

Fan Fiction and Fan Communities in the Age of the Internet

New Essays

*Edited by Karen Hellekson
and Kristina Busse*



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Introduction: Work in Progress

Kristina Busse and Karen Hellekson

It starts like this. Somewhere in cyberspace, someone complains: “I had a lousy day! Need some cheering up.” Soon after, a friend posts a story dedicating the piece: “This is for you, hon—your favorite pairing and lots of schmoopy sex. Hope it’ll cheer you up!” A third person chimes in: “I can’t believe it! What a great fic! I mean, who would have thought of gay penguin sex? It totally works! I love it!” “Gay penguin sex?” someone else adds, finding it hilarious, and in response, she posts a poem she knocked off in five minutes flat, all about gay penguins having sex. “I’m taking two lines of that to add to my signature,” someone informs her in a comment and goes on to write a three-paragraph snippet of fiction based on the poem, which in turn results in—well, you get the idea.

It starts like this. In a private e-mail, someone writes: “I want to edit a volume about fan fiction that better describes the current climate, one that takes into account online experience.” She checks with her publisher to see if they’d consider it and finds that yes, they will. “Want in?” she asks her friend. “What a great project!” reads the e-mail reply. “I have so many ideas for what we could include.” A call for papers appears online, and the responses begin. One author proposes: “I have an idea that fan fiction is more performative than literary.” Another inquires: “I heard about this volume from a friend, and I want to talk about role-playing games. Interested?” “I heard a paper on a similar topic at a conference,” the coeditors respond; “we love your idea, here are our comments on your draft, and you should also contact this person who is writing on RPGs.” And so a book begins.

These illustrations—one an example of the creation of fan fiction and the other an account of the impetus of this book—highlight the dense intertextuality found in the creation of fan works of art and in fan academic discourse. The community-centered creation of artistic fannish expressions such as fan fiction, fan art, and fan vids is mirrored in the creation of this book, with constant manipulation, renegotiation, commenting, and revising, all done electronically among a group of people, mostly women, intimately involved in the creation and

consumption of fannish goods. As the examples above indicate, the creator of meaning, the person we like to call the *author*, is not a single person but rather is a collective entity. Furthermore, that collective, what we might call *fandom*, is itself not cohesive. It is impossible, and perhaps even dangerous, to speak of a single fandom, because fandoms revolving around the TV program *Due South* have rules different from those of fandoms revolving around the *Lord of the Rings* books and movies, and fandoms that are centered around face-to-face meetings, exchange of round-robin-style letters, or generation of hard-copy fan fiction fanzines (say, the experience described by Camille Bacon-Smith in *Enterprising Women* [1992])⁴ are each different from the kind of online fandom that is our primary focus here.

Work in progress is a term used in the fan fiction world to describe a piece of fiction still in the process of being written but not yet complete. This notion intersects with the intertextuality of fannish discourse, with the ultimate erasure of a single author as it combines to create a shared space, fandom, that we might also refer to as a *community*. The appeal of works in progress lies in part in the way fans can engage with an open text: it invites responses, permits shared authorship, and enjoins a sense of community. In *S/Z*, Roland Barthes (1974) distinguishes between readerly and writerly text, with the former denoting a text whose interpretation is solidified with little room for the reader to enter the text. In contrast, the latter is “a perpetual present, ... is *ourselves writing*, before the infinite play of the world (the world as function) is traversed, intersected, stopped, ... which reduces the plurality of entrances, the opening of networks, the infinity of languages” (5). If the fan is a reader in the Barthesian sense, then serial production is the ultimate writerly text. It invites the viewer to enter, interpret, and expand the text. In so doing, the open-source text in particular invites fan fiction as an expansion to the source universe and as interpretive fan engagement where the fan not only analyzes the text but also must constantly renegotiate her analyses.

Every fan story is in this sense a work in progress, even when the story has been completed. To create a story (or, indeed, almost any other fan artifact; we just speak of stories here for convenience), some writers compose and post the story, with or without so-called *beta readers* who critique, read, and help revise on various levels, including spelling and grammar, style and structure, and canonicity and remaining in character. Others post versions and parts of the story publicly and revise according to comments. Still others cowrite, at times taking turns in voices and points of view. In most cases, the resulting story is part

collaboration and part response to not only the source text, but also the cultural context within and outside the fannish community in which it is produced. Most writing has gone through some form of critical reading, followed by revision. However, when the story is finally complete and published, likely online but perhaps in print, the work in progress among the creators shifts to the work in progress among the readers, and a whole new level of discourse begins that provides engagement and both positive and negative feedback (comments, critiques, and letters of comment).

On a more abstract level, fan academics have begun to think of the entirety of fan fiction in a given fannish universe as a work in progress. This *fantext*, the entirety of stories and critical commentary written in a fandom (or even in a pairing or genre), offers an ever-growing, ever-expanding version of the characters. These multitudes of interpretations of characters and canon scenes are often contradictory yet complementary to one another and the source text. Nevertheless, working with and against one another, this multitude of stories creates a larger whole of understanding a given universe. This canvas of variations is a work in progress insofar as it remains open and is constantly increasing; every new addition changes the entirety of interpretations. By looking at the combined *fantext*, it becomes obvious how fans' understanding of the source is always already filtered through the interpretations and characterizations existing in the *fantext*. In other words, the community of fans creates a communal (albeit contentious and contradictory) interpretation in which a large number of potential meanings, directions, and outcomes co-reside.

The notion of a work in progress is thus central to fandom and the study of fandom. The source texts in many cases are serial, in progress, and constantly changing, as are the fan stories set in these universes. Fans' understanding of the characters and the universes the characters inhabit changes, just as scholarly understanding of fans and their relationship to one another, to the source text, and to the texts they generate is constantly being revised and rewritten. As fan academics, we inhabit a fluid space that needs to be continuously revised and reconsidered, where new influences, both internal and external, change not only the object of study, but also our theoretical and methodological frameworks. Like the *fantext*, with its complementary and contradictory readings of the source text, the academic text seeking to describe and understand fandom also creates a work in progress as it attempts a larger understanding of fan culture.

In both fandom and academia, the debates about such issues as defining fans,

understanding their motivations, and debating fandom's sociopolitical effects and limitations are often more important than any provisional answers or solutions. Fan and academic discourses can contain mutually exclusive readings and are not primarily focused on synthesis.² The concept of looking at fannish and academic practices as works in progress thus foregrounds not only the similarity in what fans and critics do to the texts they study and create, but also the similarities between writing and revising a particular piece and the discipline as a whole. The convergence between the academic and the fan and between the work in progress of scholarship and the work in progress of fan texts is central because all the contributors to this volume are both fans and academics who are invested in both worlds and are able to speak both languages. But in connecting fannish and academic practices here, it is important to emphasize that we are not trying to colonize fannish spaces with an academic value system. In fact, if anything, it's the reverse: we use our fannish knowledge and values and apply them to academic practices. Rather than privileging a particular interpretation as accurate, we have learned from fandom that alternative and competing readings can and must coexist. We thus use fannish practice as a model for academic practice.

Many of the thoughts expressed here may bear the name of a single author but could not have been conceived or written without the support of the fannish community in which the bylined author is embedded. Much of the interaction during the creation of the book occurred within fannish spaces and with the constant feedback of other fans; all of it occurred online. Whereas Matt Hills (2002, 11) accuses academics of valuing only those aspects of fandom that are most like academia, we would like to foreground the places where academic disciplinary practices can learn from fandom. We want to emphasize fandom's communal spirit, what fandom itself often refers to as its collective "hive mind," and fandom's constant awareness that every reading is provisional and that every characterization yields one variation among a nearly countless number of others while still maintaining the rigor of argumentation so crucial to the academic sphere. We look at and build on two decades of collective insight into fandom studies, and we situate ourselves not in opposition to but in dialogue with the work that has come before us.

