
Framing Fan Fiction

LITERARY AND
SOCIAL PRACTICES
IN FAN FICTION
COMMUNITIES

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Introduction

ORIGIN STORIES

One of my first essays in English graduate school discussed the creation of online communities coalescing around specific identities and interests. “We’re Here, We’re Queer, We Have E-mail” was a dreadful essay, but raised several issues in early 1993 that have remained important to me to this day: how do we create, find, and maintain online communities? How do different online spaces engage with one another? How do different communities affect our actions and interactions? How do theories of queerness intersect with these virtual selves? Before the World Wide Web existed, before we’d been told that no one knows you’re a dog on the Internet (and then realized that that wasn’t quite true), before I’d ever heard of media fandom or imagined I’d find my people there, I realized—as did many others who were then studying cyberculture, Internet studies, and digital media—that there was a particular power in this new way of connecting and interacting.

In the following decade, I found fandom, along with the pleasure of cherishing, critiquing, and transforming a text with a group of others who loved the texts as much as I did. We comprised a community that created and was created by the friendships surrounding the online fannish spaces. I initially found fan fiction on a *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (WB/UPN, 1997–2002) website. I was looking for transcripts of the first season, but I found so much more: discussions about the characters, the episodes, future arcs, and, finally, stories! I wish I could remember if any of them were good, but the mere fact of their existence, along with the sheer wealth of reading material, was mind-blowing. I started shipping Buffy and Angel, I followed web rings, and soon I met other fans, beta reading and providing feedback on their stories and sharing our love. I joined mailing lists, where I had to assure the webmistress that I was of age to be allowed to read the more mature stories. There I found unconventional shippers, and along with that, slash fan fiction—that is, male/male and female/female pairings. Within a year or so, I started looking for other shows and other fandoms. I followed my favorite authors to new series, such as *Due South* (CTV, 1994–99) or *The Sentinel* (UPN, 1996–99), both shows I began watching because I liked

the stories. When writers moved from mailing lists to blogs and then LiveJournal, I followed them. I created my own journal, and on this platform, I finally began to participate fully in a place that became an emotional and intellectual home.

Even as my fandoms changed and new platforms altered the forms and shapes of interaction as well as the fan works themselves, I made friendships that I still cherish today. Over the years, fandom became more than a shared interest in a given film, book, band, or TV series or a seemingly endless stream of fan stories and meta discussions. It became a community that was neither well defined nor static, but nevertheless I felt a strong sense of membership and a feeling of belonging. Like many academics who discover that their hobby is worthy of scholarly engagement, I wrote my first essay within a year of reading my first fan fiction. I arguably overreached, as many young scholars do, by trying to claim my fandom's exceptionality while simultaneously generalizing a lot of points from my narrow sample. Yet both moves—particularity and universality—remain central when engaging in qualitative research. Over the years, I've learned that while there are variations in quality, tropes, and style among different fandoms, all are too varied and diverse, not to mention dispersed in many different corners of the web, to draw any generalizations beyond the specific.

ETHICS AND METHODOLOGY

Given the inherent diversity of fandoms and the enormous number of stories, possibly the most central issue in studying fandom and fan fiction is the question of how to choose specific texts or events for close analysis. At the heart of this issue is the relationship between the particular and the universal, between a given case study and the case study's ability to represent. Any researcher of cultural studies and popular culture eventually faces this conundrum: it is impossible to fully generalize, yet any specific example has to be representative of something larger. I try to address this issue in two ways. First, I remain aware of the specific context of any case study even when using them it to support larger arguments. Second, I write from a specific position of intimate knowledge of dozens of big and small fandoms, which I've gleaned over the years. I've read het, slash, and gen, and I've enjoyed source texts including books, TV shows, films, music bands, and sports teams. In some fandoms, I was deeply involved, creating fan works and organizing infrastructure; in others, I only read for a few intense weeks. Yet despite the many fandoms I've dipped into, my perspective

is limited to live-action Western media fandom, with a particular focus on slash pairings. I was following what I know now to be a common trajectory: mailing lists, fan-specific archives, blogs, LiveJournal, Twitter, Tumblr, and the Archive of Our Own.

