic (*The Professionals, Starsky and Hutch*), their worlds are nevertheless far removed from the everyday: packed with adventures, colourful characters, unfeasible escapades, and miraculously invulnerable heroes. And they are exceptions: the overwhelming majority of those series that evolve substantial creative fan cultures belong to the fantastic genres of science fiction, fantasy and horror. Their fictional geographies are alien, haunted or mythologized landscapes visually inscribed as strange and mysterious; they are full of night and strange beings (*The X-Files, Buffy the Vampire Slayer, Angel, Beauty and the Beast*); they have a wild and verdant beauty (*XWP, Hercules*); they are home to alien civilizations (*Star Trek, Farscape, Babylon 5*).

The fictional worlds of cult television are governed by fantastic logics that mark their distance from the everyday. Gods, ghosts and monsters are tangible presences in these realms; intergalactic travel is possible; cyborg entities exist; death is not necessarily final; the universe is teeming with intelligent life. Unconstrained by the pragmatics of realism, storylines are often speculative and focused philosophical explorations of the outer reaches of the imagination, proposing alternate selves, parallel universes, and meta-

physical paradoxes. They accommodate those wondering, almost whimsical questions that most of us ask ourselves from time to time: who might “I” be if I wasn’t me? What would it be like to be telepathic? What might an alien look like, and what would it think of us? How would the present be different if a time-traveller altered something in the past? The aesthetic, intellectual and imaginative appeal of fantastic genres is precisely that they are fantastic. Relieved of any obligation to verisimilitude, they afford exploration of the purely speculative.

Lubomír Doležel remarks that it would take “a text of infinite length to construct a complete fiction world.”²⁰ Fictional worlds are inherently incomplete, and the metaverses of cult television series always extend far beyond what is visible on screen at any given moment or in any given episode. Detached from objective reality, the visible spaces, actions and events of the televisual text have invisible lateral resonance; they function metonymically, referring us to spaces, actions and events beyond themselves, elsewhere in an implied and hallucinatory realm of structured but unforecloseable possibilities. For fans, major characters function as points of entry into the metaverse, as objects of fascination in their own right, and as avatars, ethereal beings that are animated and psychically inhibited by fans’ projected imaginations. Such characters are wholly exotic. Often, they possess special powers or abilities—the magical technologies of science fiction series, the superhuman fighting skills of Xena or Buffy. Usually, they are conflicted in some way. Xena struggles against her psychotically violent urges, Seven of Nine strives to reconcile her Borg and human identities, Mulder obsesses about his sister, Buffy seeks a balance between her destiny as the Slayer and her desire to be an ordinary teenager. Their lives are unfeasibly eventful; every week they are seized by adventure. They are usually mobile, wanderers across fantastic terrains. The appeal of such characters, with their complex psychologies and unconstrained lifestyles, is easy to understand. They are not burdened by the responsibilities and anxieties that plague us; their travels are not charter-flights bracketed by departure lounges; they do not worry about providing for their old age; they are not constrained by the routines of work. They have our adventures for us.

Like the worlds they inhabit, cult television characters are incomplete and incompletable. Lacking referents, they exist as liminal entities poised between tele-presence and absence. Every diegetic elaboration adds intricacy and uncertainty to their hauntological shadow-selves beyond the screen; the

more we learn about them, the more latent they become. As Marie-Laure Ryan observes:

in a world presenting some hidden depth (let us call it a “realistic world”) there is something behind the narrated: the characters have minds, intents, desires, and emotions, and the reader is encouraged to reconstruct the contents of their mind—either for its own sake, or in order to evaluate the behaviour.²¹

Creative and interpretive fan practices are all concerned with this latency, with reading through the surface semiotics of the diegesis and beyond into the implied interior and exterior realities of the characters and their world. Again, the linear trajectory of the narrative is subordinated in favour of depth. What is of primary importance to fans is not how characters move along the narrative but rather what narrative events can reveal about characters. As Henry Jenkins observes, for fans “the best episodes are those which not only conform to fans’ expectations about characters but also contribute new insights into their personalities and motivations.”²² In an essay for the fan-produced XWP e-journal *Whoosh!*, fan critic Merry Gilmore notes the frequency with which fan fiction authors depict scenes in which Gabrielle cares for an incapacitated Xena and use this stock situation to make explicit their diegetically implied lesbian relationship:

All the while we can hear her thoughts: Gabrielle worships Xena. Gabrielle feels pain for Xena. Gabrielle would live for Xena. Gabrielle would die for Xena. Gabrielle loves Xena. And Xena weakens. The mask cracks. She says what we all know. O.K. No surprises there. We know all the above from the few quiet moments the two share each episode. Those quiet fleeting moments.²³

Of course, fans don’t really “know” the interior workings of characters’ minds and hearts in any absolute sense because those minds and hearts have no actuality; the television series furnishes only surface indications of these ultimately ungraspable depths. It offers clues, some subtle and some explicit, to interiorities that have no objective existence, no facility for final confirmation or denial. Crucially, the series also provides silences—“those quiet fleeting moments”—that remark only the absent presence of the latent, and it provides the spectral depths that tolerate such speculations. As another XWP fan critic writes,

Xena's soul has been revealed in fragments. Each fragment is a piece of an extraordinary puzzle which one would think would explain her actions were one able to see the image in its totality.²⁴

But this "totality" is always absent, and it is this absence that seduces the imagination. The ethereal substance of cult television's fictional worlds and fictional characters both invites and refuses completion; there always remains the "impossibility of verifying properties of the fictional entity not attributed to it by the fictional text itself."²⁵ Cult television characters have structure; they are not blank ciphers. But they are ultimately unknowable others whose exotic appeal depends, in large part, on their immunity to the forces that structure ordinary reality.

Heterosexuality is as much a matter of social practice as it is of sexual practice. As social practice, it assumes a narrative form of its own, with plot points of courtship, marriage, domesticity, reproduction, child-rearing, provision for the family. Heterosexuality's narrative form is, arguably, the most embedded and pervasive foundational structure of ordinary reality. Intrinsic to it are powerful moral and social imperatives that urge economic responsibility, domestic stability, the avoidance of risk, and the shrinking of horizons to the productive space of work and the reproductive space of home. As social practice, heterosexuality is antithetical to the exoticism and adventure that characterize the fictional worlds of cult television series. If heterosexual relations between major characters go beyond the preliminary of courtship, this exterior narrative of social practice is invoked and both the cult fiction and its fans are unceremoniously returned to the structures, realities and stresses of everyday life. Fan critic Fiona Hough remarks the corrosive effects of the collapse into ordinariness that followed the marriage of the protagonists in *Lois and Clark: The New Adventures of Superman* (1993–1997):

Instead of broadening the scope of stories available, it spelled the beginning of the end of a once interesting program. We then saw such interesting storylines as:

- a) Lois and Clark buying a house;
- b) Lois and Clark arguing over who was the best cook; and
- c) Lois losing her memory and forgetting that she was married/in love with Clark.

. . . Even bringing back Lex Luthor could not save the show once the producers started down the slippery path of giving into temptation.²⁶

Cult television's imperatives are fantasy, adventure and the sustained virtuality of an exotic fictional world—imperatives that make heterosexuality problematic because the narrativized social process it invokes threatens the cult fiction's anti-realism. Cult series therefore tend to truncate or problematize heterosexual relationships involving A and B characters (although C and D characters are usually free to marry, if they so wish). Thus, Mulder can enjoy his collection of pornographic videos but he cannot enjoy Scully; Kirk can chase doomed earthwomen and unsuitable aliens, but he cannot proceed beyond seduction and/or romance to become a husband and father; Buffy and Angel's love must remain unconsummated because if Angel experiences "a moment of true happiness" his soul will be lost forever. *Beauty and the Beast* (1987–1990), the only fantastic genre cult television series to which a realized heterosexual romance is central and constant, is able to engage with heterosexuality only so long as its romantically-involved protagonists belong to opposed worlds—a situation that prevents their relationship from developing beyond romance. When Catherine eventually becomes pregnant with Vincent's child, she dies immediately after the birth, thus precluding any happy Kodak moments. In contrast, Xena can share her life and, the series strongly suggests, a lesbian relationship with Gabrielle and still remain a nomadic warrior, forever moving from adventure to adventure. Her male lovers in the series must die young or quickly depart some other way, while her relationship with Gabrielle endures because it does not trigger the same trajectory towards domestic stasis.

In *Making Things Perfectly Queer*, Alexander Doty notes a similar problematizing of heterosexuality in horror films and melodramas. The conventions of these genres, he suggests,

actually encourage queer positioning as they exploit the spectacle of heterosexual romance, straight domesticity, and traditional gender roles gone awry. In a sense, then, *everyone's* pleasure in these genres is "perverse," is queer, as much of it takes place within the space of the contra-heterosexual and the contra-straight.²⁷

The failures of heterosexual romances in cult television series similarly position the audiences to find queer pleasures in cult genres and texts. Because

active heterosexuality must continually be reined in if it is not to effect a collapse of the exotic-fantastic into suburban domesticity, protagonists' primary relationships usually fall into one of two categories:

1. Primary relationships between a male and a female character, which signal a mutual sexual attraction that is never fully realized (Mulder and Scully, Picard and Crusher, Aeryn Sun and Crichton) or which cannot progress beyond romance (Buffy and Angel, Catherine and Vincent).
2. Primary relationships between characters of the same sex (Kirk and Spock, Hercules and Iolus, Xena and Gabrielle).

Successful primary relationships in cult television series, then, are either thwarted heterosexual relationships or same-sex pairings. Fans encounter a tension: sexually interesting characters whose entanglement in heterosexual relationships threatens to invoke not just heterosexuality's passions but also its trajectory—a trajectory that leads straight back to a material and mundane world, the erasure of which is the very thing that makes the cult series compelling. The limitations imposed by the fantastic imperative upon heterosexuality create a void that allows an implied homoeroticism to function as an alternative, and less damaging, possibility of the cult fiction's exotic substance. From this perspective, the exotic erotics of slash fiction look much less like instances of “resistant” and much more like extensions of cult television's own contra-straight logics. Slash arises out of cult television's intrinsic requirements of distance from everyday reality, its related erasure of heterosexuality's social process, and its provision of perceptual depths that invite and tolerate diverse speculation about characters' “hidden” thoughts and feelings.

Of course, not all cult television fans fantasize, write or read slash. Much fan fiction is concerned with fully realizing heterosexual relationships between protagonists that cannot be realized in the series themselves. Some slash and romantic non-slash fiction develops same-sex relationships in the direction of domesticity. In the *XWP* romances of the popular and highly regarded writer Melissa Good,²⁸ Xena and Gabrielle's relationship mirrors heterosexual marriage as the characters set up home together and raise a family. In many respects, such constructions are more deserving of the term “resistant” than is slash, since slash tends to construct erotic interludes that do not substantially alter the fantastical constructions and lifestyles of characters.

That slash fiction continues to be theorized as “resistance” and—though it is rarely explicitly described as such—as “deviant” is testament both to a notion of text/reader engagements as interpretive rather than interactive and to a continued refusal to acknowledge where and how queerness manifests itself. Like the queer readings of films discussed by Doty, slash fiction has been valorized as a rebellion *against* the text, a scavenging for textual crumbs that become the raw material for an alchemical creative reworking. But cult television series are already “queer” in their constructions of fantastic virtual realities that must problematize heterosexuality and erase heterosexual process in order to maintain their integrity and distance from the everyday. It is the cult television series itself which implicitly “resists” the conventions of heterosexuality; the slash fiction stories written by some of its fans render explicit this implicit function and, more importantly, are a reflection of cult television’s immersive and interactive logics.

Notes

1. Krychick, *As Long as You Love Me*, n.d., <http://adult.density.com/krychick/fiction/XF-AsLongAs.txt>.
2. Cousin Liz, *And Still She Follows*, 1992, http://cousinliz.com/fanfic/cousinliz_assf.html.
3. Constance Penley, *NASA/Trek: Popular Science and Sex in America* (London: Verso, 1997), 101.
4. *Ibid.*, 100–101.
5. See Camille Bacon-Smith, *Enterprising Women: Television Fandom and the Creation of Popular Myth* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1992); Henry Jenkins, *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1992); Penley, *NASA/Trek*.
6. Kand, *Letter Found on a Coffee Table*, n.d., <http://www.ditb.net/basement/library/author/kand-oneverystr1180-01.htm>.
7. Lady Charena, *A Love Supreme*, n.d., <http://www.geocities.com/blairsdream/startrek/aluvsupreme.html>.
8. Penley, *NASA/Trek*, 101.
9. *Ibid.*, 127.
10. Jenkins, *Textual Poachers*, 219.
11. *The Wonderful World of Makebelieve*, n.d., <http://internetdump.com/users/daltonavon/>.
12. Nicholas Abercrombie and Brian Longhurst, *Audiences: A Sociological Theory*

of *Performance and Imagination* (London: Sage, 1998), 15–36.

13. Marie-Laure Ryan, "Cyberspace, Virtuality and the Text," in *Cyberspace Textuality: Computer Technology and Literary Theory*, ed. Marie-Laure Ryan (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992), 96.

14. Umberto Eco, *The Limits of Interpretation* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), 85–86.

15. *Ibid.*, 86.

16. Herbert Lindenberger, *Historical Drama: The Relation of Literature and Reality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1975), 24.

17. C. J. Cherryh, *The Myth of Plot: A Heresy*, 1983, <http://www.simegen.com/school/workshop/cjcherryh/cjcherryh.html>.

18. Will Brooker, "Internet Fandom and the Continuing Narratives of Star Wars, Blade Runner, and Alien," in *Alien Zone II: The Spaces of Science Fiction Cinema*, ed. Annette Kuhn (London: Verso, 2000), 51.

19. John Thornton Caldwell, *Televisuality: Style Crisis and Authority in American TV* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1995), 261.

20. Lubomír Doležel, *Heterocosmica: Fiction and Possible Worlds* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), 169.

21. Marie-Laure Ryan, "Immersion vs. Interactivity: Virtual Reality and Literary Theory," *Postmodern Culture* 5, no. 1 (1994), <http://www.humanities.uci.edu/mposter/syllabi/readings/ryan.html>.

22. Jenkins, *Textual Poachers*, 98.

23. Merry Gilmore, "A Fan's First Introduction to Fan-Fiction," *Whoosh! The Journal of the International Association of Xena Studies*, no. 6 (March 1997), <http://www.whoosh.org/issue6/gilmore.html>.

24. Marylee Aspuro, "The Fourth Season Spiritual Journeys," *Whoosh! The Journal of the International Association of Xena Studies*, no. 41 (Spring 2000), <http://whoosh.org/issue41/aspuro1.html>.

25. Ruth Ronen, *Possible Worlds in Literary Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 114.

26. Fiona Hough, "Why Subtext Should Never Become Maintext in *Xena: Warrior Princess*," *Whoosh! The Journal of the International Association of Xena Studies*, no. 27 (December 1998), <http://www.whoosh.org/issue27/hough1.html>.

27. Alexander Doty, *Making Things Perfectly Queer* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 15.

28. Melissa Good's XWP fan fiction is archived at *The Bards Corner*, <http://www.ausxip.com/fanfic.html>.



FAN COMMUNITIES AND AFFECT

Until very recently, the general public's opinion of fans and fandom could be summed up with a dismissive imperative: "Get a life!" This was the punch line in the now infamous *Saturday Night Live* skit where William Shatner dismisses his convention audience of eager and costumed fans by declaring their fannish interests unimportant and not part of real life—unlike, presumably, watching the Super Bowl or going to the theatre or collecting stamps, all fannish activities in their own right. Yet fans of popular culture are often dismissed (Grossberg 1992), and media fans in particular are frequently represented as displaying unhealthy, obsessive, even pathologic behavior (Jensen 1992). The etymological connection between fan and fanatic does little to assuage that apprehension. The essays in this section examine the impetus to engage in fan activities in terms of affect—that is, emotion and impetus beyond thoughtful analysis and reflected knowledge (Gregg and Seigworth 2010). Fans and affect are analyzed in terms of the self, the other, and the community.

The three essays that follow foreground the fan fiction communities and their affective behavior. The first two are situated in the field of ethnographic studies of media fans, where an outsider enters a closed community to study it and learn its ways. Camille Bacon-Smith (1992) and Constance Penley (1997) focus, respectively, on their empirical research and textual analysis in the study of one specific community: the fan fiction community surrounding *Star Trek*. The third essay, by Nicholas Abercrombie and Brian Longhurst (1998), differs thematically and methodologically as the authors attempt to quantify and taxonomize different types of audienceship.

Affective Psychology of the Self

Camille Bacon-Smith's 1992 *Enterprising Women* was published at the same time as Henry Jenkins's *Textual Poachers* and covered the same community: *Star Trek* fan fiction/zine fandom. However, the two studies fundamentally differ in their approach and reception. Jenkins, in his introduction, self-identifies as a fan, but Bacon-Smith maintains her role of outside observer, the traditional ethnographic positioning whose validity was being questioned, however, within the anthropology community (Clifford and Marcus 1986; Geertz 1988). Fan reception differed in that the community members embraced Jenkins's strategically positive portrayal, which worked against previous academic and journalistic portrayals of fans as alarmingly excessive. However, fans were less welcoming to Bacon-Smith's book; in particular, her theory of fan fiction as therapeutic felt intrusive and incorrect to many fans. Looking back at these texts and others published in the 1990s, it is remarkable that scholars thought that they had to explain their stance in relation to the text, just as it is remarkable that someone could present herself as a disinterested outsider looking in, without affecting the community she engages.

In chapter 4 of *Enterprising Women*, "Training New Members," the author-researcher takes the reader with her on a voyage as she is initiated into the world of face-to-face *Star Trek* fan fiction fandom. This is the world described in detail by Verba ([1996] 2003) and Lichtenberg, Marshak, and Winston (1975), but Bacon-Smith offers an outsider's account of how the community welcomes new members, and she analyzes the internal hierarchies that are revealed over time. This procedural narrative provides a present sense of how fandom functioned before the Internet, when most encounters were in

person and were mediated by someone in the know. The layers of knowledge and intimacy that Bacon-Smith describes are important; in fact, her work resembles other ethnographic studies such as Janice Radway's (1984) study of female romance readers in its emphasis on the female community and the shared interpretations they create.

In the excerpt included here, Bacon-Smith showcases an important fan fiction genre, the Mary Sue, and discusses its history and its importance to the community. The Mary Sue is a genre of fan fiction story featuring a young, attractive central female heroine who is exceptional in every respect. It is the ultimate self-insertion: in the Mary Sue, the author projects herself into her fandom's world, where, beloved by all, she gets to interact with all her favorite characters and save the day. Bacon-Smith discusses the prevalence of the genre and readers' condescension toward it, attempting to psychologically explain the appeal of Mary Sue stories. She concludes that the Mary Sue represents an internalized model of the ideal woman in U.S. patriarchal culture, and that the community's hatred of Mary Sue indicates that media fandom is trying to overcome traditional gender roles.

Instead of creating a Mary Sue self-insertion character, fan writers might co-opt existing female characters. Bacon-Smith's analysis of this writing strategy concludes that the character's sexuality becomes a concern rather than a reward, especially when faced with the male as alien in the form of Spock and *pon farr*, the Vulcan mating frenzy. The narratives often resort to romance tropes and emphasize, rather than confront, forms of traditional femininity. Bacon-Smith argues that one of the biggest problems in writing well-rounded and interesting women characters is the lack of inspiring source characters; it is also hard not to fall into traditional gender stereotypes. For female fan writers, women characters may be too similar for comfort when trying to write one's self.

Affective Psychology of the Other

Contrasting with Bacon-Smith's analysis of the affective female self as written through the (gendered, romantic, stereotypical) female body is Constance Penley's *NASA/Trek* (1997), a discussion of science and technology in terms of gender and popular culture, which moves the focus from the same to the other: the male body. In a discussion of Kirk/Spock (K/S) slash fandom excerpted from the chapter "Future Men," Penley summarizes the usual

explanations of why slash writers prefer male bodies: the absence of interesting and well-rounded female characters, the difficulties of writing female characters for women hyperaware of and steeped in patriarchal culture, and a simultaneous attempt at writing realistic men, even if they are placed in the far future. Unlike Lamb and Veith's (1986) essay elsewhere in this volume, Penley argues that the men slashed by K/Sers are not projected women but real—if feminist—men. Yet not just the minds of men are reshaped; their bodies are too. New erogenous zones, strange sexual organs, the capacity to carry children—these men often can, and will, go through traditional female bodily experiences.

This attempt to reshape the male body and mind is not an individual wish fulfillment, however, but rather a cultural collective feminist enterprise. Penley argues that by situating domesticity in outer space, slash writers collapse the separation of traditional spheres. Invoking Leslie Fiedler (1960), she uses the “male friendship on the frontier” model, but she moves beyond gender to look at the race discourses involved. She points out how Trekkers—even with their self-proclaimed ethos of tolerance—are often hostile toward slash writers, and she connects this hostility to the homophobia and racism that K/S stories confront. Race remains a little-mentioned topic in fan studies, with a few exceptions (Derecho 2008; Gatson and Reid 2011), although race in science fiction (including race in *Star Trek* in particular) has been better explored, with analyses that note that contemporary racial concerns may be displaced into the future and onto an alien body to make it more palatable to the audience (Kilgore 2003; Roberts 2006). By connecting individual stories and the community of slashers with the feminist movement in general, Penley makes a larger claim about feminism and its use of and engagement with technology. In this she precedes other work that observes the fan fiction community and its feminist investments (Pugh 2005).

Affective Sociology of the Community

Nicholas Abercrombie and Brian Longhurst, in “Fans and Enthusiasts,” from *Audiences* (1998), look at the different stages of audience studies across a variety of disciplines. In this and in its sociological background, it differs from the rest of the texts in this volume. Indeed, Schimmel, Harrington, and Bielby (2007) identify Abercrombie and Longhurst's book as one of the texts where sports studies and pop culture studies have mutually influenced one

another. Abercrombie and Longhurst classify audiences into three groups—fans, cultists, and enthusiasts—to distinguish various forms and affective intensities of fan engagement. Although their categories were used to some degree in fan and cult studies, especially among British academics (Jones and Lawrence 2000; Hills 2002), Abercrombie and Longhurst did not succeed in redefining scholarly terminology. They indicate that there are indeed different aspects to what needs to be considered in terms of intensity and investment, such as the focus on the show itself versus material based on it (including unauthorized paratexts such as fan fiction and producer-created transmedial texts such as Webisodes), as well as the level of community interaction central to media engagement. They extend the continuum of passive to active by adding to both ends: mere consumers and what they call petty producers. The move from enthusiast to producer is of special interest because they return to the capitalist economy that other scholars used to separate, not link, producers and consumers (Jenkins 1992). Abercrombie and Longhurst here anticipate Henry Jenkins's (2004, 2008) argument of a model of increased media convergence.

The move of modern culture producers to creating transmedial texts, thus turning a property into a franchise by creating a variety of texts and interfaces for engagement—message boards, Webisodes, online extras, tie-in novels, games, contests—indicates the shift of producers' thought regarding fans. Fans have moved from being ignored or merely tolerated by producers to being important and sought after. Many TV shows now cater to an engaged, active fan base, and as a result, the formerly clear lines between pro and amateur works, industry and fan production, are now fuzzier than they have ever been (Jenkins, Ford, and Green 2012; Johnson 2013). With producers seeking out fans, the emphasis on fan culture as resistance, which pervaded fan studies research particularly in the 1980s and 1990s, gets lost, and it is Abercrombie and Longhurst who clearly articulate their own challenge to this cultural studies approach. Although they discuss the various modes of audience identification, they move away from what they perceive to be the limiting binary of the incorporation/resistance paradigm (Hall 1980) and instead suggest what they call the spectacle/performance paradigm. Audiences become part of the media spectacle, the difference between performing and viewing becomes diffused, and the clear commitment to an anticapitalist frame and inclination disappears (Booth 2010).

Scholarly Approaches to Affect and Audience

No single theory or approach has been able to comprehensively discuss all fans in terms of community and affect; rather, certain disciplines tend to discuss certain sorts of affective fans. Music and movie star fandoms, for example, tend to be mostly covered in celebrity studies; the audience for TV and popular culture is the primary domain of fan studies, which turns an ethnographic lens on active audiences; and sports fandom has been the principal topic within psychological and sociological approaches to fan cultures—and, like fan studies, sports studies addresses audiences known for their unruliness and passion (Guttman 1986; Branscombe and Wann 1992; Gantz and Wenner 1995; Wann et al. 2001; Horne 2006). Some scholars look at the role of affect within a particular community. C. Lee Harrington and Denise Bielby's study *Soap Fans* (1995), for example, offers an early focused analysis of the effects that a specific fan engagement has on the entity of fans' emotional lives. Other scholars attempt to throw a wide net, encompassing discussions of various sorts of fandoms in an attempt to create a larger context. Matt Hills's *Fan Cultures* (2002) and Cornel Sandvoss's *Fans* (2005a) focus on media fans but address other fan behaviors as well, thus showing the broad applicability of a fan studies approach; and Abercrombie and Longhurst (1998) discuss fans as they theorize all forms of audiences in their sociological-theoretical approach, as the excerpt in this volume shows. Affect studies may have much to offer fan studies, but its contributions to media and cultural theory are still too new to have penetrated fan studies scholarship successfully (Ahmed 2004; Brennan 2004; Gregg and Seigworth 2010). All these studies attempt to analyze the impetus that leads someone to an (extreme) affective engagement with a text—someone whose engagement seems so all-consuming that “Get a life!” seems, to an outsider, to be an appropriate response.

Early scholarship on audiences focused on the culture industry's indoctrination of audiences (Merton 1946; Horkheimer and Adorno [1947] 1993; Katz and Lazarsfeld 1955), a stance that gave way to a discussion of the power differentials between consumers and producers. Just as scholarship has seen a reconsideration of the consumer-producer relationship, the sociological approach has caused scholars to rethink their research approach. Media fandoms tend to be studied in film, television, and new media studies departments and in the humanities, disciplines that often privilege a qualitative approach;

studies of sports fandoms, in contrast, use quantitative approaches (Schimmel, Harrington, and Bielby 2007). However, many scholars are now attempting to bridge this methodological gap (Rowe 1995; Chung 2003; Crawford 2004; Gantz et al. 2006). The study of audience responses, including a media text's emotional affect, is an important aspect of fan studies, but fan scholars are often less interested in actual fan psychology than they are in fan responses. By shifting attention from fandom-specific groups to audiences considered more generally, scholars hope to gain insight into larger, culture-scale behaviors, even as analyses of these smaller groups serve as case studies to assess the applicability of large-scale theories.