Fandom is fragmented and fragmentary, just as it is self-perpetuating, itself a continual work in progress that cannot be shut down. The work in progress represents not only the activity that creates fandom, but also this book. When the book goes to press, it will not shut down the discourse when it appears in

unchangeable print. Instead, it will spawn a series of new lines of discussion. We thus set forth a variety of highly personalized, individual experiences and readings, with each essay told from a unique point of view, and draw connections among them. Yet because fandom is continuously created, it is continuously changing, and any discussion of it is always already obsolete. Thus, rather than trying to create a homogenous reading or attempting to essentialize fandom and the artworks that spring out of it, we hope to mirror the discussions and vitality of differences that characterize fandom. This collection is thus by necessity a snapshot and by definition incomplete and transitory. The central notion of the book indicates some of the strengths of fan culture, such as self-reflection, collective production, and acceptance of conflict; it strives to exhibit an awareness of the similarities and differences between subsets of fandom. The specific essays speak to one another, at times disagreeing with but more often complementing one another's insights into fan fiction and fan culture.

After a brief definition of terms, needed to create a consistent vocabulary for what follows, we discuss the role of media and related tools in online fandom; outline past research in media/fan studies and place ourselves in relationship to these studies; and provide an overview of the organization of the book and the essays' place in that organization.

Definition of Terms

The essays in this volume all use a common terminology; however, such terminology should be understood as provisional because terms continue to evolve, often depend on fandom, and are always in dispute. Although many readers will at least have a passing familiarity with the specific terminology used in media fandom, the constant debates and attempts at correctly defining and delineating fannish expressions suggest that it may be useful to clarify some of the more commonly used terms.

Most important to treatments of fan texts are understandings of *canon*, the events presented in the media source that provide the universe, setting, and characters, and *fanon*, the events created by the fan community in a particular fandom and repeated pervasively throughout the fantext. Fanon often creates particular details or character readings even though canon does not fully support it—or, at times, outright contradicts it. Complete agreement on what comprises canon is

rarely possible, even with repeated viewings of the primary source, because of the range of individual interpretation. Furthermore, what comprises canon can be called into question: for *Lord of the Rings*, for example, the canon may include any combination of the books (including or excluding Tolkien's supplementary work such as *The Silmarillion*), the animated movie directed by Ralph Bakshi released in 1978, and the 2001–2003 blockbuster Peter Jackson films. For *Star Trek* fandom, usually any of the four TV series and any of the movies, but not the animated TV show or the novelizations, may be considered canon. An understanding of canon is particularly important for the creators of fan texts because they are judged on how well they stick to or depart from canon.

Within the field of fan fiction, the three main genres are *gen*, *het*, and *slash*. *Gen* denotes a general story that posits no imposed romantic relationships among the characters. *Het* stories revolve around a heterosexual relationship, either one invented by the author or one presented in the primary source text. *Slash* stories posit a same-sex relationship, usually one imposed by the author and based on perceived homoerotic subtext. Archives of fan fiction, or online libraries that categorize and house fan fiction, use these three genres as organizing principles, with slash often housed in separate archives. The archives' software imposes a way of presentation and thus a way of reading, because most archivists do not create their own software or fully customize existing software, instead opting to use the software as presented by the creator with only minimal fandom-specific tweaking. Most archives are very similar in the way they organize and present fiction, usually allowing different search functions, such as title, author, date, pairing, or genre.

The *header* appears on virtually all posted fan fiction and contains information about the story. It is used by fic archivists to properly categorize and upload the story without having to read it, and it is used by readers to decide whether or not they want to read it. The header traditionally provides the title, author, e-mail address, romantic *pairings* (if applicable), and rating. Often the author uses a rating system, supposedly to warn readers, although the higher ratings often function as advertisements as well. The header often includes the story's genre or story type (slash or action/adventure); *spoilers*, or identification of episodes of the media source that have plot elements given away; acknowledgments to *betas*, who read the story and make suggestions before the author posts it; *disclaimers*, or an acknowledgment that the author does not own the characters and universe; and author's notes, where extra information relevant to the story is provided.

Within fan fiction itself, a number of subgenres are well recognized—far too many to include here, particularly because many fandom-specific categories exist. Still, most fans will have heard of the following categories. These include *hurt/comfort*, or *h/c*, stories, which, as the name implies, revolve around a character being injured and another character comforting him; *Mpreg*, where a man gets pregnant; *deathfic*, where a major character dies; *curtainfic*, or fic so domestic that the main characters, often a male slash pairing, shop for curtains together; *episode fix*, a rewriting of an event provided in canon to a deliberately noncanonical, preferred conclusion; *episode tag* or *missing scene*, a continuation of a canonical scene that provides more information; *AU*, or *alternate universe*, where familiar characters are dropped into a new setting (which, depending on the media source, may or may not be canonical, because many of the source texts have fantastical components and not a few have played with multiverses); *crossover*, combining two different sets of characters from two media sources into a single story (as in a *Buffy the Vampire Slayer/X-Files* crossover); *fluff*, an often light story that usually seeks to make a tender emotional impact rather than put forward a plot; *PWP*, which gets spelled out either as “porn without plot” or “plot? what plot?”; and various forms of sexually explicit stories that revolve around *kink*, such as *BDSM* (bondage and discipline, dominance and submission, and sadomasochism). Some subgenres trouble readers and are presented with clear warnings so that readers will not be unpleasantly surprised or perhaps *squicked* (grossed out).

Many authors write their fandom’s *OTP*, or “one true pairing,” exclusively—that is, they have such an investment in the romantic relationship of that particular pairing that they will write and read to the exclusion of all other pairings. Some authors deliberately write *badfic*, or bad fiction, which is often parodic; such badfics may play with the well-known *Mary Sue/Marty Stu* story, in which an *original character*, or *OC*, all too often an avatar of the author herself, is presented as the beautiful, smart heroine who saves the day and then gets the guy, all to the virtual exclusion of the canonical characters, who generally have very little to do with Mary Sue on the case. Of course, these genres are not exclusive: one could write a crossover AU BDSM PWP, for instance.

In addition to terms that are descriptive of fiction, fans use a variety of terms to describe themselves. There’s the *Big Name Fan*, or *BNF*, a fan with a large following; the term may sometimes be pejorative, but regardless, BNFs are usually far too modest to claim such status themselves, allowing others to categorize them. BNFs are surrounded by worshipping *fangirls*, although this

term is also used in a nonpejorative sense for fans of the media source. *Fangirl* has also become a verb, as when one *fangirls* another writer or an actor, perhaps by *squeeing* (a squeal of uncontained appreciation or excitement). There are *newbies*, who are new to the fandom but eager to learn the ropes; this term may be pejorative, depending on the fandom. *Lurkers* watch the fannish activity but rarely, if ever, interact with other fans. *Listmoms* or *list owners* own online communities and maintain control over what can be posted. They set rules and guidelines, thus setting the tone for the community and outlining appropriate action. *Vidders* create fan video artworks, short videos in which scenes from the canon source are set against a particular musical piece carefully chosen for its thematic meaning. These *vids* use selection and juxtaposition to highlight particular moments in the source text to tell a story that is or is not present in the text or to analyze a particular character, often playing with visual aesthetics. Whereas formerly vidders would create *songvids* by using their VCRs to splice together scenes, now *vids* are more sophisticated, with vidders using complex authoring software to manipulate electronic files.