My methodology is thus based on my own immersion in and familiarity with a large amount of material. I can draw conclusions from the tens of thousands of stories I've read, and I use them as a base to make some generalizations as well as to choose the stories I discuss in depth. I have tried to select specific texts that are both representative and exemplary. That is, while I may choose a given text for its literary and thematic features, these features tend to illustrate a particular aspect of fan fiction within the fandom and the interpretive community built around it. When I discuss a story, I believe as a literary scholar that it is worth analyzing and interpreting in its own right. However, I also think that fan fiction loses meaning if removed from its context. Fan fiction thus offers insight into the fandom community—its conversations, its tropes, and its members' discussions and concerns. This interaction, these layers of meaning and engagement, are what I explore in the following chapters. Although I use my fannish experience and academic background, in true fannish fashion, I must acknowledge the engagement and work of my online fan friends, who read version upon version of my work, who volunteered as fact checkers, and who provided usefully critical voices. They bring with them the experiences of many more fandoms and stories.

This full immersion, however, creates an entirely different sort of conundrum, which I call the fannish uncertainty principle: the more embedded a scholar is within a given fan community, the less she will want to write about it, thus divulging its potential secrets, entwined as they are in personal interactions. I've seen many a canon war, aesthetic disagreement, or ethical debate cover (or at least become entangled with) what might be a cheated lover, roommate trouble, or financial disagreement. Or, as has been more often the case in recent years, a fannish debate might be enmeshed with larger social issues, such as debates about race. For all the praises I heap on fandom, both as an abstract creative community and as a personal emotional and intellectual support group, I am all too aware of the petty, mean, even vicious ways fans—like all humans—can interact. Some communities, of course, are more open in their engagements (and often their disagreements). Some academics do choose to bare all: they share the underlying fights and petty arguments, both the good and the bad. Such a

publication may have personal repercussions for the scholar, however: by widely sharing nonpublic material, they not only risk personal friendships but also any further access to that or other communities.

The research in this book spans nearly two decades, during which the field of fan studies has continually been redefined. Interfaces are constantly changing, and with it the people using those interfaces, resulting in altered relationships to publicity, the media, and academia. Fan vids, a fannish art form that came into its own with the rise of VCRs in the 1980s, use TV or film footage set to music, often exploring a particular theme, character, or pairing. The first vids I watched had to be downloaded from private websites; to get the password, I had to e-mail the vidder and promise not to share the password or the vid, even in private. Now these same vidders post their work on YouTube and cross-link to various other archives and sites. Fan vids that were once only known to a tiny number of vidding fans have gone viral. They are show in museums and art exhibits; they are taught in classes on media, television, reception studies, fan studies, and queer theory; and they are used as exemplary material for the DCMA (Digital Copyright Millennium Act) exemption that the Organization for Transformative Works requests every few years from the Library of Congress. As for fan fiction, it is no longer covertly purchased under a vendor's table at fan conventions; instead, it may climb the bestseller charts as professionally published fiction. Fans are different too. There are more of us now, and we are far more diverse. But we are also more self-consciously visible, interacting with media producers, artists, and commercial infrastructures in ways we didn't even a decade ago. I have to admit that I'm old enough to want to keep my distance—old enough to have come into fandom at a time when the fourth wall was mostly accepted and appreciated for the safety and privacy it provided. Yet there were fans back in the 1980s who wrote to professional authors and met TV actors, just as there are fans today who prefer to be left alone. This isn't necessarily a story of ever more publicity, ever decreasing boundaries, ever more fans merging fannish and professional identities, even though that is a large part of it.

Fans' negotiation of the private versus the public directly affects the ethical responsibilities of the researcher. My own fannish feelings on these issues have changed over time, as has my general methodological stance. However, it isn't simply a matter where privacy was upheld in the 1990s and now everything is suddenly public. I have learned that even if I consider Tumblr to be one of the most public and least intimate platforms, other

fans post with expectations of privacy; they have created specific tagging rules within their community that they understand as a reblog prohibition. I thus cannot cite without knowing the (often unwritten) rules of a specific community—but I also don't want to cite only close friends. Deciding how to engage with fellow fans, when to ask permission, when to not invite rejection, and where, whom, and how to cite are all heavily situational, depending on my own relationship to the fandom and the fan in question, but depending even more on the visibility of the fan works and its surrounding conversations. To shorthand it with “fans first” and “first do no harm” (Busse and Hellekson 2012) may be simplistic, but it acknowledges the very specific role fans play when they publish on fannish issues and cite members of their communities. The Association for Internet Research's 2012 ethical guidelines (<http://aoir.org/ethics/>), which cover many disciplines, levels of research, and potential harm, ultimately acknowledge how much depends on the specific circumstances (Whiteman 2012; Freund and Fielding 2013; Kelley 2016; Busse 2017).

