IN FOCUS: Feminism and Fandom Revisited

Fan Labor and Feminism: Capitalizing on the Fannish Labor of Love

by KRISTINA BUSSE, editor

In the early 2000s, my three-year-old son wanted a *Doctor Who* birthday party. He had been watching old 1980s-era PBS recordings on our VHS, and he couldn't understand why the party stores didn't have the Fourth Doctor next to Buzz Lightyear and Arthur paraphernalia. Now, ten years later, when I research fannish cakes, I find entire commercial cooking programs dedicated to baking a TARDIS-shaped cake, along with *Doctor Who* party- and bakeware. One reason for this change is clearly the resurgence of the *Doctor Who* franchise (BBC, 1963–1989, 1996, 2005–) and its wider popularity than before. Clearly, this amount of fan merchandise for even marginal shows is a recent phenomenon, testifying to both the expansion of media tie-in commercialization and the increased popularity of fan and geek cultures. Twenty years ago, our *Doctor Who* mugs were a special PBS fund-raising gift; today, there is merchandise available not only for the most niche shows but also for specific fans: if you want a T-shirt, tote bag, or iPhone case dedicated to Superwholock (the slashy Doctor Who / Supernatural / Sherlock crossover of "Hunters and Doctors and Boys from Baker Street"), there are dozens of designs and options available on sites that cater directly to this audience.

As an aca-fan, I am of two minds about this phenomenon. The acceptance of fans, geeks, and nerds is theoretically and personally satisfying, as is the increased popularity of geeky media, and consequently the more positive media portrayals. The freaks and geeks of my teenage years have given way to more affectionate and certainly more nuanced portrayals: Anthony Michael Hall's eternally geeky outcast of

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the 1985 film *The Breakfast Club* (John Hughes) has become the entire cast of *The Big Bang Theory* (CBS, 2007–). Where the stereotypical geek model used to be drawn from *Revenge of the Nerds* (Jeff Kanew, 1984), it is now written by Judd Apatow and Seth Rogen and played by Michael Cera. Yet even as we witness an increase in positive male geeks on-screen, female media representations remain few and far between. Mayim Bialik's Amy Farrah Fowler in *The Big Bang Theory* and Felicia Day's Charlie Bradbury in *Supernatural* (WB/CW, 2005–) are exceptions rather than the rule and are celebrated as such. Day has advocated, in and out of character, for female fans, and she does so in an otherwise not very female fan-friendly show as the young, queer, geeky, and unashamedly fannish Charlie. Any spread in popularity carries with it a danger of further segregating the remaining outsiders: if the mainstream embraces one form of geek, it risks excluding further or even negating the existence of whoever does not fit that new model. Mel Stanfill describes this as "moving the bar" in terms of queer homonormativity, where "the norm gets to congratulate itself on its tolerance" while those not able and willing to assimilate "get forcefully produced as unassimilable and Other."[1] In particular, the widespread embrace of the white middle-class heterosexual male geek in popular culture redefines but does not erase boundaries of exclusion.[2]

As fandom has entered the mainstream, and as the bar moves to include more diverse groups of fans and more varied forms of fannish engagement, the study of fans and fandom has become ever more important. That increased interest is most apparent when looking at the number of books, articles, conferences, and panels that focus on fan studies more broadly. Yet even here one can recognize a shift toward industry and production. Whereas early work in fan studies looked toward the fan communities and their countercultural productions, many of the field's recent monographs focus on industry connections.[3] Such a shift often celebrates the new industry-fan model, "an emerging hybrid model of circulation, where a mix of top-down and bottom-up forces determine how material is shared across and among cultures in far more participatory (and messier) ways," in which supposedly everyone wins.[4] Within and without such a commercialization of fan spaces, however, many important questions remain. When media industries interpellate specific types of fans, what happens to the ones that do not fit? When they embrace and encourage certain forms of fan engagement, how can fans negotiate the activities that do not fit? How can those interpellated fans engaging in expected and delineated fan behaviors negotiate their personal relationships to the properties' transmedia activities and products? Most important, who oversees the

1 Mel Stanfill, "Orienting Fandom: The Discursive Production of Sports and Speculative Media Fandom in the Internet Era" (PhD diss., University of Illinois, 2015), 188.

2 Kristina Busse, "Geek Hierarchies, Boundary Policing, and the Gendering of the Good Fan," *Participations: Journal of Audience and Reception Studies* 10, no. 1 (2013): 73–91, http://www.participations.org/Volume%2010/Issue%201/6%20Busse%2010.1.pdf.

3 Sharon Ross, *Beyond the Box: Television and the Internet* (London: Blackwell, 2008); Jonathan Gray, *Show Sold Separately: Promos, Spoilers, and Other Media Paratexts* (New York: New York University Press, 2010); Henry Jenkins, Sam Ford, and Joshua Green, *Spreadable Media: Creating Value and Meaning in a Networked Culture* (New York: New York University Press, 2012); Derek Johnson, *Media Franchising: Creative License and Collaboration in the Culture Industries* (New York: New York University Press, 2013).

4 Jenkins, Ford, and Green, *Spreadable Media*, 1.

economic exchanges that occur when fans participate in official channels, and how can exploitation of fan labor be prevented?

With the embrace of new business models of spreadable and collaborative networked culture, the danger to fan culture has become the co-optation and colonization of fan creations, interactions, and spaces rather than earlier fan generations' fears of litigation and cease-and-desist orders. Yet as different business models vie for supremacy, there exist many contradictory approaches to fan labor. They all share the desire to capitalize on fannish love and its ability to generate and disseminate interest. The best interface is useless without users, and tie-in merchandise rarely lasts longer on the shelves than its source does in the theaters. In contrast, fans engage with their chosen media, and their passion often introduces others to their beloved text. Most fannish practices are involved on some level with media economies—repeatedly watching a film in theaters, purchasing DVDs, buying licensed merchandise, going to conventions. There has always been word-of-mouth advertisement, and fans tend to regard fan labor as a labor of love and as a shared passion—and, in many cases, as paying it forward.

When this gift economy clashes with media industries, fans tend to be at best excluded and at worst exploited. An example of co-opting and then taking over a market is the case of the *Firefly* Jayne hats—a signature prop for fans of the beloved, prematurely canceled show *Firefly* (Mutant Enemy and 20th Century Fox, 2003–2009). Fans quickly started sharing knitting patterns; for many years, they offered custom-knitted versions on the handcrafting e-commerce site Etsy. Even though fans did not originally create the hat, their fannish love imbued it with a meaning that gave it worth. A decade after canceling the series, Fox licensed the hats—and the very fans who had effectively made the hats worth licensing began receiving cease-and-desist letters. Likewise, the merging of fan and industry interests often ends up shifting costs and risks onto the fans, a tendency evident in the aftermath of the *Veronica Mars* (UPN/CW, 2004–2007) crowdsourcing Kickstarter campaign.[5]

The greater danger to fans, however, is the actual exploitation of fan labor. As customers, viewers, and users get rebranded as fans, and as fannish modes of sharing and spreading interest get rebranded as viral marketing, entire companies are dedicated solely to mimicking and replicating fannish passions as user-generated content. Although such companies furnish infrastructures, fans provide the content populating that infrastructure for free. These fans often forgo remuneration—as well as the rights to their own creative contributions. Fan campaigns and contests have become common, yet they always seem to offload all the risks to the fan creator while reserving all the rights to the property owner.[6] Digital marketing firm Offerpop, which as I

5 Luke Pebler, "My Gigantic Issue with the Veronica Mars Kickstarter," *Revenge of the Fans*, March 15, 2013, http://www.suzanne-scott.com/2013/03/15/guest-post-my-gigantic-issue-with-the-veronica-mars-kickstarter/; Richard Lawson, "Anyone Know of a Better Charity Than the Veronica Mars Movie?," *The Wire*, March 13, 2013, http://www.thewire.com/entertainment/2013/03/kickstarter-kind-of-annoying-isnt-it/63060/. For an opposing view, see Bertha Chin, "The Veronica Mars Movie: Crowdfunding—or Fan-Funding—At Its Best?" *On/Off Screen*, March 13, 2003, http://onoffscreen.wordpress.com/2013/03/13/the-veronica-mars-movie-crowdfunding-or-fan-funding-at-its-best/.

6 Suzanne Scott, "Revenge of the Fanboy: Convergence Culture and the Politics of Incorporation" (PhD diss., University of Southern California, 2011), http://digitallibrary.usc.edu/assetserver/controller/item/etd-Scott-4277.pdf; Julie Levin Russo, "User-Penetrated Content: Fan Videos in the Age of Convergence," *Cinema Journal* 48, no. 4 (2009): 125–130.

write is currently facilitating a *Teen Wolf* (MTV, 2011–) fan art contest, promises that companies can "learn how brands can use UGC [user-generated content] to drive unprecedented ROI [return on investment]" (http://www.offerpop.com/)—or, said differently, "learn how to take free fan content to use as advertisements to get fans to buy more stuff."

When the time came to prepare an "In Focus" feature revisiting the theme of fandom and feminism, it was obvious to me that the question of fan labor had to take center stage.[7] The 2009 "In Focus" essays touched on the confrontation between gift culture and capitalism and the tension between love and labor. Karen Hellekson and Abigail De Kosnik both looked at the case of FanLib, a blatant venture capital attempt to commercialize fan fiction; Francesca Coppa and Julie Levin Russo illustrated the difference between videos articulating feminist desires and those limited by stringent external guidelines through the case of the *Battlestar Galactica* (SciFi, 2004–2009) video maker; and Alexis Lothian introduced the idea of the "undercommons" as a way to understand fans' community and creativity that is in opposition to—yet exists within—commercial space.[8] In 2009, the pitfalls of convergence culture were just beginning to manifest. Today, they are the central issue for fans. In a recent essay, Francesca Coppa, "In Focus" contributor and cofounder of the fan-advocacy nonprofit Organization for Transformative Works, describes how her focus as a fandom advocate has changed: "[I] the past, I found myself arguing for the legitimacy of our works; now, I find myself arguing against their exploitation."[9] This "In Focus," updated from 2009, centers on fan labor and its relationship to feminism.

Fan labor, a central issue of current fan studies, also remains an important feminist concern. Feminism has long had a central stake in labor theory through its focus on the ways in which reproductive labor tends to be unpaid or underpaid.[10] Capitalism insidiously suggests that love and labor may be antiproportional, thus justifying the continued devaluation of labors of love, including reproductive labor, fan labor, and teaching labor.[11] Fan labor is particularly vulnerable to being co-opted, however,

7 Kristina Busse, ed., "In Focus: Fandom and Feminism," *Cinema Journal* 48, no. 4 (2009): 104–136.

8 Abigail De Kosnik, "Should Fan Fiction Be Free?," *Cinema Journal* 48, no. 4 (2009): 118–124; Karen Hellekson, "A Fannish Field of Value: Online Fan Gift Culture," *Cinema Journal* 48, no. 4 (2009): 113–118; Francesca Coppa, "A Fannish Taxonomy of Hotness," *Cinema Journal* 48, no. 4 (2009): 107–113; Julie Levin Russo, "User-Penetrated Content: Fan Videos in the Age of Convergence," *Cinema Journal* 48, no. 4 (2009): 125–130; Alexis Lothian, "Living in a Den of Thieves: Fan Video and Digital Challenges to Ownership," *Cinema Journal* 48, no. 4 (2009): 130–136.

9 Francesca Coppa, qtd. in Sarah Banet-Weiser, Nancy K. Baym, Francesca Coppa, David Gauntlett, Jonathan Gray, Henry Jenkins, and Adrienne Shaw, "Participations: Dialogues on the Participatory Promise of Contemporary Culture and Politics," *International Journal of Communication* 8 (2014): 1073.

10 Gayle Rubin, "The Traffic in Women: Notes on the 'Political Economy' of Sex," in *Toward an Anthropology of Women*, ed. Rayna Reiter (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1975), 157–210.

11 For devaluation of labors of love, see Arlie Russell Hochschild, *The Commercialization of Intimate Life: Notes from Home and Work* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003); for reproductive labor, see Nancy Fraser, "The Wages of Care: Reproductive Labour as Fictitious Commodity" (lecture, University of Cambridge Centre for Research in the Arts, Social Sciences, and Humanities, March 9, 2011), http://www.crassh.cam.ac.uk/gallery/video/nancy-fraser-the-wages-of-care-reproductive-labour-as-fictitious-commodity; for fan labor, see Suzanne Scott, "Repackaging Fan Culture: The Regifting Economy of Ancillary Content Models," *Transformative Works and Cultures*, no. 3 (2009), http://dx.doi.org/10.3983/twc.2009.0150; Mel Stanfill, "Fandom, Public, Commons," *Transformative Works and Cultures*, no. 14 (2013), http://dx.doi.org/10.3983/twc.2013.0530; Mel Stanfill and Megan Condis,

because by its very nature, it is based on and driven by love and passion. In fact, when we think about spreadability, fan labor is often explicitly the labor of loving and then sharing that love, an action Mel Stanfill terms *lovebor.*[12]

Even though many fannish labors of love are performed by men, there tends to be a split, where often traditionally male-dominated fan activities move to create secure monetary remuneration and traditionally female-dominated ones do not.[13] This becomes all the more important at a time when mainstream culture embraces, supports, and encourages fannish endeavors—as long as they remain controllable. The new geek hierarchy of positive (white, male, straight, intellectual, apolitical) and negative (person of color, female, queer, embodied, political) fan identities creates legal and economic chasms that these essays here explore. All of them address the intersections of fandom and love, gender and labor, and gift and capitalist economy as they analyze specific fannish works and their encounters with corporate media industries.

Both Hellekson and De Kosnik revisit their earlier debate over whether female fan labor ought to be monetarily rewarded, but they do so within the context of both the fan-owned and fan-run Archive of Our Own (AO3) and the extraordinary success of E. L. James's 2011 novel trilogy *Fifty Shades of Grey*. Six years ago, De Kosnik could only anticipate "the moment when an outsider takes up a subculture's invention and commodifies it for the mainstream before insiders do."[14] Yet now scholars face a fannish culture in which commercial and gift cultures often contentiously coexist. The essays, by looking at different forms of engagement, negotiate the benefits and dangers of free labor and the fannish love that underlies them.

Mel Stanfill and Alexis Lothian take what may be the most industry-resistant route: they oppose corporate ownership and celebrate the legitimacy of pirated possessions. Stanfill looks at the way media fandom and the contentious ownership of transformative works mirrors other, supposedly illegitimate practices. At the center of this inquiry is how the value of additional labor is unacknowledged, so that any enhanced products still remain the full possession of the original owner. Lothian's reading of fan vidding as the undercommons resonates with Stanfill's Marxist analysis of subaltern transformations. She illuminates the ambiguities of legalizing fan works by showcasing how the works that legitimize transformations celebrate but also necessitate corporate borrowings.

If one of the two threads running through these essays is labor, then the other is love. Affect is not only the driving force of fan works but also these works' distinguishing characteristic. Lothian's central text is a literal and figurative love song to fandom;

"Fandom and/as Labor," *Transformative Works and Cultures*, no. 15 (2014); for teaching labor, see Marc Bousquet and Cary Nelson, *How the University Works: Higher Education and the Low-Wage Nation* (New York: New York University Press, 2008); Benjamin Ginsburg, *The Fall of the Faculty* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

12 Stanfill, "Orienting Fandom"; Arlie Russell Hochschild, *The Managed Heart: The Commercialization of Human Feeling* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983).

13 John Borland, "*Star Wars* and the Fracas over Fan Films," interview with Henry Jenkins, *CNet*, May 2, 2005, http://news.cnet.com/Star-Wars-and-the-fracas-over-fan-films/2100-1008_3-5690595.html; Abigail Derecho, "Illegitimate Media: Race, Gender and Censorship in Digital Remix Culture" (PhD diss., Northwestern University, 2008).

14 De Kosnik, "Should Fan Fiction Be Free?," 119–120.

likewise, De Kosnik finds a feminized focus of love, sex, and romance in fan fiction's content and form. She argues that it is ultimately the emphasis on emotional labor that separates the singular monetary success of texts like *Fifty Shades of Grey* from the "archives of women's culture" that she observes as existing in the intertextual webs of fan writings. Karen Hellekson looks at the fan-created, fan-owned, and fan-run Archive of Our Own—in contrast to fan-used corporate sites such as Wattpad and Scribd—to show how these online archives differ depending on who owns and profits from the interfaces. De Kosnik's and Hellekson's models offer different attitudes and aspects of the future of fan works, both feminist and both engaging fan labor in very different ways.