The advent of LiveJournal.com and other *blog* (Web log) spaces—an important force in fandom and in the construction of fandom communities—has led to a vocabulary unique to this space. Most terms revolve around descriptions of aspects of the blogging software, which permits the user to create diary-like dated entries that others may then comment on. Central to LJ is the *friends list*, also known as the *flist*. The user defines her flist, generally comprising people with similar interests, and this, in turn, allows her to view all her flist's recent posts. Moreover, *friending* also allows the *user* to limit her posts to that particular group of people by *flocking* (*friendslocking*) her post; as such, LJ creates a space that hovers at the border of public and private. A central function for fannish interaction is LJ *communities*, where people with similar interests can join to post on the community's topic. Fan communities fulfill a variety of functions, from simple news gathering to in-depth discussions. Many exist as de facto fic archives, share images or other media, or allow discussion about the shows, actors, or related fannish topics; some host *RPGs* (role-playing games); and others simply gather links to interesting stories or fannish discussions, called *meta*. Also central to LJ is the *icon*, an image chosen to represent oneself. Unlike other LJ users, fans rarely use their own images. Instead, they choose actors or scenes that comment on the show or fannish debates. In fact, icon making has become a new form of textual poaching, with its own set of aesthetic sensibility, fannish rules, and network.

In addition to the terms outlined above, regular online and e-mail abbreviations and emoticons are also used: *LOL* for “laugh out loud,” smileys to indicate emotion, and *g* or ::snuggle:: to indicate performative action. This use of acronyms and cryptic terms deliberately excludes those unaware of their meaning. Part of the task of a newbie is to sort through the unfamiliar terms and come to an understanding of their meaning. The exclusionary nature of the discourse enculturates the newbie and cements the online community.

Fan Communities Move Online

We focus primarily on online fandom in order to supplement earlier discussions of media fandom that mostly addressed zine culture. After all, technological tools affect not only dissemination and reception, but also production, interaction, and even demographics. The history of fan fiction makes clear that technology is complicit in the generation of fan texts. Perhaps the most important technological advance, the one with the farthest-reaching implications, is the advent of the Internet. The transition of fandom to the Internet occurred during the early 1990s. Before then, fandom was a face-to-face proposition: fan clubs formed, and fans wrote newsletters, zines, and APAs (“amateur press association” add-on circuit newsletters) and got together at conventions. This meant that fandom was transmitted from person to person through enculturation. Fan artifacts were physical, and geographical boundaries were often an issue. The movement online has changed all this. Fans may write and post fan fiction, for example, without even knowing what it is or knowing that there are forums to do this in, and such fans naturally have no idea that they are part of a wider community. In turn, fans can remain *lurkers* who consume fannish artifacts without interacting with other fans. For those who find an online fannish space in which to interact with others, rules that seemed important in the old-model enculturation stage—for instance, the admonition to never, ever write slash based on real people rather than characters (known as *real person slash*, or *RPS*)—have lost their meaning. Although hard-copy zines are still being created and sold, most fan fiction is made available on the Web for free. Fan texts are now overwhelmingly electronic, and many are transient. Moreover, demographics have shifted: ever-younger fans who previously would not have had access to the fannish culture except through their parents can now enter the fan space effortlessly; financial resources have become less of a concern because access to

a computer is the only prerequisite; and national boundaries and time zones have ceased to limit fannish interaction.

Early online fandom occurred via first GENie, which permitted electronic correspondence, and then via Usenet, an electronic discussion board to which one subscribed (for example, rec.arts.startrek). As new content-delivery technology became available, fans adopted it: ListServ technology efficiently delivers messages from a central server to individual people via e-mail. The content of the posts to Usenet and boards has tended to focus on a particular topic, such as a particular TV show. If the topic is fan fiction, then fiction and comments to that piece of fiction may be posted for everyone to read, in addition to general chatter related to the program. Related to lists are bulletin boards, fixed Web sites that focus on a large general topic (say, a TV show) that is in turn divided into smaller, related topics (episode discussion, character analysis, fan fiction, news, and actors). Individual users log in and post comments in the appropriate forum, and others comment on the comments.

In the early '00s, fandom expanded into the blogosphere, and its widespread and enthusiastic adoption has had interesting consequences for the fan-created space. Whereas Usenet, ListServes, newsgroups, and bulletin boards all focus on a particular fan topic—a television program, for example—people who blog are just that: people (who are fans) who blog. As a result, individual journals become a mix of fannish and other topics about that fandom, thus including not only fiction, fan art, and commentary on the source text, but also real-life (*RL*) rants, political discussion, and nonfannish musings. This, along with the threading, hypertextual nature of the blogosphere, where it's easy to click to another page, replaces targeted content delivery with interpersonal interaction. In some ways, the blogosphere has provided what other delivery systems could not: a return to the sense of interaction with a person with a variety of interests, only one of which happens to be fandom. In that, it resembles the kind of more personal and less topic-driven interaction fans enjoyed before the advent of the Internet. At the same time, however, online-constructed identities allow users to shield their names and other features, thus constructing a level of remove that is fundamentally different from pre-Internet fannish interactions.

LiveJournal.com has its own cultural idiosyncrasies that have affected and been affected by fannish discourses. This dialogue has been enabled by the nature of the software that powers LJ itself: it is free, it is available to anyone with a computer and a Web browser, and, perhaps most importantly, it is simple to use.

LJ has created a new culture of visibility, where much fannish interaction previously restricted to mailing lists becomes public. As such, it has allowed easier entry into fandom at a time when the numbers of new fans are ever increasing—the result, perhaps, of fandom’s pervasive presence online, which, by its mere existence, invites others in. The constant intrusion of personal information between fannish discussions and fiction presents a different mode of interaction in which a writer’s personal impression may influence the way we read her fiction and vice versa. One benefit of this is that the mix of fiction and other material allows fans who are not creative writers to interact more fully. Fans whose central fannish function is to post fan fiction reviews or *rec lists* (recommendations of noteworthy fan fiction, with links) or to produce meta may be friended for these contributions to fandom.

More importantly, however, LJ has splintered fandom into nearly innumerable factions. Certainly there is fragmentation in ListSers and mailing lists, which spawned not only general fic-related lists and general actor-related lists, but also pairing- or character-specific lists. To keep up to date in a fandom, one might have to subscribe to several lists. This fragmentation has continued apace on LJ, in part because it is both free and easy to start up such a list. Now even a brand-new show in its first season may easily have ten to fifteen fiction communities devoted to it, some of which may be set up before the show even airs. As a result, it is easier to avoid stories, styles, or pairings that one does not like, but it is harder to get a comprehensive sense of a fandom and harder still to build a truly inclusive sense of community. In addition, because LJ’s technology permits posts to be filtered by the user to a carefully targeted audience, content is further constrained. Fans counter such segregation with tools like rec journals, announcement communities, and newsletters, all of which allow LJ users to monitor interesting posts from journals not on their list. This customization makes LJ a convenient—although not necessarily the best—tool for fannish interaction. The nature of LJ’s software makes it easy to invite people in, but it also makes it easy to shut them out.