FAN STUDIES OVERVIEW

The study of fan communities and fan works covers a number of disciplines: the fields of English and communications interpret fan artifacts, their creation, and the rhetorical strategies they use to make meaning; anthropology and ethnography analyze fan subcultures; media, film, and television studies assess the integration of media into fan practices and artworks; psychology examines fans' pleasures and motivations; and legal studies analyzes the underlying problems related to the derivative nature of the artworks, including concerns related to copyright, parody, and fair use. Schimmel, Harrington, and Bielby (2007) describe how fan studies proper mostly divides along two lines: social sciences and media studies. Psychology and sociology study the group behavior of fans as well as the passionate engagement with and cathexis of fan objects. They often observe conspicuous fan behaviors, such as football hooligans or teenie mobs. In contrast, film and media studies focus mostly on the relation between media texts and their audiences, looking toward fans as often exemplary readers or viewers. Its cultural studies approaches connect media texts to fannish communities, often working within postmodern theoretical frameworks that read culture as a text in its own right.

Media fan studies grows out of several theoretical movements starting in the 1970s—most importantly the shifting focus from texts to audiences

and a newfound attention to popular cultural texts. Reader-response theory and reception aesthetics shift the focus in literature from text and author to the reader (Iser [1976] 1978; Fish 1980; Tompkins 1980; Jauss 1982). Meanwhile, Stuart Hall's (1991) incorporation/resistance paradigm repudiates the traditional notion of viewers as easily manipulated masses, the dominant cultural paradigm initially suggested by Horkheimer and Adorno ([1947] 1993). Rather than seeing audiences as homogenous and easily accepting the intended dominant reading, Hall instead distinguishes between different modes of viewing strategies, in which viewers are not necessarily passive and easily manipulated but instead can choose to agree or reject the dominant message of the text, to incorporate or resist the media text's ideology. Emphasizing active engagement with cultural texts, Dick Hebdige's work on resistant *Subcultures* (1979) foregrounds the political role played by countercultural readings and appropriations. At the same time, Pierre Bourdieu's ([1979] 1984) work on taste cultures and Michel de Certeau's (1984) analysis of everyday life contribute to a theoretical framework that inspires a reevaluation of popular culture and the myriad roles it plays for its audiences.

The 1980s brought with it implementations of these cultural studies to popular culture and its audiences. David Morley's study of British TV audiences in *The Nationwide Audience* (1980) distinguishes among dominant, negotiated, and oppositional readings of the news program, thus becoming the foundational text for this specific kind of audience research. John Fiske addresses popular texts as varied as the Sears tower, Madonna, and quiz shows in *Reading the Popular* (1989a) and *Understanding Popular Culture* (1989b), illustrating that all texts are meaningful and worthy of thorough analysis. In particular, researchers begin looking toward female viewers and readers. Ien Ang fashions a new way of audience engagement by looking at individual and specific viewers in her *Watching "Dallas"* (1985), as does Dorothy Hobson in her 1982 look at soap opera viewers; Janice Radway focuses on one specific form of popular entertainment in *Reading the Romance* (1984), her close ethnographic study of women romance readers; and Angela McRobbie looks at teen girls and their interaction with popular media, such as magazines, in *Feminism and Youth Culture* (1991).

Given the predominance of Hall's incorporation/resistance paradigm, a central task for early fan studies is to show the subversive nature of audiences. Three early fan studies examinations find such exemplary resistant readers in female media fans of classic *Star Trek* (NBC, 1966–69) and other

TV shows, who constitute an active audience that not only critically analyzes the texts but also actively writes back, creating their own narratives to fill in the plots, characters, and emotions they find lacking in the source text. Henry Jenkins's *Textual Poachers* (1992), Camille Bacon-Smith's *Enterprising Women* (1992), and Constance Penley's essay "Brownian Motion: Women, Tactics, and Technology" (1991), which she later expanded into *NASA/Trek* (1997), and her "Feminism, Psychoanalysis, and the Study of Popular Culture" (1992), all offer vital contributions to early fan studies. Even though Jenkins, Bacon-Smith, and Penley use primarily different approaches (textual, ethnographic, and psychoanalytic, respectively), all three foreground the community that fandom creates and the relationships among the fans as well as between the fans and the texts. They offer a picture of fandom as thoughtful and deliberative, as happening in and through communities of engaged and intelligent individuals, and as a legitimate source of production of meaning and value in and of itself. The communities are extremely well organized thanks to their roots in science fiction fandom, with its well-organized convention and zine culture; moreover, the fans, self-aware and self-reflective, are ready to articulate and analyze their own behavior.