Likewise, Suzanne Scott's essay tackles the complex merging of fan and industry discourses even as she displays the way gender affects this intersection. Looking at a professional cosplay (costume play) docuseries, she observes how the female cast's mimetic fan labor is nevertheless turned into actual and virtual profit for the men behind the scenes. Her essay, like the others, shows the complex negotiations that feminist fans need to engage with in order to participate in the new fannish economy: the extremes may be divorcing oneself from one's community and selling out, or working for free and going broke, but in between is a wide spectrum of commercialization of fan cultures, including the monetization of fan labor as well as the enticement and engagement of fans that we as aca-fans need to address, analyze, and if necessary, critique—because, in the end, this is the fan world that we have helped create.

Every article we have written, every interview we have given, every industry event we have attended, and every act of fan advocacy we have engaged in has, for better or for worse, helped bring about this public face of fandom. There is no way to go back to the world of buying slash zines sold under the table at conventions or making vids using a stopwatch and two VCRs—nor should we fall prey to romantic nostalgia. Technological, cultural, and academic changes have all contributed to creating a world in which rebranded fan fiction breaks sales records, marketing firms run fan contests, and fan merchandise like knit hats gets licensed. Ironically, now that my sixteen-year-old could have all the *Doctor Who* paraphernalia he likes, he has no interest in it. After all, one component that both subcultural fandom and teen culture share is the desire to be outside of the mainstream; simultaneously, we must acknowledge that the subcultural, alternative outside remains intricately entwined with commercialized media industries. ✻

Fifty Shades and the Archive of Women's Culture

by Abigail De Kosnik

***Fifty Shades of Grey*: Fan Fiction's "Sugarhill Moment."** In my 2009 "In Focus" essay "Should Fan Fiction Be Free?" I predicted that Internet fan fiction communities would soon experience a "Sugarhill moment."[1] I defined this as "the moment when an outsider takes up a subculture's invention and commodifies it for the mainstream before insiders do." I was extrapolating from the history of hip-hop music, which began, like fan fiction, as a subcultural, appropriative, copyright-defying genre (hip-hop's musical tracks often incorporate, or consist wholly of, samples of previously recorded music, and sampling has engendered an untold number of lawsuits for copyright infringement). Hip-hop's core elements were pioneered and refined by innovative DJs presiding over Bronx block parties and dance clubs throughout the 1970s; then hip-hop broke into the American cultural mainstream with the 1979 release of the Sugarhill Gang's single "Rapper's Delight," a novelty record produced by a band of performers who had nothing to do with the Bronx scene. I quoted *Vanity Fair*'s Steven Daly, who reflected on how hip-hop was introduced to the US market by novice imitators rather than by the masters of turntablism who invented the genre: "Whenever the key players of hip-hop's 'old school' look back on the pregnant moment when the Sugar Hill label blazed a trail for rap, there remains among them the nagging sense that it all went down the wrong way."[2]

When E. L. James's *Fifty Shades of Grey* was published by Random House imprint Vintage in 2012 and became a massive hit with readers (as of February 2014, it had sold one hundred million copies worldwide and spent one hundred weeks on the *New York Times* bestseller list), I realized that my guess about what fan fiction's Sugarhill moment would look like was off target.[3] Rather than fan fiction being

1 Abigail De Kosnik, "Should Fan Fiction Be Free?," *Cinema Journal* 48, no. 4 (2009): 119–120.

2 Steven Daly, "Hip-Hop Happens," *Vanity Fair*, November 2005, 250–266, http://www.vanityfair.com/culture/features/2005/11/hiphop200511.

3 E. L. James (Waxahachie, TX: The Writer's Coffee Shop, 2011)—the first Vintage Books edition appeared in April 2012; Alison Flood, "*Fifty Shades of Grey* Trilogy Has Sold 100m Copies Worldwide," *The Guardian*, February 27, 2014, http://www.theguardian.com/books/2014/feb/27/fifty-shades-of-grey-book-100m-sales.

co-opted and commercialized by outsiders, fan fiction's first major marketplace success was an inside job: *Fifty Shades* began as a fan fiction based on the teen vampire *Twilight* novels by Stephenie Meyer that James wrote under her fan pseudonym, Snowqueens Icedragon; James removed all references to *Twilight*'s universe and characters from her fan fiction before the text's publication as *Fifty Shades*.[4] Although it originated in the *Twilight* fan fiction community, *Fifty Shades* is indeed fan fiction's Sugarhill: it effectuated fan fiction's breakthrough into the general public's consciousness, drawing attention, notoriety, and controversy to the fan fiction genre by virtue of its extraordinary fame, without acknowledging the vast communities and long tradition in which that genre emerged and developed. And as with hip-hop and the Sugarhill Gang's "Rapper's Delight," members of fan fiction's old school—those active in fan fiction communities long before *Fifty Shades*—have the nagging sense that it all went down the wrong way.

I am not referring here to the literary quality of *Fifty Shades*, however that might be judged. "Rapper's Delight" may have sounded strange to the ears of hip-hop initiates in 1979, but it played well to the masses and still does, even now when most people grasp that the upbeat, poplike stylings of the rappers and the thrumming, repetitive sample of Chic's "Good Times" (1979) on the Sugarhill track could not have been more different from the intricate rhyming and complex technicity that Bronx hip-hop artists were cultivating at that time. Similarly, *Fifty Shades* has earned a positive reception from millions of readers, but longtime members of online fan fiction communities wonder at the fact that the James book has come to represent the entirety of fan fiction, a multivalent and highly collaborative genre of writing, to mainstream audiences. That *Fifty Shades* now stands for all of fan fiction in the eyes of many seems incredible, even lamentable, to those who feel that they have a deep knowledge of what makes the genre remarkable and interesting.[5] What the *Fifty Shades* phenomenon has failed to adequately communicate to the general public about fan fiction is the genre's radical enlargement of what Lauren Berlant calls "the archive of women's culture."[6]

Renovating the Feminine Project. In the fan fiction tradition, a collective called a fandom, which organizes around one source text that concerns a "canonical" set of characters, typically generates a large and varied corpus of texts about those characters. In other words, a fandom's members rework a common set of elements again and again, through multiple stories. As I proposed in a 2006 essay, I conceive of the range of fan works produced within a particular fandom to form a metaphorical archive, along with the source text and all professional and/or mass-media variations of that

4 Stephenie Meyer, *Twilight* (New York: Little, Brown, 2005).

5 A number of journalists and cultural critics have characterized *Fifty Shades* as the publication that brought fan fiction into the cultural mainstream. See Alexandra Alter, "The Weird World of Fan Fiction," *Wall Street Journal*, June 14, 2012, http://online.wsj.com/news/articles/SB10001424052702303734204577464411825970488; Hephzibah Anderson, "Fifty Shades of Fan Fiction," *BBC*, April 1, 2014, http://www.bbc.com/culture/story/20140401-fifty-shades-of-fan-fiction; Jason Boog, "'Fifty Shades of Grey': Publishing's Sexiest Trend," *NPR*, March 15, 2012, http://www.npr.org/2012/03/15/148605287/fifty-shades-of-grey-publishings-sexiest-trend; Cecilia Tan, "Fifty Shades of Stories," in *Fifty Writers on "Fifty Shades of Grey,"* ed. Lori Perkins (Dallas: BenBella Books, 2012), 293–297.

6 Lauren Berlant, *The Female Complaint: The Unfinished Business of Sentimentality in American Culture* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008), 16.

source (for example, there is a *Batman* archive, a *Lord of the Rings* archive, a *Pride and Prejudice* archive, and many other archives brought into being by popular media, and these ever-expanding archives contain all studio-produced movies and video games, all official and authorized comic books and novels, *and* all fan productions that make use of these source materials).[7] However, Berlant writes of another metaphorical archive, one that also holds a proliferation of texts that revisit the same set of core narrative elements over and over—and this archive, Berlant argues, is ideologically limiting and oppressive for women. I wish to consider how these two ideas of archive, mine and Berlant's, overlap, and even more important, how they differ.

In *The Female Complaint*, Berlant describes "the archive of women's culture" as a conceptual repository that encompasses a wide variety of texts (novels, poetry, plays, musicals), in both popular culture and high culture, designed specifically to appeal to female audiences. These texts, published and performed in the United States from the nineteenth century onward, typically focus on the heroines' romantic lives, and foreground

> the many kinds of bargaining women do to stay in proximity to the work of love at the heart of normative femininity, the utopian and pathetic impulses behind this bargaining, and its costs and pleasures, including the tragicomic pleasures of the love plot's incompleteness up to and often beyond death. Women's will, aggression, abjection, and fatalism concerning the demand for reciprocity constitute the driving forces of these narratives.[8]

What Berlant attempts to explain through framing women's genres and female-centric texts as an archive is that romantic and sexual texts written for women do more than address women's supposedly essential longing for love and sentimentality. Such narratives serve a key purpose in women's lives, which is to reconcile them to the "emotional bargains" and the life of "ordinary emotional labor" that presumably will permit them "participation in the good life."[9] Writes Berlant, "In women's culture, normative femininity and aesthetic conventionality constitute the real central couple, with the love plot as the vehicle for and object of desire. . . . In the texts of women's intimate public[s], femininity is a concept/metaphor for *not* changing, but adapting, propping the play of surface against a stubborn demand to remain in proximity to the promise."[10] Berlant argues that reciprocal romance and love constitute the promise of normative femininity, and aesthetic conventionality in the form of the love plot mirrors the "circularity of the feminine project," a project that promises perfection (perfect emotional rewards and narrative centrality for women who perform emotional labor perfectly), but whose closed circuit "can look like and feel like a zero."[11]

7 Abigail Derecho, "Archontic Literature: A Definition, a History, and Several Theories of Fan Fiction," in *Fan Fiction and Fan Communities in the Age of the Internet*, ed. Karen Hellekson and Kristina Busse (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2006), 61–78.

8 Berlant, *Female Complaint*, 16.

9 Ibid., 19.

10 Ibid.

11 Ibid., 20.

Fan studies scholars acknowledge the centrality of romance and sex to most fan fiction, which is written primarily by women, and many have made claims that fan writers resist, overturn, or radically transform the conventions of the love plot as played out in the kinds of women's culture texts discussed by Berlant. For example, Patricia Frazer Lamb and Diana L. Veith argue that slash fan fiction features "true love and authentic intimacy" that "can exist only between equals"—that is, between two men.[12] Katherine Morrissey points out that Lamb and Veith assume that "this equality is not possible in a relationship between a man and a woman" and that "slash writers and readers move beyond their day-to-day realities, and look instead to m/m romances and fantastic futures as a way of transcending the complicated realities women negotiate in their own relationships."[13] Morrissey argues that heterosexual romances, in both fan and commercial writing, also feature "themes of intimacy and equality" and are "often working to bring [their] characters from a place of inequality and misunderstanding into greater intimacy and connection."[14] In other words, many texts of women's culture—texts that are often derided as overly generic, formulaic, and low in quality, such as fan and commercial romances—attempt to "renovate" (Morrissey's term) the "complicated realities women negotiate" and the "feminine project" that can seem more like a trap than like the "promise" it is supposed to be.[15] Berlant, fan scholars, and romance scholars are equally concerned with texts that circulate in women's intimate publics, but whereas Berlant claims that the repetition of the love plot in these texts only reinforces normative femininity, fan and romance scholars propose that the love plot can be varied and reworked in ways that help women imagine possibilities for occupying positions in domestic and public settings other than that of overtaxed emotional laborers.

The difference between Berlant's perspective and that of fan scholars and romance scholars stems from the fact that Berlant analyzes the repetition of aesthetic conventions in unique texts—that is, in novels and plays that are not explicitly intertextual and that do not announce themselves as directly and specifically relating to other texts. Fan fiction and mass-market romances, in contrast, are understood by their writers and audiences to be variants of one another and of either specific source materials or of the core formula of the romance. I argue that the transparency of fan fiction and romance as repetitions, as proliferations of shared sources, permits texts in these genres, so frequently disparaged for being all the same, to register greater differences between them than texts that purport to stand alone. In a given fandom, the preponderance of versions of a single pairing's story will yield depictions of gender, sexuality, power, and agency that diverge greatly from one another. Across one hundred fan fiction stories, the same pair of characters will be used to play out scenarios of total equality between partners, of dominance or submission (it is likely that each character will have multiple

12 Patricia Frazer Lamb and Diane L. Veith, "Romantic Myth, Transcendence, and *Star Trek* Zines," in *Erotic Universe: Sexuality and Fantastic Literature*, ed. Donald Palumbo (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1986), 244.

13 Katherine Morrissey, "Fifty Shades of Remix: The Intersecting Pleasures of Commercial and Fan Romances," *Journal of Popular Romance Studies* 4, no. 1 (2014): 6, http://jprstudies.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/FSORTIPOCAFR_Morrissey.pdf.

14 Ibid.

15 Ibid.

turns, in multiple stories, at being the dominant), of betrayal and abuse, of hurt and comfort, of sacrifice, of redemption, of missed opportunities, of cooperation, of severe illness, of death.

It would be inaccurate to state that tropes of normative femininity are never reinforced in fan fiction, and it would be inaccurate to state that they always are. The quantity of fiction produced in an active fandom virtually guarantees that its authors will write a diverse range of narratives about the feminine project: some that reject the project wholesale, others that modify the project or highlight certain dimensions of it that make it seem livable and acceptable, and yet others that posit alternative lifeways to the project.[16] I could name examples of each of these in any given fandom, but my examples would likely differ from anyone else's, for the narratives that make one reader feel empowered, honored, and validated may make other readers feel oppressed, offended, or minimized. Fan fiction, like genre fiction, presents the reader with sets of tightly related texts, like families of multiples that closely resemble one another but are not identical—or, as I argued in my 2006 essay, like archives of linked, overlapping stories that sprout from a source, a kernel, of story elements but are never exact copies of that source.[17] One enters the archive of a fandom's fiction knowing that one must decide for oneself, from the plethora of stories offered up by that ever-expanding archive, which stories satisfy, which stories liberate, and which stories alienate.

In *Bone Black: Memories of Girlhood*, cultural and literary critic bell hooks writes of growing up in a family that celebrated adolescent boys undergoing puberty but shamed girls for being curious about their own burgeoning sexuality. When hooks discovered her father's hidden stash of pornography and erotic novels, she examined and read the texts in secret, trying to learn about adult female sex from them.[18] In those erotic fictions, she recalls (writing about her younger self in the third person), "Sometimes the men make the women do sexual acts. She could never understand how the women did what they didn't want to do yet felt pleasure doing it. She never felt pleasure doing what she did not want to do."[19] But in another erotic book that hooks read when she was young, the man sexually arouses the woman and "then withdraws, telling her if she wants sex to ask for it, telling her to beg for it, to want it enough to beg."[20] Her younger self, devouring the pages of this novel, "can understand the intensity of the woman's longing, her willingness to ask, possibly even to beg. She knows this affirmation of the woman's sexual hunger is exactly what would be denied her in real life."[21] The erotic texts that hooks consumed in her early life were very similar to one another, but also very different. By reading numerous tales of sexual encounters that varied perhaps only slightly from one book to the next, she made discoveries about how fiction can speak to a girl's or woman's lived experiences. She rejected variants in which

16 I am borrowing the term *lifeways* from Elizabeth Freeman, who writes of "gendered and sexualized lifeways and scenarios" in *Time Binds: Queer Temporalities, Queer Histories* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), 184n22.

17 Derecho, "Archontic Literature."

18 bell hooks, *Bone Black: Memories of Girlhood* (New York: Henry Holt, 1996).

19 Ibid., 116.

20 Ibid., 117.

21 Ibid.

the woman was made to do things that she did not want to because she herself could not understand deriving pleasure from being forced to do anything against one's will. However, she embraced variants in which the woman freely admitted—or was free to admit—the existence and force of her own sexual longing, for she had the feeling, even as a girl, that her female sexual desires would never be supported or even acknowledged in social reality.