Some fans like the individualized discourse that allows for multifannish interaction and more personal conversation; others dislike it for those very reasons. Most agree that the signal-to-noise ratio is higher with blogs like LJ than with lists and that it is more difficult to keep up sustained discussions. The software permits instantaneous deletion of individual entries or of entire blogs and leaves no archival traces. Also, fans disagree about whether they like or dislike the fact that LJ is much more visually intensive; the software permits

customization of pages with images and icons, and some fan pages are so densely customized that they are virtually unreadable or take a long time to load. Likewise, LJ has affected the types of writing produced and how such writings are presented. Many have bemoaned the increase of short pieces, *drabbles* (fics exactly one hundred words long) in particular. Little fic snippets often are written in lieu of actual comments, as in comment porn, for example, where an argument may be phrased fictionally or the writer may simply offer a whimsical fictional gift. This has changed the way readers and writers interact. Much of the beta process, in which the beta reader offers editorial help, has remained the same. But after the fic is posted, the reader/writer interaction has changed: often the writer will post the story or a link to it in her LJ, which allows readers to offer feedback directly in the comments and which usefully archives all comments to a fic in a single place. Many writers have noted that the amount of feedback has increased, yet it has become less detailed and critical. It is easy to hit the comment button and type a one-liner, but the public nature of LJ comments makes it hard for many to offer serious criticism.

Although it's tempting to provide a continuum (in-person fandom to GENIE to Usenet to ListServes to bulletin boards to blogs), this continuum is false. Usenet, ListServes, bulletin boards, and blogs are all still currently in use, and all have thriving fan communities. Also, of course, fans still get together in person in big groups for conventions and in little groups for fun. For many fans, the online fan experience is a way to meet people with similar interests who may become friends and whom one may, or may not, ever meet in RL. Rather than inhabiting a space and then moving out when a new space comes open, the spaces are continuously inhabited, with fans moving in and out of the spaces as their inclination and technological limitations dictate. Fans without broadband Internet access, for example, may avoid graphics-heavy blogs because of bandwidth constraints. They may prefer a community where they can go online just long enough to download content to their computers. Longtime fans may also continue with the Usenet groups because all their friends are there and not in the blogosphere.

Fans have migrated to new spaces as the new spaces have become available, and this is in part the result of fans' use of tools. For people who edit, print, and sell fanzines, knowledge of how to run a ditto machine has given way to knowledge of how to use desktop publishing programs with output generated by a professional printer. Similarly, as new tools have become available, fans have co-opted them and bent them to creative fannish uses. The artifacts that are most

associated with fandom, zines and vids, have themselves changed: hard-copy zines are still being produced and sold, but so are online, subscription-only zines, CDs, or .pdf files. Online fan fiction archives provide megabytes of content for free, all carefully indexed and uploaded by volunteers. VCR tapes of fan vids have given way to sophisticated, perfectly synched, high-quality electronic files. Fannishly informational Web sites have been supplemented with the hyperlink intertextuality of *wikis*, a medium perfectly suited to providing factual, cross-referenced data. And whereas before a fan was content to choose a fan name to be known under or to publish fan fiction under, now she must not only choose her name, but also illustrate it with icons, the creation of which requires the acquisition of a whole new skill set, not to mention appropriate graphics software.

The driving force behind the movement online has, of course, been the Internet's far more widespread availability, but the creation of free, easy-to-use online tools that permit easy authoring of beautiful and accessible sites with little technical expertise cannot be emphasized enough. Yet despite the proliferation of online fan activity, the movement of fandom from a physical space to a virtual one has not adequately been addressed in the academic literature. Most of the academic research in fan studies began in the late 1980s and early 1990s, before the movement online, and subsequent research has built on this base. We aim to fill this gap. To that end, we now turn to a review of the literature in the field of fan studies so that we can build on it and explain how this volume fits within and complements the literature.

Fan Fiction and Fan Studies

The history of fan fiction studies, for the most part, is a history of attempting to understand the underlying motivations of why (mostly) women write fan fiction and, in particular, slash. As a result, *m/m* (male/male) slash fiction has received disproportionate treatment in both academic and mainstream journalistic representations. The earliest academic work suggests two possible explanations. Both texts are situated in the feminist pornography debates of the 1980s and clearly take differing stances. Joanna Russ's "Pornography by Women, for Women, with Love" (1985) reads fan fiction's explicit aspects as a feminist pornography; Patricia Frazer Lamb and Diane Veith's "Romantic Myth, Transcendence, and *Star Trek* Zines" (1986), conversely, suggests that even

explicit sexual content must be metaphorically understood as a way for women to write their desires for equal relationships between equal partners. They argue that slash can depict a love between equals that does not fall prey to notions of hierarchical gender roles and that explores both the male and female sides of the characters. In fact, they suggest that the homosexual relationship actually signals a displaced idealized heterosexual one that valorizes inner compatibility, true love, and deep friendship over sexual object choices.

Russ and Lamb and Veith concur that slash is a liberatory practice for the women writing it and that such female sexual fantasies must be distinguished from classic “male” porn because of the emphasis on character, commitment, and nurture and because of the awareness that women may want different things in their sexual fantasies than either romance or porn can provide. April Selley (1987) offers more source text–based analysis to suggest what it is about the Kirk/Spock dynamic in particular that makes it appealing to slash authors. Drawing from Leslie Fiedler’s 1960 study of the homoerotic, racialized tension in many American novels, she argues that Kirk and Spock’s relationship follows a similar pattern, so that slash readings become extrapolations of this obvious textual tension.

The early 1990s established the central readings and theoretical approaches to fan fiction with three studies that remain tremendously influential. The most important is Henry Jenkins’s *Textual Poachers* (1992b), which comprehensively theorizes the field, drawing from audience studies with a particular emphasis on popular culture and television and including not only fan fiction and fannish interpretive practices, but also songvids and filking. Theoretically, Jenkins does not fully embrace Stuart Hall’s notion of “Encoding and Decoding” (1980), with its incorporation/resistance paradigm, instead choosing to use Michel De Certeau’s (1984) more ambiguous notion of “poaching”: “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” (34). Of course, given the scope and purpose of *Textual Poachers*, it is difficult to not place the fan in a position of subversiveness and resistance to the seemingly all-encompassing force of commercial media. Nevertheless, Jenkins tries to remain careful of differentiating and acknowledging the complexity of any given fan’s subject positions, as well as the diversity and complexity of any fan community as a whole. In so doing, he is often more careful than were many of the scholars who used his work in the years to come.

Methodologically, Jenkins clearly situates himself as a fan who writes “*both* as an academic (who has access to certain theories of popular culture, certain bodies of critical and ethnographic literature) and as a fan (who has access to the particular knowledge and traditions of that community)” (1992b, 5). In fact, he addresses the danger of overidentification but suggests that any position creates dangers and limitations of understanding and insight. He also addresses the responsibilities to the community itself, a concern that has been crucial to us in the creation of this collection: “Writing as a fan means ... that I feel a high degree of responsibility and accountability to the groups being discussed here” (7). There is little we wish to add to these points except to emphasize that rather than choosing fans as collaborators, we *are* the fans—we are not in “constant movement” (5) between these identities; rather, they are inseparable from us.