Aided by two important collections (Lewis 1992; Harris and Alexander 1998), these studies define the focal points and circumscribe the boundaries of what fan studies is to become. Rather than being passive consumers, these television viewers engage critically and creatively; this allows fan scholars to present a model of audience engagement that complicates earlier notions of media as simplistic ideological tools and exemplifies the more complex and politically more desirable subversive viewers. Moreover, given that these studies focus primarily on creative fandom responses such as fan fiction, fan art, filk, and fan vids and that these communities are largely female, creative fan responses can be read with and against a feminist paradigm, celebrating a critical feminist take on an often misogynist media culture. In fact, outside of *Star Trek* media fans, the most closely studied fan community is soap opera audiences (Harrington and Bielby 1995; Baym 2000). Other studies concentrate more closely on specific cult series and their fans, such as *Star Trek* and *Doctor Who* (BBC 1963–89, 1996, 2005–; Tulloch and Jenkins 1995), *Babylon 5* (PTEN/TNT, 1994–98; Lancaster 2001), and *Star Wars* (1977–; Brooker 2002). Likewise, the focus on close and definable fan community remains an important focus in Karen Hellekson and Kristina Busse's collection *Fan Fiction and Fan Communities in the Age of the Internet* (2006) and the academic fan studies journal *Transforma-*

tive Works and Cultures (launched 2008). Supported as it is by the Organization for Transformative Works, a nonprofit fan advocacy group, the journal endeavors to broaden the scope of fan studies even as it clearly shares the historic roots of early fan scholars and a focus on media fandom and transformative works.

This emphasis on resistance and subversion is challenged by the next generation of scholars (Jones 2002; Scodari 2003). Understanding fannishness as a natural aspect of human engagement, these scholars reject the central ethos of fans as resistant and subversive viewers that dominated the field of fan studies in the 1980s and 1990s. Nicholas Abercrombie and Brian Longhurst's *Audiences* (1998) opposes the incorporation/resistance paradigm with a spectacle/performance paradigm. Rather than viewing fan behavior through the lens of a political or social agenda that reads fan activities as subversive and thus worthy of studying, this approach to fan studies focuses on engagements with media as an everyday part of audiences' lives. In so doing, it moves away not only from viewing fans as intrinsically subcultural and oppositional, but also from regarding fans as parts of a specific group. Consequently, Matt Hills's *Fan Cultures* (2002) and Cornel Sandvoss's *Fans* (2005) examine the fan as an individual unit—or rather, they redefine the larger whole as a function of the individual. This focus on individual subjects and the way fannish objects get constituted in the fans' imaginary foregrounds the way fans may be fannish at different times and to different degrees about various things. In particular, Sandvoss's (2005) work puts forth singular and personalized understanding of fans, where being a fan is a function of the individual's emotional relationship to a particular text, group, or idea. As a result, his study easily encompasses sports fans as well as media fans, since he is most interested in the affective investment of the individual rather than the communities they create.

Accordingly, in the introduction to their collection *Fandom* (2007), Jonathan Gray, Cornel Sandvoss, and E. Lee Harrington define a third wave of fan studies as the one where the discipline moves away from specific communities to engage larger conceptual audience and reception issues. Likely the most important third wave study is Jenkins's *Convergence Culture* (2006a), which focuses on the various intersections between industry and viewers/fans and the way contemporary audience behaviors ever more resemble traditional fan behaviors in this changing media landscape. In fact, in his analysis, the communities that spring up spontaneously either with or without the help of industry-sponsored spaces and activities closely re-

semble the communities on which early fan studies focused. In his more recent collaboration with Sam Ford and Joshua Green, *Spreadable Media* (2013), Jenkins models how the media industry can make use of these behavioral shifts in useful and economically successful ways.

Convergence culture has forced academics to redefine the concept of what constitutes a fan and how we define fandom. One way to characterize the current definitional debates is around distinctions made between fan-ish identity and fannish behavior. For some, being a fan is defined by behavior only, whereas for others an entire ethos is attached to the term. The question is whether members of fandom are a subculture in their own right or whether they are simply consumers displaying certain actions and behaviors (Busse 2006). On the one hand, fan studies scholars identify fans as a particular group of people; on the other, they create a spectrum of behavior in which fans are merely on an extreme end of a fandom continuum. Fans are thus either described as simply a more extreme version of viewers (thus allowing media industries to actually “create” fans) or regarded as engaging media with different intensity and investment that resembles particular forms of identity politics. By giving up the focus on subcultural groups, fan studies may be in danger of looking only toward the more socially acceptable forms of fandom while ignoring the less marketable and less appealing ones.