I regard hooks's churning through her father's library of erotica, and her choosing from among the various sexual fantasies presented by those books—her opting to identify with certain scenarios and to disregard others—as very similar to the kind of reading routinely performed by fan fiction readers, who take in numerous stories that resemble one another, and then decide which "work" for them and which they find distasteful or simply banal. All of the stories that hooks read as an adolescent were somewhat alike, but their differences were deeply significant to her. Her sorting out, from among the closely related narratives, which ones she liked and responded to was crucial to her formation as a woman and as a sexual being.

Genre fiction and fan fiction make available to women abundant archives of interrelated texts about the feminine project. They enable women readers to make selections from numerous scenarios and versions of romance, sexuality, connection, bonding, yearning, denial, rejection, and release. From these archives, women can choose contents that help them understand, tolerate, criticize, or oppose the feminine project—and they may occupy a range of positions vis-à-vis the project by opting to consume different kinds of stories at different times. This opening of multivariant paths makes intertextual bodies of women's fictions powerful, engaging, and fascinating for their readers.

I therefore define the archive of women's culture far more broadly than Berlant does. Her archive contains individual texts that all serve a common purpose in the lives of American women, which is to help them reconcile themselves to the "sentimental bargain of femininity."[22] My archive of women's culture includes Berlant's novels and plays but also includes many archives of romances and fan fiction that present a plenitude of routes and options for grasping, and grappling with, normative womanhood. The inherent breadth and diversity of the archives of so-called repetitive, formulaic, "generic" fictions allow women readers to strike more than one bargain with femininity.

Archive Denial. That *Fifty Shades of Grey* is now equated with fan fiction by many non-fan readers is problematic because of its publication as a unique text rather than a text deeply embedded in a larger archive of fictions produced by a particular community of predominantly women writers and readers. A convention has been established by *Fifty Shades* of eliminating all traces of a text's fan fiction origins: the author changes the characters' names to be different from the characters in the source text; she strikes or replaces details that evoke the world of the source; she deletes the fan fiction from online archives before it is published as an original book for commercial sale. Fans call stripping a text of all traces of its fannish origins "filing off the serial numbers" and

22 Berlant, *Female Complaint*, 19.

"pulling to publish," and many fans have objected to what they perceive as individual fans' exploitation of communal, collaborative scenes of fiction production for private gain.[23] My objection to the convention of pulling to publish has nothing to do with the personal profits enjoyed by some fan authors. As my 2009 essay shows, I am in favor of fans earning income from their creative output. But *Fifty Shades*, denuded of all markers of its membership in an archive of explicitly intertextual stories, loses many, or most, of the potential meanings it can have for female readers.

Published as a work of professionally published original fiction, *Fifty Shades* no longer stands as one of many variants of the narrative of Bella and Edward from Meyer's *Twilight* novels. The values of print publishing privilege unique works over derivative ones, but I argue that women can find fan fiction valuable and affecting precisely because it presents a multiplicity of different versions of the same character pairing, which gives women readers the chance to imaginatively engage with a relationship repeatedly, through diverse reworkings, and experience the relationship through lenses that alternately reinforce, ameliorate, or transform dominant narratives of gender and sexuality. The expansive archive of *Twilight*, which includes all *Twilight* adaptations and fan works, allows women the opportunity to have alternative experiences of the love plot at the core of *Twilight* and to experience that plot as more than simply another tracing of the circular logic of normative femininity. Fan fiction helps female readers escape the zero-sum game of official women's culture and to explore manifold trajectories for womanhood and for personhood.

When James erased her fan fiction from online fan archives, she deleted a part of the cultural heritage of her fellow fans to the detriment of their community, and she denied the explicitly communal nature of the authorship of her work—what Mel Stanfill describes as fan culture's "acknowledged context of collaboration through beta reading, feedback on in-progress work, fanon formation, and other practices."[24] James also robbed her own text of much of its potential impact on readers. Each fan fiction stands beside its fellow texts in the larger virtual archive of the story universe that gave rise to it. A fan fiction's ability to deeply affect female readers derives largely from its being consumed along with other entries in that overarching archive. A fan fiction should be received as part of a series, one of a panoply of variations, so that readers can mark its differences and its similarities from its brethren texts. Critics of fan works being pulled to publish have commented on how the de-fanning of fan fiction works drains them of their signifying power. Monika Bartyzel, for example, writes that the film version of Cassandra Clare's first *Mortal Instruments* book (a book that began as a *Harry Potter* fan fiction) "doesn't relay Clare's fandom"; instead, it "plays like a . . .

23 For two rich explorations of fans' objections to and selling of fan works, see Mel Stanfill, "Fandom, Public, Commons," *Transformative Works and Cultures*, no. 14 (2013); Bethan Jones, "Fifty Shades of Fan Labor: Exploitation and *Fifty Shades of Grey*," *Transformative Works and Cultures*, no. 15 (2014).

24 Stanfill, "Fandom, Public, Commons," para. 3. According to the fandom online encyclopedia *Fanlore*, *fanon* refers to "any element that is widely accepted among fans, but has little or no basis in canon. . . . Sometimes it's something in a fanfic story that gets picked up on and repeated by other writers until it's so common that newbies might think it's a canonical fact" (http://fanlore.org/wiki/Fanon).

copy of a copy until motivations and storylines become obscured and nonsensical."[25] In other words, erasing all references to the *Harry Potter* archive of which *Mortal Instruments* was initially one variant depletes the fan text of its narrative force. Rather than being an interesting play on a set of core story elements and familiar characters, the fan text becomes meaningless, a set of seemingly empty signifiers.

Thus, what made *Fifty Shades* a disappointing Sugarhill moment for fan fiction, rather than a triumphant entry for fan fiction into popular consciousness, was the novel's misrepresentation of itself as a singular text rather than as one of many iterations of a highly generative narrative world. For fan fiction to be truly understood by mainstream cultural consumers, it must be framed as part of an open archive of women's culture. Readers unaccustomed to the modes of fan fiction consumption would have to learn a new way of taking in texts, as installments in a series that may never cease to grow in number, in order to grasp the genre.

Reading fan fiction as fans do is not like reading a novel. It is more like attending a theater festival in which every play is a different staging of the same script, or at least takes place in the same universe: a thousand *Hamlet*s, or rather a thousand stories of Hamlet/Ophelia, Gertrude/Claudius, Hamlet/Gertrude, Ophelia/Laertes, Hamlet/Laertes, and so on, some set in the medieval Danish court, others in outer space in the distant future, others in contemporary New York or Shanghai, others in the California gold rush era or on the eastern front of World War II.[26] The point of the festival format is to attend as many offerings as possible in a short amount of time. Anne Jamison compares fan fiction communities to a party: "Fan fiction invites readers, collectively and collaboratively, to *join in*. Clicking on a fan fiction link is like joining a perpetual online writing and reading party, a party that celebrates, consumes, and jubilantly re-creates a loved (or at least a known) work."[27] By producing and receiving texts in the mode of a festival or party, fans read each fan text as an adjunct to every other, each text as a comment on and response to every other, each text as a sequel to the ones that came before and a prequel to the ones that come after. All texts weave together to form a chain of multiple meanings; they offer each individual reader the opportunity to discover his or her preferred meanings of the multiplicity of available texts.

By adhering to the conventions of print publishing and passing as an independent work rather than owning its identity as a fan text, *Fifty Shades* failed to initiate general audiences into an entirely new way of reading. Of course, some readers realized *Fifty Shades*' potential as an intertextual fiction simply by taking it as genre fiction; understanding *Fifty Shades* alongside and in the context of other literary erotica or romance

25 Cassandra Clare, *City of Bones* (New York: Margaret K. McElderry Books, 2007); Monika Bartyzel, "Girls on Film: The Confounding Problems of Fan Fiction," *The Week*, August 23, 2013, http://theweek.com/article/index/248587/girls-on-film-the-confounding-problems-of-fan-fiction.

26 See Francesca Coppa, "Writing Bodies in Space: Media Fan Fiction as Theatrical Performance," in *Fan Fiction and Fan Communities in the Age of the Internet*, ed. Karen Hellekson and Kristina Busse (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2006), 225–244.

27 Anne Jamison, "When Fifty Was Fic," in *Fifty Writers on "Fifty Shades of Grey,"* ed. Lori Perkins (Dallas: BenBella Books, 2012), 314.

novels was likely a fascinating exercise for readers deeply familiar with those cultural forms. However, *Fifty Shades* was not originally conceived as an entry in the romance novel archive but as an entry in the *Twilight* archive, and so its massive nonfan readership has not yet fully grasped the possible power of the text, having never encountered the text in situ, as one of many in a collaboratively generated archive.

Of course, every archive of fan works contains entries that draw heavily on the romance novel tradition; one might say that *Fifty Shades* belongs equally to the *Twilight* archive and the romance novel archive. But in the "entirely new way of reading" that I imagine could have been (and could still be) launched by the commercial printing, and mainstream success, of fan fiction, readers would not have the option to understand a work like *Fifty Shades* as *only* a romantic or erotic fiction. Readers would be forced to engage with an entire series of closely interrelated, highly intertextual works that explicitly announce their kinship to one another and to their shared source text. This way of reading could only emerge if an innovative publisher opted to release to the paying public not a single fan fic story, but a swath of fan fics from the same fandom. Let us imagine a curated selection of stories produced within one fandom, perhaps dozens or even hundreds of stories, presented and marketed to readers in a format (a digital format, most likely) that they would understand as constituting a unified publication. Readers would then not only mark the ways in which each story reinforces, modifies, augments, or deviates from the tropes of genres such as that of the romance novel, they would also note the threads that tie together the multiple variants, and the stylistic and thematic means with which fan authors resonate with one another and also distinguish themselves from one another.

Such readers would also quickly learn that, with respect to genre, fan fiction often ventures far beyond the boundaries of romance and erotica, and draws liberally from the archives of action/adventure, mystery, dramatic tragedy, farcical comedy, supernatural/horror, historical fiction, philosophy, feminism and other forms of social/cultural/political critique, and many other categories of literature and media. Readers would, in other words, learn how to approach collections of texts that are multigenre, hypertextual, and appropriative, and yet are unique and original, each bearing the traces of its individual author's approach, interpretation, and preferences. In this new way of reading, readers would know how to work their way through an archive (or an edited subset of an archive) of stories, and they would comprehend that a large part of what makes a single story in the archive successful is how its author crafts its degrees of similarity and difference to other texts in the ensemble, as well as to the source text and to entire genres. In addition, readers who become literate in this new way of navigating archives of multiply-authored texts would discover that such navigations open up myriad possibilities for identification, self-definition, and social consciousness that far exceed those repeatedly reinforced by Berlant's "archive of women's culture."

In my 2009 essay, I asked whether fan fiction should be free and answered that fan fiction, as a creative enterprise that defies many conventions of reading and writing and inaugurates new modes of meaning making, should be allowed to generate income and fame for its makers. I did not anticipate that commercial publishing and fan-turned-pro writers would collaborate to strip fan fiction of what makes it new and special, which is precisely that no fan fiction text can be new or special entirely on its

own. Any work of fan fiction, no matter how splendidly written or laden with scandalous content, can only ever be properly understood as one of a vast archive. Unless and until commercial publishing can find a way to monetize archives of women's culture, fan fiction cannot truly be said to have entered the mainstream. ✻

Making Use Of: The Gift, Commerce, and Fans

by Karen Hellekson

When I reengaged with fandom after a hiatus between 1988 and 2000, I found the landscape had changed. Face-to-face fandom, with its mentors, in-person get-togethers, and hilarious gatherings at cons, had given way to pseudonyms and Yahoo! groups. Blog-based platforms were on the rise—if you could get an invitation to LiveJournal, that is, and could put up with the limits on the numbers of posts you could make daily. Now, in 2014, I note the chasm between that faraway initial experience and what I see now. The ground has shifted yet again: Yahoo! groups and LiveJournal are still there, of course, but they feel silent and old now, disused and perhaps a bit out of touch. They have fallen under the onslaught of the mighty Tumblr.

The fannish Internet currently buzzes with things gathered, things written just now, things in parts, things cut and recut and rearranged and thrown up and given a hashtag—a bow to pretty it up, a fillip of decoration. Yet it is old wine in new bottles. The impetus that drives fannish activity remains independent of the platform of expression: fan activity remains a search for community, a way to unabashedly love something, a desire to engage critically but also viscerally, and a mode of personal expression unlike any other, as it permits engagement through manipulation of mass culture. The Internet's two biggest gifts to fandom are, first, its flattening of geography, and second (and related), its usefulness in building community. Fans will find one another. It used to be hard, as my fourteen-year-old self found in *Doctor Who* (BBC, 1963–1989, 1996, 2005–) fandom in the early 1980s. Now it's not. That is a gift indeed.

The gift remains embedded in the narrative that I am creating of fans as they shift their attention to new modes of expression via new platforms. If I told a story of fans, it would be the story of *making use of*. Usenet? Yahoo! groups? LiveJournal communities? Tumblr hashtags?

All are ways to repurpose a platform to build community and thus to create fandom. Embedded within this (mostly female) community are complex patterns of authority, reciprocity, and exchange that can usefully be described as an expression of a gift culture. Marcel Mauss's short ethnographic work *The Gift* provides us with the insight that gifts are not really freely given; rather, they rely on a complex interplay of reciprocity among stakeholders, in terms of the larger group rather than the individual.[1] Rachael Sabotini was the first to apply Mauss's notions of gift culture to fan culture in terms of building status within a fan community.[2] As I noted in my 2009 contribution to the "In Focus" on fandom and feminism, "Online media fandom is a gift culture in the symbolic realm in which fan gift exchange is performed in complex, even exclusionary symbolic ways that create a stable nexus of giving, receiving, and reciprocity that results in a community occupied with theorizing its own genderedness."[3] I stand by this assertion despite scholarship that has questioned the gift versus the commercial—a useful stance in that "the labor framework provides a powerful way to value what fans are doing, in contrast to the dismissals that have long attended fandom."[4] The attempt to permit fans to shift the traditional gift culture aside in favor of a commercial model is a way to legitimize fan activity by placing it into the dominant paradigm.

If what a fan does is so valuable, why should she not profit from it? Certainly I would never argue that she should not profit. Instead, I would argue that ways to profit tend to not be legitimized by the fannish group, which remains a gift culture.[5] This gift culture is a remnant of the fanzine era, when a desire to fly under the radar of copyright owners led to "no infringement intended, no profit made" statements in headnotes of fan creations and set the tenor of engagement with producers: "We're just playing, no harm meant." Certainly some fannish groups have managed to construct a system that permits payment, but such attempts must be initiated by and embedded within the fandom in question. Such profiting must be a form of making use of; it must grow out of the fandom's community and its relationships with the powers that be, the copyright holders. It cannot be unilaterally imposed, and proposed constructions, such as use of Creative Commons copyright statements, are merely thought experiments.[6]

1 Marcel Mauss, "Essai sur le don: Forme et raison de l'échange dans les sociétés archaïques," *L'année sociologique*, 1923–1924, http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k93922b; Marcel Mauss, *The Gift: The Form and Reason for Exchange in Archaic Societies*, trans. W. D. Halls (New York: W. W. Norton, 1990).

2 Rachael Sabotini, "The Fannish Potlatch: Creation of Status within the Fan Community," *Fanfic Symposium*, 1999, http://www.trickster.org/symposium/symp41.htm.

3 Karen Hellekson, "A Fannish Field of Value: Online Fan Gift Culture," *Cinema Journal* 48, no. 4 (2009): 114.

4 Mel Stanfill and Megan Condis, "Fandom and/as Labor," *Transformative Works and Cultures*, no. 15 (2014), http://dx.doi.org/10.3983/twc.2014.0593, para. 3.4.

5 Nele Noppe, "Why Companies Can Profit from Fanworks in Japan's Hybrid Economy for Dojinshi," *Academia.edu*, July 5, 2013, http://www.academia.edu/4141821/Why_companies_can_profit_from_fanworks_in_Japans_hybrid_economy_for_dojinshi.

