STATES OF FANDOM:
COMMUNITY, CONSTITUENCY, PUBLIC SPHERE

A Dissertation
Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School
of Cornell University
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
by
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January 2017

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Cornell University 2017

Approaching grassroots fan communities as political constituencies, this dissertation traces the historical development of self-organized fan groups from the 1930s to the present, focusing specifically on conceptions of community, the negotiation of public discourse, processes of decision-making, and fannish engagement with social and political issues. While fan studies scholarship previously has emphasized the relationship between text and fan, this study thus steers attention towards the relationships between fans themselves and articulates the interrelations between fan activism, transformative fan practices, and the discursive conditions within fandom. On the basis of archival and online-ethnographic research, the dissertation investigates crucial controversies in the Western literary science-fiction and fantasy community from the 1930s to the 1980s as well as in contemporary online transformative fandom to show how historical context, the demographic makeup of the fandom, fans' use of communication technologies, and their self-conception as community influence the negotiation and resolution of internal conflicts. Drawing on different theories of community formation and the public sphere, the first chapter of the study proposes that pre-internet literary science-fiction fandom was dominated by a communitarian ideal that regulated in-/exclusion by prioritizing the community over its individual members. In contrast, transformative online fandom promotes the ideal of a non-hierarchical, inclusionary, unregulated alternative public sphere, in which the ethical principles of consensus-building have to be constantly re-negotiated. As the following chapters show, this constellation has facilitated the increasing fan-organized political and social activism in the past decade which goes beyond

resistant practices of reception and consumerism: from *Glee* fans supporting LGBT rights to the appropriation of images and symbols from *The Hunger Games* by political activists around the globe. The dissertation further shows how the industry attempts to control, appropriate, and incorporate resistant audience behavior and transformative fannish practices through the proliferation of transmedia storytelling and marketing strategies in contemporary entertainment franchises, thus threatening fans' attempts at meaningful action. At the same time, these marketing strategies, meant to ensure consumer loyalty by encouraging audience participation, not only appropriate fan practices and consumer-generated content but can inadvertently also facilitate fan-organized activism.

Biographical Sketch

Hannah Mueller, the author of this dissertation, graduated with an M.A. in German Literature, Art and Media Studies, and Philosophy from Konstanz University in 2004. In the following years, she worked as a managing editor for UVK Verlagsgesellschaft, an academic publishing house in Germany, before returning to her own research in a graduate program at Cornell University, where she completed her M.A. in German Studies (minor fields Film Studies and Feminist, Gender, and Sexuality Studies) in 2013. She has taught classes in German language, Academic Writing, Science Fiction, and Participatory Culture at Cornell University and Auburn Correctional Facility, and served at both institutions as a teaching assistant for courses on Feminist Theory, Film, Television, and Native-American Literature. At Cornell, she has organized conferences on the idea of contemporaneity, seriality as narrative concept, and the prison in performance and media. She has published articles on the dangers of 'queerbaiting' in Guy Ritchie's *Sherlock Holmes* film adaptations (2015), same-sex romance and non-traditional masculinity in the theatrical films *Hoje Eu Quero Voltar Sozinho* and *Do Começo ao Fim* (2015), class and gender in the Czech/East-German cult film *Tři oříšky pro Popelku/Drei Haselnüsse für Aschenbrödel* (2016), the gendered representation of nudity in contemporary US quality TV (2017), and male nudity and violence in Starz' *Spartacus* (2017).

Acknowledgments

Many people and institutions have contributed to the completion of this dissertation in different ways. My work would not have been possible without their support, and I am deeply grateful to them.

First of all, I would like to thank the members of my dissertation advisory committee at Cornell University, Professors Elke Siegel, Jane Juffer, Sabine Haenni, and Geoffrey Waite, to whom I owe so much not only for their invaluable advice and expertise, but also for their continuous belief in my project and my work, and their unwavering support of my academic and professional decisions over the past six years.