Given that fan studies began with a concern for subcultural creative responses to mainstream and cult media, a field too closely aligned with media production and industry may indeed lose its politically critical edge. At the same time, the number of publications in the past few years, as well as their sheer diversity, suggests that there is room for a wide variety of approaches. Looking at this vibrant and ever-growing field, I’d argue that the current wave of fan studies is characterized not just by industrial transmediality and the increasing immersion of production and fan cultures, but also by interdisciplinarity, expanding methodologies, and transnationalism. Fan studies includes subject matters as diverse as games (Sihvonen 2011; MacCallum-Stewart 2014; Salter 2014; Shaw 2014; Booth 2015a; Enevold and MacCallum-Stewart 2015), sports (Sandvoss 2003; Giulianotti and Robertson 2007; Millward 2011; Pope 2016), and comics (Costello 2013; Neumann 2015), often connecting it with traditional media studies approaches or looking at the interaction between different approaches to fan identities (Scott 2011). Fan studies uses approaches as diverse as the study of paratexts (Gray 2010; Geraghty 2015), the interaction of fandom and

media industries (Ross 2008; Booth 2010, 2015b; Johnson 2013), the role of affect (Zubernis and Larsen 2012; Larsen and Zubernis 2013), literary contexts (Saler 2012; Jamison 2013), performativity (Bennett and Booth 2015), and archives (De Kosnik 2016). Recent work ranges from broad and inclusive overviews (Duffet 2013; Chauvel, Lamerichs, and Seymour 2014; Duits, Zwaan, and Reijnders 2014) to highly focused and in-depth readings, such as Louisa Ellen Stein's study of millennial fan cultures (2015), Rebecca Williams's postobject fandoms (2015), and Cynthia Walker's look at all aspects of the fifty years of *Man from U.N.C.L.E.* (NBC, 1964–68) fandom (2013). Previous clear separation between Asian and Western fandoms is challenged by new work on transnationalism (Levi, McHarry, and Pagliassotti 2010; Ito, Okabe, and Tsuji 2012; Berndt and Kümmerling-Meibauer 2013; Nagaike and Suganuma 2013; Chin and Morimoto 2015), and much belatedly, critical race discourses have finally entered the discussion (Gatson and Reid 2012; Wanzo 2015; Warner 2015; Pande 2017). Finally, studies have begun to focus on the intersections of fandom with other areas of culture, politics, and economics, such as the function of materiality in fan engagements (Steinberg 2012; Geraghty 2014; Rehak 2014), an interest in fan labor (Stanfill and Condis 2014; Busse 2015), and a focus on pedagogy and fan activism (Black 2008; Jenkins and Shresthova 2012). The mere fact that we can have discussions ranging from ethics and methodologies to definitional debates indicates that fan studies is an important, growing, active discipline that can encompass and support a wide range of approaches.

SUMMARY

This amazing expansion and diversity of fan studies research allows us as scholars to narrow down our interest and focus on specific topics. For me, the central theme of this book is the study of the inextricable immersion of the literary and the social—the continuous entanglement of fan works and their community. These are not issues restricted to the genre of fan fiction, but the emphasis on community interaction, its ease of publication, its virtually instant feedback, and the lack of hierarchy between reader and writer allow fan fiction to showcase many issues erased or hidden in professionally published literature. In other words, the process of writing, disseminating, and reading fan fiction may not ultimately be different from other fiction, but all of these processes are openly visible online. The expansive discussions surrounding the creation and reception process, in particular, provide researchers with better insight into these aspects, which

tend to occur in private for most professional authors as well as their editors and readers.

At the same time, I've just argued that there may be ethical imperatives to ignore the dark underbelly of the personal. Often disagreements cannot be properly traced; they may have been deleted or hidden by locking blogs to a specific readership, or they may never have been made public, instead occurring in private instant messages or personal conversations. We also need to remember that for every open disagreement, for every battle that makes it to Fandom Wank or FailFandomAnon (two communities that share fannish disagreements and often offer personal background information), there are many, many others (Hellekson 2010; Lothian 2013). Even when studying fandom debates and their various effects on both fan works and communities, we mostly are restrained by textual evidence. This is particularly true in the case of fan-created content because its culture is primarily online and often pseudonymous; the community's members value their privacy for a variety of reasons.

Moreover, as I argue later, the proximity of fan fiction, fannish discussions, and personal stories on many social media platforms invites us to not only acknowledge the consciously constructed pseudonymous identity of a fellow fan but also foregrounds the ways in which our lives (or what we choose to share with others online) are carefully narrativized. All of these are issues of central importance to fan studies, a field that often functions as a test case of early adopters and adapters of social media. In fact, these concerns are spreading more widely as constant and immediate online access and interaction, with all its textual, interpersonal, and cultural minefields, comprise the current reality for more and more people. In fact, the last few years have brought further into public consciousness behaviors that fan communities (like many other actively social online communities) have long had to confront, such as sock puppeting (creating fake pseudonyms to deceive other users), trolling (posting provocative comments to upset other users), cyberbullying, and faked deaths. All of these showcase the complications and controversies that online anonymity, coupled with community power and human pettiness, can create, as well as the inability of traditional legal and executive means to address such threats.