6 Casey Fiesler, "Everything I Need to Know I Learned from Fandom: How Existing Social Norms Can Help Shape the Next Generation of User-Generated Content," *Vanderbilt Journal of Entertainment and Technology Law* 10, no. 3 (2008): 729–762; Suzanne Scott, "Repackaging Fan Culture: The Regifting Economy of Ancillary Content Models," *Transformative Works and Cultures*, no. 3 (2009), http://dx.doi.org/10.3983/twc.2009.0150; Abigail De Kosnik, "Should Fan Fiction Be Free?," *Cinema Journal* 48, no. 4 (2009): 118–124; Mel Stanfill, "Fandom, Public, Commons," *Transformative Works and Cultures*, no. 14 (2013), http://dx.doi.org/10.3983/twc.2013.0530.

Attempts to monetize fan activity rely on commercial ventures that will work for some fans but not others—often at the expense of unfettered fan creativity, as commercial ventures limit fannish expression in terms of explicitness and what is considered appropriate. In addition, all too often, this legitimacy is granted on terms that do not benefit the fan. Making money to create value merely applies the dominant paradigm—that of commerce—to what makes something worthwhile. The attempt to switch the fannish mode from gift to commerce is simply a way to legitimize fan activity by subsuming it under the dominant paradigm that fandom is so frequently held up as working against. Having conversations about why fans may be permitted to profit strike me as mere thought experiments. They may have their day, although their day is not yet. The push to move from gift to commerce interests me not in that it legitimizes the fan and her activity (and why ought it be legitimated in the first place? much less according to male-dominated terms?), and not in that it may permit her to make a living from her activity, but in that it permits the fan to expand her repertoire of fannish engagement. Currently, sites modeled on commerce show the fan making use of community spaces to fit the sites where she spends time.

Kindle Worlds is perhaps the best-known current experiment in the corporate monetization of fan writing. Begun in 2013 with just a few programs and fandoms, all owned by Warner Bros., it has since expanded the number of "Worlds," including properties owned by other entities. Royalties are shared among Amazon, the writer of the original World text, and the author of the derivative text. Although Kindle Worlds is actually a way for writers to write authorized tie-ins on spec for not-great terms, the original announcements included the words *fan fiction* (a term that does not appear in the current iteration of the Kindle Worlds home page), which actually served as a mode of appeal to their perceived future writers and audience. Amazon also gestured to the fannish tendency to riff off each other's work, noting, "We will allow Kindle Worlds authors to build on each other's ideas and elements"—but it goes on to say, "We will also give the World Licensor a license to use your new elements and incorporate them into other works without further compensation to you."[7]

Another model that attempts to pay writers for their work is Scribd, a subscription service founded in 2007 that permits paid users to read e-books. Scribd cut deals with major publishers and offers a deep catalog of texts.[8] However, in addition to simply reading the available texts, Scribd makes it possible for users to upload their own works—and charge for them or not—including fan fiction, although that term is not used on the Scribd site.[9] Scribd authors self-describe their work as fan fiction, often in brackets after the title. Similarly, Smashwords, a self-publishing e-book distributor launched in 2008, permits authors to create and distribute their own texts, and writers have used the service to sell fan fiction. For both these sites, there is no special category for fan fiction and no way to sort for fan fiction only, much less by categories that fans

7 "Kindle Worlds for Authors," *Amazon*, n.d., http://www.amazon.com/gp/feature.html/ref=amb_link_375976362_2?ie=UTF8&docId=1001197431&pf_rd_m=ATVPDKIKX0DER&pf_rd_s=center-3&pf_rd_r=02A4VZKFWCDM7Q233KKE&pf_rd_t=1401&pf_rd_p=1581752802&pf_rd_i=1001197421.

8 "About Us," *Scribd*, n.d., http://www.scribd.com/about.

9 "Upload a Document," *Scribd*, n.d., http://www.scribd.com/upload-document.

have traditionally used, such as "pairing" or "rating." Fan fiction exists on these sites, but users have to know where to look to find it.

Kindle Worlds, Scribd, and Smashwords all make it possible for fan fiction writers to charge for what they write. Other platforms have evolved that feature dissemination of free fan fiction, including Booksie (which has a special sister service for erotica, BooksieSilk) and Wattpad. The best known of these is Wattpad, a Canadian company founded in 2006 that focuses on disseminating and reading content on mobile devices. Wattpad in particular touts the sense of community they are attempting to build. The uploading interface forces frequent, short updates of minimally formatted material—perfect for a smartphone screen. Writers who succeed tend to post frequently and engage with the community; a few writers have been discovered via their work on Wattpad and received book deals.[10] Wattpad defines the category of fan fiction on its web page, unlike other sites, thus clearly indicating its acceptability.[11] The site's fan fiction leans heavily toward real-person fiction featuring teen idols such as Justin Bieber and the members of the boy band One Direction. Wattpad has a reputation for low-quality writing by teens, although a Wattpad executive estimated in 2012 that about 50 percent of users were adults, after a three-year period of growth when mostly teens used the service—a change attributed to users continuing to use the service as they aged, which in turn attracted more adults.[12] Perhaps to burnish its reputation as a player in the literary world, in July 2014 Wattpad recruited Canadian literary icon and Wattpad user Margaret Atwood to judge a poetry contest.[13]

In contrast to these sites, none of which came into existence in order to disseminate fan fiction, is a traditional fan fiction archive site: the Archive of Our Own (AO3). This site, first launched on November 14, 2009 (and still in beta testing), sponsored by the nonprofit, fan-run Organization for Transformative Works, is run by and for fans; it was listed by *Time* magazine as one of the fifty best websites of 2013, in part because "it's the most carefully curated, sanely organized, easily browsable and searchable nonprofit collection of fan fiction on the web, and it serves all fandoms equally."[14] Although the older, well-known multifandom fan fiction site Fanfiction.net, founded in 1998, is similar in terms of its traditional organization, "Fanfiction.net and Wattpad [have become] infamous for their low-quality writing and love of censoring adult-rated fanworks," with the AO3 arriving as "a breath of fresh air after years of Fanfiction.net being the dominant multi-fandom archive online."[15] AO3, likely because of

10 Suw Charman-Anderson, "Wattpad: Serialise Your Writing and Build an Audience," *Forbes*, November 20, 2013, http://www.forbes.com/sites/suwcharmananderson/2013/11/20/wattpad-serialise-your-writing-and-build-an-audience/.

11 "Wattpad Content Guidelines," *Wattpad*, n.d., http://support.wattpad.com/hc/en-us/articles/200774334-Content-Guidelines.

12 Sophie Rochester, "Wattpad: Building the World's Biggest Reader and Writer Community: An Interview with Allen Lau," *Literary Platform*, October 18, 2012, http://www.theliteraryplatform.com/2012/10/wattpad-building-the-worlds-biggest-reader-and-writer-community/.

13 Margaret Atwood, "Why Wattpad Works," *The Guardian*, July 6, 2012, http://www.theguardian.com/books/2012/jul/06/margaret-atwood-wattpad-online-writing.

14 Lev Grossman, "50 Best Websites 2013," *Time*, May 1, 2013, http://techland.time.com/2013/05/06/50-best-websites-2013/slide/archive-of-our-own/.

15 Gavia Baker-Whitelaw, "Fans Raise $16,000 in Auction to Help Popular Fic Archive," *Daily Dot*, May 3, 2013, http://www.dailydot.com/society/ao3-fundraiser-auction-fanfic-archive/.

its limits on account creation—an effort on the part of the all-volunteer support army to keep the site's growth slow and sane—has the reputation of hosting high-quality work with "talented, mature fan artists, writers, and podficcers."[16] Importantly, AO3 permits adult-themed or erotic works, which Fanfiction.net does not—nor do Scribd, Wattpad, and Kindle Worlds.

Yet synergy exists among gift and commerce in these platforms for (fan) engagement. For example, on Wattpad, Sony commissioned a One Direction story to celebrate Valentine's Day 2012 as a gift to their fans—an example of content owners using fan texts to reach out to their audience.[17] Other sponsored deals and launches followed, thus "prov[ing] its potential for branded collaboration" via fan fiction marketing opportunities.[18] Similarly, Kindle Worlds commissioned writer Neal Pollack to write a story in the Abnorm fandom—a fandom he had never heard of before.[19] These examples indicate that corporate entities see fan fiction—like texts—as a way to engage the audience. In contrast, the newly formed Big Bang Press is attempting to apply the fan model to commodity exchange: founded by fans and funded by a Kickstarter campaign, the press exists to make available professional-level works that are not fan fiction works by established fan fiction writers. They released their first three titles in fall 2014. As its website notes, "At Big Bang Press, we give writers the freedom to tell more diverse stories than mainstream publishing often has room for, a goal that is partly influenced by the inclusive nature of fan fiction culture."[20] Wattpad, Kindle Worlds, and Big Bang Press all realize the huge market inherent in fandom and are attempting to tap it via (fan) labor, albeit in different ways.

All the models I have mentioned have rules in place regarding what they consider appropriate content. Scribd does not permit "documents that describe explicit sexual situations with the intent to excite or titillate readers."[21] Wattpad prohibits pornography and nonconsensual sex.[22] Smashwords permits "written depictions of sexually explicit scenes" with some limitations, but it prohibits "material that contains hate speech, or material that advocates violence against other people; or material that promotes racism, homophobia or xenophobia; or written materials that advocate destructive or illegal activities."[23] Fanfiction.net, which followed a ban on explicit content in 2002 with benign neglect, in June 2012 purged a huge number of stories that it con-

16 Gavia Baker-Whitelaw, "Fanfiction Finds a Place in *Time*'s 50 Best Websites of 2013," *Daily Dot*, May 7, 2013, http://www.dailydot.com/culture/ao3-fanfiction-archive-time-top-50-sites/.

17 LDCrichton, "What Makes You Beautiful" [One Direction fan fiction], February 14, 2012, http://www.wattpad.com/3427553-what-makes-you-beautiful-chapter-one; Aja Romano, "Wattpad's Unlikely Literary Revolution," *Daily Dot*, July 25, 2012, http://www.dailydot.com/business/wattpad-unlikely-literary-revolution/.

18 Ella Riley-Adams, "Wattpad Romances Brands with Fanfiction Marketing Opportunities," *Contently*, February 25, 2014, http://contently.com/strategist/2014/02/25/wattpad-romances-brands-with-fanfiction-marketing-opportunities/.

19 Gavia Baker-Whitelaw, "Here's Proof Amazon's Fanfic Venture Is Working," *Daily Dot*, March 3, 2014, http://www.dailydot.com/fandom/neal-pollack-kindle-worlds-fanfic/.

20 "Big Bang Press—Our Mission," Big Bang Press, n.d., http://bigbangpress.org/about/.

21 "What Activities Are Not Allowed on Scribd?," *Scribd*, n.d., http://support.scribd.com/entries/25493-What-activities-are-not-allowed-on-Scribd-.

22 "Wattpad Content Guidelines."

23 "About Smashwords: Support FAQ," *Smashwords*, n.d., https://www.smashwords.com/about/supportfaq.

sidered explicit—an estimated eight thousand works in the top twenty most popular categories.[24] And Kindle Worlds notes that "World Licensors have provided Content Guidelines for each World, and your work must follow these Content Guidelines," which generally include no explicit material and no crossovers into another fandom.[25] Anna von Veh notes, "Kindle Worlds is more about carefully managed 'tie-in' novels than it is about the free-ranging, unconstrained desires and narratives of fanfiction. The content restrictions alone are likely to prove a barrier. The 'no pornography' rule is the most obvious."[26]

The sites' rules set the tone for the community and are often in place to protect the young and vulnerable: Wattpad and Fanfiction.net, for example, tend to attract teen girls as readers and writers. Kindle Worlds' guidelines are in place to maintain the integrity of the commercial property. Certainly not all fan fiction, or even most of it, contains explicit sex, rape, violence, or racial slurs. Yet what of the "free-ranging, unconstrained desires and narratives of fan fiction" von Veh speaks of? Commodification squeezes and constrains because it serves the interests of a third party; fans comply as a term of use. It is important that the fan community have a space in which this constraint can be lifted; but even such spaces, such as LiveJournal, are hosted by a third party that can—and has—removed content without warning.[27]

AO3 remains the sole site that does not police content. Further, instead of being run by an interested party intent on profit, it is run by and for fans. When the site needed to raise money, it held the online equivalent of a bake sale: it raised $16,000 by selling stories, with authors writing fan fiction to order.[28] AO3 runs on a gift model: it is run by an all-volunteer army. This mode of work has its own dangers in terms of labor, of course, but it is arguably better than letting others make money off fans. AO3's good reputation provides a tacit defense of the gift model: being paid should not equal worth or legitimacy, and limits on content, acceptability, and ownership ought to be mediated through the fan community of which one is a part, not a unilateral, controlling third party whose primary interest is profit or the perceived integrity of a property. The controlling third party means that fan writings are less fan fiction and more work for hire, as I've argued elsewhere.[29]

The various sites I describe here, particularly the ones such as Scribd that do not even categorize fan fiction, thus making it hard to find, indicate to me not necessarily

24 Hannah Ellison, "The Book Burning That Wasn't: Thousands of Works of Fiction Destroyed and No One Pays Attention," *Huffington Post UK*, May 13, 2012, http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/hannah-ellison/fanfiction-the-book-burning-that-was_b_1592689.html.

25 "Kindle Worlds for Authors."

26 Anna von Veh, "Kindle Worlds: Bringing Fanfiction into Line but Not Online?," *Publishing Perspectives*, June 25, 2013, http://publishingperspectives.com/2013/06/kindle-worlds-bringing-fanfiction-into-line-but-not-online/.

27 "Strikethrough," *Fanlore* [wiki], n.d., http://fanlore.org/w/index.php?title=Strikethrough&oldid=72260; "LiveJournal/6A Re: Mass Strikethrough—'We Screwed Up.,'" *Boing Boing*, May 31, 2007, http://boingboing.net/2007/05/31/livejournal6a_re_mas.html.

28 Baker-Whitelaw, "Fans Raise $16,000."

29 Karen Hellekson, "Kindle Worlds and Fan Fiction," *Karen Hellekson* [blog], May 23, 2013, http://khellekson.wordpress.com/2013/05/23/kindle-worlds-and-fan-fiction/.

that fans are keen to make money off fan fiction that they are writing anyway (although this may be true), but rather that fans are *making use of*. Scribd users can upload and sell their own works; why not throw some fan fiction up and see how it does? The teen girls on Wattpad exchanging One Direction fan fiction are *making use of* the platform to construct their fandom and create a fannish community, just as fans used LiveJournal in the early 2000s. Fan writers interested in writing pro fiction may be drawn to Kindle Worlds as way of learning to write to a specific rule-bound market; they *make use of* this opportunity.

Ultimately, however, fan artifacts query what James Carrier calls the social meaning of objects.[30] Fan creations have social meaning. This is true regardless of platform or means of exchange. What unites all fan activity is building community. I would prefer that fan activity be conducted in a space that values the fan and her contribution. AO3 is such a site. Attempts to monetize fan labor must grow organically from within the community to be legitimate. In 2009 I argued that the gift culture was an attempt by the community to theorize its genderedness; now I argue that in addition to the gift culture, we must consider new ways to construct a gendered community that makes use of the multiplicity of available platforms. ✻

30 James Carrier, "Gifts, Commodities, and Social Relations: A Maussian View of Exchange," *Sociological Forum* 6, no. 1 (1991): 119–136.

Spinning Yarn with Borrowed Cotton: Lessons for Fandom from Sampling

by Mel Stanfill

Fan work is laborious, but fans are rarely seen as laboring. Partially, fan activity is considered unproductive because it's considered illegitimate. The value of the fan product is seen as coming from the media source, not the work of transformation. Fan production is classified as derivative, and therefore derived, lesser, taking from the source; the value is understood as in the original and borrowed by the fan. However, under the labor theory of value, producing new value (in this case new semantic value) is, by definition, labor. Transformation is work. The new product contains the accumulated labor of both the corporate maker and the fan remaker, much as the labor value in cotton becomes part of the labor value in yarn in Karl Marx's

famous example.[1] To think that all of the value derives from the cotton and that the yarn-making process adds nothing is another manifestation of commodity fetishism: acting as if the thing itself has value independent of the human processes that put it there. Instead, "fan creations are joint productions even if copyright law would not recognize them as jointly authored works."[2] In thinking about fan creative production, then, we need to talk about spinning yarn—an aptly gendered metaphor for deeply feminized forms of labor.