At Cornell University, I am indebted also to the Department of German Studies, the Program of Feminist, Gender, and Sexuality Studies, the American Studies Program, the Department of Performing and Media Arts, the John S. Knight Institute for Writing in the Disciplines, and the Society for the Humanities for providing necessary funding and financial resources for my work. Many thanks go to *Science Fiction Studies* for the R.D. Mullen Research Fellowship, as well as Professors Sherryl Vint and Nalo Hopkinson in the Speculative Fiction and Cultures of Science Program, and the staff of the Eaton Collection at UC Riverside. My gratitude also belongs to the staff of the Fandom-Related Collections at University of Iowa, in particular Peter Balestrieri; and to the staff at the Rare and Manuscript Collections at Cornell University.

There are many others I am grateful to: the faculty and staff members at Cornell University who have supported me in different ways, in particular Professor Paul Fleming and Miriam Zubal in the Department of German Studies; all those who have become valued colleagues and dear friends alike – in particular my graduate cohort Nathan Taylor, Anna Horakova, and Matteo Calla, for making me feel like I wasn't going through it alone; the members of the Popular Culture

Reading Group and the Popular Culture Dissertation Writing Group, especially Jane Glaubman, Seth Soulstein, Leigh York, Lee Tyson, Aya Saiki, and Anaar Desai-Stephens, who share my belief in the academic and societal relevance of all things pop culture; also Carolyne Strain, Eliza Allen, Diana Hamilton, Lena Krian, and Frances Fairbain, for having my back when I needed it. Last but not least, many thanks go also to my family and all the old and new friends, near and far, for the big and the small things that make life and work worthwhile. This is for Phil, for trusting me, and for the little monster, who helped me finish this dissertation in his very own way.

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Introduction

When workers in the US fast-food industry took to the streets of New York City in the fall of 2014 to protest against poor working conditions, they were backed up by unexpected allies: Fans of the young adult fantasy trilogy *The Hunger Games* had rallied to support the workers' fight for fair wages. Pictures of the protest circulating on social media platforms like facebook and twitter showed fans and workers side by side, raising their hands in the three-finger salute that rebels in *The Hunger Games* use as a gesture of resistance against the government.[1]

In early 2016, during the primaries for the US presidential election, Democratic candidate Bernie Sanders' twitter account shared the picture of a young woman holding up a sign that compared Sanders to the Mockingjay, the symbol of revolution in *The Hunger Games*' oppressed nation of Panem. The photograph was accompanied by the caption: "Casey knows a political revolution when she sees one. She Voted Early in Wisconsin!"[2]

Both events, in which young fans of a popular entertainment franchise became active to support a political cause, are merely two examples of a recent trend that has seen fans increasingly entering public discourse as advocates for social and political issues: *Hunger Games* fans advocate for social and environmental justice, *Glee* fans speak up in favor of LGBT rights, and *Harry Potter* fans convince entertainment giant *Warner Brothers* to use fair-trade products for their merchandise.[3] These developments seem to contradict the often-repeated complaints about generations of

[1] Reeves Wiedeman, "#Activism," *The New Yorker*, December 22, 2014, http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2014/12/22/activism.

[2] People for Bernie, "Casey Knows a Political Revolution When She Sees One. She Voted Early in Wisconsin! #FeelTheBern," *Twitter*, April 3, 2016, https://twitter.com/People4Bernie/status/716731172223590401/photo/1. With thanks to Jane Glaubman for pointing out this tweet.

[3] Alyssa Rosenberg, "How 'Harry Potter' Fans Won a Four-Year Fight against Child Slavery," *The Washington Post*, January 13, 2015, http://www.washingtonpost.com/news/act-four/wp/2015/01/13/how-harry-potter-fans-won-a-four-year-fight-against-child-slavery/.

millennials and post-millennials and their presumed indifference towards political and social concerns. Instead, they seem to imply that younger generations are certainly willing and ready to put effort into the fight for social change, even if their agendas and strategies diverge from the approaches that have been associated traditionally with the political sphere. First, they look for inspiration not (only) to political manifests, to critical theory, or to established party candidates, but instead to the texts, objects, and symbols of mass-produced popular culture. Second, while some of them are certainly ready to hold up signs in the streets, they also are at home in the communication and distribution networks of the 21st century, and put their advanced media literacy to good use when they spread information and connect with others by relying on the (online) networks and communities they have built throughout their engagement in fandom.