Most recently, the focus has begun to shift from a sole focus on positive affect to one that includes negative responses as well. Jonathan Gray's 2003 essay on antifans and nonfans was the first in a line of investigations that all share an interest in audience responses that are simultaneously fannish in intensity yet negative in content (Gray 2005; Click 2007; Johnson 2007; Mittell forthcoming). This exploration of antifans is especially fertile in the wake of the *Twilight* franchise's enormous success and the consequent criticism from within and without the fan community (Scott 2010; Sheffield and Merlo 2010; Pinkowitz 2011; Gilbert 2012). There have always been critics of popular media, and TV shows in particular. Yet the study of specific fannish behaviors that nevertheless focus on negative rather than positive affect, all the while sharing information and emotional responses and creating communities not unlike those of fans, is an interesting development. As focus on affect continues to grow, so too will the analysis of the entire range of audience responses and emotions, negative and positive alike.

Training New Members

CAMILLE BACON-SMITH

The Fanzines

At Shore Leave, Judy Segal led me through the fanzine rooms. In 1983 there were four parlor rooms filled with the fanzines for sale. She guided me to the more general work, and I bought fanzines from Roberta Rogow, who specializes in, among other things, fanzines for new writers; from Johanna Cantor, an articulate feminist; and from others, while eschewing some of the more controversial genres. This is typical for new members brought into the community. Mentors, particularly for complete neophytes like myself, are often more traditional members of the community and act as gatekeepers. They lead the new member to the art and literature that either requires minimal decoding for an outsider, or that will not shock the sensibilities of a reader who has not yet learned to decode the messages embedded in the community's product. Judy mentioned the hurt-comfort genre as one she found personally troubling; she dismissed the relatively new homoerotic fiction.

We met Lois Welling and Judith Gran outside the fanzine rooms, and here I was introduced to one of the most widespread practices in fandom—"talking story." Talking story is literally verbal narrative of the community's fiction. The story so "talked" may be one the talker has written, or plans to write, or one that she has read and particularly liked. Fans likewise talk the episodes of their favorite source products—narrating orally the episodes for fans who may have missed them, or to attract new fans to a particular source product. At Shore Leave, Lois talked her novella, *The Displaced*.

In my identity as a researcher Lois and Judith told me what it means to write these stories: how writing stories works out real-life problems and

concerns about the life the writer leads both inside and outside of the fan community, and how writing is a form of reaching out to others, of making contact. As someone perceived to be an initiate, however, I am led only into those areas of the literature for which I am deemed to be prepared, primarily those stories that deal with women sharing adventures and relationships with the characters of *Star Trek*.¹

Here I began my study of the troubled and troubling history of these genres.

Re-creating the Adolescent Self: Mary Sue

Writing about women would seem to be the natural project of a women's community, but in fact the set of genres dealing with women have had a troubled history, and none more so than "Mary Sue."

Mary Sue is the youngest officer ever to serve on the starship *Enterprise*. She is a teenager, tall and slim, with clear skin and straight teeth. If she is not blond, Mary Sue is half Vulcan, her ears delicately pointed. But Mary Sue is not just another pretty face. She is usually highly educated, with degrees from universities throughout the known universe in all fields of technical and cultural studies (or an equivalent head of her class in Starfleet Academy). She can mend the *Enterprise* with a hairpin, save the lives of the crew through wit, courage, and, occasionally, the sacrifice of her virtue. If the formula is strictly followed, Lieutenant Mary Sue dies in the last paragraph of the story, leaving behind a grieving but safe crew and ship.²

Mary Sue is also the most universally denigrated genre in the entire canon of fan fiction. I first encountered the genre by reputation, because although fanzine editors no longer will publish stories about her, the controversy over her continues vigorously to this day in both the fanzines and in group discussions. Paula Smith coined the term in a brief version of the formula exaggerated for humor.³ Her story, "A Trekkie's Tale," first appeared in 1974 in an issue of the fanzine *Menagerie*. In 1980, Johanna Cantor used the story with permission of the author to demonstrate the genre characteristics as part of a debate on the Mary Sue controversy in *Archives V*.⁴ Here in its entirety is the story that coined the term "Mary Sue":

"Gee, golly, gosh, gloriosky," thought Mary Sue as she stepped on the bridge of the *Enterprise*. "Here I am, the youngest Lieutenant in the fleet—only fifteen and half years old." Captain Kirk came up to her.

"Oh, Lieutenant, I love you madly. Will you come to bed with me?"

"Captain! I am not that kind of girl!"

"You're right, and I respect you for it. Here, take over the ship for a minute while I go for some coffee for us."

Mr. Spock came onto the bridge. "What are you doing in the command seat, Lieutenant?"

"The Captain told me to."

"Flawlessly logical. I admire your mind."

Captain Kirk, Mr. Spock, Dr. McCoy, and Mr. Scott beamed down with Lt. Mary Sue to Rigel XXXVII. They were attacked by green androids and thrown into prison. In a moment of weakness Lt. Mary Sue revealed to Mr. Spock that she too was half Vulcan. Recovering quickly, she sprung the lock with her hairpin and they all got away back to the ship.

But back on board, Dr. McCoy and Lt. Mary Sue found out that the men who had beamed down were seriously stricken by the jumping cold robbies, Mary Sue less so. While the four officers languished in Sick Bay, Lt. Mary Sue ran the ship, and ran it so well she received the Nobel Peace Prize, the Vulcan Order of Gallantry and the Tralfamadorian Order of Good Guyhood.

However the disease finally got to her and she fell fatally ill. In the sick bay as she breathed her last, she was surrounded by Captain Kirk, Mr. Spock, Dr. McCoy, and Mr. Scott all weeping unashamedly at the loss of her beautiful youth and youthful beauty, intelligence, capability and all around niceness. Even to this day her birthday is a national holiday of the Enterprise.⁵

In her 1980 commentary that accompanied the reprint of "A Trekkie's Tale," Smith explained that her intent was never

... to put down all stories about aspiring females ... my original idea ... [Paula Smith's ellipses] was to parody the glut of [incredible] stories that existed in 1973 and 1974 ... one memorable one has the heroine dying and resurrecting herself (hence, *incredible* adventures).⁶

Edith Cantor's response to "The Trekkie's Tale," and to Smith's comments about the term, describes her experience as an editor with neophyte fanwriters:

"That's Mary Sue?"

This neo[phyte fan] friend was absolutely astonished, and understand-

ably so. *The Mary Sue* story runs ten paragraphs. But in terms of their impact on those they affect, those words [Mary Sue] have got to rank right up there with the Selective Service Act.

"I don't know if I ought to be sending this to you," a neo described her story in 1978. "I'm afraid it's a Mary Sue. Only I don't know what that is."

"I know you can't publish this," wrote another neo in 1979, "because it's a Mary Sue. But if you wouldn't mind reading it anyway, I'd appreciate it . . ."

. . . I started Trekwriting with a Mary Sue (though I had the self-protective smarts to call my character "Uhura," which is acceptable to the self-styled guardians determined to purge Treklit of all traces of the unfortunate adolescent). So have many other Trekwriters—in fact I would propose that just as every dog is allowed one bite, so every Trekwriter should be allowed one Mary Sue. Said story should not necessarily be published (though we publish other stories whose plot/characterization have been done before), but they should be given a sympathetic reading and critique, and perhaps returned to the author with the explanation that she is following a too-well-beaten path, with the encouragement to turn her interests to other stories.⁷

Other fans have noted that James Kirk is himself a Mary Sue, because he represents similarly exaggerated characteristics of strength, intelligence, charm, and adventurousness. They note that the soubriquet "Mary Sue" may be a self-imposed sexism—she can't do that, she's a girl.

In spite of the controversy, and perhaps at the root of it, most fans will readily admit to having written at least one Mary Sue story. Like Cantor, Jacqueline Lichtenberg claims there is a Mary Sue in all women. Usually it is the first story a fan writes, often before she knows about the literature or its forms. Ann Pinzow described her own first story, and the ambivalence that many fans feel about sharing them:

Somebody said, "that's a Mary Sue story." My emotions came into it . . . you're putting your heart on your sleeve. If I were to say this person is Ann . . . I couldn't show my face. I mean I'm no better or worse than anybody else, but I have my secrets too. But I could say "this is Mary Sue." I know that Mary Sue is Ann.⁸

Judith Gran analyzed the attraction that draws Mary Sue writers:

I think [Mary Sue] is a way people build an alter ego, an ideal image of themselves to make connections with characters who they'd like to love, not just sexually. You admire the character, you want to reach out to Mr. Spock and in the process you get in touch with yourself.⁹

Gran continued with the observation that the real danger with Mary Sue stories may arise when the writer does not pass on to other forms. Mary Sue, as we have seen, represents the intellectual woman's ideal of perfection: she is young and desirable, competent and moral. Her intellectual and physical attributes not only meet the writer's standards for the perfect woman, but the people she admires appreciate her value as well.

Not all writers speak about Mary Sue with such compassion, however. Some, like Roberta Rogow, have less patience with the feminine superteen, even when they have been her perpetrators:

My first fan story was terrible, and was rejected, and I tore it up and I hope I never do it again because it is the typical Mary Sue broken-hearted Kirk story.¹⁰

Nor are commercially published *Star Trek* novels immune to the controversy. During an interview conducted at the 1986 World Science Fiction Convention, I asked "Why do pros write—[is it] the same reason fans write?" The author of a commercially published *Star Trek* novel who wished to remain anonymous answered this way about her own book:

In some cases I won't say that's true, but oh, dear, just say that an unnamed author admitted to having written a Mary Sue. Because, in fact that book I just signed is just a classic, a classic Mary Sue. When I read your article¹¹ I just cracked up, because she [the female hero] was fitting all the criteria.¹²

Ann Crispin, writer of two commercially published *Star Trek* novels, has been vocal in defense of the commercial novel of another writer, Diane Duane's *Wounded Sky*.¹³ In Duane's novel, the heroine who saves the ship, crew, and universe is a brilliant crystal spider, a mathematician, and female. She does indeed die, or at least pass into an alternate existence at the end of the book, but not before passing her knowledge and consciousness along in the crystal egg she spins and leaves in the care of the captain. In the final pages of the book, the egg hatches, and the new spider emerges with the abilities, capacities, and memories of her mother.

In the letterzine *Interstat*, Duane had been accused of producing a Mary Sue in the person of K't'lk, the glass spider. Crispin, joining the Mary Sue debate in that letterzine, responded:

Please quit classifying many *Star Trek* stories in terms of Mary Sue and non-Mary Sue! People level accusations of Mary Sue at the most unlikely subjects nowadays—including glass spiders—Seems to me this is going a bit far, since for me at least, the term “Mary Sue” constitutes a put-down, implying that the character so summarily dismissed is not a true character, no matter how well drawn, what sex, species, or degree of individuality.¹⁴

While the applicability of the soubriquet to the self-renewing glass spider in Duane's novel may be problematic, the stories that most nearly fit the description of Mary Sue in her “pure” form can be found in the *Star Trek* section of any bookstore. In the novel *Dreadnought*, by Diane Carey,¹⁵ Mary Sue is called Piper. During her Kobayashi Maru test, a practical exercise in the no-win scenario. . . . Piper (people on her planet only have one name) beats the test, and brings down most of the training center's computers, with an ingenious maneuver she picked up reading girls' adventure books. While her astounded instructors tell her she is the first person ever to beat the test honestly (Captain Kirk cheated), she apologizes for the havoc she has wreaked with the computers. Captain Kirk observes the test and commandeers the cadet for his crew. On her first day as a crew member of the *Enterprise* she is called to the bridge because a hijacked prototype dreadnought is signaling the *Enterprise* with her biocode. From her first meeting with Captain Kirk, Piper feels a “subliminal connection” with the captain, who, she later says, “in some previous life had been my private Aristotle.”¹⁶

The cadet, now lieutenant, becomes the pivot on which turns a plan by the hijackers to thwart a military coup. In the process of uncovering the coup, Piper must free a captive Kirk. She creates a diversion by leading three companions in a bunny-hop down the hallway past his guards, who are easily overpowered in their bemused state. At the story's climax, Piper must take command of the dreadnought to overcome the military conspirators in combat without, however, killing them. (Captain Kirk has no such qualms, and blows the traitors to smithereens.) Piper rejects command until it is thrust upon her, but she says of her young (male) Vulcan companion, “The respect that mellowed his face was empowering.”

In the final chapter of the book, and after only a day or two of active service, Piper is promoted to lieutenant commander and becomes the “youngest recipient of the Federation’s second highest award,” for helping to “Save Star Fleet as we know it, Commander, with your ingenuity.”¹⁷ After the award ceremony, she makes a date with Captain Kirk for a sailing weekend.

At least in the eighties, and in commercial publication, Mary Sue survives to see the end of the book, although in J. M. Dillard’s *Demons*,¹⁸ the Mary Sue character Anitra Lantry nearly dies before her love interest, Dr. McCoy, discovers a cure to parasitic psychic plague that is killing the inhabitants of the planet Vulcan.

. . . The Mary Sue story taps into deep emotional sources in the writer. New fans almost invariably stumble upon the genre as their first writing effort, often before they know that a community exists at all, and this is as true for the writers of commercially published Mary Sue novels as it is for their amateur counterparts. J. M. Dillard, the author of *Demons* mentioned above, is a case in point. According to Dillard,

I watched the series until they cancelled it, I watched all the reruns. . . . I’d always wanted to sit down and write something, and when I saw the Pocket novels coming out, I said, well, huh! I know Trek better, or at least as well as somebody else, I wonder if I could get away with it, so I sat down and I wrote the novel. . . . I just wrote my little episode to thrill my Trekkie heart and sent it off. But I didn’t know about the fan literature.¹⁹

Clearly a form so universally arrived at among female science fiction and action-adventure fans meets emotional needs that are not satisfied with the more intellectualized approaches of satire or didacticism. At the same time, Mary Sue produces deep feelings of discomfort in her readers in the fan community. Mary Sue stories are central to the painful experience of a female fan’s adolescence.

Fans often recount the scorn they experience for their “masculine” interest in science fiction and action-adventure. These readers grew up in a period during which active, even aggressive, behavior was acceptable for prepubescent girls who were expected to put away their grubby corduroys and baseballs, their books that chronicled the male fantasies of exploration and adventure, when they entered adolescence. With the teen years, girls were expected to turn to makeup, curlers, and dresses with stockings and high-heeled shoes to attract the attention of boys who were winning acclaim on the football fields and basketball courts of their local high schools.

The teenaged girl had to be not just seductive but nonthreatening; she could not challenge the supremacy of the male on the playing field or in the classroom. Her marks could be better than his, but she was expected to mask her verbal performance with a variety of techniques to assure the men around her that she was an irrational, flighty creature in spite of her misleadingly superior performance in any particular situation.

Many women in fandom, however, did not make this transition. Some, like Devra Langsam, simply were not built for the model: five feet ten inches tall when she was thirteen, Langsam towered over both the smaller girls and the more slowly developing boys in school. Other fan women felt set apart because they were heavier than the petite ideal, or because they needed thick glasses that sometimes distorted the appearance of their eyes while they symbolically marked the wearer not only as too intelligent, but also as too "serious." Most of the women in fandom, including members of the first group who found themselves outsiders by virtue of their physical makeup, were unwilling or incapable of masking their intelligence. Some community members who did succeed on male terms found themselves stranded in an alien culture whose values they did not share.

For intelligent women struggling with their culturally anomalous identities, Mary Sue combines the characteristics of active agent with the culturally approved traits of beauty, sacrifice, and self-effacement, which magic recipe wins her the love of the hero. As described earlier, when *Dreadnought's* Piper becomes the first cadet to beat the no-win Kobayashi Maru test without cheating, she apologizes for the effect her maneuver has on the base computers. Later, when she has uncovered a plot to overthrow the Federation and has organized an effort to thwart it, she synthesizes the available data aloud. This conversation then occurs with her Vulcan companion Sarda:

SARDA: Humans can certainly be dithyrambic at times.

PIPER: I was just trying to be logical.

SARDA: Please avoid such attempts in the future.

PIPER: I'll try to stick to intuition.

SARDA: It seems more within your grasp.

PIPER: I'll remember.²⁰

At the end of the book she receives her real reward: not her medal of valor, but her date with the captain (the *Enterprise* here standing in for the football or basketball team).

Nor is Dillard's Anitra Lantry immune to the syndrome. Dr. McCoy reads humorously from her psych profile that Lantry is: "... Intelligent, creative, stubborn, sensitive, telepathic, stubborn, optimistic ... did I say stubborn?"²¹ (After a brief bit of repartee they kiss.) Earlier, Scotty tells the captain, "The woman's a phenomenon. She never asked a single question ... and she did the job [overhauled the engines] exactly as I woulda done it myself."²² But she uses her skills off-duty to wire Captain Kirk's shower for sound (he sings off-key, we learn). Traditionally for the genre, Lantry is loved and admired by one and all: she is respected by Scott and the captain, forms a telepathic link with Spock, and has a romantic relationship with Dr. McCoy. When they believe she is dead, McCoy weeps but through the link, Spock has an awareness of her that tells him she still lives.²³

For the fan woman of any age, her Mary Sue story is her attempt, if only in print, to experience that rite of passage from the active child to the passive woman who sacrifices her selfhood to win the prince. Mary Sue must be an adolescent, behaviorally if not absolutely chronologically, because she represents a transition in roles and identity specific to that period in a woman's life. The fan versions of Mary Sue often expressed a cultural truth of their time, however: to make the transition from child to woman, the active agent within her had to die. Mary Sue writers traditionally kill the active self with their alter-ego character at the end of their stories. First-time writers influenced by the women's movement seldom revised the importance of subterfuge in their characters but, like Carey and Dillard, raised the expectation that subterfuge would save the active agent from an untimely demise.

If we ask the question "Who is served by the woman's internalization of this model," we can easily see that Mary Sue is a fantasy of the perfect woman created within the masculine American culture. Men are served by Mary Sue, who ideally minimizes her own value while applying her skills, and even offering her life, for the continued safety and ease of men. Even in her superiority Mary Sue must efface her talents with giggles and sophomoric humor. She must deny that her solutions to problems are the result of a valid way of thinking, modestly chalking up successes to intuition, a term that often seems akin to Joan of Arc's voices. Women who come to fandom have usually internalized this model because it is the best of the options masculine culture offers them: they may be sexual, they may be precocious children, or they may fade into social nonpresence.

Some writers produce version after version of the Mary Sue story as they struggle to bind their personalities and identities to the cultural model of the ideal woman represented by Mary Sue. Others grow to resent her as they did her real-life counterparts in their own adolescences. The writer, become reader, recognizes Mary Sue's childish behavior as a coping mechanism she has used herself or observed in her friends to mask the threat their own intelligence and competence poses to men. Women rely on men to become husbands and to hire or promote them in the workplace, and the women in media fandom are painfully aware that those men need only ignore them to remove that threat.

In fandom, however, members strive to leave the camouflage behind, and they discourage it in their writing as they strive to create new models in their art. Women fan editors do not publish Mary Sue stories; they go to great lengths to educate their readers to look beyond the adolescent stereotype for their female heroes. I had to turn to the commercially published novels to find examples of the form as it is defined within the fan community.

Marriage and the Alien Male: Lay-Spock

Women in the fan community have rejected Mary Sue, the cultural role of precocious child, and in many cases have replaced her with the matriarch in the genre referred to as "lay" stories, so named because the alter-ego heroine develops a sexual relationship with the hero. Her adventures are an adjunct to his world; her demeanor is one of matriarchal dignity outside of the bedroom and politically correct sensuality within it. While a "lay" story can be written around any one of the characters, by far the most frequently written is the "lay Spock," with other Vulcans, and in particular Sarek, Spock's father, a close second. When pressed for an explanation for this fascination with the alien, informants reply only that Spock, or Sarek, or Vulcans in general are sexy, interesting, or handsome, that it is exciting to imagine how sex might be in an alien culture. A look at the literature itself, however, reveals deeper concerns.

Jean Lorrah's *Night of the Twin Moons*²⁴ series takes us through the marriage of Amanda and Sarek, Spock's parents, from their meeting into later life. The marriage is one of love and mutuality, with Amanda sharing in Sarek's work as well as his private life. In the story "The Time of Mating," however, Sarek enters his first *pon farr*, the male Vulcan's mating frenzy.

Every seventh year the male spends a number of days—in this story it is ten days, but the number varies from fan story to fan story—in a “blood fever” of lust in which he must either copulate mindlessly and almost continuously with his mate or die. Pon farr is so shameful, and painful, to the Vulcans that they never speak of it, but Amanda teaches Sarek to enjoy the experience, and enjoys it herself, as she shares pon farr with him through the mind meld, or telepathic contact of married Vulcans. Their experience encourages another married Vulcan couple to relax and enjoy their pon farr as well.

Sex, as defined within the canon of the episodic television series, is an intrusion into the world of work and male companionship. In pon farr as described in the *Star Trek* series episode “Amok Time,” sexuality is embarrassing for Vulcan males: uncontrollable, primarily physical, and frightening. During pon farr, a stimulated Vulcan will kill if thwarted in his pursuit of sexual release with the partner to whom he was bound in childhood. He is not perceived as a considerate sexual partner.

In Jean Lorrah’s stories, and those of other lay-Spock writers, however, male emotions are revealed, controlled but available to the partner who manages her husband’s more uncontrollable physical urges. Amanda, as the ideal wife in the ideal family, teaches Sarek and other Vulcans who fall within her influence how to accept their physical and emotional natures within a shared and caring relationship between equals who complete each other rather than subordinate one to the other.

For many women pon farr acts as a symbol for their perception of male sexuality. American men, like Vulcans, are trained not to express their feelings. The stories teach their readers how to approach the unpredictability of sexual encounters with human men, who may seem just as outwardly controlled and inwardly unpredictable as their Vulcan counterparts. Lorrah’s stories are written in a didactic mode as relationship education for adolescents, and for women at any age who have trouble making sense of their own relationships. For many of the writers, whether they use pon farr as a device for beginning a sexual relationship or as an excuse to show that even obligatory sex can be fun in the right frame of mind, the “alien” is the human male, whose motives and behavior may seem random and unpredictable.

Writing is a risky business, and fanwriters use a variety of distancing devices to protect themselves from the risk of personal exposure in their writing. . . . In Mary Sue stories, the heroine’s age, and even her giftedness, afford the adult writer a buffer between her inner world and her work. The

risk is correspondingly greater when the writer creates an adult and fully sexual woman in a less than ideal relationship. Not only does the writer reveal herself to others, she often discovers herself as well. When Judith Gran explained about Mary Sue, "You want to reach out to Mr. Spock and in the process you get in touch with yourself,"²⁵ Lois Welling agreed:

I know that's true for me. I mean Susan [her character in *The Displaced*²⁶] was. I worked a lot of my problems out with writing her. I know I did. And I think that's why I don't want to do very much with her any more. It's because she served her purpose. She was a lot of fun, but she served her purpose and I don't need her anymore.²⁷

In *The Displaced*, Susan is a widowed thirty-four-year-old emergency room nurse from twentieth-century Chicago whose vacation is disrupted when twenty-second-century slavers hijack the airplane on which she is traveling. Because of her emergency room experience, her hijackers do not consign her to the mines with the other captives but assign her to the infirmary and the breeding farm. She and the two other female members of her breeding unit, a Romulan med-tech named Tha and an Andorian teenager driven insane by sexual abuse during her captivity, are awaiting the assignment of a male partner to their hut.

Into the dark and gloomy situation comes Mr. Spock, well into pan farr and captured on his way home to mate. Tha recognizes Spock as a Starfleet officer and as a Vulcan, a people known to respect all living things. The two women co-opt him for their breeding unit but discover to their dismay that a Vulcan given stimulants while in pan farr is not the considerate sexual partner they expected. After Spock returns to guilt-ridden awareness, the women begin to overcome their initial distrust, and gradually the group develops a mutually supportive family unit that grows to include their five children.

The women chose the Starfleet officer as their male partner because he was the most likely candidate to help them escape. In fact, Spock does escape, but not before Susan and he reveal the love that has grown out of the mutual respect between them. Even after he returns to rescue them, however, the couple's hardships are not over: Susan's child, conceived during Spock's last night on the slave planet, is born prematurely and dies after only a few days. In spite of their hardships, the couple form a firm and lasting marriage. Susan insists that Spock return to his position in Starfleet, and she returns to Vulcan with his parents to start a new life.

Clearly, the lay-Spock story is closely related to the Mary Sue story; at least some readers would include *The Displaced* in that genre. If we look more closely, however, certain distinctive characteristics begin to emerge. The female hero is not an adolescent but a mature adult woman who rejects traditional male explanations for her perceptions. When Tha, her Romulan companion, does not arrive home on schedule, she asks Spock for help:

“Spock, I can’t find Tha and I just know something is wrong.”

[Spock replies] “Susan, you do not know . . .”

“Don’t tell me what I know! Tha and I have had the same routine for over two years now and we always come back here together. If one of us can’t make it we let the other know. I’ve looked; she’s in none of her usual places. Come with me now, *please*.”²⁸

Unlike her Mary Sue counterpart, Susan does not permit her male companion to dismiss her knowledge as intuition. There is nothing “natural” or “instinctive” about it, and she tells him so forcefully. Holding onto the dignity of their thought processes is one of the hardest battles many women fight in the workplace and even at home, and Susan chooses mature self-assertion rather than capitulation to the identity of child that masculine culture tries to impose upon her. She neither giggles nor bunny hops, and her humor expresses rather than defuses her aggression. When asked how she came by a scar on her face, Susan explains: “. . . Fraunt [the evil overseer] asked me if we had another male yet. I said no, we were waiting for another Vulcan. Then he said, oh, you like those pointed ears, huh? All I said was that they beat the hell out of pointed heads, and he hit me.”²⁹ Susan knows she will suffer for the remark, but it is her only way to strike back and she will not give it up.

The most obvious and striking difference between the lay-Spock and the Mary Sue, of course, is the open expression of satisfied sexual desire and the link between sexual satisfaction and trust established in the stories.

Before Spock escapes to bring help for his “family,” he and Susan recognize that their relationship has transcended the economic-survival structure imposed upon them by outsiders, and they come together for the first time out of choice rather than as breeders protecting the viability of the group:

She had seen him [Spock] unclothed many times, but had always been determinedly impersonal, professional. . . . Now she took a deep slow

breath and reached out to run her hand slowly over his chest, down his lean hard muscled abdomen to his genitals, again marvelling at the slender tendrils located on either side of his penis. Usually coiled and concealed in the pubic hair, they were now unfurled and small ripples shuddered down their length. . . .

Sue remembered her first reaction to this ultimate proof of his alienness. It had been one of surprise. But he had taken her wide-eyed expression and forceful expletive to be negative, and no amount of talking would convince him otherwise. After that he had always been very careful to keep them coiled out of sight. She came to realize from some of the mental images that they were a normal part of Vulcan mating ritual. . . . That the tendrils were uncoiled now was an important sign of the depth of his feeling and trust. . . .³⁰

In *The Displaced*, sex is not the reward for properly attracting the attention of the desired male. Rather, sex represents a contractual necessity imposed by outside forces until the couple establish a trusting and loving relationship. By contrast, Mary Sue is an object lesson in subterfuge. She cannot form a sexual relationship of substance because her love interest is drawn to the image she projects rather than to the person she is. Where there is no risk—and dropping the subterfuge means risk—there can be no trust.