Scholarship on fan creative production has distinguished it as a tradition, a move as productive to legitimize studying fan culture in what Jonathan Gray, Cornel Sandvoss, and C. Lee Harrington call the first wave of fan studies, or the "fandom is beautiful" phase, as it is to keep fan creativity from being lumped in with user-generated content today.[3] However, juxtaposition to other modes of transformative reuse illuminates aspects of fan work that otherwise tend to be obscured. Here I use musical reuse, as in the blues or sampling, as a lens to examine fan transformative reuse, which both shows how reuse functions as intertextuality that layers meaning and illuminates how social inequalities play out with respect to labor, copyright, and authorship.

Spinning Yarn: Seeing Additive Labor. One major difficulty in conceptualizing fan creative production as labor is that contemporary US culture and copyright law do not recognize this as additive, let alone as valid or compensable. As Casey Fiesler notes, the term *derivative work* "applies to anything from the slightest modification to something so transformed that the original is hardly recognizable."[4] Either something is derivative or it is not. Though the four-factor test of fair use in US copyright law assesses "the amount and substantiality of the portion used," this framing operates from a logic of subtraction.[5] In contrast, asking what portion of the resulting work comprises the source text would grapple with addition. This conceptualization haunts transformation with the specter of stealing someone else's work rather than doing one's own.[6]

However, there are other extant ways of interpreting reuse. Sampling and the blues, rooted in African-origin notions of creativity and repetition with difference, do not share the notion of the individual genius creating ex nihilo—the model on which

1 Karl Marx, "Capital, Volume One," in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, ed. Robert C. Tucker (New York: Norton, 1978), 294–438.

2 Rebecca Tushnet, "Payment in Credit: Copyright Law and Subcultural Creativity," *Law and Contemporary Problems* 70, no. 2 (2007): 137.

3 Jonathan Gray, Cornel Sandvoss, and C. Lee Harrington, "Introduction: Why Study Fans?," in *Fandom: Identities and Communities in a Mediated World*, ed. Jonathan Gray, Cornel Sandvoss, and C. Lee Harrington (New York: New York University Press, 2007), 1–16; Francesca Coppa, "Women, *Star Trek*, and the Early Development of Fannish Vidding," *Transformative Works and Cultures*, no. 1 (2008): http://dx.doi.org/10.3983/twc.2008.0044.

4 Casey Fiesler, "Everything I Need to Know I Learned from Fandom: How Existing Social Norms Can Help Shape the Next Generation of User-Generated Content," *Vanderbilt Journal of Entertainment and Technology Law* 10 (2007): 737.

5 *Limitations on Exclusive Rights: Fair Use*, *United States Code*, *Title 17, 1976*, http://www.copyright.gov/title17/92chap1.html#107.

6 Brennan Center for Justice, *Will Fair Use Survive? Free Expression in the Age of Copyright Control* (New York: Brennan Center for Justice at NYU School of Law, 2005), http://www.brennancenter.org/sites/default/files/legacy/d/download_file_9056.pdf; Rebecca Tushnet, "Copy This Essay: How Fair Use Doctrine Harms Free Speech and How Copying Serves It," *Yale Law Journal* 114, no. 3 (2004): 535–590.

US copyright law relies.[7] Indigenous intellectual property has a similarly alternative set of values, tending to rest on creative works having both community authorship and ownership.[8] If we take such alternative conceptualizations as valid rather than allowing them to be marginalized by the currently hegemonic Western notion of the Romantic author, reuse looks very different.

The scholarship on music identifies intertextuality in reuse. To use a musical sample, Anne Barron says, isn't to take a "shortcut" but to reference the sample's "cultural references and resonances, its status as a kind of aural icon that gathers together a network of associations and experiences."[9] Sampling has been understood as a way to indicate membership in a sonic community.[10] More specifically, reuse can be understood as potentially invoking the Benjaminian aura of the reused text, making that text in some sense present in the new one.[11] This could simply give a feeling of familiarity—the sort of shortcut industry claims it is—or add a layer of meaning, as in the delightful transgression of Naughty by Nature's sampling the Jackson 5's cutesy, youthful love song "ABC" (*ABC*, 1970) in their raunchier "O.P.P." (*Naughty by Nature*, 1991). There are, moreover, traditions in which the value of a new work lies precisely in the artistry of the reuse. The iterative nature of the blues tradition has been well described; in this musical milieu, creativity lies at least in part in producing particularly skilled versions of shared musical texts.[12] Even classical music, the genre most prone to conceptualization in terms of individual creative genius, was improvisational until the late nineteenth century.[13] Today, aficionados still attend symphonies that perform different versions of the same works.[14] Repetition with difference is creativity worth seeing in many musical contexts; why treat other forms of cultural production differently?

Alternative views of reuse recognize the skill involved in juxtaposition; they also recognize that relocation can be argument. Certainly a notion of creativity as selecting from a tradition, working with or against those reused elements and added ones, is fundamental to the blues.[15] Likewise, Barron points out that to choose and position a

7 Olufunmilayo B. Arewa, "Making Music: Copyright Law and Creative Processes," in *A Companion to Media Authorship*, ed. Jonathan Gray and Derek Johnson (New York: Wiley, 2013), 69–87; Thomas G. Schumacher, "'This Is a Sampling Sport': Digital Sampling, Rap Music and the Law in Cultural Production," *Media, Culture and Society* 17, no. 2 (1995): 253–273; Siva Vaidhyanathan, *Copyrights and Copywrongs: The Rise of Intellectual Property and How It Threatens Creativity* (New York: New York University Press, 2003).

8 Anthony Seeger, "Ethnomusicology and Music Law," *Ethnomusicology* 36, no. 3 (1992): 345–359; Leon Tan, "Intellectual Property Law and the Globalization of Indigenous Cultural Expressions: Māori Tattoo and the Whitmill versus Warner Bros. Case," *Theory, Culture and Society* 30, no. 3 (2013): 61–81; Mel Stanfill, "Fandom, Public, Commons," *Transformative Works and Cultures*, no. 14 (2013), http://dx.doi.org/10.3983/twc.2013.0530.

9 Anne Barron, "Introduction: Harmony or Dissonance? Copyright Concepts and Musical Practice," *Social and Legal Studies* 15, no. 1 (2006): 34.

10 Ibid.; Vaidhyanathan, *Copyrights and Copywrongs*.

11 Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," in *Media and Cultural Studies: Key Works*, ed. Meenakshi Gigi Durham and Douglas Kellner (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2001), 48–70. Although Schumacher makes an entirely opposite point about Benjamin and the aura, his piece did inspire me to ask how the aura works in the sample.

12 Barron, "Introduction"; Vaidhyanathan, *Copyrights and Copywrongs*.

13 Arewa, "Making Music."

14 Tushnet, "Copy This Essay."

15 Arewa, "Making Music"; Vaidhyanathan, *Copyrights and Copywrongs*.

sample one "has to have a solid grasp of musical history."[16] Rebecca Tushnet describes fan attitudes toward reuse as appreciation "that only one author could have combined familiar elements in that particular way."[17] In each example, choosing the right aspects to reuse, in the right way, is recognized as creative and skilled.

Additionally, the act of reuse can be political. The music scholarship's examples are black rap artists "stealing" rock music back from white artists who stole from the blues, or reusers mocking sickly sweet love songs by making them raunchy.[18] The parallel to fan critique and argumentation through the selection, placement, and recontextualization of reused source text is clear. Certainly the juxtaposition of music to video is the major driver of argument in fan vids: "The music and lyrics tell us how to understand what we see."[19] Vidding uses positioning as argument by slowing down moments to emphasize their intensity and producing moments that do not exist in the source text by imitating the rhythms of shot-reverse shot, mixing in content from other sources (e.g., sex scenes with sufficiently similar bodies), or layering in dialogue from the source in new combinations and contexts.[20] Comparable practices—keeping some aspects of the source intact, modifying others slightly, and adding entirely new ones to produce a particular vision—drive fan fiction and art.

These definitions of creativity focus on what's added—the particular way the yarn is spun. Siva Vaidhyanathan notes that "in the blues tradition, what is original is the 'value-added' aspect of a work, usually delivered through performance," placing just such an emphasis on process.[21] Indeed, as Abigail De Kosnik points out in her contribution to this section, what's added may show most clearly in "repetitions" or "proliferations of shared sources" because this "permits texts in these genres, so frequently disparaged for being all the same, to register greater differences between them than texts that purport to stand alone." In a number of ways, then, the analysis of music produces useful frames for fan transformative reuse as creative, as additive, and as labor.

Not Your Cotton, Must Be Our Yarn. The other side of the idea that fan transformation doesn't add anything contends that because fan work is perceived as derivative of the media source, it is understood as ultimately controlled by the source's rights holder. As Fiesler explains, "Legally, only copyright owners have the right to prepare [derivative] works," which again encompasses a huge swath of transformativity, from slight to fundamental.[22] As a result of this exclusive right, derivative works produced by others are seen as perhaps allowable if the rights holder benefits (or is forced by a court finding of fair use to permit them) but ultimately something over which rights

16 Barron, "Introduction," 34.

17 Tushnet, "Payment in Credit," 144.

18 Vaidhyanathan, *Copyrights and Copywrongs*; Schumacher, "This Is a Sampling Sport."

19 Francesca Coppa, "A Fannish Taxonomy of Hotness," *Cinema Journal* 48, no. 4 (2009): 108.

20 Julie Levin Russo, "Indiscrete Media: Television/Digital Convergence and Economies of Online Lesbian Fan Communities" (PhD diss., Brown University, 2010), http://j-l-r.org/diss.

21 Vaidhyanathan, *Copyrights and Copywrongs*, 124.

22 Fiesler, "Everything I Need to Know," 737.

holders do and should have a say. It has been reported that user-generated music videos make more money for the recording industry than official ones, and certainly the monetization of user-generated video includes fan vids, which at YouTube now come with links to buy the embedded songs.[23] That YouTube lets rights holders generate revenue from such videos gestures again to the cotton as the only source of value. Industry policy—and YouTube's algorithms—are narrower than the law, treating any reuse as infringement without considering fair use. However, as James Boyle points out, fair use assumes rights holders should not have complete control: "The defense is not 'I trespassed on your land, but I was starving.' It is 'I did *not* trespass on your land. I walked on the public road that runs through it, a road you never owned in the first place."[24] Copyright law grants a state-sponsored monopoly to serve the public good.[25] However, currently industry practice assumes neither public access nor duty.

Thus, the same industry aghast at audiences making yarn from their cotton feels completely entitled to take that yarn and macramé. Work on music has clearly articulated this sort of differential power, noting the history of white appropriation of both the African American blues tradition and indigenous music.[26] Authors critiquing appropriation tend to argue for protection against reuse rather than free reuse, including the need to get permission and provide payment. Such proposals are anathema to those working in the field of fan studies, which takes the perspective of fans doing the proverbial poaching, but when fans get "an inversion in the direction of fannish theft," it is clear that structural inequalities matter, and analysis of the experiences of other transformative reusers is helpful.[27]

When black artists reuse someone else's work, it's interpreted as theft—one court literally admonished a musician for sampling without payment, "Thou shalt not steal."[28] Yet when the Rolling Stones or Eric Clapton copy blues sounds or when Moby samples blues recordings, it's seen as homage.[29] Sampling can be "a political act—a way of crossing the system, challenging expectations, or confronting the status quo," but only when the powerless take from the powerful, as with rapper Schoolly D sampling Led Zeppelin, whose guitarist, according to *The Simpsons* (FOX, 1989–),

23 Joel Eastwood, "YouTube Generates More Money for Record Labels through Fan-Made Videos than Official Music Videos, a Global Recording Industry Report Says," *Toronto Star,* March 18, 2014, http://www.thestar.com/entertainment/music/2014/03/18/recording_industry_earns_more_from_fan_videos_than_from_official_music_videos.html.

24 James Boyle, *The Public Domain: Enclosing the Commons of the Mind* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008), 66.

25 James Boyle, "The Second Enclosure Movement and the Construction of the Public Domain," *Law and Contemporary Problems* 66, no. 1–2 (2003): 33–74; Lewis Hyde, *Common as Air: Revolution, Art, and Ownership* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2010); Arewa, "Making Music."

26 David Hesmondhalgh, "Digital Sampling and Cultural Inequality," *Social and Legal Studies* 15, no. 1 (2006): 53–75; Vaidhyanathan, *Copyrights and Copywrongs*; Arewa, "Making Music"; Steven Feld, "Notes on World Beat," *Public Culture* 1, no. 1 (1988): 31–37; Seeger, "Ethnomusicology."

27 Henry Jenkins, *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1992); Alexis Lothian, "Living in a Den of Thieves: Fan Video and Digital Challenges to Ownership," *Cinema Journal* 48, no. 4 (2009): 135.

28 Brennan Center for Justice, *Will Fair Use Survive?*, 10.

29 Hesmondhalgh, "Digital Sampling"; Tushnet, "Payment in Credit"; Vaidhyanathan, *Copyrights and Copywrongs*.

is "one of the greatest thieves of American black music ever to walk the earth."[30] Similarly, lateral blues borrowing—within the form itself, for audiences who knew the tradition—differs greatly from removing sounds from that context.[31] The relative power of borrower and borrowed matters, and it sorts out along predictable lines. As David Hesmondhalgh frames it, some people are seen as artists being copied and others are viewed as just raw material.[32] Creator status parses out along racial lines with music; in fandom, the primary axis of inequality tends to be gender.[33] Fan creative production like fiction and vidding is primarily women's work, and it is devalued.[34] Without being able to prove causality between those two features, it is worth noting that work replicating the Western lone-genius, self-interested, professional-author model is both valued and disproportionately carried out by men.[35] Spinning someone else's cotton, then, is not art. It's not worthy. Industry will, however, turn a buck on it quickly enough.

By contrast to this steal-as-you-can attitude, fandom has a fairly clear set of ethics around reuse. Fan norms distinguish clearly between copying from those with more power and those with less, avoiding the contradiction exposed by music scholarship: "Fans need to credit . . . other fans' work, whereas they feel free to mine the outside world for raw material, as long as the resulting works stay noncommercial."[36] Moreover, fans author works communally through support and feedback to authors; much of the (common but not universal) consternation over pulling to publish or filing off the serial numbers—the practice of taking fan fiction, removing the traces of the media source, and selling it as original fiction, discussed in more detail in De Kosnik's contribution to this discussion—comes from repudiating community production in favor of the single

30 Vaidhyanathan, *Copyrights and Copywrongs*, 136; Mark Kirkland, dir., "The Regina Monologues," *The Simpsons* (Fox, 1989–), November 23, 2003.

31 Arewa, "Making Music."

32 Hesmondhalgh, "Digital Sampling."

33 The focus on gender to the exclusion of race is partially because of the unbearable whiteness of fandom as both a cultural concept and a population. See Mel Stanfill, "Doing Fandom, (Mis)doing Whiteness: Heteronormativity, Racialization, and the Discursive Construction of Fandom," *Transformative Works and Cultures*, no. 8 (2011) http://dx.doi.org/10.3983/twc.2011.0256; TWC editor, "Pattern Recognition: A Dialogue on Racism in Fan Communities," *Transformative Works and Cultures*, no. 3 (2009): http://dx.doi.org/10.3983/twc.2009.0172.

34 The literature on fan fiction and vidding as primarily done by women is vast, but see, for example, Coppa, "Fannish Taxonomy"; Abigail Derecho, "Archontic Literature: A Definition, a History, and Several Theories of Fan Fiction," in *Fan Fiction and Fan Communities in the Age of the Internet: New Essays*, ed. Karen Hellekson and Kristina Busse (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2006), 61–78; Karen Hellekson, "A Fannish Field of Value: Online Fan Gift Culture," *Cinema Journal* 48, no. 4 (2009): 113–118. Among those making the point that feminized creative practices are devalued are Kristina Busse, "Introduction," *Cinema Journal* 48, no. 4 (2009): 104–107; Kristina Busse, "Geek Hierarchies, Boundary Policing, and the Gendering of the Good Fan," *Participations* 10, no. 1 (2013): 73–91; Suzanne Scott, "Revenge of the Fanboy: Convergence Culture and the Politics of Incorporation" (PhD diss., University of Southern California, 2011), http://digitallibrary.usc.edu/assetserver/controller/item/etd-Scott-4277.pdf.