If I started this book by recalling the early 1990s, with the beginning of the World Wide Web and the first big online fannish shift from alt.tv newsgroups to mailing lists, it's because this entire book is ultimately the story of my personal involvement both in fandom and in fan studies. In our

first collaboration, my *Transformative Works and Cultures* coeditor Karen Helleson and I entitled our introduction “Work in Progress” (Busse and Helleson 2006). Harking back both to fan writers’ habits of partial publication of their stories and the conceptual sense of a fandom’s collective work never ceasing to expand, the title also showed an awareness that fan studies would continue to expand and that the essays we had collected were but one iteration of an ever-growing field. We were also, somewhat hopefully, looking forward to the journal we founded a couple of years later, offering a platform where we could continue to present new engagements with fan texts and communities.

If a field is a work in progress, then an individual scholar’s work is even more so, and this volume clearly shows that. Though only obviously retroactively, the essays that comprise this book mirror certain fannish moments and fandoms, and engage with specific fannish concerns and debates, even as they circle around and repeatedly return to a distinct number of concerns. Just as my very first essay anticipated issues related to online queer communities, most of the work of the past decade seems to revolve around the same points of preoccupation: (1) fan works as individual identificatory practice and collective erotic engagement; (2) fan works as shared interpretive practice and the role of tropes as shared creative markers; and (3) fan works and ethical community conflicts surrounding their interpretations. My focus on these topics perfectly illustrates not only the constant repetition with a difference that is central to transformative works but also the overall role of works in progress to fan and academic writing.

CHAPTER OVERVIEW

I open the collection with chapter 1, “The Return of the Author: Ethos and Identity Politics,” to offer an historical overview of the legal, aesthetic, and economic construction of the author, beginning in the late eighteenth century. Looking at the historical development of conceptions of authorship, I argue that far from having dismissed authors and their intentions, current reading practices require authorial identities for their interpretive processes. This chapter sets the stage for the threads that continue through the rest of the book. Its discussion of Foucault’s and Barthes’s theories of authorship foreground the complex interrelationship between the actual (e.g., raced, gendered, sexed, embodied, classed, desiring) being writing a text, the authorial role they may take on, and the reader-driven author construct, all of which gets doubled and tripled when readers become authors

as is common in fandom. Its discussion of the devaluation of certain stylistic modes is crucial for my repeated focus on the relevance of generic tropes and repetition as driving narratively central (and emotionally resonant) features within fan fiction. The discussion of authorial ethos is important both in terms of identity construction within fan fiction and the fannish personas that often become the authorial online avatar.

The remaining chapters are divided into three parts, each focusing on a particular theme and exploring it from different directions. While the chapters are all clearly situated in their historical fannish moment—if only through the central texts I discuss—they also each contribute to a larger argument that I hope illustrates the development and progression of my thought.

Slash as Identificatory Practices

The first section discusses how fan fiction, and slash in particular, allows fans to reimagine the source material to not only negotiate their own identities and sexualities but also do so within a community of like-minded people. One of my earliest contributions to slash theory was a short online essay I wrote on slash fandom as a “queer female space,” arguing that this community of primarily female readers and writers was ultimately queer, not so much because the stories featured men having sex with men (and sometimes women with women), but because the entire space was built on an erotic exchange of ideas among and between women. Even if the women in question might have been nominally straight, the very act of creating and consuming erotic fantasies for, by, and with other women created a queer space. Themes of sexual identity and orientation, the questioning of both, and the focus on the queer spaces that fandoms can help create showed up again and again in fan fiction and their surrounding discussions. All three chapters in this section analyze the way writers (and readers) use fan fiction to explore issues of identity and desire.

Chapter 2, “‘I’m jealous of the fake me’: Postmodern Subjectivity and Identity Construction in Boy Band Fan Fiction,” looks at the way real people fiction addresses questions of subjectivity, agency, and performativity by investigating how celebrity identities are constructed in public and fan fictional discourses. Fan writers and readers enact roles as creating and desiring subjects by reenvisioning pop stars, whose defining feature is already their explicit and artificial constructedness. Such performativity is also central to pseudonymous fans. The layers of identity that comprise the star

image and its queered fan fictional variations mirror the layers of identity that fans themselves present within online communities. If the previous chapter looks at slasher's relationship to performative identities, chapter 3, "Bending Gender: Feminist and (Trans)Gender Discourses in the Changing Bodies of Slash Fan Fiction," explores the identificatory implications of genderswap, a popular slash trope. This chapter, which I cowrote with Alexis Lothian, explains some of the apparent appeal of casting male characters as women, looking at the way it affects bodily autonomy, professional identities, and romantic and sexual relationships. It discusses the trope of male pregnancy (mpreg) in particular, offering a reading that recuperates some of its feminist potential without ignoring its more reactionary aspects.