The distinction between the Mary Sue and the lay-Spock genres is a vital one. While many women in the community maintain the ideal of home and family as part of a woman's life, roughly 70 percent of them are unmarried. Those who are married must struggle with the threat a changing sense of self imposes upon their relationships. It is no coincidence that so many of the stories take place in a setting of slavery, often in situations that subject the protagonist to sexual exploitation, even rape. While many community members idealize the family, as we saw with the Lorrah story, some participants perceive traditional family life to be institutionally oppressive. In their writings they demonstrate that both the man and the woman must work within the family to overcome the oppression inflicted upon them both by society and by life.

In Barbara Wenk's *One Way Mirror*,³¹ Jenny, the heroine, again is a twentieth-century woman, this time a *Star Trek* fan captured to be a slave not in a backwater of the benign Federation, but in the mirror universe of her favorite *Star Trek* episode, "Mirror, Mirror." In the mirror universe, a cruel

empire counterparts the Federation, and women are valued for their expense more than for their contribution to society. Slair, the Vulcan third officer of the starship *Victory*, has been pressured to take a mistress from among the captives as an appropriate display of property, and he chooses Jenny out of spite because she seems the least likely to cause him trouble:

“Beautiful women can provide an officer with problems. I merely require a passably attractive female.” He eyed her speculatively, then continued, “You also appear to be of a calm temperament. I do not wish this arrangement to inconvenience me unduly.”³²

The heroine is not happy with her situation but realizes that a worse master or death are her alternatives if the Vulcan discards her. She consciously draws on the example of *The Thousand and One Nights* and holds her Vulcan master’s attention by telling him stories from *Star Trek* the television show, and about fandom and fan stories. Here Wenk mixes in a rich stew of insider humor: Gene Roddenberry is a renegade from the Imperial Empire, and the series episodes a “vicious distortion” of Empire politics. The idic, favored in jeans patches and costume jewelry as a symbol of universal tolerance, is “really” the family crest of Vulcan’s ruling dynasty overthrown by the Empire; wearing the idic is considered treason. Over the course of their relationship, the Vulcan is amused and outraged by the stories, and impressed with the spunk and determination of the human cast adrift in an alien universe. He begins to see her as companion rather than property, and she falls in love with him in spite of his continuing though less frequent abuse, which Wenk presents as mild compared to the treatment other women of Jenny’s station receive in similar circumstances.

Wenk’s *One Way Mirror* is a complex work. She begins with an epigram from Jean Cocteau: “Mirrors should reflect a little before throwing back images,” and on the first page, Jenny reflects on her situation: “Be careful what you wish for, Dad always says. You may get it.” Clearly the story that follows will be a warning to its readers to consider the implications of their fantasies. And yet, the story that plays out is similar to *The Displaced*. While the empire does not enslave the Vulcan people, that society does force the Vulcan Stair into a relationship with Jenny just as slavery forced Spock into a relationship with Susan in the foregoing story. The couples both have sex long before they establish the interpersonal trust that marks the shift in their relationship from temporary and outside-motivated to permanent and

inner-motivated. Unlike Susan, however, Jenny has no rescue, and her Slair is the harsh and sometimes brutal man his society has made him. She can never completely let go of the example of Scheherazade but must learn when to stand up for herself, and when doing so will cost her more than she can pay. At the very end of the story, Jenny, who has perceived herself as plain and unsophisticated, wishes she were like a woman she sees fleetingly, then realizes immediately that the other is herself, seen in a mirror.

The message in this story seems to be that a woman can learn to curb the more hostile impulses of a man and win a modicum of respect by standing up for herself and also by knowing when to back down. The mirror Vulcan does learn to love the heroine, or so one is given to assume, and his behavior gradually becomes more respectful, while Jenny grows in sophistication and understanding of the new culture of which she becomes a part. But the lesson here seems to be “make the most of even the worst situation in which one finds oneself.”³³

Differences of opinion are a part of fan life, and I have often met readers who disagreed vehemently with my interpretations of stories, while a sufficient number agreed to make me feel reasonably confident that I had, if not *the* interpretation, at least a reasonable one. My objection to *One Way Mirror*, that it encourages readers to stay in abusive relationships, however, is the one reading that has received no support in the fan community whatsoever. Fans often accuse me gently of taking the story too seriously. It is only play, they say, and the author does use the reflexive humor of the group, mixing fannish behavior with classic literature and the canon of *Star Trek* in a text that is broadly marked as “play” in spite of its romance novel form.³⁴

The play aspects of the text, however, are motivated by the reader’s insider knowledge of the series, of the formulaic nature of romance novels, and of the fan community itself. Fans see the character Jenny as a reflection of their own culture, and they enjoy her playful use of the series and the materials of their own community while they share with the author the sly literary allusions, and the fun of wildly mixing their genres. If the reader doesn’t know *Star Trek*, the community, the *Arabian Nights*, science fiction, romance novels, and the theory that they don’t mix, she may enjoy the story, but she won’t get the joke.

In correspondence the author herself emphasized the play aspect of the novel:

One Way Mirror is a sex/romance fantasy: it has the same relationship to actual male/female relationships that *Three Weeks* did to the Balkan Question and *The Sheik* did to the Mid-East Conflict. The whole point of a fantasy is its amusement value; the more jewels and gold lame, the better. (And surely every reader has noticed that *not once* does Slair ask Jenny to clean the cabin or pick up his socks; housework on the ISS Victory is apparently done by Helpful Elves.) There is no message in this story; in the immortal words of a Great Movie Mogul, "If you want to send a message, call Western Union."³⁵

As we will see later in this work, the challenge of mastering a form and playing with it may often motivate a fanwriter. Fans who have discussed *One Way Mirror* with me do give the work serious critical consideration, however, both for its subject matter and for its length—well over a hundred thousand words. Most consistently, readers object to my interpretation of the story because I imply that the heroine had a choice in her actions—escaping while planetside, for example. The fan women often explained to me that Jenny could not manipulate the situation for her benefit because she found herself in a culture whose rules she did not know and in which she had neither status of her own nor kin or friendship networks for her support. Her actions, I am told, must be seen as the best available in a bad situation. Above all, they remind me of the words with which the story begins: "Be careful what you wish for. . . . You may get it." To fans, *One Way Mirror* acts not as a model for living but as a cautionary tale of wishful thinking gone wrong, in which signals of playfulness deflect the risk of the serious message behind them.

Women in the Eighties

If members reserved their criticism of female characters for those who fit the Mary Sue stereotype, I would have expected to see many female characters develop in the fan fiction with the support of the community. In fact, Johanna Cantor's challenge posed in 1980,³⁶ "Why is it that in a group that is probably 90% female, we have so few stories about believable, competent, and identifiable-with women?" remains substantially unmet. The term Mary Sue seems to expand to encompass the characters women write to overcome that onus.

All the stories discussed above were in print when Cantor asked her question, and more had come into print by 1984, the time of the debate in *Interstat* described earlier in this chapter. And yet, participants at a panel discussion in January of 1990 noted with growing dismay that any female character created within the community is damned with the term Mary Sue.³⁷

At Clippercon in 1987, a panel of women who do not write female characters in their stories described similar experiences as the reason they write only about the male characters that appear in the source products themselves:

— . . . [e]very time I've tried to put a woman in any story I've ever written, everyone immediately says, this is a Mary Sue.

—The automatic reaction you are going to get is "that's a Mary Sue."³⁸

In her analysis, Johanna Cantor suggests an explanation for the lack of convincing women characters, and for the expanding usage of the term Mary Sue:

. . . Could it also be that we are afraid, as women, to put into our creations that touch of humanity for which read touch of self, that might make them a little too real? I think so. . . . "So what if it hurts, if it makes a good book," Lord Peter Wimsey decreed. (Granted, he wasn't the one who was going to write the book, read the reviews, and do the hurting.) We're not going to get rid of the term Mary Sue. . . . But we can be prepared to turn a resolutely deaf ear, as we work on what we want to work on.³⁹

I suspect that the matriarch stories we have discussed in the previous section suffer from too much of the self for the comfort of many fans. Whether expressing love in an idealized marriage as do Amanda and Sarek, overcoming adversity as do Susan and Spock, or finding space for mutual respect in a harsh and oppressive culture like Jenny and Slair, all of these female characters are realized in terms of their relationships to men. Their relationships are not incidental in the women's identity, but integral to them; whereas the achievements of the women in the stories may be their own, their status depends on their husbands. Even Cantor, who decries the lack of strong women, makes the status of her female hero T'Pan contingent upon that of Spock. In her story "Rendezvous," T'Pan has agreed to mate with Spock because he is in pon farr and has no bondmate. In exchange, both her family and Spock's have agreed that the child, if any, will belong to her house. Spock and T'Pan are drawn to each other, but T'Pan will not marry because that would cloud

the legal status of the child, and because she would have to travel with her husband in case he went into pon farr again. She agrees instead to a pledge that leaves Spock legally free and T'Pol his chattel:

As a chattel T'Pol could not vote, could not own property: she was a non-person. T'Pol brushed that aside. So long as she did not try to vote and avoided using other channels that might activate an inquiry, no one outside their immediate families need know.⁴⁰

As a corpus, these stories seem to say that a man's status depends on appearances and the hierarchy of his culture, but that a woman has no need of these trappings of success to recognize her self-worth. Competence and a relationship built on mutual respect are their own rewards.

Writing the Self

When women in fandom write about women they are talking to each other about themselves in the symbolic language of their literature. With their efforts they pass through stages of their own development as individuals, from the superteen Mary Sue who lingers in the consciousness even of middle-aged matrons who have steadfastly refused to let go of the active agent of their prepubescent years (or fantasies), to the matriarch struggling for dignity against a society that pressures the family into systems of oppression. Few of the stories about women seem to postulate institutional dignity or equal status for women, but in the fan fiction the fan women talk about their struggle for dignity in their relationships. And in amongst the stories of struggle, the reader finds the stray sentence, given little weight in any single story, but that repeated in story after story speaks of the small frustrations that build up into deep-seated resentments over time: "Sarek had never, ever, been one to turn away from her and fall asleep after making love . . ."⁴¹ or the many references to bathing and cleanliness that appear particularly in erotic stories from England and Australia.

While the stories about women do represent the struggle of some women in the community, that number seems to be very small. In a survey I conducted at More Eastly Con . . . which attracted a high concentration of fanzine readers, only 9 percent of respondents reported reading Mary Sue stories, and only 14 percent reported that they read lay-Spock stories. By contrast, 20 percent reported reading homoerotic fiction, and 24 percent enjoyed hurt-comfort.

Part of the reason so few stories about women are written or read by fan readers may take us back to the question of distance mentioned earlier in this chapter. Most of the stories that do feature women characters take place in the science fiction universes of *Star Trek* and *Blake's 7*. The different times and different cultures in which they play out stories of women's captivity and redemption offer writers a degree of distance from the situations they write. By contrast, contemporary dramas tie the writer to the here and now. The writer has little fictional distance from which she may imagine alternative ways of relating, and she is always drawn back to the recognition of the way things really are in the world in which she actually lives.

Notes

1. Camille Bacon-Smith, "The Mary Sue Genre in *Star Trek* Fan Fiction," *Folklore Women's Communication* (1984).
2. Personal correspondence with Paula Smith, September 27, 1990.
3. Paula Smith, "A Trekkie's Tale," reprinted in "Mary Sue: A Short Compendium," *Archives V* (Winter 1980), ed. Johanna Cantor, 34 (fanzine).
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid., 35.
6. Ibid.
7. Cantor, "Mary Sue: A Short Compendium."
8. Ann Pinzow, taped interview, Cockeysville, Md., July 1984.
9. Judith Gran, taped discussion, Cockeysville, Md., July 1984.
10. Roberta Rogow, taped interview, New York, September 1985.
11. The author was referring to my article "The Mary Sue Genre in *Star Trek* Fan Fiction," which circulated among writers in both the fan and commercial Trekwriting circles.
12. Taped interview, 1986; citation information withheld at request of informant.
13. Diane Duane, *The Wounded Sky* (New York: Pocket Books, 1983).
14. Ann Crispin, letter, *Interstat* (June 1984), ed. Teri Meyer (fanzine).
15. Diane Carey, *Dreadnought* (New York: Pocket Books, 1986).
16. Ibid., 167.
17. Ibid., 246.
18. J. M. Dillard, *Demons* (New York: Pocket Books, 1986).
19. M. Dillard, taped interview, Atlanta, September 1986.
20. Carey, *Dreadnought*, 139.
21. Dillard, *Demons*, 156. The ellipses are Dillard's.

22. Ibid., 63.
23. Ibid., 138–39.
24. Jean Lorrach, series published by the author from 1975 through the present and including the novel, *Night of the Twin Moons*, and three volumes of collected stories by Lorrach and others.
25. Gran, taped discussion, Cockeysville, Md., July 1984.
26. Lois Welling, *The Displaced* (Champaign, Ill.: self-published, 1978).
27. Welling, taped discussion (with Gran and others), Cockeysville, Md., July 1983.
28. Welling, *Displaced*, 92. Ellipses are Welling's.
29. Ibid., 118.
30. Ibid. First ellipses are Welling's.
31. Barbara Wenk, *One Way Mirror*, in *Masifurm D*, special supplement #2 (Brooklyn, N.Y.: Poison Pen Press, 1980).
32. Ibid., 8.
33. In personal correspondence with me dated September 26, 1990, Wenk adds her wry objection to this interpretation: "As for the matter of encouraging women to stay in abusive relationships I can only state, categorically and firmly, that I am utterly opposed to their so doing, and strongly urge any woman trapped in an abusive relationship on a starship with an alien nobleman to leave immediately and seek professional help."
34. Note in particular the "dark hero" aspect of the romantic male, as described in Janice Radway's *Reading the Romance* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984).
35. Personal correspondence from Barbara Wenk, September 1990.
36. Cantor, "Mary Sue: A Short Compendium," 35.
37. Reported by Judy Chien, who attended the panel discussion at Most Eastly Con, Newark, N.J., January 1990.
38. Taped panel discussion, Cockeysville, Md., March 1987.
39. Cantor, "Mary Sue: A Short Compendium," 34–35.
40. Johanna Cantor, "Rendezvous," *R & R XXII* (Bronx, N.Y.: Yeoman Press, 1985), 77 (fanzine).
41. Jean Lorrach, *Full Moon Rising* (Bronx, N.Y.: Yeoman Press, 1976), 64.

Fans and Enthusiasts

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Subculture

There is now an extensive literature on this topic (for summaries see Baldwin et al. 1998 and Brake 1985), much of which arose from consideration of “deviant” subcultures and the spectacular youth subcultures studied from Birmingham in the 1970s. These literatures have been subjected to an important critique by Fine and Kleinman in a discussion which will be incorporated into the argument being developed here.

Fine and Kleinman (1979) argue that the concept of subculture needs to be rethought within a symbolic interactionist framework. Their approach is critical of the sort of work associated with the Birmingham Centre which placed emphasis on the structural aspects of society in the determination of subcultures. Further, they argue that the concept of subculture had previously been used in a confused and unclear fashion. They identify four conceptual problems with this literature: first, concerning the relationship between subculture and subsociety; second, with respect to the empirical referent of the subculture; third, in the characterization of the subculture as a homogeneous and static system; and, finally, in the value orientation adopted in subcultural research.

With respect to the first point, they argue that because of the way in which they have been structurally defined “as aggregate of persons,” subcultures have often been treated as a subdivision of society, or as what they call a subsociety. However, in contemporary societies, which allow movement between different groups and which have a number of different belief systems, it is difficult to see subsociety and subculture as the same thing. As Fine and Kleinman explain:

Thus, all members of the age category 13–21 might, according to a “structural” conceptualization, be considered part of the youth subculture. However, it is clear that many of the persons within that age cohort do not share common cultural values and behaviors. (3)

On this basis, Fine and Kleinman argue that it is important to distinguish between subsocieties and subcultures.¹

Concerning the second issue, they argue that the concept of subculture is often used without a referent—“a clearly defined population which shares cultural knowledge” (4). Thus, as they explain:

Although researchers identify the subculture to which the group “belongs” (such as the delinquent subculture), they have no way of knowing the extent to which the cultures of the gangs overlap, the extent to which the particular gang examined is representative of all gangs in the population segment, and the degree of interrelatedness among the cultures of the gangs under study. (4)

The third point is more familiar in that Fine and Kleinman argue that the study of subcultures tends to treat them as if they were both homogeneous—more or less as if all members of the group were the same and all shared exactly the same beliefs and practices—and unchanging. In fact what should be kept in view is the fluidity of subcultures. Finally, they argue that through the selectivity of the way in which the subculture is discussed, the representation of it often becomes little more than a caricature. There is a tendency to focus on the central themes of the subculture, as in the work of Miller (1958) on deviant subcultures, at the expense of the complex interplay of different cultural aspects which may co-exist.

Fine and Kleinman argue that there is a better way to understand subcultures, proposing that “the conceptualization of the subculture construct within an interactionist framework will provide a more adequate account of subcultural variation, cultural change, and the diffusion of cultural elements” (8). Therefore, they maintain that their approach overcomes the problems of earlier approaches. They argue that subculture should be used to refer to an interacting group. On first sight this would seem to produce rather small subcultures. However, Fine and Kleinman argue that subcultures exist beyond immediate groups because of the way in which cultural patterns are diffused in contemporary societies. The network which results from the

diffusion of cultural elements is then the referent which they argued did not exist in most earlier writing. Subcultures start from group cultures:

Cultural forms are created through the individual or collective manipulation of symbols. From its point of creation, the cultural form is communicated to others, and diffused outward from the individual's own interaction partners. The transmission of culture is therefore a product of interaction. The diffusion may remain quite limited unless the information reaches wider audiences via the mass media. (9)

Fine and Kleinman identify four mechanisms by which communication can occur: first, individuals may be members of a number of different groups; second, there may be other interconnexions which do not involve group membership as such but which are based on "weak ties," casual conversations with acquaintances and so on; third, some individuals or groups perform what Fine and Kleinman refer to as structural roles, in linking groups that may not otherwise be in contact and providing cultural information (drug dealers, for example); and, fourth, there may be media diffusion, as when certain films or television programmes influence cultures in the wider sense. . . .

Fine and Kleinman also emphasize the need for analysis to concern itself with what they call the "affective" dimension of subcultures (12). People need to be seen as involved in choices about culture and the extent of the identification with the culture needs to be considered and researched. An example of this approach can be found in Fine's (1983) book on fantasy gaming, which provides extensive detail on the social characteristics of gamers, in producing an account of a subsociety. Furthermore, Fine considers and emphasizes both fantasy and forms of identification in the production of the collective fantasy of the game. The concern with the social construction of a shared fantasy is of particular significance to the general argument concerning imagination that we have been making during the course of this book.

At least three general aspects of Fine and Kleinman's approach are important for our present purposes: first, the emphasis on concrete interacting networks; second, the emphasis on process and social change; and, third, the voluntarism which accords people choices in pleasures. These points have been developed in a rather different way by Thornton (1995) in her consideration of "club cultures" from within a "Bourdieu paradigm" (see further Longhurst and Savage 1996) which emphasizes the role of distinctions in contemporary youth cultures. Moreover, Thornton (1995, 8) emphasizes

the empirical approach of her work as distinct from the theoretical driven “readings” of the Birmingham approach. In addition to this emphasis on empirical research and examination of distinction, Thornton’s attention to the role of media in the generation and reconstitution of club culture is important. She examines the clubbers’ own use of the critique of the media in the construction of their own senses of self and authenticity, but suggests that this neglects the very concrete use of different media, and that, like the academic writers on subculture from Birmingham, it relies on a problematic notion of the media and the mainstream. It is the centrality of the media in the construction of contemporary taste cultures which is important to emphasize in accord with the themes we have been developing. . . .

On the basis of these points, and the discussion hitherto, we want to suggest a set of terminological distinctions which involve the redefinition of some of the terms used in the studies discussed in this chapter so far. This terminological redefinition will enable further consideration of the areas of process and change, both on the individual and collective dimensions.

Fans, Cultists, and Enthusiasts

Our suggestion is that the literature discussed so far can be read so as to introduce three categories ranged along a continuum: fan, cultist (or subcultist) and enthusiast, who are members of fandoms, cults (or subcultures) and enthusiasms respectively. These are different in some respects from the ways in which these categories are used in the approaches so far considered. Hence, in this section we shall spell out our understanding of them. In different ways all these individuals and groups are involved in production and consumption along different dimensions and we shall explore the similarities along these lines below. However, they do differ significantly along the dimensions of object of focus, extent and nature of media use and degree and nature of organization. The differences are summarized in figure 8.1.

With the rider that we are in the initial stages of constructing a continuum here, which will be further developed below, the figure suggests the following. Fans are those people who become particularly attached to certain programmes or stars within the context of relatively heavy mass media use. They are individuals who are not yet in contact with other people who share their attachments, or may only be in contact with them through the mechanism of mass-produced fannish literature (teenage magazines, for example), or

8.1. Fans, cults, and enthusiasts.

	FAN	CULT	ENTHUSIAST
OBJECT	Star/programme	Specialized star/ programme	Activity
MEDIA	Heavy	Heavy but specialized	Specialized
ORGANIZATION	None	Loose	Tight

through day-to-day contact with peers. For example, many young children are fans. They tend to be relatively heavy TV viewers and form clear attachments which are constructed and reconstructed through day-to-day contact at school.

Cultists (or subcultists) are closer to what much of the recent literature has called a fan. There are very explicit attachments to stars or to particular programmes and types of programme. In moving on from fans the cultist focuses his/her media use. They may still be relatively heavy users but this use revolves around certain defined and refined tastes. The media use has become more specialized, but tends to be based on programmes which, and stars who, are in mass circulation. The specialization also occurs through the increased consumption (and generation) of literature which is specific to the cult. Thus, as the studies discussed above show, increased immersion in fannish (in our terms cultist) literature occurs as the cultist becomes more involved. Given the constraints of time, we would expect this to cut down on the consumption of other material. Cultists are more organized than fans. They meet each other and circulate specialized materials that constitute the nodes of a *network*. In our terms, then, cultists are linked through network relations which may take a number of forms, but which are essentially characterized by informality. Such informality may often exist in spaces which oppose the dominant forms of organization of an activity. These more dominant forms often take the form of enthusiasms.

Enthusiasms are, in our terms, as we have already suggested, based predominantly around activities rather than media or stars. Media use is then likely to be specialized in that it may be based around a specialist literature, produced by enthusiasts for enthusiasts, even though the producing company may be part of a conglomerate. Furthermore, given the amount of time devoted to the enthusiasm by its participants, there is likely to be little time left over to sleep let alone read/view other mass-circulated texts. Finally,

enthusiasms are relatively organized, in the ways suggested by Moorhouse, for example. In many respects the activities of those previously considered to be fans of *Star Trek* are actually closer to being enthusiasts.

Enthusiasms are sometimes contested by fans and cultists in particular. Thus, the women fans (or cultists) discussed by Bacon-Smith and Jenkins struggle against the male dominance of the SF enthusiasm and the fantasy role gamers discussed by Fine (1983) are criticized by the more established war gamers of an older generation. The organization of enthusiasms is a prime site for struggle and change.

At the Ends of the Continuum

Our argument, then, is that the categories of fan, cultist and enthusiast can be distinguished from other categories of person which exist at opposite ends of the continuum established so far: the consumer and the petty producer. In terms of the criteria which we have used in the elucidation of this continuum until now, consumers have a relatively generalized and unfocused pattern of media use. Of course they may have tastes, but these are *relatively* unsystematized. The extent of their media use may vary; it may be heavy, but it may not. In the sense that they are consumers, rather than fans of any one text, they are unorganized with respect to media use, and their organization as media users will not differ significantly from other aspects of social organization. However, it is important to stress our earlier contention that media are becoming more important in social organization for everybody.

At the other end of the continuum are the petty producers, who in a seeming paradox tend to turn the continuum into a circle as they become more like consumers. Petty producers are those who have perhaps developed from being enthusiasts to become a professional in Moorhouse's terms. Thus, the car enthusiast who begins to be concerned with the production of specialized parts may be on the route of moving from being an enthusiast to becoming a full-time producer where the previous enthusiasm becomes a full-time occupation. Pop music is especially interesting in this respect. . . . This will lead to the use of even more specialized literature which may become ever more technical, involving the knowledge of British standards, patent law or copyright law, for instance. Finally, relationships tend to become organized through the market, and are therefore outside the control of the group of enthusiasts. As the enthusiast moves out of an enthusiasm towards being a

8.2. The audience continuum.

Consumer—Fan—Cultist—Enthusiast—Petty Producer
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petty producer or forms a production company, he/she is returned more to general capitalist social relations; as producers, they are as much at the mercy of structural forces as the consumers at the other end of the continuum.

An important part of our argument is that we have identified a synchronic and diachronic continuum in the audience, which is represented in figure 8.2. Lest we be misunderstood, it is important to stress that we are not making judgements about the relative worth of these different positions along the continuum. In our view there is not necessarily more worth in being an enthusiast than a consumer.

Our approach here chimes with some other recent accounts. Thus, in their consideration of science fiction fans, Tulloch and Jenkins (1995) make a distinction between fans and followers, in the following terms:

This book will, therefore, adopt a distinction between fans, active participants within fandom as a social, cultural and interpretive institution, and followers, audience members who regularly watch and enjoy media science fiction programmes but who claim no larger social identity on the basis of this consumption. Fans and followers are conceived as two specific segments of the larger science fiction audience, though the boundary between the two groups remains fluid and somewhat arbitrary. (23)

Perhaps to emphasize the fluidity and differential extent of consumption, Tulloch and Jenkins also talk of those “secondary followers” like “young mothers” in the audience remembering “their pleasures and fears in *Doctor Who* from childhood, and, in the present, keeping regularly, but probably distractedly abreast with the series while cooking tea for their children” (113). Our suggestion is that consumers are increasingly *follower*-like in their tastes, as society becomes more media-saturated.

While we have suggested in our discussion so far that we have been identifying a continuum, it can also be suggested that this continuum may represent a possible career path under certain conditions. This is an area importantly investigated by Stebbins (1992), who traces a potential progression from amateur to professional, through five stages: “beginning, development, establishment, maintenance, and decline” (70). The beginning is

fairly straightforward in that it characterizes the start of the progression. Development is the stage of more systematic engagement with “serious leisure.” Stebbins identifies five “patterns of development”: sporadic, gradual, steady, broken-steady and delayed-steady. Different patterns of development tend to occur in different activities. Thus Stebbins found, for example, that stand-up comedy most commonly fell into the steady pattern. As might be expected, there are a number of “contingencies” built into the development of the career, to do with geographical location, for instance. Moving beyond the “learner” stage leads to “establishment.” Reactions to parents can have a significant role at this point in determining between the subsequent development of an amateur or professional career path, as can the decision to go commercial (see, classically, Becker 1963, and further Longhurst 1995). The fourth stage is maintenance, where the “amateur-professional career is in full bloom” (Stebbins 1992, 88). This is the time of greatest career rewards, but it is followed by career decline in the final stage.