35 See, among others, Abigail De Kosnik, "Should Fan Fiction Be Free?," *Cinema Journal* 48, no. 4 (2009): 118–124; Henry Jenkins, *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide* (New York: New York University Press, 2006); Busse, "Introduction."

36 Tushnet, "Copy This Essay," 157.

genius author, because this denies credit for the contributions of others.[37] This differs markedly from how ownership over the cotton is extended indefinitely into the past and the future.

Spinners' Rights. Ultimately, considering musical transformative reuse alongside fan transformative reuse shows that recognizing transformative reuse as legitimate and as labor rests on the distinction not between the original and the copy but between the powerful and the disempowered. The same corporations filing takedown requests on fan transformative works are quite willing to appropriate fan labor by monetizing those works, and they often profit from appropriating other artists who never get to count as artists. In 2009, De Kosnik noted, "Fan fiction is nearing what I call the 'Sugarhill moment': the moment when an outsider takes up a subculture's invention and commodifies it for the mainstream before insiders do."[38] Since then, between Amazon Kindle Worlds monetizing fan fiction and the cash generated by fan-made video, that moment would seem to have come and gone. If fandom has traditionally been framed in terms of civil disobedience, the new move away from prohibition seems like a move toward a freer culture. However, the case of music suggests that the contemporary willingness to monetize rather than curtail fan work is a question of industry relaxing its enforcement of restrictions because there is money to be made—but not giving up control.[39] Fan creative production is still not seen as legitimate creative work, and therefore industry sees no contradiction in the differential claims to ownership and control, although it'll allow it if the price is right. If fans have been poaching, then monetizing fandom is building out the enclosure. ✻

37 Stanfill, "Fandom, Public, Commons"; Bethan Jones, "Fifty Shades of Fan Labor: Exploitation and *Fifty Shades of Grey*," *Transformative Works and Cultures*, no. 15 (2014): http://dx.doi.org/10.3983/twc.2014.0501.

38 De Kosnik, "Should Fan Fiction Be Free?," 119–120.

39 Hector Postigo, "Cultural Production and the Digital Rights Movement," *Information, Communication and Society* 15, no. 8 (2012): 1165–1185; Simone Murray, "'Celebrating the Story the Way It Is': Cultural Studies, Corporate Media and the Contested Utility of Fandom," *Continuum: Journal of Media and Cultural Studies* 18, no. 1 (2004): 7–25.

A Different Kind of Love Song: Vidding Fandom's Undercommons

by Alexis Lothian

Thieves and Lovers. Now more than ever, fannish love is an essential part of industrial production. To keep the machinery of content creation profitable, someone has to care about what is being produced; the more money spent on a product, the more it needs fans. As Abigail De Kosnik points out, fans are "essential components of the capitalist system within which official producers operate."[1] According to a 2014 article in the *Toronto Star*, fan-made music videos make more money for recording artists than officially produced ones, all without costing the producers a penny.[2] Fannish labors of love, manifested in creative works or in less tangible, affective forms, may not typically be compensated, but the ways in which these labors produce value has become paradigmatic of digital capital's blur between work, play, community, and advertising.[3] Yet this capitalist-realist model for understanding fan creativity fails to account for many practices and collectivities that exist under the broad heading "fandom." In "Living in a Den of Thieves: Fan Video and Digital Challenges to Ownership," my contribution to 2009's "In Focus" on fandom and feminism, I insisted on the importance of countercapitalist currents within fan production. This piece updates and extends those arguments.[4]

Considering fandom as theft seems to be the opposite of thinking of fandom as love; lovers, after all, would surely work to keep order in the systems that benefit their beloveds. Thieves, however, will take anything they want for their own, laboring to disrupt the structures that maintain a property-based social order. You wouldn't steal from the people you loved. Or would you? Seeking an answer to that question that can honor the complications and contradictions within

1 Abigail De Kosnik, "Fandom as Free Labor," in *Digital Labor: The Internet as Playground and Factory*, ed. Trebor Scholz (New York: Routledge, 2013), 102–103.

2 Joel Eastwood, "Recording Industry Earns More from Fan Videos Than from Official Music Videos," *Toronto Star*, March 18, 2014, http://www.thestar.com/entertainment/music/2014/03/18/recording_industry_earns_more_from_fan_videos_than_from_official_music_videos.html.

3 For full elaboration of these arguments, see Mel Stanfill and Megan Condis, "Fandom and /as Labor," *Transformative Works and Cultures*, no. 15 (2014), http://dx.doi.org/10.3983/twc.2014.0593.

4 Alexis Lothian, "Living in a Den of Thieves: Fan Video and Digital Challenges to Ownership," *Cinema Journal* 48, no. 4 (2009): 130–136.

fannish communities, I borrow Fred Moten and Stefano Harney's term *undercommons*. Moten and Harney use the term to name the revolutionary, elusive, and very real zone in which delegitimized subjects steal from and steal away from the production of official knowledge to which their labor, in other contexts, also contributes.[5] I argue that fan production forms part of an undercommons in which dominant media and cultural forms are both reproduced and unmade.

"Living in a Den of Thieves" engaged Lim's 2007 fan vid "Us," which combined pop-culture images of rebellion with clips from shows familiar to slash fan communities to suggest that fandom's revolutionary potential was real, if contingent and contradictory.[6] Here, I turn to a more recent metadepiction of fans' collective self-understanding. Gianduja Kiss's 2012 vid "A Different Kind of Love Song" gathers TV and film imagery of fan practices, connecting this growing archive to extralegal content sharing.[7] Looking to this vid enables me to think through labor and value in terms of not only intellectual property but also transient collectives that emerge among fans themselves—forms of being together that fan creations can capture and produce, where ideas of intellectual property as the dominant culture knows them simply do not apply.

Dedicated to Everyone. The opening sequence of "A Different Kind of Love Song" lays out its focus on fandom, copyright, and love. The first shot depicts a black man speaking to a white woman whose face blurs in the foreground. He complains, "Took more than an hour to torrent the last episode of *Doctor Who*" (BBC, 2005–). Fans will recognize the character of Alec Hardison (Aldis Hodge) from TNT's *Leverage* (2008–2012), a show about a team of con artists who combine their skills to fight corporate injustice. Those who don't know the show will recognize the speaker as an American fan keen to keep up with a popular BBC production. That the epigraph for this celebration of fannish pleasures is a man of color is worth noting, given the commonplace stereotype of TV science fiction fans as white—though popular media representations and scholarly work alike have given the lie to this in recent years.[8] From here, we cross-fade to a game of Klingon Boggle (Figure 1), complete with a *Star Trek*–brand dictionary (*Star Trek*, CBS/Paramount, 1966–2005), played by the four male leads of *The Big Bang Theory* (CBS, 2007–) as the music swells and Cher's Auto-Tuned voice sings, "This is a different kind of love song" ("A Different Kind of Love Song," from the album *Living Proof*, 2002). Next comes a close-up of one particular kind of fannish love: slash fan fiction, as depicted in a meta–story line of *Supernatural* (CW, 2005–) in which the character of Becky Rosen (Emily Perkins) stands in for real-life fans who

5 Fred Moten and Stefano Harney, "The University and the Undercommons: Seven Theses," *Social Text* 79, no. 2 (2004): 101–115; Stefano Harney and Fred Moten, *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning and Black Study* (Brooklyn, NY: Minor Compositions, 2013). Moten and Harney's 2004 article refers specifically to the university; their 2013 book extends the idea into larger social realms.

6 Lim, "Us," YouTube video, 3:56, March 1, 2007, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_yxHKgQyGx0.

7 Gianduja Kiss, "New Club Vivid Vid: A Different Kind of Love Song (Multifandom)," video, August 11, 2012, http://giandujakiss.dreamwidth.org/785401.html.

8 See, for example, Ytasha Womack, *Afrofuturism: The World of Black Sci-Fi and Fantasy Culture* (Chicago: Chicago Review Press, 2013).

write about same-sex love between brothers Sam and Dean.[9] We cut from sentences on Becky's screen to her face at the computer, deep in concentration, then move to another computer screen, this one open to a fan site in the process of being updated. Its author, pictured next, is Sarah Silverman playing Marci Maven, the self-professed biggest fan of the eponymous detective in TV's *Monk* (NBC Universal, 2002–2009) (Figure 2).



Figure 1. Geeks play Klingon Boggle in *The Big Bang Theory*. From Gianduja Kiss's 2012 fan vid "A Different Kind of Love Song."



Figure 2. Sarah Silverman as superfan Marci Maven in *Monk*. From Gianduja Kiss's 2012 fan vid "A Different Kind of Love Song."

Pushed along by the song's driving beat, the slower opening gives way to clip after clip of fan communities and activities. The list of sources at the end of the four-minute vid has forty-two entries and takes eighteen seconds to scroll through. Gianduja Kiss uses Cher's lyrics to guide our interpretation of this vast aggregate as a collectivity greater than the context of any of its component parts, "dedicated to everyone." Most scholarship on fan vidding has emphasized the way that fans make meaning in a deep context that relies on shared source knowledge to make an interpretive community.[10] "A Different Kind of Love Song" highlights the extended reach of fannish references created by the mainstreaming of geek culture. Indeed, as Gianduja Kiss describes in her announcement post, to find the sources she used for the vid, she turned to personal friends within her fan communities and to online resources where fans had cataloged cultural references to their favorite shows. "This is a different kind of love song / Dedicated to everyone": it is not just about the fact that fan activity is now easy to find on television but about the love and the labor that puts it there and the ways that fannish love brings diverse people together.

9 For discussion of Becky and fans' responses to her, see Judith May Fathallah, "Becky Is My Hero: The Power of Laughter and Disruption in *Supernatural*," *Transformative Works and Cultures*, no. 5 (2010), http://dx.doi.org/10.3983/twc.2010.0220.

10 See Francesca Coppa, "An Editing Room of One's Own: Vidding as Women's Work," *Camera Obscura* 26, no. 2 77 (2011): 123–130; Tisha Turk, "Your Own Imagination: Vidding and Vidwatching as Collaborative Interpretation," *Film and Film Culture*, no. 5 (2010): 88–111.

The ending satirically underlines this message. In the same *Leverage* clip that began the vid, the woman in the car speaks back, her tone serious: "Hey. Illegal downloading's wrong." The irony intensifies for those with contextual knowledge: this character, Parker (Beth Riesgraf), is a professional thief. The use of this scene to bookend a video praise song to the fun of fandom comments on the counterintuitive legal structure of intellectual property in the 2010s. How can so much innocent fun and joy be illegal, and whose interests are served by making it so? Vidder and fan scholar Thingswithwings praises the vid's representation of "how completely ludicrous it is to apply outside ideas of 'intellectual property' to what we do."[11] For Thingswithwings, fan creativity is bigger than economic and property-based justifications; fannish collectivity is a peer-to-peer affective creation where the transformation of each show's cathected elements makes something that is greater than the sum of its parts.

"Illegal Downloading's Wrong?" Fannish investment is the reproductive labor that keeps media companies going, enabling media corporations to produce surplus value in an age when the manner of paying for content has become very uncertain. "A Different Kind of Love Song" pays homage to that process as much as it does to the love that plays out among fans. The images it presents are, with a few exceptions, things that you can buy: a Klingon dictionary, a light saber, a Wonder Woman mug. Merchandise is essential in an era when paying for content is not as reliable a revenue source as it once was; licensing fees can be minimal and profit margins high. Meanwhile, crafted costumes (Figure 3) and other objects show the labor of fannish hands as both self-expression and free advertising. Lim's earlier metavid "Us" painted fans as copyright outlaws standing against "the Man"; here, we see mainly gratitude that a love song this collective and sincere can exist, that the labor of fans can be accepted by their objects.



Figure 3. Yvette Nicole Brown as Shirley in Harry Potter costume on *Community*. From Gianduja Kiss's 2012 fan vid "A Different Kind of Love Song."

Attending to gender makes some changes to this story. TV shows are less likely to represent the most feminized and least mainstreamed kinds of fan labor, nontelegenic activities like fan fiction writing and vidding.[12] Creating a video for an audience composed primarily of women, Gianduja Kiss chooses as her entry points two depictions of fan fic–writing women, whose meaning is shaped by the joyful depictions of fannish happiness that follow. Yet in the context of the original

11 Thingswithwings, "Three Little Vid Recs," August 12, 2012, http://thingswithwings.dreamwidth.org/185168.html.

12 See Kristina Busse, "Geek Hierarchies, Boundary Policing, and the Gendering of the Good Fan," *Participations: Journal of Audience and Reception Studies* 10, no. 1 (2013): 73–91; Francesca Coppa and Rebecca Tushnet, "How to Suppress Women's Remix," *Camera Obscura* 26, no. 2 77 (2011): 131–138.

shows, their fannish activity is not celebrated but mocked and punished. In *Supernatural*, Becky's obsession forwards the plot and perhaps even saves the world, but we see little in the way of self-aware intelligence behind her wide-eyed stare. Unlike two male fans who teach the protagonists a lesson by explaining how *Supernatural* fandom rescues them from the mundanity of lower-middle-class wage labor, she stands for an excess that culminates in near rape when she finally tricks the drugged hero into marriage before agreeing to give up her claim on his body and the show's story line. *Monk*'s Marci, whose handmade tributes to her fannish object feature in several montages (see Figure 2), is similarly excessive, violating a restraining order to force herself on her loved detective and even usurping his paid assistant's position, hinting that free fan labor might prove a threat to content creators' union jobs. Her incompetence sends a message that taking fans' work too seriously could risk endangering the smooth running of productive operations: Marci is a dreadful assistant who confuses details of past cases with her own fan fiction.

Becky and Marci are figures of fun who are disciplined by their shows for taking fannish love too far. Their excess of fannish femininity endangers its very objects, suggesting that they have been placed in the text to rein in unruly fans who won't cede control of narratives and characters to their rightful creators. When Gianduja Kiss brings together these representations with the more positive masculine ones from other shows, one effect is a flattening that obscures the sexism of fan representation.[13] Yet the juxtaposition also works to make heroic the unheroic, creating a different kind of love song in which the weirdness of Becky and Marci no longer need be held in check. Cher sings, "What if the world was crazy and we were sane?" What if the irritating excesses, the unreasonable demands for narrative control, that these figures display could be part of the conversation about ownership and legitimacy begun by fan works more explicit in their rebellion? In "Us," Lim ends the vid with an image of a revolutionary girl from the 2006 movie *V for Vendetta* (James McTeigue) as her fangirl-creator stand-in. The girl removes the iconic mask that has come to be associated with Anonymous, sold and worn at Occupy protests, as Lim implicitly insists that fans' rebellion inheres in the practice of taking what media gives and making it their own, in any way they want.[14] This possibility of gendered rebellion is important even when it follows the line of fannish affirmation, as "A Different Kind of Love Song" does; Becky and Marci have a place in the fannish undercommons alongside Lim's more easily politicized avatar.

In 2009, I wondered whether the formation of the fan-advocacy nonprofit Organization for Transformative Works (OTW) would lead to a point at which legally transformative uses of copyrighted material would be valued as "the new originality."[15] Although the legal battles are far from won, recent developments involving Gianduja Kiss's vids show that this has in some ways become the case. The OTW has successfully used fan videos as evidence to gain and renew an exemption to the Digital

13 The choice to focus on these characters is itself a commentary on media depictions of fandom because it was driven by an absence of positively depicted women fans (Gianduja Kiss, personal communication, July 2014).

14 Lothian, "Living in a Den of Thieves," 134.

15 Ibid., 133.

Millennium Copyright Act (DMCA), legalizing DVD capture for the purposes of video remix. Gianduja Kiss's vid "It Depends on What You Pay" (2009), a *Dollhouse* (Fox, 2009–2010) vid that calls out the show for its sexual violence, was sent to Congress as part of this campaign. Finding the thesis of "It Depends" apparently unarguable, respondents singled out an earlier one of her vids, "Der Kommissar" (2007), as self-evidently illegitimate and illegal, simply a jumble of images set to music. Gianduja Kiss responded by explaining the ways in which she had made a critical interpretation through her choice of images.[16] To argue for the legal legitimacy of the creative work they do, vidders must show not only that what they do is not theft but also that it is about more than love—that remix has critical uses and is not just a mechanism for sharing the kinds of fannish joy that "A Different Kind of Love Song" depicts.