Yet, a mere six months after young Casey had proudly raised her sign that called for revolutionary change with reference to a young adult fantasy novel, the political developments of 2016 might raise the question of whether the movements and discourses I describe in this dissertation – complex, but tentatively hopeful examples of political discourse, community work, and civic engagement emerging from within fan organizations – have proven to be pointless, because they have ultimately failed to achieve what their actors were hoping for: a greater diversity of voices in the public sphere and, ultimately, a more just and equal world.

Two weeks before I completed this dissertation, populist Republican candidate Donald Trump won the electoral vote in the United States presidential election. As shocking as this development was to many, in other ways it was also unsurprising: Trump's victory came at the end of a year in which the people of the UK had decided, in a referendum known as Brexit, to leave the European

Union, and in which a right-wing populist candidate only narrowly failed to become the next Austrian Federal President – to name only three examples of the noticeable rise of right-wing populism across the western world.

While it is certainly too early to tell how history will judge the political events of 2016 in the western hemisphere, many commentators and analysts seem to agree that one significant contributing factor has been the wide-spread dissatisfaction with the current state of established political institutions, among groups like the traditional working class, the younger generation, and other segments of the population in many industrialized countries. This dissatisfaction, so the argument goes, has led to a rallying around populist candidates on the right, and to a refusal to vote for moderate candidates, or a refusal to vote altogether, on the left. Consequently, much of the public resistance to Trump's win in the United States has also played out, purposefully and demonstratively, not through official political channels, but rather through protests, declarations of solidarity, and networking campaigns, both in the streets and on social media.

In the context of this political climate, then, I argue that studying the groups, discussions, and movements I write about in this dissertation has not become obsolete, in fact, it is now more relevant than ever. These initiatives and discourses are important not because they offer a perfect solution for the enormous problems of the global political landscape of the present, but because they mirror the turn away from traditionally political spaces and towards forms of discourse and engagement that remain outside conventional coalitions and party politics: including science-fiction fans coming together on online platforms to analyze the role of race and racism in speculative fiction (chapter 2), fans of the young adult fantasy trilogy *The Hunger Games* rallying to support workers in the fast-food industry in their protests for fair wages (chapter 4), and fans of the television show *Glee* organizing panel discussions and charity auctions to raise awareness for LGBT

rights (chapter 3). In fact, the organizations and communities that have given rise to these different actions are so far removed from what is traditionally considered the political sphere that one might easily question whether they can be called 'political' at all.

In particular fans' inevitable complicity with the capitalist structures of the entertainment industry as consumers might cause some to automatically dismiss their legitimacy as political actors. However, their obvious, perhaps even blatant entanglement in the system fans are seeking to change is precisely what makes these examples particularly fruitful as objects of analysis for a study of alternative activism.[4] The initiators of fan-organized activism are generally very aware of the ideological 'messiness', for lack of a better word, that shapes and affects the spaces they attempt to navigate. They are for the most part conscious of their complicity in the apparatus of the entertainment industry but nevertheless strive to carve out spaces within that system that allow for moments of resistance and critique. This is not to say that this form of internal resistance is unproblematic, or that it can or should replace a more radical politics, but rather that the examples discussed in this dissertation can serve as a poignant reminder of the restrictions and limitations that the pursuit of any alternative political agenda will face, provided its proponents are not too invested in an ideal of political purism for it to be anything but theoretical. Even movements and spaces often considered 'autonomous' or 'independent' have to negotiate their position within larger economic and political systems. In the academy, the production of critical theory itself takes place within the constraints of an education industry, in particular within the privatized education system in the United States. And in the aftermath of the US elections, protesters' and activists'

[4] This is true in particular at a time when 'actual politics' are increasingly looking at social media to spread information and sustain (voter) loyalty, and when the supporters of political figures or movements exhibit behavior that is distinctly similar to that of fans.

reliance on the online platform facebook for purposes of organization, networking, and declarations of solidarity has to remain uncomfortably at odds with their awareness of the strategies the social networking giant employs to steer, select, and censor flows of information.