In contradistinction to Jenkins’s clear identification and immersion in fan culture is Camille Bacon-Smith’s *Enterprising Women* (1992), in which she consciously constructs herself as an outside observer. Her methodological self-positioning intends to assure her reader that she is removed from her object of study and is thus not unduly invested in it, a move that trades fan approval for the academic value of objectivity. She uses ethnography, an anthropological approach, to emphasize the community of women and their interaction and ties in a way few other scholars had done or would do for a long time to come. The central problem with her study, from both the fannish and the academic position, is her overly privileged positioning of the hurt/comfort genre, which she reads as the emotional heart and secret of fandom. Perhaps because she draws from a limited set of fandoms and stories, Bacon-Smith fails to accurately depict the diversity of fandom as she tries to impose universal interpretive models; indeed, it seems clear that her ethnographic approach worked all too well as she embedded herself into a very particular fannish world. Her emphasis on community and the friendship between the female fans is powerful, even if her self-chosen outsider status prohibits her from fully understanding the bonds she observes.

The third important text, published in 1992, is Constance Penley’s “Feminism, Psychoanalysis, and the Study of Popular Culture,” later expanded in *NASA/Trek* (1998). Penley’s essay uses a psychoanalytic approach to complicate notions of identification. She argues that, especially for heterosexual readers, slash allows female readers to have and be either and both of the characters. This identification with the characters is supplemented by an identification with the scene and fannish universe in its entirety, thus affording the reader multiple entry points and modes of identification. Although she does not draw any real

conclusions, Penley raises questions about the sexual orientation of slashers and about class issues. She draws attention to her ambiguous situation as both participant and observer and as both fan and academic, although in this essay she refuses to occupy a particular subject position, as Bacon-Smith does.

These three texts set the stage for more than a decade of fan fiction studies that mostly used their various approaches—media studies, anthropology, and psychoanalysis—to apply their theories to particular texts or fandoms. These critics' source texts were mostly limited to the fandoms they engaged in personally or through their fan networks and were mostly restricted to pre-Internet culture. In fact, neither Bacon-Smith's nor Jenkins's full-length book treatment on fan fiction addresses Internet fan culture much, and even Penley's later *NASA/Trek* describes a fan culture that is “enthusiastic yet thoughtfully cautious about the new Internet culture” (1998, 116).

The year 1992 also saw the publication of the most centrally important collection of fan studies itself, which addresses the various ways fans engage with the source material, the psychology of their interaction, and the studies of the communities they create. Lisa Lewis's edited volume *The Adoring Audience* (1992) includes central essays on fans and fan culture alike. One essay in this volume, “Fandom as Pathology,” by Joli Jenson, analyzes traditional (academic and popular) representations of fans and relates these predominantly negative portrayals to a critique of modernity. As such, a cultural unease with modern life gets projected onto fandom that functions as a symptom for modernity's failures. John Fiske's essay discusses the “Cultural Economy of Fandom” and the way fans “invest and accumulate capital” (30–31) within this economy. He defines a model of cultural capital within fan culture as well as a materialist model in the interaction between fans and the culture industries. Lawrence Grossberg's essay “Is There a Fan in the House?” focuses on what he terms the “affective sensibility of fandom” to determine how and why fans function (50). He emphasizes the active status of audiences and how pleasure and affect must be seen as crucial, not only in determining a group's relationship to popular culture but also in constructing individual fan identities. All three essays delineate various forms of theoretical approaches to fan studies that clearly tie in with cultural studies, in particular media and audience studies, and situate fan studies as one aspect of a larger disciplinary cultural phenomenon.

Over the next decade or so, most essays in fan fiction studies focused on fanfic as an interpretive gesture, thus using fan fiction to gain further insight into a

particular source text. At the same time, of course, the issues raised by previous scholars regarding the particular appeals of slash, the sexual dynamics explored, and its identificatory practices were usually addressed in passing. Examples of such close readings of particular source texts include Christine Boese (1998) and Jeannie Hamming (2001) for *Xena: Warrior Princess*, Atara Stein (1998) for *Star Trek: The Next Generation*, Mirna Cicione (1998) for *The Professionals*, Christine Scodari and Jenna L. Felder (2000) and Robin Silvergleid (2003) for *X-Files*, Kurt Lancaster (2001) for *Babylon 5*, Esther Saxey (2001) and Kristina Busse (2002) for *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, Will Brooker (2002) for *Star Wars*, Victoria Somogyi (2002) for *Star Trek: Voyager*, Sharon Cumberland (2002) for Banderas fan sites, Christine Scodari (2003) for *Farscape* and *Stargate SG-1*, Rachel Shave (2004) for *Harry Potter*, and Anna Smol (2004) for *Lord of the Rings*.³ Most of these essays clearly focused on the source text and often used particular fan stories in an exemplary fashion. Many reiterated the concept of poaching, the subversiveness of women writing erotic fiction against the mainstream media, and the contentious relationship of slash to romance fiction.

Likewise, fields related to media fiction studies have done their own work that is influential to fandom and fan fiction studies, such as Nancy Baym's defining study of soap opera fans, *Tune In, Log On* (2000); John Tulloch's and Henry Jenkins's *Science Fiction Audiences* (1995); and Camille Bacon-Smith's *Science Fiction Culture* (2000). At the same time, a variety of books and essay collections have been published that focus on a particular source text and that usually address fans' relationship to specific TV series. Examples of this include David Lavery's *Deny All Knowledge: Reading the "X-Files"* (1996), Roz Kaveney's *Reading the Vampire Slayer* (2001), David Lavery and Rhonda Wilcox's *Fighting the Forces: What's at Stake in "Buffy the Vampire Slayer"* (2002), and Rhiannon Bury's *Cyberspaces of Their Own: Female Fandoms Online* (2005).

Meanwhile, some fanfic scholars tried to use different paradigms and methodologies to address the widening field of fan fiction. Catherine Salmon and Don Symons's *Warrior Lovers* (2001), for example, uses human evolutionary biology to argue that slash is simply another version of women's erotic fiction. They contend that there exist differences between male and female mating psychology; as a result, women want nurture and monogamy rather than sex, so that romance novels, rather than pornography, fulfill women's erotic needs. Women's romance is characterized by a desire to "form a permanent monogamous union," and they argue that slash fulfills these exact needs. The

main reason why women read slash rather than romance, according to Salmon and Symons, is that it presents both protagonists as “co-warriors” (82, 89), an idea that grows out of Lamb and Veith’s (1986) contention that slash offers a love between equals.

In “‘Normal female interest in men bonking’: Selections from the *Terra Nostra Underground* and *Strange Bedfellows*” (1998), Shoshanna Green, Cynthia Jenkins, and Henry Jenkins create an interesting cowriting experiment that relies heavily on fan quotes and tries to reproduce the discussions and debates that occur within the community. In so doing, they try to avoid some of the more typical errors in academic fan studies, namely, the universalizing interpretations, homogenizing of fannish discourses, and the lack of contextualization. By letting fans speak for themselves, the essay presents fandom as a contradictory and contentious space where intelligent women can and do think about their practices as well as fandom’s inherent problems, such as misogyny and homophobia, and find a variety of answers or explanations. Likewise, Sheenagh Pugh’s *The Democratic Genre* (2005) draws heavily on fan writers and their thoughts about writing in favor of academic treatments. She foregrounds the similarities between fan fiction and other literary texts in order to focus on the texts themselves, often citing extensively and letting the fans and fan texts speak for themselves.

Even more fan centered are two more recent essays in which fans themselves analyze their own writing practices and use their experiences and texts to draw tentative conclusions: Kylie Lee (2003) and Susanne Jung (2004). Kylie Lee’s text, a personal essay, is introductory in nature, but it stands out as a result of its informal, conversational style. It clearly situates the author as a fan writer (even in choosing to use her fannish pseudonym rather than her real name, with its academic credentials) and draws attention to the sexual aspects of fan fiction, not only by theoretically stating it but by providing extensive examples. In fact, the entire essay is predicated on the personal and contingent: “I make no claim that my research has any kind of statistical or scientific rigor. Rather, the responses can serve as a snapshot of a particular moment in time of members of the slash community” (81). Her repeated emphasis on her own affective relation to slash is indicative of a move in fan studies to acknowledge and address the unanalyzable, unexplainable, and often unspeakable excess of pleasure that fans experience.