Chapter 4, "Affective Imagination: Fan Representation in Media Fan Fiction," looks at explicit pornographic writing and the way fan writers conceptualize their own erotic and voyeuristic impulses. If the currency of the queer female space is its various erotic fantasies, then this chapter focuses in depth on some of the identificatory and voyeuristic desires that play out in sexually explicit fan fiction. Rather than explicit metanarratives that thematize larger theoretical issues, I focus specifically on stories that exemplify the sexual, erotic, and narrative affect that reading and writing fan fiction can evoke. I situate these explicitly sexual narrative moments within feminist film theory to suggest that these voyeuristic moments constitute a feminist intervention both on the visceral textual level and on the social level of community interaction. Underlying all the chapters in this section are fan debates about colonizing gay male bodies and appropriating queer identities, by often straight women; the importance of online identities and their performativities; and the paratextual relationship to the bodies of characters and celebrities. At the center of all three chapters is the way fan fiction allows writers (and readers) to imagine different sexual identities and desires, to explore the way we create and reimagine fictional characters as well as our own performative selves, and to articulate and enjoy explicit sexual discourses.

Canon, Context, and Consensus

Whereas the previous section mobilizes various fan fiction tropes to investigate gender and sexual identities, this section looks more specifically at its narrative elements, in particular the creation and circulation of tropes. Fan fiction celebrates repetition and its creative potentials, and nar-

rative tropes and genre categories are important aspects of discussing and understanding the power of repetition and its ability to structure interpretation and organize reading pleasure.

The opening chapter prefaces the other two by using theoretical models to explore the way fan texts are created and negotiated between author and fans as well as among fans. Chapter 5, “May the Force Be With You: Fan Negotiations of Authority,” examines the relationship between media creators and audiences in terms of who gets to control (and interpret and alter) the text. I use this tension to look at the way shared interpretations get constructed and disseminated and the way fans negotiate meanings and interpretive authority among themselves. Drawing from reader-response and poststructural theories, this chapter showcases the multiple layers of negotiation and interpretation that create fan stories. Chapter 6, “Limit Play: Fan Authorship between Source Text, Intertext, and Context,” is a collaboration with Louisa Ellen Stein. It continues the focus on how fan fiction is written with and against a variety of constraints: the source text, the community with its shared interpretations, and the technological limits of interfaces. We contend that these limitations are at the heart of fan creativity. Fan creativity thus publicly challenges long-held cultural values of originality, creativity as newness, and ownership of ideas and style.

If chapter 6 traces the various influences that affect any fan work, then chapter 7 situates this intertextual relationship as part of a recontextualization of fan fiction as literary artifact. “Fandom’s Ephemeral Traces: Intertextuality, Performativity, and Intimacy in Fan Fiction Communities” argues that fan fiction ought to be understood as both a social and literary artifact, and that such an understanding ought to influence scholarly engagement with fan texts. Fan fiction, I suggest, is exemplary as an ephemeral trace of a larger social conversation, with its often fragmentary characteristics, its complex intertextuality, and its intimacy within and without the stories. Returning to some of the ideas from the first section, this chapter suggests that the shared interpretations and the focus on id-focused tropes creates an intimacy within a fan community that is only intensified by the preponderance of sexually explicit contents and the often close-knit communities in which stories get created and circulated.

Community and Its Discontents

Given my argument that fan works need to be situated within their cultural context, the final section moves away from fan fiction and individual

fans to look at the way fan communities engage and how discourses, especially controversial ones, circulate. It returns to issues of gender and sexuality and the way identities continue to affect online communication as well as the internal fan conversations this generates. The opening chapter returns to the first section and its central concerns of slashers' sexual identities. The early 2000s were a time among online media fans that saw an increased focus on queer identification, both in terms of fans coming out and discussing their sexualities in online fan communities such as LiveJournal, and an increase in meta discussions about queer fans. Within a community that all but fetishized gay men, gay identities became simultaneously valued and interrogated. After all, online identities were a place to explore but also could easily be used to falsify facts to the point of exploiting and harming other fans. In this context, chapter 8, "My life is a WIP on my LJ": Slashing the Slasher and the Reality of Celebrity and Internet Performances," looks at the way fans perform their online identities and enact certain roles with and for one another, specifically on LiveJournal, where many users relate to each other through adopted personas and avatars. Rather than dismissing online fannish roles as false, this chapter suggests that these roles may tell us more about our actual identities than any attempt ever could to separate real from false, real from virtual, or real from fictional.