The Differential Distribution of Skills

In [a previous chapter] we distinguished three types of skill or competence: technical, analytical and interpretative. Technical skills embody an appreciation of how the textual effect is created. For television, these include evaluation of acting, conveyance of feeling, production values, script, camera work. These apply to other media as well; hence, for popular music, they include performance, conveyance of feeling, production values, writing/construction of the piece, production work, and so on. Analytical skills have to do with the analysis of the text from within the parameters of the text itself. These include: generic (soap opera, reggae), corpus-specific (knowledge of *Coronation Street*, the Bob Marley corpus), personification/characterization (Is someone acting in character? Are rounded characters created? Does the music create coherent images?), plot/narrative (Does it work? Is it coherent?). Interpretative skills are to do with the interpretation of texts from without the text, by comparing them with something else. These include: inter-text comparisons (is *Coronation Street* better than *EastEnders*? How does k. d. lang play off Patsy Cline? . . .) and comparisons with reality or everyday life (How real is *Coronation Street*? Does Ice Cube articulate the community feelings of Compton?). As the examples show, we apply these skills to different media. How do these categories of skill map on to the continuum developed above?

8.3. The skills continuum.

SKILL	CONSUMER	FAN	CULTIST	ENTHUSIAST	PETTY PRODUCER
TECHNICAL	Very specific	More context, especially of stars	More context, move into the use of such skills	Increased use of such skills, in production for enthusiasm	Use of skill in production for market
ANALYTICAL	Very generalized	Within genres or comparisons	Immersion in genre and intrageneric comparisons	Immersion leads to increased productivity	Comparisons to locate market niches
INTERPRETIVE	Referential mode, taste in consumer purchase	Generic and used in fan legitimization	Use in authenticity arguments	Immersion leads to less outward direction	Comparison for profit

A summary of the distinctions here is contained in figure 8.3. It is worth pointing out, before we say any more about these distinctions, that in general levels of skill increase over time after the introduction of a particular media form. With regard to technical skill, our view is that the consumer will have very specific technical skills. He or she will be able to assess some aspects of technique, but will have relatively little background knowledge about the reasons for such judgements. For example, much daytime soap opera in Britain is routinely criticized for bad acting or poor sets, without appreciation of the relatively low production values which generate such drama. These judgements are clearly made, and can be argued to be "accurate" in that the sets in *Neighbours* may look unreal, for example, but they are decontextualized and relatively unsubstantiated—they are assumed. It is the filling in of contextual knowledge which develops such technical skills. Thus, the fan, through his or her reading and discussion with others, fills in the context which enables him or her to come to fuller and more reasoned technical judgements. Fans of a particular band may know that a poor performance was due to the star having an illness, for example. This is the sort of knowledge that is increasingly available in mass circulation press and magazines. The cultist has even more of such knowledge, which is filled in through the narrow-cast media which circulate within the cult itself. Thus, royal watch-

ers (Rowbottom 1994) will explain the appearance of members of the royal family through very specific and precise information (or their interpretation of such information) which would not be mobilized by the general public. Furthermore, the cultist makes the transition into using such technical skills in the production of texts of his/her own. The cult video maker will have a developing knowledge of video techniques, for example. This use of technical skills is further developed by enthusiasts, who are moving from the reading or viewing of other people's texts to the production of their own within an enthusiasm, for example the photography or gardening enthusiast. It is the use of skills that becomes paramount. This is then further developed when the enthusiast becomes a petty producer. In particular, specific technical skills (how to make a video, for example) need to be allied to skills which are more general: how do you market a video or distribute a record? The petty producer uses technical skills, but because of the market context needs to learn skills beyond those found in an enthusiasm.

In general, then, it is possible to see an increase in technical skills across the continuum. It is important to emphasize, however, that such skills are becoming increasingly prevalent amongst consumers. Take video production, for example, where, though they may be less skilled than fans, cultists or enthusiasts, consumers possess skills in this realm that would have been unthinkable ten years ago, primarily due to the technological innovation in camcorders. In the current context, television programmes can now be constructed from such videos (*Video Diary, You've Been Framed*), which, while they may not measure up to overall broadcast standards, are still adequate for transmission.

Concerning analytical skills, another set of transitions can be identified. Consumers tend to use analytical skills in a relatively general manner, but, given the internalist nature of analytical skills, they will be using them less often than those located in the other continuum positions. Further, such judgements would tend to revolve around the relatively untheorized areas of taste, for example the hearing of a record on the radio which, in consumer mode, we say that we like. The fan tends to mobilize analytical skills within the genre or the corpus: "This is a better record than Take That's last one," "*Coronation Street* is relatively boring at the moment," and so on. The cultist becomes immersed in comparisons within the genre and between shows themselves, and analytical skills become exceptionally developed. He or she will know when a character in a long-running show has knowledge which

they could not possibly have within the show's world, but will also use such knowledge to deal with such "problems." As Jenkins (1992) explains:

Star Trek fans have found ways to explain away such apparent continuity problems as Khan's recognition of Chekov in *Star Trek: The Wrath of Khan* even though Chekov had not yet become a program regular when the Enterprise last crossed paths with Khan in "Space Seed" or radical reworkings of the make-up for the Klingons between the television series and the feature films. The fans have come to accept that their ideal *Star Trek* never aligns perfectly with what producers provide. (104)

Such skills are often used to develop the world of the show itself, in part forming the basis for the productive activity associated with cultists and enthusiasts. The immersion in the world of the text facilitates the development of the new texts. The immersion in the world of music facilitates the enthusiastic development of new texts as the rules of the genre become exceptionally clear. The enthusiast is less involved in comparison as he or she becomes immersed in the production within the network of the enthusiasm. The analytical skills are taken for granted. Interestingly, the generic and textual comparisons become more salient for the petty producer: as the place of the text within the marketplace of texts becomes salient, this leads into the examination of interpretative skills.

The consumer may make a number of interpretative comparisons. However, these are more likely to be in the referential mode (Liebes and Katz 1993). Thus, *Coronation Street* will be compared with real life, or with other soap opera like *EastEnders*, especially along the plane of the extent to which they compare with the consumer's own experience. The issue of taste is again important, in particular as it will inform consumption decisions. Thus, within a context of relatively dispersed media use, for example the purchase of CDs, it is important to make judgements along the lines of "Shall I purchase this CD rather than that one?" Essentially this is the basis for consumer choice. The fan becomes more focused on particular genres or types of text, making comparisons within the genre, but also mobilizes interpretative skills in the defence of the fan object from those who attack it. Real-life or referential functions have to do with fan identity rather than whether the text reflects experience or reality. The cultist develops greater analytical skills, and in the context of music may make extreme claims for the way in which the cult object reflects or organizes experience. Thus, cult followers of black rap will mobilize

analytical skills to argue that such performers represent their community; and so on. The enthusiast again makes less comparison as she or he is within the world of the object itself. Defence of the text is less salient since assumptions of value are made, or use is within the context of the enthusiasm itself. Again, the petty producer is different: interpretative skills again become important in relation to the market. However, the point here is to place material within a market, that is, to produce: “Will I be able to sell?” rather than “What should I consume?” Hence, significantly, the producer and the consumer are operating on a similar terrain of commodity relations.

Differential Production

Fiske (1992) has argued that fans are semiotically, enunciatively and textually productive. By semiotic productivity Fiske means that activity which is characteristic of popular culture as a whole. According to Fiske, it “consists of the making of meanings of social identity and of social experience from the semiotic resources of the cultural commodity” (37). When we make commodities mean something for us we are engaging in *semiotic productivity*. When such meanings are communicated to others, enunciative productivity takes place. One of the most important vehicles for enunciation is talk. Thus, according to Fiske, the verbal communication to others of the meanings that we have made for ourselves is an important way in which fans can form communities. However, Fiske cites other non-verbal examples of *enunciative productivity* such as the wearing of colours by football fans, and the Madonna fans who, in dressing like their idol, “were not only constructing for themselves more empowered identities than those normally available to young adolescent girls but were putting those meanings into social circulation” (38).

The third category of production, *textual productivity*, entails the production of texts for circulation within the fan community itself. . . . A great deal of recent research on fans has drawn attention to the ways in which fans produce texts, such as stories, paintings, songs and videos about the characters from their favourite television shows (for example, Bacon-Smith 1992; Jenkins 1992). Fans write stories which place the characters from different television shows in different contexts and allow the development of aspects of the original text to which fans feel attracted. This may involve placing the characters in different universes, or bringing characters from different shows together in one story. Fans also paint pictures of different characters. These

8.4. Textual production.

CONSUMERS	FANS	CULTISTS	ENTHUSIASTS	PETTY PRODUCERS
Little textual production, but are involved in “textual production” in talk, e.g. “Did you see <i>Coronation Street</i> last night? . . . I don’t think that Curly should marry Raquel . . .”	Production exists, but is incorporated into everyday life	Important activity, becomes central to the everyday life of a knowable community	Textual production is subordinated to “material” production within the knowable community	Textual and material production for the market—an imagined community
“Discursive”				
“Part of everyday life”				

activities are discussed at fan conventions and the texts circulate in the fan community. In this section we want to address this issue of textual productivity in more detail, again pulling out the differences across the positions in our continuum to establish the purchase of our approach on this topic (see figure 8.4).

In general our argument is that textual production increases in importance as one moves across the continuum. However, simply to assert this point misses the qualitative differences between the different positions along the continuum. Consumers, as the label would suggest, are involved in little textual production in the specific sense outlined here. However, it is important to note that they are involved in textual production through talk, which can often create alternative texts, even if these are fleeting and not written down. Thus conversations which centre on the actions in a soap opera will often suggest alternative actions for the characters to those given to them by the script writers. This constructs an alternative text within discourse, even if it is not then turned into a product with a textual presence which can be

circulated independently of its producer (see further, Harrington and Bielby 1995, and below). Such imaginative discursive reconstructions are actually facilitated by the circulation of knowledge of the stars and future happenings in soap operas in the tabloid press. This increases the consumer knowledge which can lead to the generation of alternative storylines. However, in general for consumers textual production is discursive in the sense of involving talk and is woven into the fabric of everyday life.

Fans also incorporate textual production into their everyday lives but they actually produce something “material” which can be passed on to others. Therefore when young children act as fans, characters from films and television series will be incorporated into the general playground games but will also be included in their drawings. However, it is important to note that the logic of these games and drawings is not generated from the texts which are being reinterpreted themselves, or only indirectly. Thus, the Terminator or Robocop may appear in the games and drawings of children who have never seen the films, though they may possess the toys which have been “spun off” from series and films as merchandise. Fans’ textual activities are material, but tend to be generated from within the pre-existing concerns of everyday life.

Cultism represents a further move. Here, the material production of texts becomes a central aspect of the cult activity. The *Star Trek* fans discussed above generate new texts of a variety of types on the basis of the characters and situations depicted in the television programmes and films. These texts are then circulated within the fan or, in our terms, cult community. This community is potentially *knowable*, in Raymond Williams’ (1970) terms, even if not all the participants are actually known to those within the cult network.

For the enthusiast, production has become central. The enthusiasm tends to revolve around the production of things, from railway models to plays to second-hand dresses. There may be textual productivity as well, but this is subordinated to the material production. However, this production is still located within the enthusiasm itself. This is where enthusiasts are different from those petty producers who are moving from the realm of production on the request of members of an enthusiasm, to production for the market itself. Here, production, rather than being located within patterns of network sociation, begins to be increasingly directed towards an anonymous market, where the consumers of the goods can only be *imagined*. Production here is generative of other activity, rather than being located within it. This shift is

important as it represents a clear shift in the identity of the producer, leading us to a consideration of the notion of identity in the different places of the continuum.

Differential Identities

In this section we explore some of the relationships between identification and identity. Hall (1996) has maintained that the relationships between identification and identity are of critical importance in the study of contemporary culture. His argument attempts to revitalize debates about the relationship between the positions offered for identification by texts of different types and the adoption of such positions, however transitory, in the construction and reconstruction of identity and subjectivity. As he says:

I use "identity" to refer to the meeting point, the point of *suture*, between on the one hand the discourses and practices which attempt to "interpellate," speak to us or hail us into place as the social subjects of particular discourses, and on the other hand, the processes which produce subjectivities, which construct as subjects which can be "spoken." Identities are thus points of temporary attachment to the subject positions which discursive practices construct for us. (5–6)

Hall, therefore, attempts to locate the discussion of identification and identity within a broadly post-structuralist framework and does this at a relatively high level of abstraction. However, the sort of approach he recommends has been illustrated by more substantive discussion. An important examination of these processes in the context of cinema viewing is provided by Stacey (1994). We therefore use this work here further to substantiate and demonstrate the differences between the places on the continuum described earlier in this chapter.

In an analysis of female audience response to the cinema of the 1940s, carried out through the examination of audience letters and questionnaires, Stacey identifies three themes or discourses: escapism, identification and consumerism. She suggests that the cinema was escapist in a number of concrete ways in this period. For example, it was a ritualized "night out" to the comfort and "material pleasure" of the cinema. Moreover, the cinema provided a shared experience and a sense of belonging to an audience and provided an escape from the war. Finally, the cinema offered not only escape

from some of the discomforts and anxieties of the everyday, but also an escape to American wealth as represented by the stars and their surroundings.

Stacey distinguishes between the forms of identification which take place in the main during the watching of a film that “involve fantasies about the relationship between the identity of the star and the identity of the spectator” (137), and those which occur outside the cinema. The latter involve “practice as well as fantasy, in that spectators actually transform some aspect of their identity as a result of the relationship to their favourite star” (137). We shall suggest that the move from the former to the latter may also involve the move from fan to cultist.

Stacey identifies five main types of “cinematic identificatory practices” which occur during the course of cinema viewing: devotion, adoration, worship, transcendence and aspiration and inspiration. The first three of these are particularly focused on the construction of the star’s image and their contents are relatively clear from the categorization itself. The latter particularly involve connexions between “escapism and identification” (145). Transcendence involves the breakdown of the boundary between self and the star as the audience member fantasizes about becoming the star and feeling the emotions of the star. Stacey suggests that this involves the movement of the audience member to the star and that consequently it is the star who is predominant. In the final category the emphasis falls on the audience member’s identity and the desire to transform this dominates. Stacey’s discussion of these categories therefore involves the move towards the position where the audience member’s identity is itself being transformed and the relation to the star affects everyday practice outside of the cinema itself. This leads her to the second strand identified above.

Stacey distinguishes four main types of “extra-cinematic identificatory practices” (159), which take place outside of the cinema itself: pretending, resembling, imitating and copying. In the first, the audience members would pretend to be the star with whom they identified and play at visiting other stars in their Beverly Hills mansions, for example. The “fan takes on the identity of the star in a temporary game of make-believe” (161). These connexions were often facilitated by connexions of “shared physical appearance” (161) which are involved in the category of resemblance. This differs from imitation, where there is a conscious effort at transformation towards the star. This involves taking on an aspect of the star’s identity. The final category of copying is similar to imitation, though Stacey distinguishes them by arguing

that audiences imitate “behaviour and activities” and copy “appearances” (167). These activities therefore involve relations of similarity and difference.

The media consumer is likely to have little identification with a star or a programme; it may be something that he or she watches as part of his or her everyday life. This is true in particular of television, where it has been argued that stars are relatively unimportant by comparison with personalities. Owing to the everyday nature of the experience, the television consumer does not engage in the characteristic features that are identified by Stacey. The fan, however, does engage in such practices and the images connected to them may involve television as much as any other medium. Thus, in particular relation to a star, or a group as well in the case of pop fans, the fan is involved in relations of devotion, adoration and worship. These are relations which are often expressed in accounts of fan feelings (for example, Aizlewood 1994). The processes of transcendence, aspiration, inspiration and pretending are important in facilitating the shift from fan to cultist. Thus, children, for example, are particularly likely to be involved in relations of pretending as fans. At the point of becoming a cultist there is the type of physical transformation that is involved in imitating and copying. Through this production the fan often becomes a part of a very loosely organized cult community. The following shows how, having dressed up in Bay City Roller clothes in a process of imitating and copying, a small group of girls became a much larger group:

Our estate was where the bus route terminated, and as the empty bus pulled into the stop, the conductor looked genuinely nervous. We whooped in delight, swarming upstairs so we could hang our scarves out of the window, breaking into choruses of BCR songs. As the bus progressed along its torturous route into town, the excitement increased. At each stop, more and more girls piled on, all of them in uniform and in the same over-excited mood. I'd never talked to total strangers like this before. We discussed our favourite Rollers, admired each other's banners and scarves, and, every so often, someone would shout out and we'd all join in, at the top of our voices: “B-A-Y, B-A-Y, B-A-Y C-I-T-Y, and an R-O double L E-R-S, Bay City Rollers are the best!” No one told us to shut up. No one would dare. There were too many of us. (Garratt 1994, 82–83)

For Garratt, this was a relatively transient experience in that her membership of this cult only took up a small period of her life. However, for some

subcultists and fans of the *Star Trek* type it is far more likely to be a long-lasting and more all-encompassing part or way of life. The other aspects of enthusiasm and production are then built upon the construction of such fan and cult identities, though, of course, many fans will remain just that, not moving into the places at the right-hand end of the continuum. Identification and the reconstitution of identity can then facilitate the exercise of skill and production discussed above.

Note

1. As was classically realized by Karl Mannheim (1952).

Future Men

CONSTANCE PENLEY

The K/Sers are constantly asking themselves why they are drawn to writing their sexual and social utopian romances across the bodies of two men, and why these two men in particular. Their answers range from the pleasures of writing explicit same-sex erotica to the fact that writing a story about two men avoids the built-in inequality of the romance formula, in which dominance and submission are invariably the respective roles of men and women. There are also advantages to writing about a futuristic couple: it is far from incidental that women have chosen to write their erotic stories about a couple living in a fully automated world in which there will never be fights over who has to scrub the tub, take care of the kids, cook, or do the laundry. Indeed, one reason the fans give for their difficulty in slashing *Star Trek: The Next Generation* is that children and families now live on the *Enterprise* (albeit in a detachable section!), and that those circumstances severely limit the erotic possibilities.

All the same, one still wonders why these futuristic bodies—this couple of the twenty-third century—must be imagined and written as male bodies. Why are the women fans so alienated from their own bodies that they can write erotic fantasies only in relation to a nonfemale body? Some who have thought about this question, fans and critics alike, have tried to show that Kirk and Spock are not coded as male but are rather androgynous, even arguing that this was the case on the original show. Slash readers and writers would then be identifying with and eroticizing characters who combine traits of masculinity and femininity. However, the more I read of the slash literature, the more I am convinced that Kirk and Spock are clearly meant to be male. Understanding this helps to answer the question about the women fans' alienation from their own bodies. For the bodies from which these women

are alienated are twentieth-century women's bodies: bodies that are a legal, moral, and religious battleground, that are the site of contraceptive failure, that are seen to pose *the* greatest potential danger to the fetuses they house, that are held to painfully higher standards of physical beauty than those of the other sex. Rejecting the perfect Amazons of female fantasy/sword-and-sorcery writing, the K/Sers opt instead for the project of at least *trying* to write real men. (From what I have seen and read in the fandom, I would argue that it is indeed a rejection of the Amazons' perceived artificiality and not a rejection of lesbianism, even though most of the K/Sers are heterosexual.)

What must be remembered also is the K/Sers' penchant for "making do": when asked why they do not create original characters who could be women as well as men, they most often respond that they are just "working with what's out there." In this case it happens to be the world of television, an arena typically populated with strong male characters with whom to identify and take as erotic objects. The writers also insist that one can enter the *Star Trek* world through the male characters only, since the female characters, like Lt. Uhura, Nurse Chapel, and Yeoman Rand, were so marginalized on the show by the sketchiness of their roles and the feminine stereotyping to which they were subjected.

The desire to write real men can be carried out only within a project of retooling masculinity itself, which is precisely what K/S writing sets out to do. It is for this reason as well that Kirk and Spock must be clearly male and not mushily androgynous. This "retooling" is made easier by locating it in a science fiction universe that is both futuristic and offers several generic tropes that prove useful to the project. Feminists, as well as the fans in their daily lives, have had to confront the fact that we may not see the hoped-for "new" or "transformed" men in our lifetimes, and if the truth be told, we often ridicule the efforts of men who try to remake themselves along feminist lines (as Donna Haraway says, "I'd rather go to bed with a cyborg than a sensitive man.")¹ The idea of sexual equality, which will necessarily require a renovated masculinity, is taking a long time to become a lived reality and is hard to imagine, much less write.

This difficulty can be seen, for example, in the unsatisfying attempt to rewrite male romance characters in the Silhouette Desire "Man of the Month" series. Each volume features a male protagonist trying to come to terms with his identity and his sexuality in a world that no longer gives clear messages about what will count as "masculinity" but still threatens dire consequences

for those men who fail to attain it. In trying to explore male subjectivity, the series' authors are admirably trying to go beyond the "male semiotics" project that almost all feminist critics of the romance have identified as central to the romance narrative. In that narrative, the heroine must learn to read and recode what seems to be, at the beginning of the novel, a cold or even brutish indifference on the part of the hero, so that by the end she has completed the mental work necessary to understanding the perfectly good reasons for his aggressively bad behavior (for example, he had been misinformed by a rival that she was a tramp, a goldigger, or a manhater). The typical romance novel, then, critics say, serves to adjust the female reader to a patriarchal world where she must do all of the mental work of understanding and even forgiving her oppressor. (At least contemporary romance novels no longer require heroines to recode a rape as a simple "miscommunication.") The problem with the "Man of the Month" series is that the male characters are so feebly and unconvincingly sketched out that it is both painful and distasteful to have to share the man's consciousness. More implausible yet is the heroine's passion, if only because it is so hard to believe that anyone would want these guys!

But Kirk and Spock, as rewritten by the slashers, are another matter. If it has become difficult to imagine new men in the present day, then it may be easier to imagine them in a time yet to come. *Surely*, three hundred years from now things will be better. In the slash stories, Kirk and Spock *are* sensitive, as well as kind, strong, thoughtful, and humorous. But their being "sensitive" carries with it none of the associations of wimpiness or smug self-congratulation that it does in the present day. Only in the future, it seems, will it be possible to conceive that yielding phallic power does not result in psychic castration or a demand to be extravagantly praised for having relinquished that power. But Kirk and Spock are rarely written as perfect; they too have to do some work on themselves. Although the characters are provided with the SF device of the Vulcan mind link, which allows them to communicate more intimately than today's men are thought to do, Kirk and Spock are typically shown learning to overcome the conditioning that prevents them from expressing their feelings. Spock, whose Vulcan training has led him to suppress his emotions totally, has to learn to accept his human or emotional side, since he is, after all, half human. And Kirk, raised an Iowa farm boy, must first recognize and then reject now-archaic ideas of masculinity that were the product of his extremely conventional upbringing.

Many slash stories relegate “action” to the background to ensure the tightest possible focus on the two men undergoing this painful yet liberatory process of self-discovery and learning to communicate their feelings. A Romulan attack—will it destroy the *Enterprise*?!—may be the catalyst and context for a weighted exchange of looks, secret caresses, and anguished, revealing intimacies, which no one else on the bridge is supposed to notice, even though Kirk and Spock might carry on like that for forty pages.

And although it is true that, by the fans’ own admission, they usually “heterosexualize” Kirk and Spock’s sexual practices,² often the major sign that Kirk and Spock are different from today’s men is that they can freely discuss their own homosexual tendencies and not be insulted or afraid if someone takes them for a gay couple. There is a perfectly understandable idealization of the gay male couple in this fan writing, because such a couple, after all, is one in which love and work can be shared by two equals (a state of affairs the fans feel to be almost unattainable for a heterosexual couple). But there is also a comprehension of the fact that *all* men (and women) must be able to recognize their own homosexual tendencies if they are to have any hope of fundamentally changing oppressive sexual roles. So, too, the fans appreciate gay men’s efforts to redefine masculinity, and feel a sense of solidarity with them insofar as gay men also inhabit bodies that are a legal, moral, and religious battleground.

But slash does not stop with retooling the male psyche; it goes after the body as well. Some changes are cosmetic; others go deeper. Spock, for example, has extra erogenous zones (especially the tips of his pointed ears) and a triple-ridged penis. But the greatest change concerns the plot device of *pon farr*, the heat suffered every seven years by all Vulcan males. The man goes into a blood fever (*plak tow*), can become very violent, and will die if he does not have sex, preferably with a mate. The slash fans are not making this up—in the thirty-fourth episode of *Star Trek* (written by Theodore Sturgeon), Spock goes into *pon farr*, begins to die, and is taken back to Vulcan by his comrades so that he can complete the mating ritual and live. *Pon farr* stories are so popular with the slash fans that a zine called *Fever* has been started to publish only *pon farr* stories. I think the fans relish these stories, in part, because they like the idea of men too being subject to a hormonal cycle, and indeed their version of Spock’s pre-*pon farr* and *plak tow* symptoms are wick-edly and humorously made to parallel those of PMS and menstruation, in a playful and transgressive leveling of the biological playing field. Another nice

touch is that Kirk, because he is empathically bonded with the Vulcan through the mind link, does not have to be told when Spock is getting ready to go into *pon farr* or how he is feeling; in fact, he often shares Spock's symptoms.

But perhaps the most extreme retooling of the male body is seen in the stories in which Kirk and Spock have a baby. Few of these stories exist and they are generally reviewed negatively by the fans, who feel that the premise is too farfetched, even for them, and that, finally, pregnancy and child-rearing responsibilities get in the way of erotic fantasies. In one such story, Kirk and Spock are able to have a baby only after Dr. McCoy does a great deal of genetic engineering to create a fertilized ovum, and Scotty a great deal of mechanical and electronic engineering to build an exterior womb. Not only does it take four men to have a baby in this story (!), but the very awkwardness of the apparatus (at the level of story and discourse) and the fans' rejection of most Kirk-and-Spock-have-a-baby stories suggest that some feats of bodily technology, especially when they involve such substantial regendering, are still unimaginable and unwritable.

In slash fandom and the writing practice that it supports, we find a powerful instance of the strength of the popular wish to think through and debate the issues of women's relation to the technologies of science, the mind, and the body, in both fiction and everyday life. Much can be learned from the way the slashers make individual and collective decisions about how they will use technology at home, at work, and at leisure, and how they creatively reimagine their world through making a tactics of technology itself. Even more can be learned by understanding how these tactics are only the latest performance of this popular wish.