In contrast, Susanne Jung, in “Queering Popular Culture: Female Spectators and

the Appeal of Writing Slash Fan Fiction” (2004), reads her own story as implicated in current gender politics and consciously traces her political impetus in writing it. She describes how in her story she intended to “depict a utopian society which had overcome our current straight/gay divide, a society beyond heterosexual norms” (¶7). Although Jung’s essay is important in showing how fanfic writers are often very familiar with current gender and queer theories and quite consciously use this theoretical framework when creating their fiction, her own subject position remains untheorized throughout.

A central theoretical shift occurs with Sara Gwenllian Jones’s “The Sex Lives of Cult Television Characters” (2002) and Roberta E. Pearson’s “Kings of Infinite Space: Cult Television Characters and Narrative Possibilities” (2003). Both essays follow Nicholas Ambercrombie and Brian Longhurst’s critique in *Audiences* (1998), in which the researchers suggest that the incorporation/resistance paradigm of audience responses to media should be replaced by a so-called spectacle/performance paradigm: “a more positive view of consumption, which is seen no longer as a more or less enforced product of a capitalist economy but as a set of choices made by consumers anxious to construct an identity. This new model of the consumer is isomorphic with the new model of the active audience” (32–33). In so doing, fan fiction and the discourses surrounding it become less of a uniform force of resistance and instead much more differentiated—in parts even compromised.

This more contentious and complex relationship between producers and audience is also at the heart of Henry Jenkins’s interest in media convergence. Jenkins (1998, ¶6) defines media convergence as “the fact that the technological convergences being discussed in the information and entertainment industries, the bringing together of all existing media technologies within the same black box in our living room, actually build upon a complex series of cultural and social shifts which are redefining how we relate to media and popular culture.” In his 2004 essay “The Cultural Logic of Media Convergence,” Jenkins describes a variety of effects of convergence, including “revising audience measurement,” “rethinking media aesthetic,” “redefining intellectual property rights,” and “renegotiating relations between consumers and producers” (39–40). In fact, the recent mainstreaming of fan fiction, at times not only tolerated but also invited and endorsed by producers, is just one of the effects Jenkins is describing. Similarly, Simone Murray’s “Celebrating the Story the Way It Is” (2004) describes the way producers engaged with the *Lord of the Rings* fans before releasing the movies in order to ensure its positive reception. The fact that

these discourses are available (that producers can and do interact with fans) negates more simplistic one-directional models. Other essays that address the interaction between fans and media at large include Sharon Cumberland's "Private Uses of Cyberspace: Women, Desire, and Fan Culture" (2000), Mia Consalvo's "Cyber-Slaying Media Fans" (2003), and Cathy Cupitt's "A Space for Sex" (2003).

Concurrently, the other central shift in fan studies is a move away from studying the community to studying the individual fan, in particular her underlying motivations and psychology. Veering from the earlier interest in media fandom as a particular case study and creative community in its own right, several more prominent recent studies have appeared that widen the field of research and the definition of *fan*. In so doing, the research foregrounds the relationship of one particular fan to the object of her fannish affection. Matt Hills, in particular, in his essay "Media Fandom, Neoreligiosity, and Cult(ural) Studies" (2000) and the more comprehensive *Fan Cultures* (2002), has focused on these concerns. Cornel Sandvoss's *Fans: The Mirror of Consumption* (2005) likewise focuses on the specific emotional investment of the individual fan and the relationship between a fan's investment in her fannish objects of desire and her psychological and cultural identity construction. Sandvoss's study widens the concept of fandom to include any "regular, emotionally involved consumption of a given popular narrative or text" (8). Although such an approach allows the study of varying degrees and forms of fannish behavior, the specific particularities of the fannish community tend to be sidestepped. Because we are more concerned with the collective nature of fandom, its internal communications, and the relationship between fans that arises out of a joint interest in a particular text, the psychology of the individual fan is not the focus of this book, even though many of the essays do address the fan as individual.

Finally, fans themselves have continued to produce a corpus of literature that is often more insightful and current than much academic work. the Fanfic Symposium (<http://www.trickster.org/symposium>, accessed June 1, 2006), for example, hosts a collection of essays, and *Whoosh* (<http://www.whoosh.org>, accessed June 1, 2006) is a fandom-specific site with a similar host of writers. Moreover, every day, LiveJournal.com produces meta, including theoretical essays discussing specific shows and episodes, fan fiction, and fan writing, culture, and interaction. Although these are usually written in a nonacademic style, many are clearly influenced by literary theory, such as gender and queer studies, easily citing and referencing Sedgwick (1985), Butler (1990),

Halberstam (1998), and Doty (2000), for example. As part of fandom, such essays reflect the community and its concerns far better than any outside observer ever could.

Autoethnography

With all of this in mind, and following Green, Jenkins, and Jenkins (1998), this collection merges fan and academic discourses, but it does so not by placing fans' quotes and voices next to our analyses, but rather by gathering together fans who are already academics and academics who are already fans. The trend in academic discourse to the personal and the realization that no subject position is completely outside the field of study, as well as the work that has gone before of well-known and well-regarded scholar-fans such as Jenkins, have permitted us to take a subject position that melds the fan and the academic without implying a lack of insight or intellectual rigor. We think that being embedded in a community—which we nevertheless study critically—can provide a useful approach, and a sketch of our subject position is necessary to situate this text among those we have just listed.

Hills (2002) defines *autoethnography* as an exercise in which “the tastes, values, attachments, and investments of the fan and the academic-fan are placed under the microscope of cultural analysis” (72) and suggests it as a useful tool to situate writers in their scholarly and fannish contexts. However, whereas Hills regards this as a “voluntary self-estrangement” (72), we think of it as more, rather than less, of an investment and as an awareness of our subject positions that creates a stronger, not a weaker, affect. We would like to put forth this book as a way in which the collective sum of the essays may permit an ephemeral, provisional, and contingent autoethnography. We do not try to make large-scale universal claims, nor can we provide a self-reflexive autoethnographic study, as Hills does, because this book is a collection of essays by different people and not a single-authored text that can make a claim about the self while it makes an argument. By remaining fan-scholars at the same time that we become scholar-fans,⁴ we hope to shift the concerns from a dichotomy of academic and fannish identity to subject positions that are multiple and permit us to treat the academic and fannish parts as equally important. Our identities are neither separate nor separable. We rarely speak as fan or scholar; we rarely differentiate between an

academic and fannish audience, except perhaps in formality of tone.

We return again to the theme of this introduction: the act of performing fandom parallels the act of performing academia. Both rely on dialogue, community, and intertextuality. All of us are academics who have spent years training in the particular discourses established by our disciplines. All of us have learned modes of interaction and mediation and specific forms of analysis in fandom. We'll continue to exist on the intersection of the two, trying not to aca-colonize fandom or lose our academic allegiance through our fannish one. But we also want to profit from this intersection and to use our academic and fannish tools and insights to give a more complex and multifaceted image of fandom and its communities. In fact, we contend that our self-definition as participants and observers does not hinder us from seeing but rather helps us to see a more comprehensive picture of fandom.