Where chapter 8 looks at intrafannish conflicts, chapter 9 addresses the contentious relationships among different groups of fans, especially as it relates to gender. As fan behaviors have mainstreamed and are often actively solicited by media industries, fan identities have become an important point of contention within and outside of fan studies. Recent fan studies work in particular has begun to focus on the roles industry can and should play in regard to fan spaces and fan works. In contrast, I strongly believe that it remains important to study more clearly self-identified fandoms and its members. In particular, I see the danger that as all viewers become fans, some fans become more equal (that is, more appealing financially and less controversial) than others. It is within this context that "Geek Hierarchies, Boundary Policing, and the Gendering of the Good Fan," looks at the internal and external hierarchies that get established within fan communities and the internal biases that continue to be replicated among fans. In particular, age, gender, and fannish background generate intense boundary policing and thus create internal hierarchies. Given the vast effects of media industry biases, I illustrate how fans often mirror, replicate, and internalize these prejudices, often creating a hostile environ-

ment for any fan not fitting into the category of the young, cis, male, white, straight, and able-bodied.

Chapter 10, “Fictional Consents and the Ethical Enjoyment of Dark Desires,” returns to the discourses within the fan fiction community and conversations that address the pushing of sexual boundaries in particular. I look at the role sexually explicit fiction plays when it engages with unconventional desires and various forms of kink up to and including nonconsensual (noncon) fantasies. I argue that fans are aware and often collectively critical about the various lines that demarcate ethical, aesthetic, and affective engagements with texts. Fans employ community conversations and conventions such as content notes, tags, and headers to provide a contextual frame in which sexual fantasies can be explored and safely contained. By sharing a sexual ethos of consent, fan fiction fandom creates a space in which problematic fantasies can be explored within feminist politics.

TEXTUAL COMMENTS

This essay collection brings together previously published and new material without fundamentally revising the older material. As a result, it retains much of the historical and contextual moment, which I hope will be interesting, if not helpful, to readers. I chose not to update the secondary literature with more current material; several fields, such as trans studies, have grown substantially, and I could not easily update the references without also substantially changing the arguments. Several of the chapters were published in different venues, which affects their presentation. I did not change content or style, but I have unified presentation and updated references where necessary. To make the book more cohesive, I cut several repetitive sentences and removed one section in its entirety (the introduction of chapter 1). I unified the chapters by removing all footnotes, moving the indispensable material into the text proper and cutting those merely pointing to background material or general policies.

One such general policy is the use of in-text citation with name and date but no direct URL link to fannish social interfaces (primarily LiveJournal [LJ] and Dreamwidth [DW]) or to fannish archives (primarily the Archive of Our Own [AO3]). Site name, fan name, title, and date allow anyone to find the cited page but avoid lengthy URLs. Moreover, this citation format avoids directly linking to often intimate fannish spaces (Busse and Hellekson 2012). Another policy is the use of “she” as the default third-person pronoun: beyond basic feminist reasons, it seems appropriate for the readers

and writers in the fan fiction communities I discuss, most of whom are women.

Chapters 3 and 6 were written with coauthors, Alexis Lothian and Louisa Ellen Stein, respectively. I am immensely grateful that they allowed me to include these essays, not only because the essays are both important in their own right but also because it allows me to include these vital intellectual relationships. I am almost certain that had I not found LiveJournal and the fannish community, I might never have published an academic essay again. After finishing my dissertation and deciding to remain with my family, working as an adjunct instructor at a local university, there were no professional pressures or encouragements to continue academic research. Removed from academia, motivations and scholarly tools are hard to come by, as is a community of like-minded thinkers. Yet that is exactly what I found in fandom: a group of incredibly smart, educated, self-reflexive, and critical readers and writers. Especially my early thoughts were read, commented on, debated, and critically taken apart in lengthy and passionate online discussions. My fan friends improved my arguments and often made me a better—more self-aware and more sensitive—thinker. Some of these fans who also happened to be academics became long-time intellectual companions and coauthors. I think and write better with someone else, and if not every single chapter here has more than one name as the author, that's mostly an academic formality rather than an actual account of the creative and intellectual depths I owe so many of my fellow fans and acafans. I am particularly glad that at least two of the chapters acknowledge just how important the role of community and collective writing has been for my work.