As strange and even aberrant as the slash fans' activities might seem at first glance, their oddness quickly fades when viewed through the lens of contemporary feminist criticism on nineteenth-century women's communities (both real and imagined) and writing practices. "In life as in literature, scholars are uncovering unperceived utopias," Nina Auerbach says in *Communities of Women*.³ She goes on to cite Carroll Smith-Rosenberg's influential essay, "The Female World of Love and Ritual," which describes the intensity of shared emotions and attachments between nineteenth-century American women "not as an aberration from a norm or a sublimation of a norm gone wrong, but as a natural growth and source of strength."⁴ (Or, as a Christmas card I received from two slash fans put it: "Slash fandom—as close as two

straight women can get!") Auerbach's description of the nineteenth-century Anglo-American scene could just as well describe today's slashers:

Women in literature who evade the aegis of men also evade traditional categories of definition. Since a community of women is a furtive, unofficial, often underground entity, it can be defined by the complex, shifting, often contradictory attitudes it evokes. Each community defines itself as a "distinct existence," flourishing outside familiar categories and calling for a plurality of perspectives and judgments.

Auerbach is, however, more concerned with the images of community in women's literature of some standing, like *Little Women*, *Pride and Prejudice*, or *Villette*, than either female communities that existed in fact rather than fiction or popular writing of little artistic or professional status. Slash writing is clearly more reminiscent of the writing practices of women's popular fiction, whether called "domestic," "sentimental," or "sensational." Eschewing traditional claims to artistry, genius, and literary professionalism, nineteenth-century domestic novelists used stereotyped characters and sensational, formulaic plots to educate, entertain, and move their vast, largely female audiences. Crafting an idiom that blended women's domestic, social, and political concerns with a wish to reorganize culture from the woman's point of view, this "damned mob of scribbling women" (as Nathaniel Hawthorne called them) authorized themselves to write trenchant critiques of American society in the face of scorn and disgust for their popularity and perceived lack of literary quality.

As described by literary historian Nina Baym, the prototypical women's novel was one in which a female protagonist struggled against adversity and, on the basis of her independent ability, found success in her own terms.⁵ But because this story of feminine development is set in a social context, the fiction contains implicit, if not always explicit, social commentary:

Indirectly at least, women were beginning to articulate and take a stand on some social issues in their fiction. Opinions on temperance and slavery are often expressed, but other matters are more basic to the structure of these novels. Besides the running attack on the predominance of marketplace values in every area of American life, woman's fiction took especial cognizance of rural-urban tensions and the class divisions in American society. (45)

Although the slashers are writing for much smaller audiences—in fact, largely for themselves—their work nonetheless embodies the same impulse as the female nineteenth-century popular novelists: to transform the public sphere by imaginatively demonstrating how it could be improved through making it more answerable to women's interests. With the slashers, as we have seen, this reshaping takes the form of folding concerns about inner space into the language of outer space, in a kind of narrative Möbius strip, where home and the frontier are finally on the same continuum. Such a movement has its twentieth-century precedent in what media scholar Lynn Spigel has called the 1960s fantastic family sitcom, “a hybrid genre that mixed the conventions of the suburban sit-com past with the space-age imagery of the New Frontier. Programs like *I Dream of Jeannie*, *My Favorite Martian*, *The Jetsons*, and *Lost in Space* were premised on an uncanny mixture of suburbia and space travel.”⁶ Spigel's description of these shows helps to explain why Captain Kirk's command chair looks like a Barcalounger and the deck of the *Enterprise* like a suburban rumpus room, with everyone playing electronic games, watching large-screen television, and carrying on conversations mediated through talking back to the TV set.

But in thus relocating domestic space in outer space, the slashers have boldly gone where no “ink-stained Amazons” of the nineteenth century have gone before. Although some domestic novel heroines were sent West to take part in a civilizing movement of creating garden cities in the wilderness (thus at once taming the city and the wilderness), the majority of them worked from the home in their effort to overturn “the male money system as the law of American life” (Baym 47). The slashers, by contrast, locate their heroes in “Space: the final frontier . . .,” thus implicitly rejecting the separate-sphere ideology that characterized the domestic novel, an ideology that severely limited the transformation of the public sphere to modeling it after the private sphere of the woman-centered home. And the fact that the slash protagonist is not a heroine but two heroes puts a novel spin on what literary theorist Jane Tompkins calls the “cultural work” of American fiction, the work of expressing and shaping the social context that produces the novels.⁷ What is that “cultural work” when a community of women writers that produces a twentieth-century version of domestic fiction sets out collectively to elaborate the frontier or male quest novel, a form of American fiction considered the antithesis (and even the enemy) of the domestic or sentimental novel?

From D. H. Lawrence's discovery of a linked mythos of escape and immaculate male love in America's literary canon to Leslie Fiedler's own discovery that Huck and Jim were "queer as three dollar bills," the Sacred Marriage of males has been identified as key to understanding the psychosocial and political unconscious of American fiction.⁸ The male couple in the wilderness or on the high seas, always one light and the other dark—Dana's narrator and the *kanaka*, Hope; Cooper's Natty Bumppo and Chingachgook; Melville's Ishmael and Queequeg; Twain's Huck and Jim—represent for both Lawrence and Fiedler the absolute wilderness in which the stuffiness of home yields to the wigwam, and "my wife" to the natural primitivism of the colored man. In this Eden, the new Adam, the boy who will not grow up, lives in innocent antimarriage with a Noble Red Man. Fiedler first demonstrated this American *mythos*, and its deeply nostalgic appeal, in his famous 1948 essay "Come Back to the Raft Ag'in, Huck Honey!" In 1982 he returned to this topic to question the essay's optimism and to insist on the centrality and persistence of the myth of interethnic male bonding: "The Jew Starsky and the Gentile Hutch, the black Tenspeed and the white Brownshee, the earthling Captain Kirk and the Vulcan Mr. Spock . . . [are the] descendants of Natty Bumppo and Chingachgook" (157). He delights in the wide popular reception of his prescient queering of American literature by noting that an early newspaper review of *Star Trek* was headlined, "COME BACK TO THE SPACESHIP AG'IN, SPOCK HONEY."

Why, Fiedler asks, should the Negro and the homosexual become stock literary themes in American fiction and why should these themes have become so bound up with each other? The mythos of interethnic male bonding, he says, both reveals and conceals two essential aspects of American life: the homosocial bonds that structure U.S. culture and the bitter fact of racism. Interethnic male bonding is a fantasy of immaculate passion with no possibility of miscegenation (the men do not really have sex, even though the stories are wildly homoerotic) and astonishing reconciliation, with the white man folded in the arms of his dark beloved and forgiven everything: "'Honey' or 'Aikane'; he will comfort us, as if our offense against him were long ago remitted, were never truly *real*" (Fiedler 150). The reconciliation is an astonishing one because it requires that someone victimized in the extreme does the forgiving. Dana's Hope is dying of the white man's syphilis; Queequeg is racked by fever; Cooper's Indian is aged and hopelessly depressed over the dying of his race; Jim is loaded down with chains, and so on. Similarly, the

slashers typically depict Spock as periodically ravaged by *pon farr*, achingly lonely because he is neither human nor Vulcan but something in between, and secretly humiliated by those who mock his devil-like appearance. And in the second *Star Trek* movie, he dies a painful death by radiation, his skin falling from his flesh, sacrificing himself to save others. Fiedler also notes that “the immense gulf of guilt must not be mitigated any more than the disparity of color. Queequeg is not merely brown but monstrously tattooed; Chingachgook is horrid with paint; Jim is portrayed as ‘the sick A-rab died blue.’” Spock, of course, is green. And indeed one of the most recurrent and affecting scenes in slash fiction is Spock cradling Jim and calling him “Thy’la,” Vulcan for bondmate.

But what is Spock’s race? Many *Star Trek* fan writers, not just the slashers, delight in writing stories about Vulcan culture and history. Since this is science fiction, Kirk and Spock can use both warp drive and time travel to get them handily to the planet Vulcan and into an exploration of its past. The history and prehistory of Vulcan is almost invariably written by the fans as an exoticized Asian martial arts culture or a romanticized Native American culture. Never, except for rare efforts to Egyptianize Vulcan history, do the fans touch on anything even remotely African. Although Fiedler thinks a man of any color will do to stand in for the fantasy of the Negro, it is significant that the slash fans consistently avoid writing Vulcan culture and history—and Spock’s race—as African or African American. They prefer to orientalize or romanticize the color divide in a strategic yet unconscious evasion of what has historically in the U.S. been the most bitterly contentious racial division.

“Home as Heaven, Home as Hell” is the title Fiedler gave to the 1982 essay in which he takes back the optimism of “Come Back to the Raft Ag’in, Huck Honey.” In this essay he reconsiders his earlier relegation of the domestic and sentimental novels to “subliterature” lacking in “tragic ambivalence or radical protest” and his corresponding belief that the “masculine” sentimentality of a male writer like Cooper was superior to the “feminine” pathos of a female writer like Stowe. Fiedler says he now realizes that it is not just “the dream of racial reconciliation” that determines that the antiwife must be nonwhite but also the “nightmare of misogyny” that says the antiwife must be nonfemale. It is a misogyny, he says, in a peculiarly American form, a view of women which identifies them with everything that must be escaped in order to be free.

There are thus two myths here, working dialectically, which allow this symbolic resolution:

The myth of the wilderness companions represents also the male ex-European's dream of effecting—behind the backs of white women, as it were—a reconciliation with those fellow males we know we have really, *really*, oppressed. (153)

The reconciliation, Fiedler emphasizes, must be a marriage of the spirit, never the flesh. “Our anti-heroes,” he says, “do not flee white women to beget red/brown/black/yellow children neither white nor nonwhite.” Is it the horror of miscegenation haunting these texts that also rears its ugly head in the slash fans’ resistance to the technologically miraculous Kirk-and-Spock-have-a-baby stories? Probably not, because the miscegenation has already happened: Spock is the offspring of a human mother, Amanda, and a Vulcan father, Sarek, who are lovingly written by the fans as one of the few positive heterosexual couples to appear in slash fiction.

While the slash fans are undoubtedly complicit with a traditional American tendency to obscure racism and racial tensions (both in their writing and the everyday life of the fandom), they are also engaged in collectively elaborating a story that goes a long way toward untangling and recasting this double American mythos of misogyny and racial reconciliation.⁹ In this respect, it is significant that the slashers celebrate the miscegenation that resulted in the birth of Spock and depict Kirk and Spock’s marriage as very much of the flesh, not only allowing but extolling a male-male relation that is overtly homoerotic. Fiedler argues that overt homosexuality threatens to compromise “an essential aspect of American sentimental life: the camaraderie of the locker room and ball park, the good fellowship of the poker game and fishing trip, a kind of passionless passion . . . possessing an innocence above suspicion” (143). Christopher Newfield, writing in the wake of the emergence of queer studies and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s idea of “homosexual panic,” takes even further than Fiedler the specification of what it is in American culture that is threatened by overt homosexuality.¹⁰ Homophobia, Newfield says, is politically charged by a phobia about equality:

Male homoeroticism, when it becomes public homosexuality, threatens not just male but *military* order. It threatens the widely fetishized “unit cohesion” rooted in the despotism of unchallenged leaders. It threatens to undermine the despotism that has symbolically and in fact stabilized democratic society; it threatens by challenging not just straight homosexuality in general, but a male homosociality that consists of submission to superiors. (30)

In a broad tradition most famously articulated in the U.S. by Walt Whitman, Newfield says, “homoeroticism figures a faith in radical democracy.” This tradition is one of a “brotherly love” that fuses sexual and political identity to defeat the competitive hierarchy “that mainstream U.S. culture works especially hard to cast as the only viable mode of personal freedom” (30).

When the history of slash fandom is written (not by me, but others, likely the fans themselves), it will also have to be a history of the extreme hostility that many “regular” *Star Trek* fans have shown toward the slashers. The Trekkers have had to struggle mightily, however, to find the right language to deride and dismiss the slashers. After all, Trekdom is a culture that believes itself superior to the rest of U.S. society in the strength of its allegiance to the values of democratic equality and tolerance for differences. Trekkers are therefore reluctant to criticize the slashers in overtly sexist or homophobic language, usually falling back on “We wouldn’t want children at conventions to accidentally be exposed to this stuff” or “It’s an insult to Gene Roddenberry’s vision.” But Trekkers are also people devoted to reimagining the world through a stubbornly militaristic fiction, barely disguised as Yankee adventurism even in *Next Generation*’s more corporate-bureaucratic version of it. (Captain Picard usually takes an anguished meeting with his senior officers before bagging the Prime Directive.) The slash version of *Star Trek* threatens the Trekkers because it is not only sexually but politically scary, with its overt homoeroticism throwing into sharp relief the usually invisible homosocial underpinnings of Trekdom, the Federation, and U.S. culture.

How do the slashers deal with the other side of all this, Fiedler’s “nightmare of misogyny”? As Sedgwick has shown, misogyny lies not only in the exclusion of women but in requiring them to legitimize the bonds between men with their real or symbolic presence. The ethics of how to treat women characters is, in fact, one of the most discussed topics in slash fandom. “Mary Sue” stories, as the fans call them, are utterly reviled, even though such stones are often the first story that a fan will write. A “Mary Sue” is any story where a young, bright, gorgeous new ensign (usually a transparent stand-in for the author) falls head over heels for Kirk or Spock. This is too close to the “sentimental love religion” of the romance novel for the slashers to stomach. The fans also reject stories in which a woman serves as a mere bridge or relay between the two men.

In one much criticized story, Lt. Uhura realizes the unarticulated passion that Kirk and Spock feel for each other but knows that neither one, especially

the repressed Spock, will ever make a move. She seduces Spock to blow the lid off all that passion and then tenderly talks to him until he finally understands the true direction of his desire. After Kirk and Spock are united, she graciously steps aside. It is no wonder that fans vociferously rejected this scenario because slash ethics determine that the women characters in the *Star Trek* fictional universe, minor though they may be, are to be written about respectfully and never used just to get the two men together, to either enable or legitimize that relation. Slash fiction, then, is careful to avoid the misogyny Fiedler rightly found to be the necessary complement to the symbolic resolution of “the bad dream of genocide.” Even though women have been largely written out of slash fiction, women’s interests have not. As we shall see, writing the women out of this traditional scenario is the surest way for those interests to get expressed.

Literary theorist Joseph Allen Boone argues that the quest romance as written by men has not invariably valorized ideological concerns that our culture has designated “masculine” or “patriarchal.”¹¹ He agrees with Fiedler that the male quest romance was an unconscious rebellion against the ethos of sexual polarity pervading sentimental treatments of love and seduction throughout the history of the novel. It was, Boone argues, meant to be an alternative to the antagonistic sexual relationships emanating from the novel’s “sentimental love religion.” But he also insists that leaving the constraints of traditionally defined manhood does not have to be escapist or regressive: “The outward voyage to confront the unknown that by definition constitutes quest narrative simultaneously traces an inner journey toward a redefinition, a ‘remaking’ of self that defies, at least partially, social convention and sexual categorization” (228–229).

And indeed, Boone finds in the very novels that Fiedler discusses visions of selfhood and mutual relationship that attempt to “break down conventional sexual categorization by breaking through the limiting forms of culture and the conventions of love literature at once.” Such a rejection of institutional marriage can have several important advantages. Where there is mutuality of gender there is, at least in theory, a degree of equal interchange and individuality that is often automatically negated in the conventional marital union:

As a result, these questing comrades often evolve multifaceted relationships that daringly blur the boundaries separating literary subject and object: their loving bonds simultaneously partake of brotherly, passionate,

paternal, filial, even maternal qualities, without being restricted to one role or model alone. (236)

Nothing better exemplifies the way slash writers have developed precisely such a model of equality and individuality, while exploring every permutation of Kirk's and Spock's roles, than the 1991 publication *The 25th Year*, described on the cover page as "a collaborative K/S novel celebrating twenty-five years of *Star Trek* . . . and the infinite diversity of the love of Kirk and Spock." Edited by Alexis Fegan Black and issued by Pon Farr Press, *The 25th Year* brings together over thirty writers, poets, and artists to write the story of Kirk and Spock from their first meeting to growing old together. In an editorial, Black writes of the "magic" of pulling this anthology together, as authors and artists working separately wrote amazingly complementary stories, taking up and expanding on ideas and plot points already anticipated by the other writers. She goes on to tell how she wrote a frame story for all the contributions and a few linking stories to fill in the gaps.

The major dramatic thread of the stories (passing through Klingon battles, Romulan treachery, Vulcan machinations, Federation bureaucracy, and much more) is Kirk trying to convince Spock that he, Kirk, is really a bottom and wants their sex to be rougher, much rougher, even than the violent madness of *pon farr*. After all, he has to be captain all day, always responsible and in charge; at night and in bed he wants someone else to give the orders. Enough of Spock folding him into his arms, tenderly making love to him, comforting him, nurturing him, calling him "Thy'la," he wants to be fucked and fucked hard. Not every time, just often enough to restore a mutuality of emotion that alone makes the bond between them come alive. Spock resists, because hard sex and the fierce emotions that come with it remind him of the violent passions that so roiled Vulcan culture before a collective decision was made to construct a society based on the suppression of all emotion. So, too (how nineties!), his fear of hard sex is given an elaborate psychological basis in infantile sexual trauma: as a child he accidentally overheard his parents having sex during his father's *pon farr* and mistook the screams and groans of his mother as cries of fear and pain. Jim asks him to consider that perhaps they were the sounds of pleasure. Spock finally comes around, assuring the mutuality of their relation, now at every level. The front and back covers of *The 25th Year* . . . artistically document the movement toward that final resolution.

To make slash fiction do the “cultural work” the fans want it to do, the slashers have ingeniously rewritten and recast the American mythos of interethnic male bonding by making that relationship homoerotic rather than homosocial. Ensuring the democratic equality of the pair, the slashers have eliminated its racism by celebrating miscegenation and avoided the misogyny inherent in the mythos by respecting the women characters and never using them to further the male-male bond. It is thus not only fascinating (as Spock would say) but logical (as Spock would also say) that amateur women writers around the country would, in the early 1970s, “spontaneously” get the idea of writing their sexual and social utopias through a futuristic and technologized version of the Sacred Marriage of males.

Notes

1. Constance Penley and Andrew Ross, “Cyborgs at Large: Interview with Donna Haraway,” in *Technoculture*, ed. Constance Penley and Andrew Ross (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), 18.

2. In “Pornography by Women for Women, with Love,” in *Magic Mommas, Trembling Sisters, Puritans, and Perverts: Feminist Essays* (Trumansburg, N.Y.: The Crossing Press, 1985), Joanna Russ points out the fans’ tendency to heterosexualize Kirk and Spock’s sexual practices (83). In my essay, “Feminism, Psychoanalysis, and the Study of Popular Culture,” in *Cultural Studies*, ed. Lawrence Grossberg, Cary Nelson, and Paula Treichler (New York: Routledge, 1992), I try to say why many slash fans want Kirk and Spock to be, however improbably, heterosexual.

3. Nina Auerbach, *Communities of Women* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1978).

4. Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, “The Female World of Love and Ritual: Relations between Women in Nineteenth Century America,” *Signs: Journal of Women and Culture in Society* 1 (Autumn 1975): 1–29.

5. Nina Baym, *Women’s Fiction: A Guide to Novels by and about Women in America, 1820–1870* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1978).

6. Lynn Spigel, “From Domestic Space to Outer Space: The 1960s Fantastic Family Sit-Com,” in *Close Encounters: Film, Feminism, and Science Fiction*, ed. Constance Penley, Elisabeth Lyon, Lynn Spigel, and Janet Bergstrom (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), 205–6.

7. Jane Tompkins, *Sensational Designs: The Cultural Work of American Fiction, 1790–1860* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986).

8. Leslie Fiedler, “Home as Heaven, Home as Hell,” in *What Was Literature? Class*

Culture and Mass Society (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1982). My citation of Leslie Fiedler might seem a little dated because so many scholars of American literature have gone over this ground so extensively since Fiedler first argued the centrality to American literature of the mythos of interethnic male bonding. And certainly scholars have gone beyond Fiedler's personal epiphany that the domestic novels weren't "trash" but culturally significant works of American literature; this insight is now taken for granted. But Fiedler did it first, did it well, and recognized that Kirk and Spock, too, were "queer as three dollar bills," so I give him his due here.

9. Such obscuring of the issue of race and racism in America is prevalent in both regular *Star Trek* and slash fan culture. For example, when *CCSTSG Enterprise*, a *Star Trek* fan newsletter, conducted the widest survey yet of *Star Trek* fan characteristics and attitudes—asking every imaginable demographic, vocational, and social attitude question—the category of race and any questions about racism simply did not appear. When I asked the survey organizer why issues of race and racism had not been included, he said it had never occurred to him. Daniel Bernardi's *Star Trek and History: Race-ing toward a White Future* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1998) is an extremely useful overview of how the issue of race has been played out in thirty years of *Star Trek*.

10. Christopher Newfield, "Democracy and Male Homoeroticism," *Yale Journal of Criticism* 6, no. 2 (1993): 29–62.

11. Joseph Allen Boone, *Tradition Counter Tradition: Love and the Form of Fiction* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987).



FAN CREATIVITY AND PERFORMANCE

Thus far we have focused on fan fiction texts and the cultures surrounding them. The emphasis in this section moves away from text and toward the ways fans perform their fannish identity within and outside of the fan community. Performances are carried out by various participants for diverse audiences—producers and show runners, actors and writers, fan audiences and general audiences, journalists and academics—and can take many forms, including embodied and online, self-conscious and unaware, and critical and celebratory. Certainly one aspect of performance may be expressed through text: by writing fan fiction, for example, a fan may perform by manipulating the characters' bodies (that is, causing the characters to perform) and by creating or manipulating a particular milieu that may direct her audience how to react to her (that is, engaging in self-performance).

As media fandoms go mainstream and digital technologies become easier to master, fans create ever more diverse and imaginative forms of fan works to share. Creating and distributing fan videos, podfics (audiorecorded fan

fiction), and filk (fandom-specific songs) required considerable expertise and complicated, expensive technology in the 1980s and even the 1990s. Now, however, creating media files, recording audiovisual texts, and using editing tools are fairly standard activities, although finding a reliable, persistent source to host the media online remains a problem. In addition, live-action role-playing and cosplay (costume play) used to be mostly local and usually convention dependent, but fans now share their images and video files online; further, fan-created objects, like *Star Trek* model replicas, Tardis birthday cakes, and *Supernatural* jewelry, can now easily be shared online (Rehak, forthcoming). By showcasing the vast range of material fan works, the move online foregrounds the fact that fans are creatively performing (Gunnels and Cole 2011).

The essays in this section focus on the ways that fans and fandom create identity via an analysis of performance and performativity. They discuss place, identity, and performance as enacted by show runners, fans, and their texts.

Producers as Performers

Like Abercrombie and Longhurst (1998), who call for using performativity as an important audience paradigm, Kurt Lancaster focuses on issues of performativity his 2001 book *Interacting with "Babylon 5."* *Babylon 5* was an important mid-1990s television show marked by writer-producer J. Michael Straczynski's auteur vision and by its strong, vocal, and interactive fandom. Lancaster's "Performing in Babylon—Performing in Everyday Life" looks at Straczynski's performance and the way the producer's interactions with fans helped establish his reputation among the fan base. At a time when fans were barely acknowledged by producers, let alone actively engaged, Straczynski was a steady presence on fan boards, interacting with viewers and strongly affecting fan discourses. His social performance, Lancaster shows, remains heavily controlled in all situations, whether appearing at cons, submitting to interviews, or commenting in online fan forums.

Straczynski's performance succeeds in presenting him simultaneously as a modest fanboy and as a consummate professional. He thus presents himself as like every other fan but exceptional, part of the fan community but separate, part of Hollywood but not. This pattern is common among filmmakers and TV show runners, especially within science fiction and fantasy, and includes such well-known fanboy auteurs as Steven Moffat (Hills 2012), Zack Snyder

(Scott 2013), and Peter Jackson (Gray 2010). Unlike their predecessors, these producers have a clear sense of the importance of engaging their audiences in an age of convergence culture, yet their behavior displays ambiguity toward these changes. These auteurs all share a performative tension that continually fluctuates between a seemingly familiar egalitarianism with their fans and an authorial hierarchical distance from their audiences.

Lancaster draws a connection between Straczynski's auteur/Hollywood outsider status and his specific literary approach to narrative television. The show runner consciously and vocally set up *Babylon 5* with an epic, long-form structure, which entices fans and keeps them interested. Straczynski's *Babylon 5* thus offers both a show and a show runner that model ideal audience engagement and encourage fan creation. Further, Straczynski anticipates the narrative complexity that would draw critics' attention in the 2000s (Mittell 2006, forthcoming).

Lancaster's focus on the producer performance implicitly assumes the textual performance of fans that most of the essays in this volume have touched upon. After all, whether in essays in print zines, on the online fan forums Straczynski would visit, or in LiveJournal posts, fans tend to present their textual identities in ways similar to their embodied performances in cosplay. In his 2002 book *Fan Cultures*, Matt Hills uses the concept of performative consumption to address the question of agency in how fans present and perform their own bodies as they enact and embody their fannish selves. He suggests that fans revel not only in the acts themselves, but also in the meanings they inscribe on their environments.

Characters as Performers

Francesca Coppa's essay moves away from fan performances into the performances of texts and characters. In "Writing Bodies in Space" (2006b), Coppa suggests that we should understand fan fiction as a form of theatrical performance. Coppa, who grounds her argument historically in the availability of modes of cultural production, suggests that in the absence of do-it-yourself film production equipment, written text was the easiest way for media fans to create their own versions of texts—that is, without access to film, text has to do. Just like theatre productions, where every new performance creates yet another version of familiar characters and story lines, fan fiction iteratively returns to canonical elements.

By tracing a theatrical rather than literary lineage for fan fiction, Coppa explains not only the repetitive factor inherent in fan fiction, but also its emphasis on embodiment: fan fiction often foregrounds the characters' bodies in ways that recall their visual origins, whether by depicting elaborate battle and sex scenes or by showing characters' emotions through physical interactions. Beyond providing an explanation for the specific styles and characteristics of fan fiction, Coppa's focus on fan fiction as theatrical performance moves the genre away from authorial originals to collectively shared productions. This collective, which might be called a fandom, is a collaborative field of play. Ideas and tropes are shared and disseminated, and fans share a common base of canon, fan texts, and context, with images and story lines that can be referenced at will (Busse and Hellekson 2006; Stein and Busse 2009).

By using drama and not narrative as the literary dramatic model, Coppa shows how fan fiction allows fans to create a visual likeness of the characters by creating their costumes and enacting their personas; fans also control all aspects of performance of these bodies within their fiction. By repeating well-known phrases and describing familiar actions from the media source text, fan fiction writers create repetition with a difference, thus bringing themselves into the space between script and performance and celebrating fandom together within this performative space.

Performance and Community Building

These analyses of performance are geared toward embodied fannish spectacles, be it a show runner creating a fanboy-auteur persona, a fan engaging in cosplay and role-play, or a writer moving bodies in space. However, they point to a larger theoretical point: the engagement between the performer and the community that consumes the performance. Indeed, this research topic has become important, with scholars addressing a number of platforms, many of them new online ones. For example, some actors, performing a persona via social media, use their celebrity to ask their fans to engage in activism: Cochran (2012) describes how Joss Whedon rouses his fan audiences to engage in political activism, and Stein (2013) looks at the Twitter performance of *Supernatural* actor Misha Collins and the way he mobilizes his followers for humanitarian disaster relief. Celebrities are thus engaging in a performance to build a community around action.