Arguments for fan labor's economic and social legitimacy frequently contradict themselves. On the one hand, fan production is defensible to copyright holders inasmuch as it performs free labor for a brand; on the other hand, fan laborers become lawbreakers if they share and create too freely. The methods available to vidders perpetuate this contradiction. It is far more difficult and expensive to capture copyrighted images through the methods legitimated by the DMCA exemption than it is to download illegal reproductions of episodes and movies over peer-to-peer networks, obtaining media from a collective commons whose origins are fuzzy but whose feelings can be trusted. This is the realm that "A Different Kind of Love Song" celebrates. It is not only a happy, fannish world in which the concept of illegal downloading has become irrelevant in the face of fannish world making but also an undercommons in which lacking the resources to buy fannish things, whether DVD sets or con memberships or merchandise, is no barrier to sharing the love.

Dancing through the Undercommons. In a 2014 *Cinema Journal* roundtable responding to Henry Jenkins, Sam Ford, and Joshua Green's book *Spreadable Media*, Kristina Busse raised the question of fan studies' broad significance, given the extensive applicability of the term *fan* beyond the subcultural groups around whom the field first cohered in the 1990s: "What does fan studies let us see? In other words, what critical lens does it afford us that broader audience studies may not?"[17] For me, fan studies offers a range of models for relating to popular culture and digital media that centralize affective connections and ways of being that cannot be reduced to the economic, even as they inevitably become forms of exploited labor. It is a field that takes seriously the work done by intense emotion attached to objects that are widely considered unworthy of such cathexis. As a form, fan video can often feel embarrassing in its earnestness. After all, it takes the lyrics of ephemeral pop songs seriously, and it believes in the

16 For a full account of these events, see Rebecca Tushnet, "'I'm a Lawyer, Not an Ethnographer, Jim': Textual Poachers and Fair Use," *Journal of Fandom Studies* 2, no. 1 (2014): 21–30.

17 Louisa Stein, moderator, "Online Roundtable on Spreadable Media by Henry Jenkins, Sam Ford, and Joshua Green, with participants Paul Booth, Kristina Busse, Melissa Click, Sam Ford, Henry Jenkins, Xiaochang Li, and Sharon Ross" (review of *Spreadable Media: Creating Value and Meaning in a Networked Culture*, by Henry Jenkins, Sam Ford, and Joshua Green), *Cinema Journal* 53, no. 3 (2014): 174.

capacity for truly transformative work from a form most widely associated with advertisements and throwaway clips on YouTube.

One way of arguing for fan works' validity is to showcase the myriad ways in which their techniques enable the production of necessary and important knowledge by fans and others.[18] Yet the mockable, uncritical, reproductive-of-capital facets of fandom coexist with its radical transformative capacities. Writing of the undercommons created by state workers' labor, Harney and Moten note, "There are all kinds of little holes and tunnels and ditches and highways and byways through the state that are being produced and maintained constantly by the people who are also at the same time doing this labor that ends in the production of the state. So, what is it that these folks are producing?"[19] Fans are, I would suggest, among the producers of the holes and tunnels that aerate our deeply capitalistic, endlessly surveilled digital world.

In the 2013 book that grew from their 2004 article, Harney and Moten extend the idea of the undercommons with the notion of study: a collective learning together, exemplified by the black radical tradition of cultural, political, intellectual, and artistic forms developed in opposition to white supremacist capitalism, that does not solidify into institutional knowledge production. Fan cultures are not without connections to radical movements for racial, gender, and disability justice, but it is a smaller kind of revolution that we are most likely to see continuing in the fannish undercommons celebrated in vids like "A Different Kind of Love Song."[20] Nevertheless, I do want to insist that a dance vid's translation of awkwardness into beauty can be a moment of transformative world making. Drawing on the slippery concept of an undercommons allows that potential to remain present even when the content of fannish activity may undermine the capacities inherent in its distribution.

The context of many of the clips in "A Different Kind of Love Song" is comic, albeit not always as cruelly comic as the depictions of Becky and Marci. Gathered together and placed in a gathering of people who recognize themselves within them, the mockable becomes sincere through Cher's lyrics as they animate the vid:

> What if the world calmed down
> And we all could breathe together easily?
> Connecting the sky and ground with you and me
> And everything in between.
> I am part of you
> We have living proof
> We're all part of the light that flows through everything

Here, a final place to turn to is the scene of bodies dancing, a scene that queer and especially queer of color scholarship has highlighted again and again as a space of

18 See Kristina Busse and Alexis Lothian, "Scholarly Critiques and Critiques of Scholarship: The Uses of Remix Video," *Camera Obscura* 26, no. 2 77 (2011): 139–146.

19 Harney and Moten, *Undercommons*, 145.

20 For some connections between science fiction fan culture and women-of-color feminisms, see TWC editor, "Pattern Recognition: A Dialogue on Racism in Fan Communities," *Transformative Works and Cultures*, no. 3 (2009), http://dx.doi.org/10.3983/twc.2009.0172.

making a world.[21] I danced at the premiere of "A Different Kind of Love Song" and felt thrills of recognition, knowing they would extend out of the bounds of one Chicago hotel function room (the site of Club Vivid, a dance party held at the vidding convention VividCon) and into the eyes and ears of those who watched the vid online. A fan convention might not make the kind of space for the excluded that an underground queer club can, yet it is likely that few of the dancers in person or online experience themselves as completely at home in the mainstream world. The feelings of the dance, and Gianduja Kiss's connection of those feelings to the undercommons of downloadable media, should call us to awareness that we miss out on much if we think of access to fannish love and labor as only for those with economic privilege. "You and me and everything in between": dancing along also means joining an awkward undercommons whose members will not all be living through the violence of racialized oppression but who are nevertheless likely at any moment to be experiencing depression, anxiety, disability, and poverty, as well as gender- and sexuality-based oppression.[22] By vidding a revolution composed of dancing, Gianduja Kiss composes and archives fannish love as something that slices through the labyrinth of copyright restrictions and media ownership. It might not leave anything to hold on to, but it lets those who feel it breathe more easily. ✻

21 See José Muñoz, *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999).

22 Little has yet been published on forms of exclusion and marginalization experienced by many self-identified fans, including discrimination on the basis of body size and (dis)ability as well as poverty and unemployment. There are some brief allusions to the first of these in Francesca Coppa, "Fuck Yeah, Fandom Is Beautiful," *Journal of Fandom Studies* 2, no. 1 (2014): 73–82.

"Cosplay Is Serious Business": Gendering Material Fan Labor on *Heroes of Cosplay*

by Suzanne Scott

Cosplay, or costume play, the practice of constructing costumes and props inspired by fictional characters and embodying those characters in real-world spaces such as fan conventions, remains undertheorized within fan studies. Although scholars have considered cosplay as a mode of identity performance and geek culture bloggers are increasingly engaging the identity politics of convention culture for cosplayers, the labor and materiality of cosplay as a mode of fan production, as well as how that labor is gendered, is rarely addressed.[1] This is perhaps because cosplay occupies a conflicted positioning within preexisting discourses around fan production and performance. Fan studies as a field has historically focused on female fans' transformative textual production through the creation and circulation of fan fiction, fan vids, and fan art. Cosplay, by contrast, typically presents itself as a form of mimetic fan production. Mimetic modes of fan production—a term I borrow from Matt Hills—seek to replicate what is seen on screen, and thus do not "create radical mash-ups, or 'read' in provocative ways, nor transformatively rework the object of fandom."[2] Hills nonetheless makes a compelling case for a consideration of mimetic fan production, like replicating props,

1 For discussions of cosplay and identity, see Jason Bainbridge and Craig Norris, "Posthuman Drag: Understanding Cosplay as Social Networking in a Material Culture," *Intersections: Gender and Sexuality in Asia and the Pacific*, no. 32 (2013): http://intersections.anu.edu.au/issue32/bainbridge_norris.htm#n33; Joel Gn, "Queer Simulation: The Practice, Performance, and Pleasure of Cosplay," *Continuum: The Journal of Media and Cultural Studies* 25, no. 4 (2011): 583–593; Jen Gunnels, "'A Jedi Like My Father before Me': Social Identity and the New York Comic Con," *Transformative Works and Cultures*, no. 3 (2009), http://dx.doi.org/10.3983/twc.2009.0161; Nicolle Lamerichs, "Stranger Than Fiction: Fan Identity in Cosplay," *Transformative Works and Cultures*, no. 7 (2011), http://dx.doi.org/10.3983/twc.2011.0246; Frenchy Lunning, "Cosplay, Drag, and the Performance of Abjection," in *Mangatopia: Essays on Manga and Anime in the Modern World*, ed. Timothy Perper and Martha Cornog (Santa Barbara, CA: Libraries Unlimited, 2011), 71–88. For discussions of cosplay and convention culture, see Sushi Killer, "The Beginnings of CONsent," *16-Bit Sirens*, April 3, 2013, http://www.16bitsirens.com/consent/; Chaka Cumberbatch, "I'm a Black Female Cosplayer and Some People Hate It," *Xojane*, February 2013, http://www.xojane.com/issues/mad-back-cosplayer-chaka-cumberbatch.

2 Matt Hills, "As Seen on Screen? Mimetic SF Fandom and the Crafting of Replica(nt)s," *In Media Res*, September 10, 2010, http://mediacommons.futureofthebook.org/imr/2010/09/10/seen-screen-mimetic-sf-fandom-crafting-replicants.

as a transformative endeavor—one that has the capacity to deconstruct "the separation of supposedly female-centered transformational and male-centered affirmational fandoms."[3]

Cosplay, as a form of mimetic fan production popular with both men and women, would thus seem to present an ideal site for navigating ongoing, and distinctly gendered, anxieties surrounding the professionalization and monetization of fan labor. Although, as Hills suggests, mimetic fan practices might allow us to complicate many of the gendered binaries of contemporary fan studies, I contend that these gendered binaries around fannish professionalization not only persist but also are often used to reentrench the notion that male fans are more adept at professionalizing their labor and discursively discipline female fans who make similar efforts to monetize their mimetic fan works.[4] To revisit some of the core concerns of the 2009 "In Focus: Fandom and Feminism," I consider how the SyFy Channel's reality series *Heroes of Cosplay* (2013–) genders professionalization and material fan labor, and how fans have responded to those representations via the Tumblr *Heroes of Cosplay Confessions*.

Too often, labor is marked only when it aligns with the interests of capital. Compared to textual forms of fan production, cosplay is expensive, but it is precisely this expense (the purchasing of items such as fabrics, materials, and makeup), as well as the tactile nature of the product within material fan production, that allows it to be more culturally legible as a form of labor. This, coupled with the growing array of cosplay retailers online and burgeoning legal battles over licensing and the sale of fan crafts on sites like Etsy, creates a fertile space for revisiting and expanding on Abigail De Kosnik and Karen Hellekson's 2009 "In Focus" exchange surrounding the future of fandom's gift economy and the professionalization of fan fiction.[5] Hellekson, framing fandom's gift economy as a form of legal and social protection, argued that fandom constructs "a new, gendered space that relies on the circulation of gifts for its cohesion with no currency and little meaning outside the economy, and that deliberately repudiates a monetary model (because it is gendered male)."[6] De Kosnik countered with concerns that female fans might be "waiting too long to decide to profit from their innovative art form," contending that "women writing fanfic for free today risk institutionalizing a lack of compensation for all women that practice this art in the future."[7] I don't intend

3 Matt Hills, "From Dalek Half Balls to Daft Punk Helmets: Mimetic Fandom and the Crafting of Replicas," *Transformative Works and Cultures*, no. 16 (2014), http://dx.doi.org/10.3983/twc.2014.0531.

4 For a discussion of gender and fan professionalization, see Kristina Busse, "Geek Hierarchies, Boundary Policing, and the Gendering of the Good Fan," *Participations: Journal of Audience and Reception Studies* 10, no. 1 (May 2013): 73–91, http://www.participations.org/Volume%2010/Issue%201/6%20Busse%2010.1.pdf; Francesca Coppa, "Writing Bodies in Space: Media Fan Fiction as Theatrical Performance," in *Fan Fiction and Fan Communities in the Age of the Internet: New Essays*, ed. Karen Hellekson and Kristina Busse (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2006), 225–244.

5 One recent example is the wave of cease-and-desist letters sent to fan crafters creating and selling replicas of Jayne's knit cap from *Firefly* (Mutant Enemy / 20th Century Fox, 2003–2009). See Jill Pantozzi, "Updated: Are You a *Firefly* Fan Who Makes Jayne Hats? Watch Out, Fox Is Coming for You," *The Mary Sue*, April 9, 2013, http://www.themarysue.com/jayne-hats-fox/. For further discussion of issues around crafting and copyright, see Debora J. Halbert, "The Labor of Creativity: Women's Work, Quilting, and the Uncommodified Life," *Transformative Works and Cultures*, no. 3 (2009), http://dx.doi.org/10.3983/twc.2009.0041.

6 Karen Hellekson, "A Fannish Field of Value: Online Fan Gift Culture," *Cinema Journal* 48, no. 4 (2009): 116.

7 Abigail De Kosnik, "Should Fan Fiction Be Free?," *Cinema Journal* 48, no. 4 (2009): 120, 124.

to take sides in this ongoing debate but rather to expose an additional layer to Hellekson and De Kosnik's initial exchange. As both *Heroes of Cosplay* and submissions to the *Heroes of Cosplay Confessions* Tumblr reveal, the question isn't merely whether women should or should not professionalize their fan labor, but how professionalized female fans are received and scrutinized differently from their fanboy counterparts, who are rarely interrogated about their capacity to professionalize their labor.

Heroes of Cosplay follows a group of predominantly female cosplayers as they travel the fan convention circuit, entering competitions. Through the show's depiction of material fan labor, what ultimately materializes on *Heroes of Cosplay* is a gendered vision of fan participation that problematically assumes that all fans are driven by a desire to professionalize. Fan responses to *Heroes of Cosplay* reveal two key tensions around this assumption. First, there is a lingering discomfort surrounding the professionalization and monetization of fan labor and growing distrust within fan communities of what I have called the fantrepreneur, or one who openly leverages or strategically adopts a fannish identity for his or her own professional advancement.[8] The second core tension is the belief that this role of the fantrepreneur is one that women cannot, or should not, occupy. *Heroes of Cosplay* structurally suggests that "professional" is yet another identity performance for the female cosplayers featured on the show—the one character they can never fully embody. Thus, instead of offering a rare representational example of female fans choosing to professionalize their labor, *Heroes of Cosplay* formally undermines the female cast members' status as professionals in its subtle emphasis on the male support systems that surround them.

Despite the title of this article, which quotes one of the show's female competitors, it should be noted from the outset that cosplay *isn't* serious business for most of the fans who participate in it. The "play" component of the portmanteau *cosplay* is significant; it has overwhelmingly been the focus of scholarly analyses of cosplay. In hierarchically and repeatedly describing its subjects as cosplay "pros," "veterans," and "royalty," *Heroes of Cosplay* constructs an aspirational vision of cosplay that tends to ignore its ludic roots entirely, presenting cosplay as a strategic exercise in postfeminist self-branding rather than a form of identity play. The controversial injection of cash prizes into convention competitions featured on the show reinforces this skewed portrait of cosplay as driven by capital and competition rather than creativity or community.

Cosplay is an especially rich form of fan production in which to locate this analysis because material forms of fan production have historically been aligned with "boy culture."[9] Cosplay also brings to the fore conversations about the relationship between professionalization and technological proficiency, particularly because *Heroes of Cosplay* emphasizes fabrication techniques such as resin casting, plaster and latex molding, and LED components over the more tacitly "feminine" elements of cosplay construction,

8 Suzanne Scott, "Walking the Talk: Enunciative Fandom and Fan Studies' 'Industrial Turn,'" paper presented at the Society for Cinema and Media Studies conference, Seattle, March 19–23, 2014.