The latter example in particular demonstrates not only the significance of acknowledging and analyzing these almost inescapable structures of complicity but also the relevance of building and strengthening alternative media networks and communication channels for social and political movements. In this regard, the organizational structures of fan communities can provide insight into the development and maintenance of alternative networking strategies that transgress spatial distance, national borders and language differences, and consider online spaces as inseparable from offline realities. While many contemporary grassroots movements employ a combination of online networking, face-to-face negotiations, and public appearances in order to connect, organize, and gain visibility, fan organizations have long been used to switching between different spaces and channels – online and offline, written and oral – to sustain their communities across distances and borders. Fans have worked to build these networks of communication since the early days of literary science-fiction fandom in the 1920s (chapter 1); and throughout the entire 20th and early 21st century, they have always been quick to appropriate new technologies of communication, publication, and distribution to further grow and solidify those networks. In order to negotiate their inevitable entanglement in the entertainment industry's structure through their role as consumers, to stay under the radar, or to keep technology both accessible and affordable to the members of their communities, fans have often consciously worked to build networks and platforms of communication with as little reliance on corporate providers as possible, from the amateur presses of early science-fiction fandom to the independent non-profit online archives of contemporary trans-

formative fandom. In the context of fan-organized activism, these networks gain a renewed significance, since alternative media are not "merely oriented towards the creation of content and infrastructures," but "inherently political. Indeed, these media create spaces that oppose the dominant cultures in a direct manner, and, hence, challenge mainstream and mass media power that have the monopoly over the naming of realities."[5]

This dissertation is not the first analysis of fan-organized activism within media studies. Scholars in media and fan studies, who have worked since the early 1990s to show that there is more to fan communities than the stereotypical images of the lonely science-fiction nerd and the masses of screaming fan girls,[6] quickly began to notice the apparent proliferation of fan-organized sociopolitical activism since the beginning of the 21st century, which seemed to confirm earlier arguments about the resistant potential of fan organizations. While fan studies in the early days had focused to a large extent on the secretive creative fan practices in female-dominated so-called media fandom, like the appropriation and modification of copyrighted materials or the production of transformative fanworks, within the last decade fan scholars have become increasingly interested in the ways fans have started to appear as public actors who are not only concerned with the fate of their favorite television character, but also with issues of general societal relevance – from gender equality to poverty to environmental issues. Scholars like Tanya Cochran, Ashley Hinck, Henry Jenkins, Neta Kligler-Vilenchik, and Sangita Shresthova have published studies of different cases of fan-organized activism and shown in detail how specific fictional texts (television shows,

[5] Donatella della Porta and Alice Mattoni, "Cultures of Participation in Social Movements," in *The Participatory Cultures Handbook*, ed. Aaron Delwiche and Jennifer Henderson (New York: Routledge, 2013), 176.

[6] For early seminal texts on fan culture, see for example: Camille Bacon-Smith, *Enterprising Women: Television Fandom and the Creation of Popular Myth* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1992); Miriam Hansen, *Babel and Babylon: Spectatorship in American Silent Film* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991); Damon Knight, *The Futurians* (New York: John Day, 1977); Lisa A. Lewis, ed., *The Adoring Audience: Fan Culture and Popular Media* (London; New York: Routledge, 1992); Constance Penley, *Nasa/Trek. Popular Science and Sex in America* (London/New York: Verso, 1997); Jackie Stacey, *Star Gazing: Hollywood Cinema and Female Spectatorship* (London/New York: Routledge, 1994).

theatrical films, serial novels) seem to be able to inspire civic engagement, in particular in young people who may not have been interested in politics before.[7]