Fan studies' focus on performativity draws from a variety of fields, with sociology and anthropology dominating one approach (Goffman 1959; Turner 1982) and performance studies and gender studies another (Schechner 1988; Butler 1990, 1997; Phelan 1993). Most of these studies address the performativity of self, identity, gender, and bodies within embodied spaces. However, the strong online presence of fandom communities and their interactions has drawn scholars to bring Internet theories to bear on how identity and text/narrative interact and function in online spaces (Turkle 1995; Nakamura 2002; Ryan 2003).

Both the performance of fannish identities and the way these performances affect fan fiction and its surrounding communities are important topics of research and have gained more attention recently. By far the largest sort of performance-identity play is role-playing games. Fans engage in transmedial role-playing on various social media platforms, such as MySpace, Second Life, Facebook, LiveJournal, Tumblr, and Twitter, where they perform various character identities and use textual play to collectively create narratives (Booth 2008; Caddell 2008; Wood and Baughman 2012). Role-playing games connect the two fan activities of gaming and storytelling (Fine 1983; Mackay 2001; Bowman 2010). In addition, online interactions among fans create a form of role-play where fans use text and visual signifiers as they perform their online identities (Busse 2006). Fans co-opt these public tools and spaces to create a private community that they find meaningful and fulfilling.

Performing in Babylon— Performing in Everyday Life

KURT LANCASTER

Performing a Social Front and the Construction of *Babylon 5*

A discussion of a public figure such as Joe Straczynski must begin with the realization that his persona—as evidenced in interviews, magazine articles, science fiction conventions, books, Web sites, essays, and interactions with fans online—involves a social performance, whether or not he or his fan participants are aware of it. Performance, as defined by sociologist Erving Goffman in his seminal work, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1959), comprises “all the activity of a given participant on a given occasion which serves to influence in any way any of the other participants” (15). Goffman believes that people project a social front—what one could call a personality type—in much the same way as an actor performs a role.

It is important to look at Straczynski’s personal history as a kind of performance. . . . It needs to be made clear that the performances fans enact are no less and no more important than the performances occurring on *Babylon 5*; neither is the role Straczynski performs when interacting with fans and critics. By examining how a public figure exerts a social performance, we can begin to see how that person, if not to influence people to think and act in a certain way, at least defines the situation so that people will think of them in the way he wants them to. Public figures attempt to force others to act favorably toward them.

Whenever one person tries to impress another—for example, when two people are on a first date, or when a chef is preparing a meal for a patron at a restaurant, or when a television producer interacts with fans online—these

people are enacting a social performance. In essence, a person performing in this mode attempts to “control the conduct of others, especially their responsive treatment of him” (Goffman 1959, 3). No person on a date wants to make a social blunder, for a misplaced remark or misunderstood gesture could ruin the evening. The chef needs to appear well trained in the culinary arts, and decorates a salmon plate so as to give an appearance that not only has it been prepared by a professional, but that it will taste better than a similar meal cooked at home (thus making the customer feel good about paying the bill). So, as Goffman explains, “This control is achieved largely by influencing the definition of the situation which the others come to formulate, and he can influence this definition by expressing himself in such a way as to give them the kind of impression that will lead them to act voluntarily in accordance with his own plan” (3–4). The chef’s purpose is to have people come back to her restaurant, and the guy or girl presumably wants a second date. A television producer wants to please the fans so that they will continue to watch his show.

Joe Straczynski’s plan is to be known as the creator of *Babylon 5* and as a producer who cares about his customers, the fans. Straczynski performs a front that includes self-effacing humility (he’s just an average “Joe”), while at the same time maintaining roles as educator (he wants to teach people how television is made so viewers can demand better TV—*his* brand of television), “underdog” producer (who had to face challenges to get his vision onscreen), and creative artist (who will not compromise his vision). When it comes to the *Babylon 5* universe, he is the authoritative producer whose very word is canon. All of these roles and attributes comprise Straczynski’s social performance, and, as will be seen, when he interacts with fans, “he automatically exerts a moral demand upon the others, obliging them to value and treat him in the manner that persons of his kind have a right to expect” (Goffman 1959, 13). Whether at science fiction conventions or online, Straczynski performs a social front that expresses this “moral demand.” In his public appearances he will, in Goffman’s terms, “mobilize his activity so that it will convey an impression to others which it is in his interests to convey” (4). And it is in his interest to convey an “implicit or explicit claim to be a person of a particular kind” (13)—an innovative Hollywood producer who is also a science fiction fan. Goffman’s project analyzes “non-verbal” communication (“expressions given off” as opposed to “expressions given”), and he refers to the former as a “more theatrical and contextual kind”—“bodily action” (1959, 4). I believe

this form of communication can be also detected when analyzing a public figure's role as it is performed through magazine and newspaper interviews, as well as through Web sites. The textual expressions within these environments have the effect of being "given off," as I will explain below. In addition, the nonverbal is inextricably tied to the verbal expression and there is also the influence of subtext: it's not what one says, but *how* one says it that evokes another meaning outside and below the textual syntax.

Straczynski, as producer and creator of a science fiction television series—one that has achieved critical success—does not want to come off as an arrogant Hollywood producer who cares more about making money and keeping his job than about his fans, which is the stereotypical nature of the professional role he has taken. So, the "average Joe" social front he performs helps to protect him from this stereotype, and puts him in the position of appearing to care about his fans and his show, which may in fact be accurate. (A social front is not a lie—although it can be.) Straczynski's social performance, however, does contain contradictions, indicating the weakening of his will to maintain the reputable front he has projected in his performances. If we look below the surface of the front he has created for himself, we can see that Straczynski is not just an average person. He has a large amount of power over the fans (he determines the stories and what will happen to the characters within the plot). And he has little humility when he defends himself against professional and fan critics, returning "flame" attacks—the online equivalent of verbal assault and abuse—if he gets burned by someone. It is within these diatribes with fans that we can begin to see cracks appear in the social front persona known professionally as J. Michael Straczynski. What follows is a brief history of Straczynski, his television show, and his relationship to fans, as performed through a social front projected in interviews, books, magazine articles, essays, and Internet postings.

Straczynski's history is as controlled, defined, and random as that of any public figure, for a social front is a mask, and what lies behind it is difficult to determine. The various facets that comprise his social front are, however, clear. Part of this includes growing up in a family that "stayed in one place as little as six months. Never more than a year or two" (1997a, 7). Because he didn't stay in one place for long, Straczynski's only constant companions were "television, and the local library," where he read such writers as Asimov, Bradbury, Clarke, Heinlein, and Tolkien (7). After graduating from high school, about twenty years before his initial idea to write *Babylon 5*,

Straczynski dedicated himself to writing, averaging ten pages a day, seven days a week. His career has since included playwriting, journalism, and the writing of radio dramas, novels, and short stories. "I was born a writer, it just took me 17 years to learn how to type," he facetiously explains (1997b). The combination of these facts presents Straczynski as a non-Hollywood executive type. He is just another kid who grew up watching television and reading science fiction, got an education, and learned how to write—making the most of a public education system in the midst of a difficult family life and moving from one town to another.

One way that Straczynski is able to come across as an average person is by dressing in jeans when working and attending science fiction conventions (he does not wear a "suit," the typical costume of other producers). He also relates anecdotes to his fans at these conventions, often describing the scene wherein he first conceived the idea of creating *Babylon 5*. In 1986, while taking a shower (he's like everyone else), he received a flash of inspiration for a new kind of science fiction series with a five-year story arc. Straczynski explains: "In the shower at the moment of this revelation, I dashed out and hurriedly scribbled down what would become the main thrust of the series before I could lose the thread of it," recording that revelation in *The Official Babylon 5 Magazine* (1999, 66), "for whatever historical value it may have in showing the thoughts at the very moment that the B5 universe unfurled itself in my head." Straczynski knows that his creation notes have deep historical significance to fans, but he presents this story with such humility it would seem that he does not care about its value. He appears to be just an average guy revealing a deeply held secret: "I've never shown anyone those original notes. Until now." Yet, in this officially sanctioned fan magazine, Straczynski defines his social front not just as an average person, but as creator, the Great Maker, as he is fondly referred to by fans (as well as by his cast and crew). During the lunch hour of Straczynski's directorial debut of the final episode, "Sleeping in Light," the cast and crew came in wearing t-shirts that read on the front: "Shh . . . The Great Maker is Directing," and on the back: "And on the seventh day we wrapped" (1997c).

Despite this nickname, Straczynski continues to present a social front that expresses his role as an "underdog" producer, far from his position as the Great Maker. After writing down the notes for *Babylon 5*, he spent that year writing a pilot movie script, and started making the rounds with it around Hollywood in 1987 (1993). Even though Straczynski felt that his

series could be done on half the budget of *Star Trek: The Next Generation* (1987–1994), many television executives would not believe it. He hooked up with Douglas Netter, who came on board as an executive producer, thereby increasing Straczynski's own status as a little known producer. Since Netter had a reputation around Hollywood for bringing in television series on budget and on time, Warner Bros. threw in their support for the series. In 1991 Warner Bros. organized PTEN, a conglomerate of about 100 local broadcast stations in the United States. Executives would have to be convinced that Netter, producer John Copeland, and Straczynski could *really* do the series as cheaply as they claimed they could. (This same team had worked together on *Captain Power* in 1987.)

Straczynski was also a coproducer on *Murder She Wrote* (1984–1996), where he had begun to realize that part of a series budget was wasted due to poor planning. With proper foresight, he felt, nearly a third of the budget could be saved. Many producers turn in scripts at the last minute, and then in order to make production deadlines workers have to be paid overtime. Special effects were another matter. To do a science fiction series with such optical effects as the *Babylon 5* station, starships, and various planets, if done in the conventional way, would be too expensive. Ron Thornton, of Foundation Imaging in Los Angeles, was hired to come up with a 30-second special effects clip that Straczynski would show Warner Bros. and the PTEN executives. Thornton, using the mid-1980s Amiga home computer with the animation software Lightwave 3D (which can be purchased for \$2,200), came up with a CGI (computer graphics image) shot of the *Babylon 5* space station. The pitch, along with the cheaply done special effects, won them over (see Killick 1998).

In November 1991, *Babylon 5* was announced as one of three “flagship” projects for PTEN. The pilot movie, *The Gathering*, was shot during the summer of 1992. On November 7 of that year, Straczynski presented *The Gathering* at a science fiction convention (a tradition Gene Roddenberry began in 1966, when he presented his pilot of *Star Trek* at a convention). The movie was broadcast during the week of February 22, 1993, and earned an Emmy award for visual effects. Because PTEN was not a broadcast company (like ABC, CBS, FOX, and NBC), but a conglomerate of local stations, each one broadcasted *Babylon 5* on a different time and day at each location. The pilot movie received a large enough market share to convince Warner Bros. to go ahead and order the first season of production, which aired beginning the

week of January 26, 1994, and would continue with the PTEN market until the fall of 1997.

The series was officially canceled at the end of its fourth season, but not before winning another Emmy for make-up design in 1994, four additional Emmy nominations in 1995 and 1996, and two Hugo Awards in 1996 and 1997 for “The Coming of Shadows” (1995) and “Severed Dreams” (1996). It also earned the *E Pluribus Unum* award for the best dramatic television series to address “fundamental social values in a positive manner,” as well as the Space Frontier Foundation Award for Best Vision of the Future (“Lurker’s Guide to *Babylon 5*”). The cancellation, however, was not due to low ratings, as was the case with the original *Star Trek* (1966–1969); rather, PTEN, and consequently *Babylon 5*, faced an increasingly tight market as other television companies (such as UPN and the WB) formed their own first-run syndication broadcast conglomerates and competed with station times to present *their* new shows. There simply wasn’t any room to squeeze in *Babylon 5* in the shrinking marketplace. The cable station TNT had already picked up the broadcast rights for the first four seasons of *Babylon 5*, and, when it heard about *Babylon 5*’s cancellation, decided to negotiate a purchase for the fifth and final season, which was broadcast in 1998. TNT also purchased four made-for-TV *Babylon 5* films and a spin-off series, *Crusade*, which was broadcast in the summer of 1999. *Babylon 5* completed its fifth season in a genre that rarely makes it past the first year, as evidenced with *Crusade*, which was cancelled after thirteen episodes because of creative differences between Straczynski and studio executives at TNT.

In less than five years Straczynski, the veritable “underdog,” broke every Hollywood script-writing record when he wrote 91 episodes out of the entire 110-episode saga (61 of them consecutively), as well as four B5 television movies. However, Straczynski believes that television, and science fiction in particular, is outside the realm of most critics’ experience and understanding. “They *always* attack sf. Always have, always will. And always unfairly,” Straczynski complained early on in *Babylon 5*’s history. “I’d point to [a] *USA Today* review . . . as emblematic of that approach. [The critic] says that yes, *Babylon 5* might get the ratings, it might succeed, but you should in essence be ashamed if that happens. People have targeted this show with incredible *vehemence* bordering on character assassination” (1994a). Here Straczynski continues to project his role as an underdog producer, one who has to fight and struggle to have critics take his work seriously. These statements become

what Goffman calls “corrective practices . . . employed to compensate for discrediting occurrences that have not been successfully avoided” (1959, 13). This is done in order to maintain the value and respect he feels he has deserved as a producer, and to maintain emotional ties with his fans.

As part of his corrective practice to maintain his social front as a legitimate producer, Straczynski argues that too many critics spurn television as being a nonliterary medium—a notion he at once agrees with but yet wants to challenge. “Yes, I think that TV storytelling is generally devalued or undervalued by the critical press and by literary critics,” he explains, adding, “And for the most part, maybe they’ve been accurate.” He deems himself doubly devalued, however, because much of the mainstream critical press also refuses to take science fiction seriously: “They assume that if the show is sf, then it cannot have any literary or social merit,” he points out. “They are, of course, utterly incorrect,” he stresses. “Cliché[d] thinking and regurgitative thinking” in writers, he exclaims, “makes for bad TV and movies” (1997b). To counter this kind of “bad television,” Straczynski presents himself as a hard worker, claiming that during the week he averages three to four hours of sleep each night: “I’m at the stage in the morning, lunch is usually about 1, I’m there until about 6:30–7:00, I get a bite to eat on the way home in most cases, I get behind the keyboard at about 8–8:30, and I’m there until about 4:30 a.m., and then I crash. On weekends I try to make up for the lost sleep as best I can” (1998c). This statement clearly projects a performance that intends to garner respect from the fans who read the message.

In addition, Straczynski claims that his show is different (therefore superior) from other Hollywood television productions, and by doing so he, as Goffman says, is trying to “control the situation” of how people perceive his own role as the underdog producer creating innovation. “I’ve never really been part of the Hollywood SYSTEM, and have no desire to do so,” Straczynski once said (1994c). In conventional television, audiences are either given plots exploring such issues as whether the heroes “will catch the bad guy” or “cut the wire to the bomb in time (and it’s always the blue wire, never the red wire),” Straczynski complains, or they are given stories that deal with “current, trendy issues.” It is these kinds of shows, he posits, that breed nonliterary television: “At the end of the hour, the audience has been diverted, even entertained, but not uplifted, ennobled, enriched, or called upon to question, even to reconsider their positions on issues of importance.” Not only are most shows diversionary, but they are at once “ephemeral and trivial,” Straczynski

contends. “In the television genre,” he adds, writers “generally only think in terms of this week and next week” (1997b). Conventional television series depict a cast of characters thrown into the midst of a one-hour story, and, in the following week, they’re placed in a new story. Usually the stories do not connect together and characters rarely change. In contrast, *Babylon 5* is more comparable to Tolkien’s multivolume epic *The Lord of the Rings* (1954–1955; revised 1965), wherein each season is one volume of a large saga—“an epic story in the tradition of other epic tales,” Straczynski says (1997b). Essentially, he ended up writing a novel for television—a telenovel. In this kind of television, he develops evolving characters who become more than they thought they were within a tightly structured story. And this approach allows him to “set up plot threads that may take years to pay off,” he adds.

Despite the claims attributed to Straczynski of being a television innovator, he was not the first to tell stories through this mode. In England the adventuresome but oft-times campy *Doctor Who* (1963–1989) aired in half-hour segments and contained plots that took many episodes to resolve—the series itself lasted twenty-six years. Patrick McGoochan’s intelligently written British show *The Prisoner* (1967–1968), though short-lived (seventeen episodes), is considered by many to be one of the finest science fiction series ever made. Terry Nation’s *Blake’s 7* (1978–1981), another British production, was a one-hour series that contained a fairly clear beginning, middle, and end over its four-year life. The Brazilian *telenovella* has been around for many years. In the United States, long-running television series are found on daily soap operas that contain plots mapped out months in advance, and these have a certain similarity to the Brazilian form. One of the first successful dramatic one-hour television series to be created within the *telenovella* style in the United States was Steven Bochco’s *Hill Street Blues* (1981–1987). In this show, characters grew and changed over the course of the series. At one point in the late 1980s, Straczynski described how he wanted to produce a science fiction series with the same dramatic quality of *Hill Street Blues*. From there, such shows as *L.A. Law*, *NYPD Blue*, *Ally McBeal*, and *Sports Night* (to name a few) began to reveal a new style of television (for the United States) that carried the vision of a single creator. *Sports Night*’s entire first season (1998–1999), for example, was written by its executive producer Aaron Sorkin, who also wrote the screenplay for the film *A Few Good Men* (1992).

Babylon 5, however, does stand out as one of the first science fiction television series that evokes the depths of classic science fiction novels—Asimov’s

Foundation series being one such example. Most science fiction television, up to this point, tended to pander to an adolescent-minded audience (*Buck Rogers* [1979–1981] and *Battlestar Galactica* [1978–1979], for example), the original *Star Trek* (1966–1969) being mostly an exception. Literary science fiction as found in novels takes its readers seriously and presents issues found in the best of literature. Farah Mendlesohn, a lecturer in American History at the University College of Ripon and York St. John in England, as well as assistant editor for the scholarly journal *Foundation: The International Review of Science Fiction*, presents a similar argument about *Babylon 5*: “The depth of research embedded in this show is fascinating. Season two in particular seemed to be following very closely the break down of the League of Nations in the inter-war years,” she explains, “and while Straczynski says that the Yugoslav crisis helped shape his ideas, he clearly also knows his political history of the 1930s” (in Lancaster 1997, 13).

This kind of literary achievement contrasts strikingly with the kinds of stories that are “sci-fi,” that pejorative term designating what Harlan Ellison (the creative consultant for *B5* and the only writer to be honored with the Television Writers’ Guild of America Award four times) calls “cheapjack foolishness” (1997). Sci-fi is found in the tabloid mentality of UFO abductions, triangular-headed ETs, reinterpreted biblical apocrypha, and just plain bone stick stone gullibility” that the Heaven’s Gate cultists got caught up in, he explains (1997). *Independence Day* (1996) is an example of sci-fi. Scholar Mendlesohn agrees that *Babylon 5* is not this brand of sci-fi, but is sf, the acronym associated with literary merit: “*B5* is the first piece of television sf to bear any resemblance” to literary science fiction novels, she says. “It has plot depth and more importantly political depth. It does what only sf can do—deal with the major issues without getting too polemical” (1997).

Within these claims, Straczynski’s social front is further defined and performed as a producer who creates a literary form of science fiction television, one that deals with issues while at the same time offering an innovative way for pushing the limits of the medium. Just as *Star Trek* became equated with Gene Roddenberry, *Babylon 5* has become Straczynski’s social front:

I created *B5* because it was the story I not only wanted to tell, but the story I needed to tell. Using sf as a venue would allow me to deal in larger questions and issues of controversy without the political limitations that tend to be applied to other shows. Make the character a minority group

member, and lots of complications enter the equation if that character is shown in an unfavorable light; ditto if you show a Caucasian of a particular political stripe (either side, actually) . . . but the moment you substitute alien aliens, substitute interstellar affairs for geopolitical struggles, you have a new tool at your disposal: metaphor. And you can tackle issues without the political baggage from either side of the spectrum. (1997b)

Straczynski uses science fiction as a metaphor to comment on today's political and social struggles. One such struggle had its birth in the post–World War II space race, where the desire for empire was extended out into space. As this project failed in the 1970s, these ideals were fictionalized in various television shows, films, and novels. The 1980s and 1990s saw an increased awareness of postcolonial struggles: where nations, left behind in the postimperial wake, had to assert their own individuality and desire in an increasingly shrinking world. Straczynski's *Babylon 5* consistently casts international actors, and key characters are aliens who want to assert their individuality in a diverse galaxy that seems increasingly circled by the upstart humans dominating the political and market economies. . . .

From Praise to Criticism: Interacting with the Fans

In an attempt to avoid this trend of Hollywood insularity, Straczynski decided that he would keep an open door to his fans as well as to critics by daily going online to interact with them in order to provide answers to them about the show (except for a three-month hiatus between January and March 1996). In all, he posted over 17,000 replies. This allowed fans not only to participate in the *Babylon 5* universe, but also to interact at a critical level with the creator of that universe. In this way these “spectators stand outside” the drama in order to study it with an almost Brechtian distance. Scholar Henry Jenkins even believes (arguably) that the level of attention fans pay to the “particularity of television narratives . . . puts academic critics to shame” (1992, 86). Constance Penley agrees: “there is no better critic than a fan. No one knows the object better than a fan and no one is more critical” (1997, 3). During her time “hanging out” with *Star Trek* fanfic writers in the 1980s, Penley believed that these “amateur writers . . . ingeniously subverted and re[wrote] *Star Trek* to make it answerable to their own sexual and social desires” (2–3). . . . Penley even feels that her

own “critical stance” as a scholar grew from what she learned from these fan writers: “what I learned most from them was an attitude that I later developed into a critical stance” (3).

This kind of attitude challenges the social front Straczynski performs as a television producer. As a science fiction fan he can lurk (observe other postings online without interacting) and post messages on various Web sites, attend science fiction conventions, and talk with other fans as just another person. However, as soon as it became established that he was the creator and head writer—the show runner—of *Babylon 5*, a series many fans love, he could no longer move about with anonymity. In performing the social role of a producer—a business person—Straczynski could never escape the fact that the customer is always right (even when they are wrong). Goffman contends that when a person assumes a professional role in life—whether that of a mail carrier or, as in Straczynski’s case, of a television producer—he is not taking on a “material thing, to be possessed and then displayed; it is a pattern of appropriate conduct” that must be “enacted and portrayed, . . . realized” (1959, 75).

It is within Straczynski’s online social performance that we can begin to see his persona as producer break, and the flippant fan personality—the personality he contends against as embodied by some fan-critics—becomes his own persona, and the “pattern of appropriate conduct” comprising his producer front self-destructs. When one fan asked if he had taken the name for one alien species, the Minbari, from a science fiction novel by C. J. Cherryh, Straczynski “flamed out,” his answer revealing his defensiveness when it comes to the perceived unliterary role of his profession:

No, I did not use “The Faded Sun” [trilogy] as (to quote you) “a source when [I] created the Minbari.”

That’s called plagiarism.

And now I’m going to vent for a moment.

Why the fuck is it that every time a TV writer comes up with something, everybody scurries to figure out what book or short story it was swiped from? That standard is virtually never applied to novels that I’ve seen. But it always comes to us TeeVee types.

I have a brain, you know. I’m perfectly capable of thinking up stuff on my own. I’ve published novels. I’ve published short stories. I’ve written plays. I’ve never read ANY of Cherryh’s work that I can recall.

Instead of suggesting something was cribbed, all you needed to say was, “So, JMS, where did you get the name Minbari?”

And I would’ve told you that a “minbar” is the name for a pulpit in a Mosque. The first time I heard that, I thought it would be great as a name for an alien or an alien planet. And the people who would live there would be called Minbari.

Not everything that comes out of TV is cribbed, okay?

End of venting.

If I seem a bit pissed, it’s not specifically directed at you but at the general sense that TV writers have the creative capacity of blowfish and are incapable of creating anything on their own. (And you weren’t pointing to just the name but to the whole concept and parts thereof.) I don’t mean to flame, but I’ve heard it enough over the years, and I’m getting a little tired of it.

Every TV writer gets it, and almost no prose writer does, and that’s simple discrimination and stereotyping. (1994b)

This example shows Straczynski losing his “expressive coherence,” to use Goffman’s term, and it is here that we can see what Goffman means when he says that there is a “crucial discrepancy between our all-too-human selves and our socialized selves. As human beings we are presumably creatures of variable impulse with moods and energies that change from one moment to the next. As characters put on for an audience, however, we must not be subject to ups and downs” (1959, 56). Straczynski is unable or unwilling to maintain the polite role of producer to his customer, an eager fan, and so an analysis of his online performance reveals his “ups and downs.” Part of this expectation placed on Straczynski may derive from the fact that both roles Straczynski and his fans perform—the social front they project—have become, as Goffman would say, “institutionalized in terms of the abstract stereotyped expectations” (1959, 27) to which they give rise. Straczynski, whether he likes it or not, is dealing predominantly with a strong *Star Trek* fandom, and these fans were used to the outgoing congenial personality of Gene Roddenberry, which was much different from Straczynski’s somewhat introverted, shy personality,

Since Straczynski never is able to get the last word in online, he at one point used his role of producer to convey a message through his television show. Working within this tension between criticizing the medium he writes

in—having fought every year to get his show renewed—and the critics who would have loved to see their predictions become the epitaph on yet another failed science fiction series, Straczynski placed the following coda at the end of the concluding fourth-season episode, “The Deconstruction of Falling Stars”: “Dedicated to all the people who predicted that the Babylon Project would fail in its mission. . . . Faith manages.” This episode was filmed after TNT gave the producers of *Babylon 5* a fifth season. Straczynski had, in fact, previously written and directed what was to be the final episode of *Babylon 5*. After receiving the fifth-season renewal, he pulled the series’ closer and placed the segment at the end of the fifth season, writing “Deconstruction” as the replacement for the fourth season slot. The coda was Straczynski’s way of celebrating the fact that they had received their fifth season, despite all the critics who said that *Babylon 5* would not make it. As some fans criticized his show online, the statement was also one way for Straczynski to try to maintain control of the universe he had created. Some fans, however, continue to challenge his authority.

At one point, a fan posted a message online: “Up to [‘Into the Fire’] was good, but I can’t stand the aftermath, or what I see as JMS’ condescending and holier than thou attitude towards fans.” Straczynski responded by explaining how some people look to “spoilers” (the release of plot points for a story before it is aired) to determine where a story is heading and usually get it wrong—they “look ahead and write off the shows forthcoming.” So, Straczynski said to this fan that “the little gift I dropped into ‘Deconstruction’ [is] for folks who read spoilers and then dismiss the show as a result” (1997d). This both reveals the playfulness of Straczynski’s approach in dealing with his critics, and also renders a recorded performance that locates *Babylon 5* within a history of television production made up of people who have personal feelings, desires, and tastes—all of which determine which shows make it and which fail in the competitive television market. Straczynski knows this all too well, and he must maintain, as much as possible, the role of polite producer for fans, who, in Goffman’s words, “grudgingly allow certain symbols of status to establish a performer’s right to a given treatment, [. . .] are always ready to pounce on chinks in his symbolic armor in order to discredit his pretensions” (1959, 58–59).