9 Bob Rehak, "Materializing Monsters: Aurora Models, Garage Kits, and the Object Practices of Horror Fandom," *Journal of Fandom Studies* 1, no. 1 (2013): 33.

like sewing, makeup application, and wig styling.[10] Thus, while Hills rightly frames mimetic fan production as mutually rooted in the "conventionally and problematically masculinized practices of craftwork as well as feminine handicrafts," shows such as *Heroes of Cosplay* offer a stark reminder of the lingering power of conventionally masculinized and feminized concepts of fan labor and of the ongoing need to be attentive to the devaluation and erasure of female fans' labor.[11]

Although most of the show's titular heroes are women with the technical skills and equipment to fabricate elaborate costumes and props, the show routinely constructs a narrative in which male friends and partners are presented as the unacknowledged technical brains and fabricating brawn behind their success. As one of the rare examples of fangirl representations on television, *Heroes of Cosplay* is significant because it aligns material fan production with masculine-coded values (e.g., competition, professionalization) and skills, and because it diegetically undermines the female heroes the show supposedly celebrates. The result is a vision of material fan labor that is always already masculine and that men are always already best equipped to perform. The scenes of fan labor featured on the show, and the centrality of men within those scenes, ultimately helps reify the presumed place of the female cosplayers on the show as objects of the male gaze.

Because *Heroes of Cosplay* has received widespread criticism from the cosplay community as a result of its representational bias toward competitive cosplayers, I focus on the moments in which *Heroes of Cosplay* subtly calls the professionalism of its female subjects into question and the gendered discourses around fan labor these scenes produce. For this, I draw on the Tumblr *Heroes of Cosplay Confessions*, which is modeled on *PostSecret*, the popular website to which people submit anonymous postcard confessions that combine image and text to reveal hidden or shameful truths. Because submissions to the *Heroes of Cosplay Confessions* Tumblr codify the gendered discourses around material fan labor that the show subtly provokes, I focus on the overwhelming number of confessions that focus on men as invisible or uncredited laborers. Figure 1 is typical of these confessions in both form and content: an image (typically highlighting the presence of men within scenes of material fan labor on the show) coupled with text confessing the viewer-fan's response to the show's depiction of this labor.[12]

Sarah Banet-Weiser has argued that "if self-branding is part of a 'project of the self,' then the conceptual crux of this project is feedback," and that the act of

10 The 2007 "Gender and Fan Studies" debate between Robert Jones and Louisa Stein on *machinima*, a male-dominated mode of fan production frequently used as a professional launching pad for jobs within the video game industry, is emblematic of the gendered stereotypes surrounding technological proficiency and fan professionalization. Responding to Jones's claim that "women have historically been denied access to these more advanced technologies based on cultural rhetorics that situate men as 'masters' of technology while women merely use them once user friendly interfaces have been developed," Stein suggested that the real issue is the systemic erasure of female fan labor and their early adoption and mastery of technologies to facilitate that labor. See Robert Jones and Louisa Stein, "Gender and Fan Studies (Round Two, Part One): Louisa Stein and Robert Jones," *Confessions of an Aca-Fan: The Official Weblog of Henry Jenkins*, June 6, 2007, http://henryjenkins.org/2007/06/gender_and_fan_studies_round_t.html.

11 Hills, "From Dalek Half Balls."

12 All submissions culled from the *Heroes of Cosplay Confessions* Tumblr are referenced by their image number; they can be accessed via the following URL: http://heroesofcosplayconfessions.tumblr.com/image/[referenced image number].

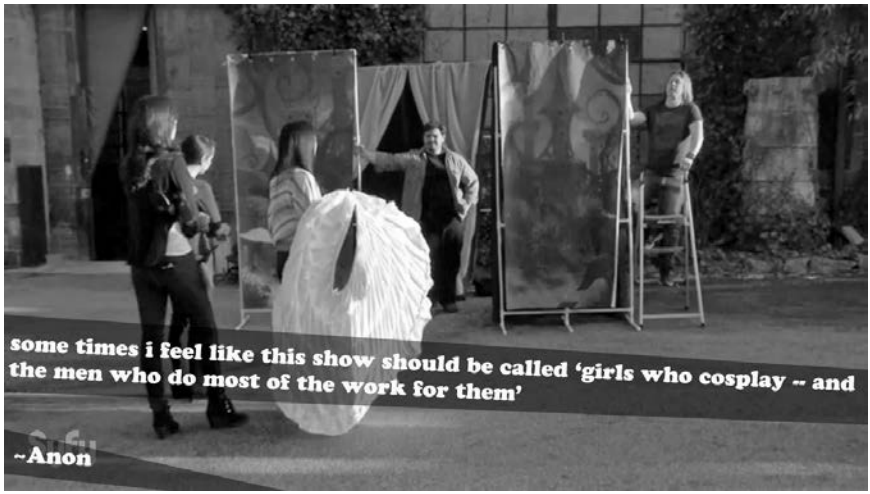


Figure 1. Fan submission to the *Heroes of Cosplay Confessions* Tumblr. Credit: Anonymous (http://heroesofcosplayconfessions.Tumblr.com/image/61472986292).

commenting frequently "reproduces normative identities and relations."[13] I contend that as a feedback platform for the show *Heroes of Cosplay*, the *Heroes of Cosplay Confessions* Tumblr discursively offers broader feedback on material fan labor and fan professionalization, reproducing a gendered normative conception of both. Contrary to Banet-Weiser's claim that within our contemporary brand culture the "authentic self and the commodity self not only is more blurred, but this blurring is more *expected and tolerated*," the submissions to the *Heroes of Cosplay Confessions* Tumblr suggest that within fan culture, professionalization is expected and tolerated only when it comes to male fans and masculine-gendered forms of fan production.[14]

Of the show's nine regular cast members, eight are women, and four had leveraged their cosplay into careers before being cast. One cast member, Yaya Han, is the show's self-proclaimed ambassador of cosplay and a frequent guest judge on the show. Nearly every episode features some new venture in Han's efforts to build her brand, from shooting a cosplay calendar to creating her own action figure. Holly Conrad and Jessica Merizan are the cofounders of Crabcat Industries, a creature and costume fabrication studio that has done work for Guillermo del Toro and is consistently cross-promoted on the show. Chloe Dykstra is confusingly depicted by the show as the cosplaying newbie, although she hosts the cosplay web show *Just Cos* on the Nerdist Channel. Even though these women had previously established themselves as pros before appearing on the show and are routinely seen crafting their own costumes, *Heroes of Cosplay Confessions* frequently features posts suggesting that their success is either the product of their ties to men or dependent on men's labor. For example, one confession makes a point of exposing Chloe's relationships with *Star Wars: Episode IV—A New*

13 Sarah Banet-Weiser, *Authentic: The Politics of Ambivalence in a Brand Culture* (New York: New York University Press, 2012), 87.

14 Ibid., 13.

Hope (George Lucas, 1977) visual effects artist John Dykstra (her father) and Nerdist fantrepreneur Chris Hardwick (her boyfriend), rhetorically inquiring whether it's "cheating" to solicit help from "THE MAN THAT DID STAR WARS."[15] Other confessions suggest that Yaya's fiancé, Brian Bowling, is responsible for the bulk of her costume production.[16] Both of these confessions repurpose images of men appearing briefly in the background of scenes, foregrounding the men's presence and labor.

The remaining four female and one male cast members all repeatedly and vocally frame their cosplay as part of a broader effort to break into the media industry as costumers, prop fabricators, character designers, and actors, and the show makes a point of showing them in meetings with industry professionals. Even though nearly half of the female cast members already make a living from their material fan production, recurring sequences in which female cosplayers' material labor is assessed by male professionals present an ongoing theme that female fans will always seek a degree of professionalism that they can never fully attain or appreciate. For example, in episode 2, cosplayer Riki LeCotey meets with Hollywood costume and prop designer Jose Fernandez for feedback on her portfolio. The scene's introductory voice-over establishes Jose as a professional authority ("if anyone is going to know if Riki has what it takes to turn pro") and concludes with him noting that if Riki wants to "take it to the next level, there's that last 10 [to] 15 percent" of labor and detail needed to attain professional status. Fan submissions to *Heroes of Cosplay Confessions* pointedly repurposed his comment to critique Riki's decision to use a spandex bodysuit, rather than red body paint, for her Hellgirl costume, featured later in the episode.[17]

If Riki's meeting with Jose was coded in confessions to suggest she is too "lazy" to professionalize, Monika Lee's internship interview at Blizzard Entertainment (where she currently works in licensing), featured in episode 4, provoked confessions suggesting that women don't fully appreciate these opportunities.[18] Selecting a slack-jawed freeze-frame of Lee, the confession's creator accusatorially remarks, "If I landed a meeting with a single Blizzard exec, I would have the decency to look interested and excited." Scenes such as these not only are popular origins for such so-called confessions but also go on to inform subsequent confessions that call into question the women's ability to professionalize. After Riki's stated objective of becoming a Hollywood prop maker in her meeting with Jose on the show, her subsequent costumes and appearances by her husband, Chris, were scrutinized. Although Chris rarely appears, these scenes have a tendency to call into question Riki's skills as a fabricator and by extension her capacity to become a professional prop maker. These brief scenes provide fodder for confessions that suggest Chris is "doing most of the actual work," and fixing fabrication issues "Riki's suppose [*sic*] to be good at," while they critique Riki for building her professional portfolio on Chris's uncredited labor.[19]

15 *Heroes of Cosplay Confessions*, image 60976592225.

16 Ibid., image 59365501933.

17 Ibid., image 59261108734.

18 Ibid., image 62166601952.

19 Ibid., images 59894169135 and 59640934140.

In the introduction to their 2014 *Transformative Works and Cultures* issue on fan labor, editors Mel Stanfill and Megan Condis suggest that a fundamental reason it is important to consider fan production is, first and foremost, simply to acknowledge it as labor. They state, "[C]alling this work 'work' opens up appreciation for the skills involved, much as with feminist insistence on care work as labor."[20] Although *Heroes of Cosplay* frequently shows the female cast members in a variety of traditionally feminine poses—hunched over sewing machines, shopping for elements of their costumes, applying makeup—*Heroes of Cosplay* gender-swaps or "crossplays" this notion of women's work.[21] Within the show's diegesis, men are portrayed as the invisible laborers, their work confined to the domestic spaces of sewing rooms and garages. Their female partners ultimately claim the public sphere for their own through the culminating performance at the fan convention in each episode, often obscuring the care work and craftsmanship of their male collaborators during judging. Fans have even conspiratorially analyzed the show's costume construction sequences to suggest that Jesse Lagers, the only male cast member featured on the first season of the show, has covertly fabricated props for his female cast mates, reinforcing this narrative of invisible male labor.[22]

The irony, of course, is that this women's work is visible and valorized precisely because men are performing it. The fact that none of these men are featured in the show's opening credits yet play integral roles in the fabrication sequences provokes fan readings of their labor as invisible or uncompensated, but it also reveals the gendered hypocrisy of these responses. In some cases, like Lance Moose (the friend and roommate of cast member Becky Young), the fact this work is interpreted as a labor of love, motivated by an unrequited infatuation, is a frequent subject of conversation seemingly (and simply) because a man is performing it. Confessions alternatively reveal that they initially assumed that Lance was Becky's boyfriend, express concern that Lance has been "friendzoned" by Becky, or criticize her for exploiting his feelings for her.[23] Because these readings frame Becky as domineering, Lance tends to be feminized in these fan confessions, forced to "do all the bitch work," noting his containment to the con equivalent of the kitchen, the hotel room, remarking on his nail polish, and so on.[24] In most cases, though, these fan confessions are quick to rhetorically frame the care work provided by male partners as the product of abusive relationships, expressing shock when female cast members "thanklessly boss around their doting man-slaves" or justifying their cuckolded status as sexually motivated ("I'd take the abuse to marry those legs").[25]

Jinyo, a fan favorite character, is routinely painted as the show's only true hero of cosplay, and images of him working on Victoria's costumes are used to accompany

20 Mel Stanfill and Megan Condis, "Fandom and/as Labor," *Transformative Works and Cultures*, no. 15 (2014), http://dx.doi.org/10.3983/twc.2014.0593.

21 *Crossplay* refers to a type of cosplay in which one dresses up as a character of a different sex. Women dressing as, or crossplaying, male characters is more common.

22 *Heroes of Cosplay Confessions*, image 61154145478.

23 Ibid., images 62344864531, 61252177118, and 61521574245.

24 Ibid., images 59788234289 and 61420552067.

25 Ibid., images 60785510814, 61772103735, 61348006203, 61521574245, and 61908854532.

confessions about how the show has inspired fans to learn to sew or cosplay.[26] Jinyo's fiancée, Victoria, more than any of the other female cosplayers featured on the show, is presented as unskilled, unprofessional, and ungrateful. The show suggests that it's not that Jinyo's labor is alienated, in the Marxist sense, but rather that Victoria actively attempts to alienate him from his labor, particularly during competition judging. Episode 2, in which Jinyo is depicted designing and doing the bulk of the construction on Victoria's *Tron* (Steve Lisberger, 1982) dress for Emerald City Comic-Con, is typical of the pair's representation on the show—and why confessions involving Victoria tend to elide her contributions to her cosplay entirely.[27] Prefaced by a recap from the prior episode, in which Victoria failed to complete her costume in time ("I really need Jinyo here, I can't do this without him," she notes in a voice-over), the couple's episode arc begins with scenes in which we see Jinyo sketching Victoria's costume and walking her through the design elements, interspersed with taped confessionals of Victoria describing the dress as "easily the most intricate thing I've made." The subsequent fabrication scenes open with the show's voice-over noting that "Victoria has Jinyo hard at work," coupled with briefly inserted images of Victoria sewing and draping fabric as Jinyo labors on the complex wiring for her dress and modifies a pair of platform heels with LEDs. Although Victoria acknowledges in her confessional that Jinyo's role in the dress's fabrication "is huge," she flounders when asked by the judges about what percentage of the costume she made without help. After an uncomfortable reaction shot of Jinyo sitting in the audience, Victoria dodges the question. These moments, and others in which Victoria is shown verbally berating Jinyo ("I don't know whether to, like, yell at you, or hit you"), inevitably lead to fan confessions that inquire why Victoria, and not Jinyo, is featured in the show's opening credits.[28]

In *Heroes of Cosplay*, female fans' desire to professionalize their material labor practices is simultaneously valorized and contained, presented as aspirational and yet impossible without some form of masculine intervention. Scholars working on cosplay routinely draw on Judith Butler's theories of gender performativity and drag to consider how the mimetic qualities of cosplay as a form of fan expression might help us better understand how fan identities are constituted.[29] *Heroes of Cosplay,* I suggest, paints its female stars as failing in their own drag performances as professional fans (a category that is always already male). Much like Butler's suggestion that drag is, at its best, "a site of certain ambivalence" that might be "used in the service of both the denaturalization and reidealization of hyperbolic heterosexual gender norms," the sort of allegorical drag I'm constructing here to discuss the show's presentation of female cosplayers offers a sort of subversive potential in its focus on female fans professionalizing their labor even as it reconfirms the inherent masculinity of material fan labor and the ability to professionalize that labor.[30]

26 Ibid., images 60906991084, 61430240912, and 62105560986.

27 Ibid., images 59128115533, 60693308395, and 60865940458.

28 Ibid., images 59797134009 and 61800819070.

29 See Lamerichs, "Stranger Than Fiction"; Lunning, "Cosplay, Drag"; Bainbridge and Norris, "Posthuman Drag."

30 Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 125.

Just as fan scholars have found it productive to consider cosplay a form of identity performance through scholarly work on drag, we might consider analyzing emergent representations and performances of fan professionalization through Judith (Jack) Halberstam's work on drag kings. Halberstam, in discussing the difference between a consideration of female and male impersonators, notes that "white men derive enormous power from assuming and confirming the nonperformative nature of masculinity" because "if masculinity adheres 'naturally' and inevitably to men, then masculinity cannot be impersonated."[31] The result, and one that plays out clearly within both the diegesis and fan responses to *Heroes of Cosplay*, is that "all performed masculinities stand out as suspect and open to interrogation," and that the notion of a professional female fan continues to be considered a space for scrutiny rather than celebration.[32] *

31 Judith Halberstam, *Female Masculinity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1998), 235.

32 Ibid.

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