This dissertation departs from their work in two significant ways: First, it adds a historical perspective to the issue of civic engagement in fan communities. Much of the scholarship on fan activism has discussed it as a fairly new phenomenon that has emerged over the past 15 years, since the end of the 20th century, alongside the rise of online participatory culture. In contrast, I am interested in tracing the development of political discourse and civic engagement in fan communities back to the early 20th century. While the first chapter is most obviously a historical study in its focus on early 20th-century science-fiction fandom, each chapter tracks the historical development of the different discourses, practices, and movements I analyze and discuss. I show that fans' turn towards alternative forms of sociopolitical activism did not come out of nowhere and did not begin only with the migration of fan communities to the internet, but is in fact the result of a long history of fan organizations thinking of themselves as constituencies and communities. At the same time, this historical approach aims to problematize the oftentimes universalizing assumptions about fan culture, and to show the specificity of the respective phenomena at the focus of each chapter. I show that fannish formations not only differ in regard to their objects of interest, but also significantly in the ways they conceive of themselves as communities, which in turn affects how they think of their own role as actors in the public sphere.

[7] See for example: Lucy Bennett, "Fan Activism for Social Mobilization: A Critical Review of the Literature"; Tanya R. Cochran, "'Past the Brink of Tacit Support': Fan Activism and the Whedonverses'"; Ashley Hinck, "Theorizing a Public Engagement Keystone: Seeing Fandom's Integral Connection to Civic Engagement through the Case of the Harry Potter Alliance"; Neta Kligler-Vilenchik et al., "Experiencing Fan Activism: Understanding the Power of Fan Activist Organizations through Members' Narratives", all in: *Transformative Works and Cultures,* Special issue: Transformative Works and Fan Activism, ed. Henry Jenkins and Sangita Shresthova, no. 10 (2012), http://journal.transformativeworks.org/index.php/twc/issue/view/12; also Neta Kligler-Vilenchik, "'Decreasing World Suck': Harnessing Popular Culture for Fan Activism," In *By Any Media Necessary,* ed. Henry Jenkins et al. (New York: New York University Press, 2016), 102-148.

Consequently, then, my dissertation also aims to direct the attention away from the relationship between text and fan which has been the primary focus of fan studies scholarship, and steer it towards the relationships *between fans*, that is, their conception of community, their negotiation of public discourse, their processes of decision-making, and their engagement with social and political issues. According to Liesbet van Zoonen, this work on community maintenance is precisely what fan communities have in common with political constituencies. She proposes that "fan groups and political constituencies resemble each other when it comes to the endeavors that make one part of the community" and that "both rest on emotional investments that are intrinsically linked to rationality and lead to 'affective intelligence.'"[8] This dissertation explicitly approaches grassroots fan communities *as* political constituencies in order to articulate the interrelations between fan activism, fan practices, and the discursive conditions within fandom. As we will see throughout the chapters of this dissertation, many fans conceive of their fannish identity as one that is at its core political. They think of their fan organizations in ways that are often remarkably similar to the discourses of civil political formations, an understanding that is not only revealed in the way they negotiate interactions within their group, but also manifests in outward-directed actions, like boycotts, awareness-raising campaigns, public protests, and fundraising events.

Methodologically, this dissertation combines a critical focus on the production, representation, and consumption of cultural texts and is thus firmly situated within the tradition of cultural studies. To some degree the material itself lends itself to this specific approach: in the phenomena that will be considered in the following chapters, the levels of production, representation, and re-

[8] Liesbet van Zoonen, Entertaining the Citizen: When Politics and Popular Culture Converge (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2005), 53.

ception are often so closely entwined that it seems almost impossible – and certainly counterproductive – to study them independently from each other. In fact, it will become apparent that in many cases it is difficult to determine under which of these categories a certain cultural practice should be considered. Consequently, while my dissertation employs methods of textual analysis, my understanding of 'text' is a very broad one that encompasses a wide range of cultural production, including mass-produced entertainment, works created by individual authors, derivative texts like fanworks, but also advertising and marketing, activist campaigns, and public discourses. The inclusion of advertising and marketing strategies within this broad definition of text also correlates with an investment in what Timothy Havens et al. call "critical media industry studies:"[9] while this work is concerned with industrial processes, it focuses less on a general theory of political economy and more on empirical micro-level processes in the media and entertainment industry.