The posting of a message online constitutes a performance that does display the type of behavior Goffman defines, despite the fact that the event has already occurred. The posting is not only the record of the event—it is

the event, the performance between fan and producer displayed on a digital public stage. The original performance between the fan's question, the producer's answer, and then their reading of that answer later is simultaneously the performance and the surface record of the performance. The performance actually occurred within the minds of the fan and Straczynski. Their words—and not gestures or vocal intonations—delineate the physical (or textual) ontology of a virtual performance.

With Internet exchanges, the performance of self is drawn as lines of text. People perform with textual utterances that Austin referred to as a “performative” back in 1955: “The uttering of the words is, indeed, usually a, or even *the*, leading incident in the performance of the act” (1975, 8). On the Internet—where there are no verbal utterances—the written text is equivalent to the spoken word. The utterances between Straczynski and fans are not just used to help engage an action—they *are* the action. The “effect upon the referent” in a performative utterance, philosopher Jean-François Lyotard explains, “coincides with its enunciation” (1984, 9). The reader of such exchanges is reconfigured into the role of spectator in observance of Straczynski's performance of his social front (as defined by Goffman).

Straczynski is unique in Hollywood in that he answers his fans, sometimes defensively. It is this performance between the fans and a producer, however, which immerses them not only in his imaginary universe, but also in his public persona (as a producer). For some fans, to have questions about a producer's show actually answered by the creator and writer of the series is as an honor. When “standing” in the presence of one whom some refer to as “the Great Maker,” fans may feel closer to the imaginary universe of *Babylon 5*. Answers to their questions—the performative utterances—place them near the same orbit as the maker of a universe they have watched for five years on television. These fans show the proper obligation of respect to their hero and, in return, receive the same respect. In essence, as Goffman would say, “they commonly seek to acquire information about him or to bring into play information about him already possessed” (1959, 1). Many fans perform the role of follower of the Great Maker, asking him specific information about *Babylon 5*. He presumably answers with the authority of one who knows. Straczynski's historical performance of his social front helps shape the exchanges with his fans: “Informed of these ways, the others will know how best to act in order to call forth a desired response from him,” Goffman contends (1).

In one recent post, a fan asked Straczynski a perceptive question about a particular plot point after watching the reedited and rebroadcast original pilot movie, *The Gathering* (1993; 1998). Ambassador Kosh, one of the First Ones, sees Commander Sinclair and recognizes him from 1,000 years ago. “So Kosh recognizes that Sinclair is the same person he knew 1000 years in the past as Valen; since Kosh didn’t know that this wasn’t really Sinclair (else why greet him so?) wouldn’t this have given Sinclair a dangerous foreknowledge?” (1998a). This attention to detail and expertise are outside the realm of the observation of most scholars of popular culture, Jenkins argues, giving fans the default status of a “competing education elite, albeit one without official recognition or social power” (1992, 86). Most producers are not themselves fans, nor grew out of fandom, and thus they would not even bother to communicate with fans at a critical level about the material they create. So this fan’s question, and the thousands like it, would normally circulate within fandom. The competing answers among fans would constitute the only critical discourse on *Babylon 5*. Straczynski, however, apparently answers nearly every question asked by fans. His answer to the above question silences the apparent inconsistency: “Internal dialogue . . . what he was thinking, his reaction” (1998a).

During the first season, Straczynski even incorporated a few ideas from fans into the show, maintaining his role as a producer who cares about his fans. One such instance occurred when he was trying to think of a name for a new kind of mineral; his ideas were repeatedly rejected by the legal department at Warner Bros.:

When names submitted for a mega corporation and a mineral were rejected for legal reasons, JMS went to the [online service] GENie B5 Category and asked for suggestions. The resulting names used are Quantum-40 for the mineral and Universal Terraform for the company. Q-40 is mentioned in “The Parliament of Dreams” and “Mind War.” The waiter mentioned in “Parliament” is named for David Strauss, who submitted Q-40. (“Lurker’s Guide to *Babylon 5*”)

This is the kind of interaction with the fans that Straczynski prefers to perform—it is a logical outcome of the social front he has created for himself (and which is, in some cases, now expected of him—so he becomes defined by his own previous actions and the expectations arising from those actions). If a character in a play, for example, performs an action that does not have

any logical grounding in any previous scenes, then the audience knows that something does not ring true—the character seems false. . . .

Straczynski wanted to answer for his show. He did not want to leave fans outside the producer's circle and its knowledge of how a show is made, and he felt that the fans of a television show deserve to be treated well by those who are responsible for making it. He has always felt that "sf media fans are the most exploited group of viewers around. They're expected to watch the show, pony up the dough for merchandise, then shut up and be good little viewers" (1994b). Straczynski says that he doesn't expect the viewers of his show to shut up. He wants to hear their voices. "It's very difficult at times—emotionally, and in terms of time and energy—to stick around (there are currently 1,154 messages in my GEni internet mailbox), but I think that it's important to keep with it. Because it's a way of showing respect to the viewer, to be open and accountable and responsive. Sometimes I get cranky, but I'm human, and that'll happen from time to time. Usually I avoid that" (1994b). Straczynski believes that he has the right to behave in the same manner and tone as his fan-critics, but when he does, he is no longer performing within the producer front many fans expect of him.

At one point, a *Star Trek* fan sent Straczynski an email "bomb" that, when downloaded onto his hard drive, "exploded"—deleting files from storage, including a *Babylon 5* script he was writing. A message popped up on screen: "*Star Trek* Lives." Other virulent fans have flamed Straczynski out of an unmoderated Internet news-group, forcing him into a three-month hiatus, until a moderated site could be set up. (The postings on a moderated site are prescreened.) Partly, these fan attacks originate in the fact that many science fiction shows, placed in an ever tighter market, have to fight to garner their ratings. Jenkins believes that these "fears of competition may be valid, since the emergence of a new fan interest can often be the center of a succession of shifting alliances" (1992, 91). Some *Star Trek* fans (and executives) did not want to lose their ratings to *Babylon 5*. In addition, many fans are not able to give input on their favorite shows. In the case of *Babylon 5*, they end up releasing this frustration on the producer. They attack because the anonymous medium allows them to perform their own social fronts in which they themselves attempt to exert legitimacy as individuals with valid opinions, when they otherwise have no voice in the show they want to critique.

Cultural critic Mark Dery believes that "the wraithlike nature of electronic communication accelerates the escalation of hostilities when tempers flare;

disembodied, sometimes pseudonymous combatants tend to feel that they can hurl insults with impunity (or at least without bodily harm)" (1994, 1). Email bombs and vitriolic attacks sent online are an extreme form of communication that pushes the boundaries of Jenkins' belief that "organized fandom is, perhaps and foremost, an institution of theory and criticism, a semistructured space where competing interpretations and evaluations of common texts are proposed, debated, and negotiated and where readers speculate about the nature of mass media and their own relationship to it" (1992, 86).

The fans' relationship with Straczynski is typically performed within the social front—his rules of the situation as he defines it. He is the creator and producer who can log off the Internet at any time. Each fan who realizes this must perhaps interact within the situation as defined by Straczynski. This fan-producer consensus is, as Goffman would say, a kind of "veneer" and it is "facilitated by each participant concealing his own wants behind statements which assert values to which everyone present feels obliged to give lip service" (1959, 9). By doing so, "the participants contribute to a single over-all definition of the situation which involves not so much a real agreement as to what exists but rather a real agreement as to whose claims concerning what issues will be temporarily honored" (9–10). Straczynski attempts to fight for this honor—to remain as a respected producer in the eyes of his fans.

However, when this "working consensus" is no longer honored, then any "defensive practices" employed by Straczynski to maintain his social front—"to safeguard the impression fostered by an individual during his presence before others" (1959, 14)—cracks, as can be seen in the two examples below. At the close of *Babylon 5*'s first season, as rumors spread that Michael O'Hare was fired at the end of season one and his character, Commander Sinclair, written out of the show, Straczynski answered this concern with his typical logic: "Someone should point out to [the fan-critic] the article appearing this week (out in many newspapers already) for the Tribune Syndicate, in which [the journalist] states that, based on her interviews and sources, it WAS a mutual and amicable parting, that Sinclair is NOT gone, and basically reinforces every single point made here [on the Net]" (1994c). But then he ends this statement more vehemently: "Assuming anyone really cares anymore . . . frankly, I'm getting pretty fucking tired and disgusted with the whole discussion. [This fan] is an idiot, pure and simple" (1994c).

In 1994 he put one fan “on notice,” after receiving what he claims was continual harassment:

[Name of fanatic]: you have ended your messages with a “quote” from me stating, “I’m foolin’ ’em with these funny footprints!” As with much of what comes out of your and [and that other fanatic’s] mouth, this is a lie and a fabrication, I never made that statement.

Just what the hell is your problem, anyway? You put info out that I’m fired, you misquote me, you lie to others on [Internet] systems about me . . . this is stalking behavior on your part, and I’m getting very, very tired of it, and I’m not going to stand for much more of it. You may consider that I am now putting you on formal notice. Henceforth, all further fabrications and downright lies that you post, all harassing messages sent by you, all rumors and deliberate distortions will be forwarded from me to my attorneys, and gathered to be filed with an attorney in your state for potential prosecution under libel laws and anti-stalking laws. Further, I may be forced to take personal legal action against you. Remember that I have your address.

You have deliberately manufactured quotes from me. You have stated, as fact, that I was fired from my job. You have told others that I tracked you down for disagreeing with me, when in fact (as others here can and have agreed to testify), it was incident #1, the firing story, that prompted this action. You (and now, our latest homunculus, [name of another fanatic]) deliberately distort and misrepresent and simply lie about matters injurious to my (and in the latter case, Michael O’Hare’s) career.

I would also request the sysop of the system from which you are logging in to be aware of your stalking behavior, and to reconsider your continued access to this forum.

I have had enough of this obsessive behavior from you. You are now under formal notice to stop it and stop it now. I don’t know what the reason is for this sick fixation of yours, but get some help for it.

If you don’t stop, you, and your family, and your employer will be hearing from my attorneys in very short order.

Enough is enough. (1994c)

Straczynski believes that it is such behavior by obsessive fanatics that deters other producers from logging on to the Internet for discussions:

Y'know . . . [producers James] Morgan and [Harry] Wong from *X-Files* used to be on the nets a lot, and they got out because they were driven to despair by the casual, callous cruelties of people who judge harshly and without any kind of information . . . [*Babylon 5* actress] Mira [Furlan] was on for a while, and isn't on anymore, because she says people are just casually cruel, they bitch about things that aren't even true half the time. I know a lot of others, actors and producers, who just don't want to put up with this crap. Some days, I don't blame them. Some days, I think I'd like to join them. (1997c)

In July 1998 Straczynski logged off America Online—his main Internet account—after an irate fan flooded his email box with so many messages that his important mail was shunted aside. (Complaints to AOL did not help.) He has continued to keep his Compuserve account open. Near the end of 1999 he reactivated his AOL account.

However much Straczynski would like to log off, by remaining online he continues to participate in what he calls interactive television. Instead of viewers interacting with the actors and plot onscreen (as with CD-ROMs), however, fans interact with the producer at the level of production process—not fiction. His other front, the one of educator, becomes the reason he claims as to why he stays logged on. Could it not also be the excitement generated from the fact that by logging on Straczynski is able to find out what his viewers actually think about his show? Instead of reading reviews by professional critics, he gets to read the reviews as written by the fans of his show. One time a fan asked Straczynski why he continues to defend his show:

—Oftentimes when people criticize the show, or a character or whatever, you rise to its defense. I could understand you answering questions people have about different aspects of the story—that helps us all. But rebutting people who don't like X or Y or whatever?

—Your work is your work. There is no need to defend it or its quality.

—So, why do you do this?

Straczynski typically weaves in a self-effacing answer in an attempt to come across as someone who is not spiteful when he receives feedback not in line with his expectations:

Usually, I don't . . . if someone doesn't like something, he doesn't like something, that's fine and to be expected. It's when someone deliberately

distorts something that I tend to get into it.

Why?

Because I'm an idiot, that's why. (1998b)

Straczynski's apparent contradiction of his social front—his graciousness in answering fan questions and his sarcastic overreaction to a few fan-critics—reveals a complex performance. The social front Straczynski performs is perhaps far different from his private persona. Yet, within the evidence gleaned from his public performance, it can be seen that Straczynski is ethically motivated and rarely suffers fools, or at least those he perceives as fools. But since fans can interact with him only at conventions or online, they will continue to perceive only his public social performance. But within the analysis of this performance his private personality begins to be revealed: Straczynski is not just a producer, and he isn't playing a producer role—he is an intelligent, sometimes impatient artist who desires to answer only to himself.

Note

1. This is clear in today's politics when Democrats and Republicans enact their desire to redraw Congressional districts to favor their constituencies. Republicans try to keep the lines mainly white and middle-class, while Democrats want to make the lines reflect an interracial population, so minorities can have a stronger voice within the government.

Writing Bodies in Space

Media Fan Fiction as Theatrical Performance

FRANCESCA COPPA

Introduction

I explore a relatively simple proposition: that fan fiction develops in response to dramatic rather than literary modes of storytelling and can therefore be seen to fulfill performative rather than literary criteria. This may seem obvious, as the writing of fan fiction is most strongly and specifically associated with the nearly forty-year-old phenomenon of media fandom,¹ which is to say, the organized subculture that celebrates, analyzes, and negotiates with stories told through the mass (mainly televisual) media, and whose crossroads has long been the annual MediaWest convention held since 1981 in Lansing, Michigan. But the importance of media fan fiction being written in response to dramatic rather than literary storytelling has been overlooked for at least two reasons; first, that fan fiction is itself a textual enterprise, made of letters and words and sentences written on a page (or, more likely these days, a screen), and it therefore seems sensible to treat it as a literary rather than an essentially dramatic form; and second, that media fandom has its origins in science fiction fandom, which is a heavily textual genre. Media fandom spun off from science fiction fandom as a direct result of the original *Star Trek* television series (1966–1969),² and although fans and scholars have catalogued many similarities (in fannish organization, jargon, and interests; even today, most media fans maintain a strong interest in science fiction and fantasy) and differences (most strikingly in terms of gender, but also in attitudes toward profit and professionalization) between the two fannish cultures, the impact of the switch in genre from prose to drama is rarely

discussed or even noticed. But whereas fans of literary science fiction often take to writing “original” science fiction themselves, fans of mass media write fan fiction—which, I submit, is more a kind of theatre than a kind of prose.

In making this claim, I should note that I am defining *fan fiction* narrowly as creative material featuring characters that have previously appeared in works whose copyright is held by others. Although the creative expansion of extant fictional worlds is an age-old practice, by restricting the term *fan fiction* to reworkings of currently copyrighted material, I effectively limit the definition not just to the modern era of copyright, but to the even more recent era of active intellectual property rights enforcement. Although fans themselves often seek continuities between their art-making practices and those with a much longer history (Laura M. Hale starts her *History of Fan Fic* timeline with “0220 The Chinese invent paper”),³ this conflation of folk and fan cultures may blur important distinctions between them, not least of which is the relatively recent legal idea that stories can be owned. It is only when storytelling becomes industrialized—or, to draw upon Richard Ohmann’s definition of mass culture, produced at a distance by a relatively small number of specialists—that fan fiction begins to make sense as a category, because only then are “fans” distinguished from Ohmann’s distant “specialists,” just as amateurs are differentiated from professionals (1996, 14; and see Garber 2001).

The line between amateur and professional writing is both sharply defined and frequently crossed in science fiction fandom, because science fiction is a literature itself written by fans of the genre; to be an amateur science fiction writer is therefore merely a step on the way to becoming a professional science fiction writer, and professional writers still go to conventions to hobnob. From this perspective, the professional is superior to the amateur, who is serving a kind of apprenticeship. Conversely, MediaWest prides itself on being a convention run by fans and for fans, without any paid guests (professional authors, actors, or producers), and fan fiction writers tend to be defiantly amateur in the sense of writing precisely what they want for love alone. In this schema, to be a professional is to write at the command of others for money. There are exceptions to this in creators like Joss Whedon or Aaron Sorkin, who are seen as relatively fannish auteurs trying to make personal shows within the confines of the industry. However, fans mostly shake their heads in bemusement at television shows that can’t keep track of basic continuity, or films that miss obvious dramatic opportunities; it’s understood

that this is the by-product of creating a dramatic universe for profit and by committee. Bemusement can give way to an angrier sort of frustration when creators visibly command the resources and power necessary for good mass media storytelling and are judged to have botched it anyway (George Lucas and Chris Carter come to mind).

In the infamous “Get a Life” (1986) sketch on *Saturday Night Live*, William Shatner framed his involvement with *Star Trek* as purely professional: “You’ve turned an enjoyable little job, that I did as a lark for a few years, into a colossal waste of time!” Shatner’s professionalism is tied to his refusal to take mass media storytelling seriously. But what of the fan who does take mass media storytelling seriously? What response is available to her? The science fiction fan may challenge her literary forerunners by becoming a professional writer, but the media fan is less likely to become a producer, screenwriter, or director. Science fiction is produced from among “us,” but the mass media is still produced at a distance by “them.” Few fan fiction writers will ever have access to the means of production for mass media storytelling. The bar is much higher; the funds needed are enormous; one still has to move to Los Angeles or Vancouver; the odds of writing a show you like, as opposed to one you’re assigned to, are small; until relatively recently, the gender bias in Hollywood was astounding. There is, in short, a very small chance of a fan fiction writer becoming a professional mass media storyteller, even if she was inclined to do so. Defiant amateurism in this case is both realistic and structurally smart, but that doesn’t stop some science fiction fans from scoffing at the media fan’s refusal to write something potentially salable.

Not only has “derivative” fiction been scoffed at within science fiction fandom, but drama has historically been a belittled category as well.⁴ Despite the popular sense of science fiction as a genre with space battles, laser guns, and voyages to the moon, these dramas have been traditionally scoffed at by science fiction writers, whose allegiance is to idea-based narrative fiction. Magazines and novels are at the heart of science fiction fandom, not stage, film, or television (Ohmann 1996; Zimmerman 2003). In January 1976, an essay by Harlan Ellison appeared in the Science Fiction Writers of America newsletter urging the membership to take drama, and the SFWA’s Nebula Award for Best Dramatic Presentation, more seriously:

We haven’t been quite as concerned with the Drama Nebulas as with the more familiar categories, chiefly because a small percentage of our

membership has been employed in the areas that Nebula touches, and so it has been something of an illegitimate offspring. But sf films and tv shows and stage productions and sf-affiliated record albums reach a much wider audience than even our most popular novels and stories. And to a large degree the public image of sf is conditioned by these mass-market presentations. (Ellison 1984, 82)

Ellison pointed out the historic “snobbishness on the part of our older, more print-oriented members toward film and tv” and noted that “everyone else seems to understand the power of film/tv. SFWA doesn’t” (84). However, when the group chose not to award a Nebula for drama in 1977, Ellison resigned from SWFA and gave a speech in which he berated his audience for “worrying about a lousy 5 cents a word” while ignoring the much more lucrative fields of stage, television, film, and audio recordings (87–98). But Ellison’s concern was for the strategic and financial importance of drama, not for drama’s artistic value. In fact, Ellison is blatant about his allegiance to prose: “Tragically, the illiterates keep multiplying, and the audience for books *must* be kept alive! . . . Books are *my* first interest, books should be *your* first interest. They count. But the way to support the writing of books is to get some of that film and TV money” (93).

This is hardly an enthusiastic defense of performative storytelling; Ellison merely argued that SFWA members should profit from the current boom in dramatic science fiction—1977 being, of course, the year *Star Wars* was released. Ellison not only wrote the hands-down most popular episode of *Star Trek*, “City On the Edge of Forever,” but is now also famous as a fierce defender of writers’ intellectual property. However, the snobbishness against drama Ellison was fighting in the 1970s is still alive and well in the new millennium. Orson Scott Card (2005) celebrated the recent (and surely temporary) death of the *Star Trek* franchise by attacking the original series as mere visual “spectacle” for people who weren’t readers of science fiction, although he does end by granting that “screen sci-fi has finally caught up with written science fiction.” This is offensive to the female sf fans who created *Star Trek* fandom in the late 1960s; as Justine Larbalestier (2002) has shown, women were always present as readers of sf, though they weren’t always visible on the zine letter pages that were the public face of the sf fandom (23–27). In fact, the subset of female sf fans who founded *Star Trek* fandom had multiple literacies and competencies: like many readers (and

writers) of science fiction, they were likely not only to be avid readers but also to have advanced degrees in the hard sciences at a time when this was much less common for women (Coppa 2006a).

Most media fans still maintain at least a (ritual) allegiance to print over film; the two most recent large-scale media fandoms—*Harry Potter* and *The Lord of the Rings*—are listed at the multifandom archive site Fanfiction.net under “Books” rather than “Movies” even though both fandoms grew exponentially only after film versions appeared. Ask a fan, and she’ll generally express a preference for the book over the “movieverse,” but over and over, dramatic, not literary, material generates fan fiction. Although creative fan-nish practices have become familiar enough to be applied to practically every genre of art—fanfic exists about books, movies, television, comics, cartoons, anime, bands, celebrity culture, and political culture—it’s only when stories get *embodied* that they seem to generate truly massive waves of fiction.

It is a truth almost universally acknowledged that fan fiction is an inferior art form and worthy of derision—oh, for kids, maybe, sure, to get them reading and writing, but writing fan fiction is nothing that any respectable adult should be doing. Fan fiction, from this point of view, is neither art nor commerce. Instead, it is charged with being derivative and repetitive, too narrowly focused on bodies and character at the expense of plot or idea. That may sound like failure by conventional literary standards, but if we examine fan fiction as a species of performance, the picture changes. Fan fiction’s concern with bodies is often perceived as a problem or flaw, but performance is predicated on the idea of bodies, rather than words, as the storytelling medium.

Scholars of performance studies often refer to their object of study as “the movement of bodies in space,” and the behavior of those bodies is never unique or “original”; all behavior, as Richard Schechner (2002) explains, “consists of recombining bits of previously behaved behaviors” (28). For this reason, Schechner defines performance as “twice behaved” or “restored” behavior (22), so a focus on the importance of repetition and combination as well as a focus on bodies is intrinsic to performance as a genre. As Schechner explains:

Restored behavior is living behavior treated as a film director treats a strip of film. These strips of behavior can be rearranged or reconstructed; they are independent of the casual systems (personal, social, political, technological) that brought them into existence. They have a life of their own. The original “truth” or “source” of the behavior may not be known,

or may be lost, ignored, contradicted—even while that truth or source is being honored. (28)

This decontextualizing of behavior echoes the appropriation and use of existing characters in most fan fiction; in fact, one could define fan fiction as a textual attempt to make certain characters “perform” according to different behavioral strips. Or perhaps the characters who populate fan fiction are themselves the behavioral strips, able to walk out of one story and into another, acting independently of the works of art that brought them into existence. The existence of fan fiction postulates that characters are able to “walk” not only from one artwork into another, but from one genre into another; fan fiction articulates that characters are neither constructed or owned, but have, to use Schechner’s phrase, a life of their own not dependent on any original “truth” or “source.”

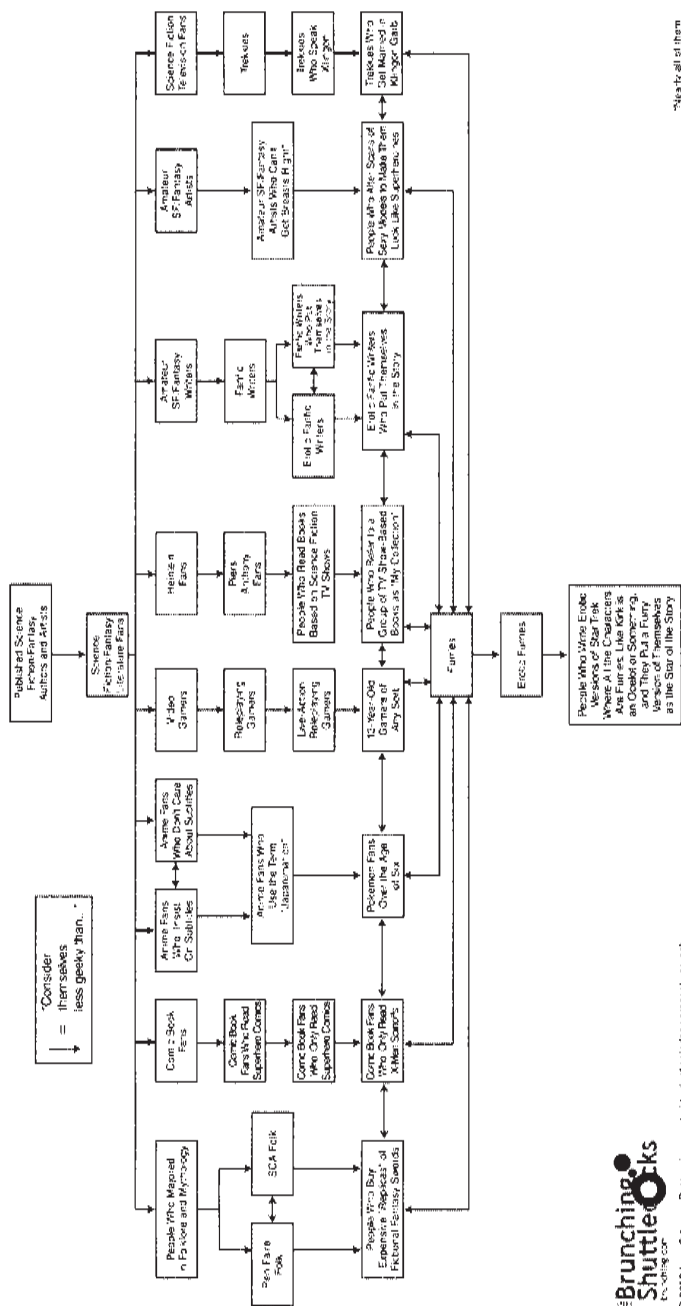
What better tool to apply to studying *Star Trek* and its derivative artistic productions than a form of criticism dedicated to explaining the semiotic value of bodies in space? By recognizing drama and not prose as the antecedent medium for fan fiction, and by examining fan fiction through the lens of performance studies, we are able to begin explaining three highly debated things about fan fiction: (1) Why does fan fiction seem to focus on bodies? (2) Why does fan fiction seem so repetitious? and (3) Why is fan fiction produced within the context of media fandom? What is the relationship between a fanfic writer and her audience?