Many of us have tested our pronouncements against the responses of the community, which is varied and which debates many of the issues we address among ourselves; we thus hope that the ideas put forth in these essays approach the essence of what it means to be a part of the fan fiction community. Through this interaction, we simultaneously draw from and give back to the community. This collection speaks with a multiplicity of voices through which we attempt to recreate—albeit in a different venue—the very thing fandom itself does. None of our ideas, whether academic or fannish, is ever ours alone, and in choosing to offer a collection of fannish ideas rather than a singly authored volume, we hope to acknowledge our debt to the community at the same time that we present, if only metonymically, the complexity of thoughts that fandom itself generates.

This volume, then, presents a snapshot of fannish and academic interests at this point in time within the particular communities we inhabit. The essays speak to and with one another and represent a variety of methodologies, approaches, styles, and subject positions. If anything can begin to mirror the vitality, innovativeness, personal affect, and even contentiousness of fandom, it is their collective whole.

Overview of the Volume

PART I: DIFFERENT APPROACHES: FAN FICTION IN CONTEXT

One of the difficulties in defining fan fiction is the formulation of boundaries.

Are media tie-in novels fan fiction? Is any derivative literature? What about commercial fiction that is really fan fiction with the serial numbers filed off? Most definitions emphasize the amateur aspect, the community that surrounds the production, dissemination, and consumption of fan fiction. This aspect places fan production in a specific postmodern, postcapitalist moment with easy access to the source text—usually TV programs—and reproductive tools. As such, fan fiction is defined as much by its context as its content; its specificity is as much a function of its engagement with the source text as the way stories are disseminated and the communities that surround these fannish engagements. Part I of the volume analyzes these questions.

Abigail Derecho's "Archontic Literature: A Definition, a History, and Several Theories of Fan Fiction" expands the definition of fan fiction to include any writing she calls *archontic*. Her definition emphasizes the intertextuality and the repeated engagement with a source text in order to create an ever-expanding, collectively created archive. Unlike Jenkins, who considers any community storytelling as falling within the purview of fan fiction, Derecho clearly delimits fan fiction as a concept by placing it in relation to modern concepts of authorship, technologies of book production, and cultural availability of leisure time. She posits fan fiction as a practice that offers marginalized groups, especially women, a tool for social criticism in its opposition of hierarchical notions of ownership.

Catherine Driscoll's "One True Pairing: The Romance of Pornography and the Pornography of Romance" similarly returns to the eighteenth century to trace fan fiction's literary sources. Driscoll is less interested in fan fiction's derivative aspect. Rather, she focuses on its contentious generic fields of pornography and romance. By looking at fan fiction as indebted to both, yet unlike either, Driscoll contextualizes fan fiction in respect to both fields as she illuminates the generic definitions of both pornography and romance, as well as their traditional gendering, arguing that in fan fiction, the two genres are intimately connected, with each genre illuminating and altering the other.

Elizabeth Woledge, by looking at the generic conventions of slash in "Intimatopia: Genre Intersections Between Slash and the Mainstream," argues that rather than defining the field in terms of its amateur or professional status, a focus on narrative themes and styles indicates similarities that transcend the generic boundaries often used to identify slash. Woledge focuses on stories that thematically address homoerotic intimacy to define the concept of the

intimatopic within and outside of fan fiction. Like Driscoll's essay, which refuses to position subversive potential in porn alone, Woledge argues that it is explicit intimacy rather than pornographic depictions that challenge the more traditional representations of interpersonal relationships. She thus emphasizes the similarities and ties between slash and mainstream forms of homoerotic writings outside the fan fiction community; as a result, she concludes that any definition of fan fiction must remain aware of the diverse generic possibilities within and the similarities outside of fan fiction.

The notions of context that are the focus of this section of the volume tacitly rely on the community that creates meaning. Derecho's notion of fan fiction as collectively created archive, with a canon that by its very nature can never be complete, calls into question any sense of individual ownership. Similarly, Driscoll, by refusing to pigeonhole fan fiction in either the realm of porn or that of romance (as so much previous research has done), recontextualizes the genre by refusing to fix the way it is situated or the way it is read by the community. Woledge applies methods of interpretation that transcend notions of an acceptability of genre, placing fan fiction within a community of readers who use the same strategies to read fan fiction as they use to read professionally published fiction. Working against community-created definitions, all three essays succeed in illuminating aspects of fan fiction by looking for similarities and differences with writings that must be excluded yet can help us understand the generic, social, and economic qualities that create the field of fan fiction.

PART II: CHARACTERS, STYLE, TEXT: FAN FICTION AS LITERATURE

Even though close textual analysis has always been part of academic discussions of fan fiction, these readings often serve to establish larger cultural understandings of fans and fan culture rather than focusing on fan fiction as an object of study in its own right. The essays that comprise Part II highlight the literary aspects of fannish writings by concentrating on the texts themselves and using different modes of textual analysis.

Mafalda Stasi's essay, "The Toy Soldiers from Leeds: The Slash Palimpsest," foregrounds the intertextual aspect of fan fiction by using the model of the *palimpsest*. By reading slash through the lens of textual analysis, Stasi foregrounds how no story can ever fully have meaning on its own but must be read in conjunction with the source text's canon and the community at large. As such, individual authorship and the notion of discrete texts is problematic.

Instead, it is replaced by a sense of collective authorship within a community.

Deborah Kaplan moves from the intertextual to the intratextual by focusing on character portrayal in “Construction of Fan Fiction Character Through Narrative,” in which she compares the portrayal of characters within fan fiction to the creation of original characters in original fiction. Although fan fiction clearly facilitates the representation of characters that are already constructed within the source text, Kaplan emphasizes the ways in which any characterization is a complex negotiation among fan writer, source text, and context (be they other stories, fannish discussions, or non-fan fiction cultural artifacts). Any character portrayal is therefore in part a conversation between readers and writers. Even though the source text offers the broad framework, it is the fans who make often one-dimensional characters multifaceted and complexly intriguing.

The final essay in this section connects the text to its specific writer, particularly the emotional, intellectual, and political investment of the author in the fan fiction she creates. Ika Willis uses her own fan fiction in “Keeping Promises to Queer Children: Making Space (for Mary Sue) at Hogwarts” to reassert the subversive potential of fan fiction—not in the sense of subverting commercial productions, but in a more personal, intimate sense. By foregrounding the relationship between the writer’s identity and self-positioning and her identificatory entry points into the text, Willis challenges neat confluences along lines of gender and sexual orientation and questions the all-too-easy dismissal of so-called Mary Sues in fan and academic discourses alike.

Even as this section ranges from the interrelationship of fan texts in their entirety to the highly personal relationship between author and text, all the essays concentrate on the text as literary artifact as well as fannish document. Be it their stylistic and compositional intertextuality, their meaning for fannish interpretation, or the very personal significance of particular plot events or characters, textual analysis deserves as central a place in our analysis of fan fiction and fan culture as it holds within fandom itself—after all, as an interpretive exercise, every piece of fan fiction is, in its own way, an analytic engagement with the source text.

PART III: READERS AND WRITERS: FAN FICTION AND COMMUNITY

The interaction between readers and writers—the dynamics of community itself

—is one of the central differences between professional literature and fan fiction, and the study of this reader-writer dynamic is the focus of Part III. Not only are readers and writers emotionally invested in different ways, but their interaction is also always clearly visible and central—from the creating and editing of fan fiction to its reception and review and to the discourses surrounding fannish productions.