Embodying the Geek Hierarchy

I begin a more detailed argument about the conflict between textual and embodied meanings with a quick close reading of the Brunching Shuttlecock’s “Geek Hierarchy” (figure 11.1). The Brunching Shuttlecocks are an online comedy troupe popular among a broad spectrum of geeks, nerds, fans, programmers, and hackers. The “Geek Hierarchy” is one of their most circulated jokes, but a revealing joke, one that gets at something true about fannish hierarchies and social structure.

The Shuttlecocks place “Published Science Fiction *Authors*” at the very top of the chart, to be followed by “Science Fiction *Literature Fans*,” “Science Fiction *Television Fans*,” “*Fanfic Writers*,” “*Erotic Fanfic Writers*,” and “*Erotic Fanfic Writers Who Put Themselves in the Story*” (all italics are my emphasis).

THE GEEK HIERARCHY



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Figure 1: A flow diagram illustrating the study design. The process starts with 'Study Design' (n=100), which leads to 'Data Collection' (n=100). This is followed by 'Data Analysis' (n=100), which then leads to 'Results' (n=100). Finally, the 'Results' lead to 'Conclusions' (n=100).

To frame it another way, the Shuttlecocks rank the dramatic below the literary and the erotic below the dramatic. The hierarchy supports traditional values that privilege the written word over the spoken one and mind over body. The move down the hierarchy therefore represents a shift from literary values (the mind, the word, the “original statement”) to what I would claim are theatrical ones (repetition, performance, embodied action). As we descend, we move further away from “text” and more toward “body,” and, at least on the media fandom side of the diagram, toward the female body (because fan writers are likely to be women). At the very bottom of the hierarchy are the “furries,” or fans who enjoy media involving anthropomorphic animals. These fans indulge a fantasy of pure body that asserts a connection between our human bodies and animal bodies. The mainstream discomfort with that idea is straight out of Freud’s *Civilization and Its Discontents*.

Even the Geek Hierarchy’s comparison between “Science Fiction Authors” and “Fanfic Writers” makes its distinction in terms of embodied action—because writing is a visible physical activity, a verb, while “authoring” (derived from the Latin *auctor*, “creator”) is something more complex. To author a text is to have power over it, to take public responsibility for it, regardless of whether or not one did the actual work of selecting words and putting them in order. Authorship is a sign of control rather than creation. This distinction is gendered, because there is a larger tradition of seeing the female writer in terms of body rather than mind. Consider, for instance, Hawthorne’s famous denigration of female authors as “scribbling women”; the slur conjures a picture of these women as engaged in frenetic activity, as if women’s writing must be more physical than mental. Scribbling women are like *skiing* women, *cleaning* women, *dancing* women—not minds, but bodies in space.

Moreover, Henry Jenkins, in *Textual Poachers* (2002), explains that one of the earliest uses of the word *fan* was in reference to “women theatregoers, ‘Matinee Girls,’ who male critics claimed had come to admire the actors rather than the plays” (12)—or, to gloss the idea another way, bodies rather than texts, or to have given a somehow wrongful emphasis to the body in space. Similarly, Joan Marie Verba, in her 1996 [2003] history of *Star Trek* zine culture, *Boldly Writing*, notes that by 1975, ever-increasing numbers of fans saw *Star Trek* not as science fiction but “as a ‘buddy’ show, or as a heroic/romantic saga, in which Kirk and Spock were the focus.” She continues, “Many of these stories reminded me of the ancient Greek legend of Damon and Pythias, with Kirk and Spock substituted” (23). This allusion is

interesting, because practically speaking, the legendary characters aren't so much "characters" as a set of actions, a behavioral script; to offer to exchange places with a comrade who is facing death is to *be* Damon and Pythias, and so this sort of fan fiction "casts" Kirk and Spock as the legendary friends in a performance of the myth. From this viewpoint, Kirk and Spock aren't characters firmly enmeshed in a narrative, but performers whose twice-behaved behaviors might (like Schechner's behavioral strips) be rearranged or otherwise reconstructed. The result of this reconstruction wouldn't be "original" behavior, however, because according to Schechner, there's no such thing. Rather, Kirk and Spock are well cast to perform Damon and Pythias. One set of twice-behaved behaviors is exchanged for another. This emphasis on character, behavior, and relationships is often framed as a female value; it's certainly a theatrical one.

We can see these theatrical and performative values in the very earliest creative contributions to *Star Trek* zines. The first *Star Trek* fanzine, *Spockanalia* (1967, edited by Devra Langsam and Sherna Comerford), included the creative artwork "The Territory of Rigel," by Dorothy Jones (figure 11.2). In *Boldly Writing*, Verba describes this as a "poem," but it is, in fact, a song with an explicit stage direction that tells us it's a *ni var* to be performed by two voices and a Vulcan harp, no doubt influenced by the scene in the *Star Trek* episode "Charlie X" where Uhura sings while accompanied by Spock. Perhaps some readers actually sang the song with their friends, or perhaps the reader was merely supposed to direct the performance of the song in her head—but the key thing is that the reader of this song can do these things because she has an image of Leonard Nimoy as Spock with a Vulcan harp accompanying a singer. The performance of this song has already been cast; we know the behaviors of both singers and harpist. To read this song is therefore to supplement the written words with the mental image of the appropriate bodies. This "text" is overtly performative and relational; two voices, *ni var*, two people singing; as the songwriter explains, *ni var* means "two form," comparing and contrasting two aspects of the same thing (Verba 1996 [2003], 11). This *ni var* features two people singing, a third if the Vulcan harpist isn't one of the singers, and a fourth if you, the reader/director, isn't part of the performance. It's not a poem, it's a party; it's an artwork that implies a community.

Similarly, some fan fiction has been written in script or teleplay form, often by fans who aspired to write for the produced show (and there is a

The Territory of Rigel

(A *ni var* to be performed by two voices and Vulcan harp)

First Voice

Rigel in the scanner,
blue-white and crystalline,
shining. Light
born in the corona
pours into space.

The instruments whisper,
the panel lights flicker.
The stars are still and clear.

Their song is deliberate,
long years to a cadence.

Dust in their paths
moves in their wake like water.

and Rigel shines.

The stars like ancient trees.
heavy with planets, blazing with life.

I wander the bright roads
whom no planet claims:
live in the open Galaxy

I have clarity before me,
and Rigel full of light.

Second Voice

Dark and silent

is the field of space.

The bridge is empty.
The time, three hundred.

The instruments tell little.
The computer absorbs in silence
trivial patterns meaning nothing.

Three-twenty.
The night is very long.

In the dark gulf is the ship.
in the sleeping ship is the bridge
on the bridge am I,
silence upon silence,

as quiet as memory,
and dark as death.

I am far
from my beginning and my end.

Four hundred and the watch is changed.
I leave the bridge and go
from darkness into darkness.

11.2. "The Territory of Rigel," by Dorothy Jones. From *Spockanalia I* ©1967, edited by Sherna Comerford and Devra Michele Langsam. Available in *Verba* (1996, 2). Used with permission.

perception among fans that a greater proportion of these script-writing fans have been men [Cynthia Walker and Laura Hale, personal communications, June 8, 2005]). An actual theatrical play based on *Star Trek* was put on at the Denham Springs Community Theatre in 1971; the fact was widely reported in zines, as was Gene Roddenberry's approving letter: "I have no objection to plays similar to *Star Trek* or even identical to *Star Trek* if done by students or community groups on a non profit basis as long as the appropriate credit

is given to the source material and individuals. Or as long as a production remains a community theatre venture" (Verba [1996] 2003, 6). Roddenberry's coda insists on the play's nonprofit status; then as now, to write in script form would be a sign of a writer's aspiring professionalism. Although some fan teleplays were probably written as spec scripts for the industry, others ended up published in zines, and when online fan fiction archives became popular in the mid-1990s, the fiction was categorized not only as "gen," "het," or "slash," but by such categories as "romance," "drama," "humor," "poetry," "filk," or "teleplay." But the script form has always been unpopular among readers, so a fan whose primary audience was other fans rather than the television industry was more likely to tell her dramatic story in prose. Arguably, the teleplay form declined as media fandom broke away from science fiction fandom, becoming more defiantly amateur as television writing grew more professionalized, but the current fracturing of the television market due to competition from cable, satellite, DVD, video games, and the Internet seems to be reversing this trend once again. Newer shows (and older shows that have had time to evaluate the creative and economic value of their fan base) increasingly invite the creative participation of fans, and many seem to want to blur the lines between amateur and professional, fan and specialist. As an example, the Web site for the television series *The Dead Zone*, a show helmed by longtime *Star Trek* writer and producer Michael Piller, offers to fans not only free copies of the aired scripts, but a writer's guide for the show and explicit instructions on how to send in your teleplay for professional consideration. In this climate, fans may become professional movie or teleplay writers while still maintaining their identities as fans and while writing fan fiction.

The existence of the teleplay and other performative forms helps to demonstrate fan fiction's roots as an essentially dramatic literature, but the larger part of my argument is that fan fiction directs bodies in space even when it's not overtly written in theatrical form. Readers come to fan fiction with extra-textual knowledge, mostly of characters' bodies and voices. Jane Mailander (2005) argues that fan fiction is an ideal medium for erotica because "the audience knows the characters; they've walked that mile in their shoes, they are *primed*. The dynamic between these two people is clear to the audience." A fan fiction writer has "the challenge of expressing that dynamic, of taking it to a place that would make the producers blush—but a place that must follow logically from that baseline development." Mailander is talking about

character, but she might as well be talking about bodies; we know who these characters are because we know the actors who play them, and we bring our memories of their physicality to the text, so the reader is precharged, preeroticized. But the actor's body, as much as the words on the page, is the medium of even nonerotic fannish storytelling. In making her point that we come to fan fiction "primed," Mailander also identifies something we might correlate with Schechner's twice-behaved behavior. We're primed because we've met these characters already, and now we're seeing them again. In theatre, we call that a *production*, and it isn't a problem.

Repetition and the Derridean Supplement

From a literary perspective, fan fiction's unusual emphasis on the body seems like a thematic obsession or a stylistic tic, but in theatre, bodies are the storytelling medium, the carriers of symbolic action. Similarly, in literary terms, fan fiction's repetition is strange; in theatre, stories are retold all the time. Theatre artists think it's fine to tell the same story again, but differently: not only was Shakespeare's *Hamlet* a relatively late version of the tale (previous versions include the "Amleth" of Saxo Grammaticus, its translation by François de Belleforest, and the *Ur-Hamlet* attributed to Thomas Kyd), but we're happy to see differently inflected versions of the tale. Moreover, there's no assumption that the first production will be definitive; in theatre, we want to see *your* Hamlet and *his* Hamlet and *her* Hamlet; to embody the role is to reinvent it. We also want to see new generations of directors and designers recast the play without regard for authorial intent or historicity, putting Hamlet into infinite alternative universes. What if Hamlet was a graduate student? What if Hamlet had an (entirely ahistorical) Oedipal complex? What if Hamlet was a street kid in the Bronx? Hamlet has been portrayed as an action hero/medieval warrior (Mel Gibson, dir. Franco Zeffereilli, 1990), the avenging son of a Japanese CEO (*The Bad Sleep Well*; Toshiro Mifune, dir. Akira Kurosawa, 1960), an angry young man (Peter O'Toole, dir. Laurence Olivier, *Old Vic*, 1963), and a university student home on break (Alex Jennings, dir. Matthew Warchus at the RSC, 1997).

In theatre, there's a value to revising the same text in order to explore different aspects and play out different behavioral strips; similarly, in television, we don't mind tuning in week after week to see the same characters in entirely different stories. We don't mind new versions of *Hamlet* the way we

don't mind new episodes of *Star Trek*. We don't say, "Oh, *Star Trek* again? We had *Star Trek* last week!" We don't mind if Kirk and Spock visit—as they did on the aired series—a planet based on Roman gladiator culture, or Native American culture, or America during the Great Depression. Most people happily watch televised repeats—identical replays of dramatic action. How much more interesting would different performances of the same scripts be if the actors and directors explored the limitations of the text and tried to elicit different readings, different embodied meanings? And because fan fiction is an amateur production accountable to no market forces, it allows for radical reimaginings: plots, themes, and endings that would never be permitted on network television. One could imagine *Star Trek* by David Lynch, *Star Trek* by Stanley Kubrick, *Star Trek* by Woody Allen—and what I'm getting at here is that that's what fan fiction is.

But you don't even have to attend multiple productions to understand doubling and repetition in theatre. Most productions were scripts first: theatre is an art form where we read something with the goal of making something else out of it. The script isn't the final product in theatre; in fact, one of the questions that theatre theorists have had to debate is the location of the work of art. Is it in the author's original script? Probably not; the original script goes through innumerable changes in performance and is rarely seen outside of library archives. The published script of a theatrical or teleplay is usually a postproduction draft that takes into account changes that were made during production by actors, director, and designers; far from being evidence of a single authorial vision, a published play is one of the most collaborative genres in existence. And most theatre works never result in a published script at all, so it's difficult to argue for text as the central object in a theatrical art experience.

Far from being a sacred text, a play's script is more like a blueprint for a production—a thing used to make another thing. Like any architectural blueprint, a script provides the directions for building something three-dimensional and situated in space. But one can't point to theatrical production as the center of dramatic art either, because the question then becomes: which production? A script isn't simply directions for building something in space, but also in time—not just a single production, but a potentially infinite series of productions. Marvin Carlson (1985) theorizes the complicated relationship between all the multiple and vastly different works of art that can be associated with a single dramatic story in terms of the Derridean

supplement, and the supplement also serves as an excellent model for fan fiction as well (see Derecho 2006, who uses the Derridean term *archontic* to describe this same supplementarity).

The best way to explain a supplement is by pointing to a concrete example of one; Roger Laport used a French dictionary, but let me substitute for that the more familiar example of an encyclopedia. When you buy an encyclopedia, you buy a complete set, volumes A–Z. But the world keeps progressing, and knowledge keeps expanding, and so this “complete” set of encyclopedias is outdated the second you buy it; it doesn’t include today’s news and discoveries. So when you buy an encyclopedia, they generally also include a yearly supplement—2005, 2006, and so on—that you can slot into your bookcase after “Z.” So with that image in mind, consider what the supplement does: it reveals the original thing, the encyclopedia, in this case, as incomplete, but also prophesies future supplements. In fact, a supplement suggests that completeness is actually impossible, as the presence of a 2005 supplement suggests the need for one in 2006, 2007, 2008, and on into the future, indefinitely.

We can apply this concept to theatrical performance, and then to fan fiction as performance. In theatre, a working script becomes a staged performance, but as Carlson explains, “A play on stage will inevitably display material lacking in the written text, quite likely not apparent as lacking until the performance takes place, but then revealed as significant and necessary. At the same time, the performance, by revealing this lack, reveals also a potentially infinite series of future performances providing further supplementation” (1985, 10). Fan fiction works much the same way. Once a story supplements canon—giving us something the original source did not by filling in a missing scene, getting inside a character’s head, interpreting or clarifying or departing from the story as originally told—future supplements become inevitable, and they aren’t any more redundant than multiple productions of *Hamlet*.

A conservative critic might argue that Shakespeare can support that level of interpretation and invention, whereas your average—or even better than average—television show simply can’t. We tell certain stories over and over because they’re brilliant and continue to be relevant. I don’t share that point of view. I agree with Alan Sinfield when he argues that Shakespeare seems relevant because he is constantly interfered with (1994, 4–5). It is Shakespeare’s endlessly creative fans—be they theatre practitioners carrying the stories on their bodies or literary critics teasing out new textual interpreta-

tions—who keep Shakespeare going. An endless number of Shakespearean productions supplement the texts, adding meanings that Shakespeare never intended and making them meaningful to twenty-first-century audiences. There’s no reason not to see this as a perfectly valid artistic activity; and if it is so for theatre, why is it not for television?

Before a Live Audience

The third theatrical quality I want to discuss in terms of fan fiction is the need for a live audience. A live audience has always been a precondition for fandom. Longtime fanzine editor and archivist Arnie Katz (n.d.) explains that science fiction magazines—particularly their letter pages—were essential to the genesis of science fiction fandom. As Katz notes, “Science fiction and fantasy were widely available for many years before fandom erupted. . . . Those who wanted to be more than readers couldn’t do much while books remained the main delivery vehicle for science fiction. It’s hard to interact with a book, other than to write a letter to the author in care of the publisher.” Science fiction fans have a saying: “fandom is a way of life”—which is to say, science fiction literature fandom is more than a celebration of texts; it’s a series of practices. This may be why most academic works on fandom are ethnographies, or analyses of social organizations and cultural performances. As Katz points out, fandom is essentially interactive in a way beyond the traditional reader-writer relationship.

Fan fiction, too, is a cultural performance that requires a live audience; fan fiction is not merely a text, it’s an event. Whether published in a zine, on a mailing list, to an archive, or to a blog like LiveJournal.com, there’s a kind of simultaneity to the reception of fan fiction, a story everyone is reading, more or less at the same time, more or less together. Over the years, technology has allowed television viewers to reconstitute themselves as an audience; now, you can watch television while you post to the boards at TelevisionWithoutPity.com, or sit in an IRC channel, or send updates to your mailing list; you don’t have to wait for the next issue of a zine to be mailed. Similarly, fandom gathers together a live, communal audience for stories, and fans have adopted and adapted every mode of communication in an effort to ensure that fan fiction quickly reaches its target audience.

Compare this to John Ruskin’s definition of a “true” book:

A book is essentially not a talked thing, but a written thing; and written, not with the view of mere communication, but of permanence. The book of talk is printed only because its author cannot speak to thousands of people at once; if he could, he would—the volume is mere multiplication of his voice. . . . But a book is written, not to multiply the voice merely, not to carry it merely, but to perpetuate it. (1985, 259–60)

Most books—including most mass market fiction—are not “true books” by this standard. Most books merely convey the storytelling voice to an audience that cannot be gathered together to listen simultaneously, as they do in theatre. A book’s audience is generally dispersed over both space and time; people in different places read a book at different times, and reading is—at least in the last hundred or so years—a pretty solitary activity. This didn’t used to be so; the line between reading and theatre was thinner in the days when a family patriarch might read aloud to his family after dinner, or a group of middle-class women might stage a tableau based on a favorite text. Ironically, the rise of literacy and the greater availability of printed matter are largely responsible for fracturing the communal reading audience and encouraging the solitary consumption of stories. Consider Isaac Asimov’s prophetic description of “the perfect entertainment cassette”:

A cassette as ordinarily viewed makes sound and casts light. That is its purpose, of course, but must sound and light obtrude on others who are not involved or interested? The ideal cassette would be visible and audible only to the person using it. . . . We could imagine a cassette that is always in perfect adjustment; that starts automatically when you look at it; that stops automatically when you cease to look at it; that can play forward or backward, quickly or slowly, by skips or with repetitions, entirely at your pleasure. . . . Must this remain only a dream? Can we expect to have such a cassette some day? We not only have it now, we have had it for many centuries. The ideal I have described is the printed word, the book, the object you now hold. . . . Does it seem to you that the book, unlike the cassette I have been describing, does not produce sound and images? It certainly does. . . . You cannot read without hearing the words in your mind and seeing the images to which they give rise. In fact, they are your sounds and images, not those invented for you by others, and are therefore better. (quoted in Ellison 1984, 51–52)

Asimov, writing years before VHS, let alone DVD, frames the book as an improvement over other forms of dramatic storytelling (“sounds and images”) precisely because it’s more individualized (“visible and audible only to the person using it”). Asimov’s prophetic description illustrates how the book, taken as a technology, anticipates the virtual reality so feared by those who worry about the effects of video games and the Internet on children; it’s interesting that those same parents are often keen to encourage immersive reading of the kind Asimov is valorizing. But immersive reading is generally not the kind encouraged by literature departments, which teaches students to attend to language. To read critically is to see a text not as “sounds and images” but as specific words placed on a page in a particular order; to closely read a text is to make meaning out of those particular words and no others. To look at, rather than through, the specifically defined words on the page is to see a story as a written rather than a “talked” thing.

Fan fiction is Ruskin’s “talked” thing, or Asimov’s “perfect entertainment cassette.” Fan fiction writers generally use a relatively transparent style of prose conducive to an immersive reading experience. There are marvelous exceptions: many fan fiction writers are great prose stylists or even poets. But historically the fan fiction writer has tried not to get in the way of the reader’s view of the characters, and in this, fan fiction writers are part of a more general literary trend. In an article in the *Washington Post*, Linton Weeks (2001) complains about the “No-Style style” of many best-selling authors and quotes book reviewer Pat Holt as noticing that “the style of commercial fiction has shifted over to a television mentality,” with “short paragraphs, a lot of switching of locations and lots of dialogue,” without ever questioning to what extent this might make it not simply “inferior” prose but prose put to a different and nonliterary purpose. In her introduction to the forthcoming *Reconstructing Harry: “Harry Potter” Fan Fiction on the World Wide Web*, Jane Glaubman observes J. K. Rowling’s “transparent” prose style without judgment, concluding that “the impression of transparency must stem in part from continuities with visual culture” and these continuities “call on devices ubiquitous in commercial media that themselves aspire to transparency.” Certainly, Rowling’s visual style may explain why the *Harry Potter* books were adopted by media fandom; they share fan fiction’s theatrical values. For instance, Glaubman notes the unusual extent to which Harry was embodied in Rowling’s text: “An awareness of the body is everywhere in these books. . . . Rowling expresses [Harry’s] feelings somatically, ‘his

heart twanging like a giant elastic band,' 'as though he'd just been walloped in the stomach.' . . . By giving us immediate access to his sensations, she contributes . . . to the effect of transparency."

Harry Potter comes to us as the embodied protagonist of a series of stories that retell Harry's adventures during a series of school years. By the time of the fourth installment, *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*, the simultaneous, worldwide release of the book was the occasion for something very like a public festival, with people coming out at midnight, sometimes in costume, not simply to purchase the book but also to formally constitute themselves as an audience. The ongoing series of novels was then made into an ongoing series of films. In all of these ways, the *Harry Potter* books resist the status of "finished literary text" made up of particular words in a particular order, and instead construct themselves as the open-ended inspiration for future performative supplements that will allow its audience to reconstitute itself on a regular basis. *Harry Potter* has already resulted numerous translations, four sequels, three films, and, as of June 13, 2005, at least 190,994 fan fiction stories—so far.

Why stop there? *Can* it be stopped there? This is no longer a phenomenon within a single author's control; "Harry Potter" is now an entire creative universe within which millions of people are writing, reading, drawing, reporting, discussing, analyzing, criticizing, celebrating, marketing, filming, translating, teaching, theorizing, playacting. Although Rowling may be responsible for putting together an initial series of words in a particular order, only in the legal sense is she the "author" of all of these other creative productions. Or, to put it another way, she's the *author* in the sense of taking responsibility for these productions, but she's not the *writer* of those specific other expressions of the idea of a boy wizard at school. There are other creative players involved, some paid (the artists who illustrated the text; the scholars who are writing the critical studies of the series) and some unpaid (the fans who participate in heated analytical discussions on *Harry Potter* Web sites or mailing lists, fan fiction writers). Similarly, a film like *Star Wars* or a television show like *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* have become rich art worlds quite apart from the authorial or auteurial efforts of George Lucas or Joss Whedon.

One last word about the complex relationship between the author, these other creative writers, and the audience: in traditional literary studies, the author is dead, and has been for some time. The phrase alludes to Roland Barthes's essay "The Death of the Author" and to Barthes's argument that

“as soon as a fact is narrated . . . the voice loses its origin, the author enters into his own death, writing begins” (1977, 142). From this perspective, language always means more than an author intends, and we cannot evaluate writing as an expression of a “person’s” ideas or thoughts. Rather, we should look at writing as a separately existing linguistic performance that does/says more than any one person ever could. Barthes concludes by saying that what meaning there is to a text is made by the reader, and “the birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the Author” (148).

But not the writer. In fandom, the author may be dead, but the writer—that actively scribbling, embodied woman—is very much alive.⁵ You can talk to her; you can write to her and ask her questions about her work, and she will probably write back to you and answer them. She might enjoy discussing larger plot, style, and characterization points with you if you engage her in critical conversation. You can tell her that her story is bad and hurt her feelings, or you can flame her as someone who shouldn’t be writing at all. Moreover, the writer may well have worked with a team of editors or beta readers; the fiction might well be not only derivative of an author, but written collaboratively by a group, or crafted as a birthday present for a fellow fan—in short, the writer is part of an interactive community, and in this way, the production of fan fiction is closer to the collaborative making of a theatre piece than to the fabled solitary act of writing.

I believe that fandom is community theatre in a mass media world; fandom is what happened to the culture of amateur dramatics. In the days before television, people often made theatre in their homes, for fun, and in fandom, we still make theatre together, for fun, except we cast the play from our televisions sets. Theatre—actual, three-dimensional theatre that moves bodies in space—is expensive and requires tremendous social capital; you’ve got to have the power to make those bodies move under your direction and at your command. We discover women’s poetry in attic trunks and women’s novels written under male pseudonyms, but we still find that women are underrepresented in the roles that orchestrate and dictate the actions of (male) bodies in performance. Consider the ongoing underrepresentation of women playwrights, composers, directors, and symphony conductors. If traditional theatre takes a script and makes it three-dimensional in a potentially infinite number of productions, modern fandom takes something three-dimensional and then produces an infinite number of scripts. This is not authoring texts, but making productions—relying on the audience’s

shared extratextual knowledge of sets and wardrobes, of the actors' bodies and their smiles and movements—to direct a living theatre in the mind.

Notes

1. Media fandom, although probably best known and most studied as a result of the popularity of the mass media it is based around, is not the only kind of fandom. Comics, anime, and gaming each have well-established fandoms with different histories. However, the Internet has encouraged crossover among these groups.

2. Or possibly as a result of the double whammy of *Star Trek* and *The Man from U.N.C.L.E.* (1964–1968), another television series that was hugely popular with science fiction fans; see Walker (2001) and my own “A Brief History of Media Fandom” (2006a).

3. When possible, I have chosen to cite the online work of fan-critics and fan-historians rather than the published scholarly works of professional academics. As a fan, I am wary of “distanced professional expertise,” even my own; the position of the media fan is one of defiant amateurism. In that spirit, I therefore note that fandom has always done an excellent job of explaining itself to itself, producing its own canon of theoretical literature, its own roster of fannish scholars, and its own critical apparatus for reviewing, analyzing, and recommending fan fiction.

4. Although the social value of live theatre has historically been greater than that of mass media dramatic forms, both have been marginalized. Literature and theatre are often grouped together as “high art” against film and television, but in practice, textual values are often opposed to performative ones. Drama has been seen as appealing to the working classes, women, children, and illiterates; also, until recently, there was no way to record and distribute it. In the specific context of science fiction, plays like Karel Čapek's *RUR* (1920), which introduced the word *robot* into the world's languages, are often left out of the sf canon, even though they antedate the rise of prose magazine fiction.

5. I am indebted to my conversations with Georgina Paterson for these insights.

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