Angelina I. Karpovich’s “The Audience as Editor: The Role of Beta Readers in Online Fan Fiction Communities” studies the interaction between writers and their betas. Karpovich compares the role of betas with that of commercial editors, finding the former to be unique and community building. She thus positions beta reading practices clearly within the many interactive aspects of fan fiction communities interested in improving the literary qualities and entertainment values of a given fan fiction while, importantly, creating bonds and allowing conversation between fans.

Like Willis’s essay in the previous section, Eden Lackner, Barbara Lynn Lucas, and Robin Anne Reid’s “Cunning Linguists: The Bisexual Erotics of *Words/Silence/Flesh*” is self-reflexive insofar as it traces the reception of one particular fan work as seen by its authors and one reader. The authors closely study the eroticized (and often sexualized) discourse in feedback and discussions in order to complicate simplistic notions of gender and sexual orientation. As a result, they succeed in complicating the dichotomy that reads slash as either subversive or misogynist as they show the fan work and its surrounding discourses to be fundamentally queer in all its multiplicity.

This notion of fandom as a queer female space is continued in Kristina Busse’s “My Life Is a WIP on My LJ: Slashing the Slasher and the Reality of Celebrity and Internet Performances,” in which she focuses on the fannish community itself and its interaction. Busse extends the thread of fandom as inherently queer by reading online interactions as performative and not dissimilar to the fan genre of real person slash. By studying the often-repeated accusation of fan fiction’s inherent dismissal of actual gay lives in its fetishization of virtual queerness, she addresses the homosocial component of online female friendships and the highly performative nature of all social interaction.

The dense interaction between the community of readers and writers that Karpovich covers in her analysis of betas and that Lackner and others’ essay epitomizes complements the affective nature of fandom and the fannish

community itself that is so central to Busse's essay. The last two essays, in particular, address the relationship between the fannish community and the individual fan's identity construction, especially in terms of the erotics of reading and writing; they thus hearken back to Driscoll's concern with the often pornographic content of the stories, as well as Willis's discussion of the relationship between story and writer in terms of (sexual) identity.

PART IV: MEDIUM AND MESSAGE: FAN FICTION AND BEYOND

All three essays in the previous section work around notions of performativity in the textual production and reception of fan fiction. Part IV, "Medium and Message: Fan Fiction and Beyond," acknowledges and theorizes this performative aspect of fandom. It expands the field of study by considering both fan texts and performativity. Although most of this collection has focused on storytelling through literary forms—the artifact we call *fan fiction*—other creative artistic forms resonate in between the essays. As we mentioned earlier, the use of new media and new technologies not only eases access, but also directly affects form and even content. Starting with Francesca Coppa's provocative claim that what fans are really doing is manipulating bodies in space, the concluding essays exemplify how new media finally allow fans to further embody their creations. They do so, however, by moving beyond the use of words only as they hint toward the way fannish manipulation of source materials can take shapes other than simple (often linear) narratives and other than words on a page.

Coppa's "Writing Bodies in Space: Media Fan Fiction as Theatrical Performance" starts with the deceptively simple proposition of conceiving of fan fiction not as literature but as drama. She shifts the central fan studies discourse into the realm of performance theory, studying not only the fans but also their texts. She thus reorients the discussion of fan fiction's seemingly more problematic aspects, such as its focus on bodies and its repetitiveness, as a central function of the field rather than an artistic failure. Coppa argues that fan fiction creates a performance: text gets embodied in front of an interactive audience that shares extratextual knowledge.

If all fan fiction is a dramatic performance, none is so more clearly narrativized than role-playing games, one of the focuses of Louisa Ellen Stein's "This Dratted Thing': Fannish Storytelling Through New Media." Stein uses new media theory and genre theory to illuminate novel ways of storytelling in online

role-playing games and the computer game *The Sims*. Stein foregrounds the ways media shape stories as they simultaneously limit the narratives they bring into being. She thus suggests that a focus on the form and actual technological framework is paramount in understanding narrative productions and their similarities to more traditional forms of storytelling.

The final essay of this collection expands our notion of fannish creations by moving beyond the specific community of media fandom to look at an art form that derives from a different heritage yet uses similar poaching tendencies. Whereas the rest of the contributors are firmly steeped in what we have called *media fan culture*, the largely female, heavily text-oriented fan engagement, Robert Jones's "From Shooting Monsters to Shooting Movies: Machinima and the Transformative Play of Video Game Fan Culture" looks at the new art form of *machinima* in the light of fan theory that has developed around more female fannish cultures. Reading these (largely male) fan-created manipulations of video game images as transformative play, Jones connects this new art form to both game design theory and theories of media fandom, thus bridging those clearly gendered fields and indicating that new forms of fannish creations and producer/consumer relationships require us to draw from various fields to establish similarities and differences.

Whereas the media fan fiction community has developed its own tradition of visual filmic media with vidding, the setting of film clips to music, machinima must be traced to the different fannish heritage of gaming culture; nevertheless, its inclusion acknowledges the widening field of fannish creativity in terms of both the new media technologies and the recent mixing and merging of fandoms: fans with different genealogies, vocabularies, and values are beginning to engage with and influence one another. This cross-fertilization we see between media and other fandoms challenges some of the traditional notions of fans' identities, psychologies, and goals. As fannish engagements become ever more mainstream and as different forms of fans share similar spaces and engage in similar activities of understanding and cherishing their object of affection as they manipulate and alter it to create new works of art, the rigorous divisions that fan studies could draw a decade or two ago are more difficult to maintain.

Moreover, we end with a focus on new technologies because they continually interact with and alter the dynamic of the community itself: the software that permits the blog space is co-opted by fandom and used to generate new texts in new ways, and this in turn results in an expansion of fannish behavior, as

Busse's essay in Part III exemplifies. Stein's description of the use of *The Sims* and Jones's description of the use of machinima show us that fans will willingly adopt tools to create new kinds of artwork, and we have no doubt that as new technology becomes available, fans will bend it to their own ends—repurposing it and playing with it—in ways perhaps never conceived of by the creator of the technology. We began with Barthes's notions of entering, interpreting, and expanding the text. We conclude with another Barthesian concept crucial to any understanding of fan culture: that of pleasure and play (1977). Although fandom continues to change with each new text added to the fantext (as Derecho's essay in Part I shows us and whose effects Stasi explores in Part II) and as new creative art forms join fan fiction as fannish artifacts, the community that interprets it remains just that: a community, one that continually shifts its boundaries and the roles assigned to reader, writer, and audience to permit, and even invite, play.

Notes

- [1.](#) Full information on works cited here may be found in “Fan Fiction: A Bibliography of Critical Works,” which follows this introduction.
- [2.](#) For an example of the juxtaposition of contrary viewpoints, see Green et al. (1998); for a theoretical analysis of the contradictory positions held not only within fandom, but also within a given fan, see Stein (2005).
- [3.](#) We have consciously left out academic studies of Japanese-centered media fiction, such as Sabucco (2000, 2003), McLelland (2000a, 2000b, 2001), and Chandler-Olcott and Mahar (2003), because we think that the historical context and cultural background of anime makes it different enough to not fall under the rubrics we outline here. In addition, the more ambiguous legal status of anime and manga separates them from the fiction, art, film, and vids of most western-based fan-created texts.
- [4.](#) In his study of academics and fandom, Matt Hills (2002) distinguishes between the *academic-fan*, who co-opts fan cultures into his or her academic project, and the *fan-academic*, who is primarily a fan using academic strategies.