This way of applying textual analysis to a broad spectrum of materials has two significant consequences: First, my approach does not simply erase the category of 'identity' – in fact, questions of race, class, gender, and sexuality will repeatedly be brought up throughout the chapters – but it allows for a focus on the cultural and social practices that generate *discourses of identity* instead of relying on an understanding of identity as fixed and defining notion of the self. For that reason, archival and online-ethnographic research undertaken for this dissertation engages with issues of identity primarily within the context of communicative and discursive practices and purposefully does not rely on demographic data regarding the members of communities considered in this work. Second, the interest in cultural practices, which replaces a more narrow and separate focus on the production, representation, and consumption of texts respectively, makes it possible

[9] Timothy Havens et al., "Critical Media Industry Studies: A Research Approach," *Communication, Culture & Critique,* no. 2.2 (2009): 234-253.

to better capture the complex and shifting flows between the discourses and practices surrounding popular culture, alternative media, online communication platforms, marketing campaigns, institutional politics, grassroots activism, and interpersonal relationships that shape and in return are shaped by the practices and self-understandings of fan communities.

In the first part of my dissertation, I investigate conceptions of community and public discourse within fan communities on the basis of archival and online-ethnographic research through the lens of theories of community formation and the public sphere. In the first chapter, **"'Preserving harmony in all the fan field': The Great Exclusion, the Breen Boondoggle, and the Debate over Community"**, I discuss literary science-fiction and fantasy fandom in the early/mid-20th century against the backdrop of a critique of theories of community. Based on the study of archival materials like fanzines, amateur press publications and convention materials from the 1930s to 1980s, the chapter analyzes two events that drastically divided the fan community into different camps at the time of their occurrence: the 'Great Exclusion Act' of 1939, in which the conservative fraction of the fan community on the North-American East Coast barred a group of socialist-leaning fans from attending the World Science Fiction Convention in New York; and the 'Second Great Exclusion' (also called 'The Breen Boondoggle') of 1964, during which Marion Zimmer Bradley's husband Walter Breen, a well-connected member of the fan community, was excluded from Pacificon II in Oakland because he was known for molesting children in fannish circles. I use these two controversies to discuss how science-fiction fandom at the time saw itself as community and political constituency, how public discourse functioned within the community, and how decisions were made regarding the in- or exclusion of entire groups or individual members. I argue that this male-dominated and highly educated fan group maintained a communitarian notion of community in which exclusion was based on how much the controversy affected the balance of

the community, not on the risk it posed to individual members. This dominant notion of community also provides an explanation for the fan community's overall negative reaction to the emergence of 'radical' feminist thought among female fans and writers in the 1970s, ultimately leading to a splintering between traditional science-fiction fandom and a new community of feminist writers and media fans which over the decades developed into what is now known as 'transformative online fandom.'

This fan group is at the focus of the second chapter, "**From Secretive Subculture to Alternative Public Sphere: Journal-Based Fandom and Political Discourse**," which discusses the community of transformative online fandom as an alternative public sphere. Against the backdrop of theories about online spaces and the public sphere, I analyze the characteristic forms of communication and social-justice related discourse that emerged from within online transformative fandom. I use yet another inner-fannish dispute to show how the discursive practices of transformative online fandom significantly diverge from those of the literary science-fiction community. In the wide-spread and long-winding online debate generally known as 'RaceFail '09,' writers and fans of both the traditional science-fiction community and transformative online fandom clashed violently in what has perhaps been the most extensive discussion about race and racism in science-fiction culture to this day. Because the internet allowed these different groups to directly interact with each other on social media platforms like Livejournal and Dreamwidth, this debate not only highlighted their different positions regarding inclusivity, discursive rules, the relationship between public and private, the role of fiction, and the relationship between author, reader, and text, but also demonstrated the possibilities of the internet for the emergence of new forms of public discourse.

As I discuss in the second part of the book, the emergence of this configuration at the turn of the 21st century has facilitated the increasing fan-organized political and social activism of the last decade. In chapters 3 to 5, I show how the transition from fan to social activist has been made possible, on the one hand, by contemporary online fandom's concept of fannish identity, the community's rules of discourse, and its use of social media platforms. I show how the respective fans conceive of themselves as social or political activists with an agenda that is influenced both by their identity as members of transformative fandom, and by their identification with specific fictional texts. On the other hand, I also pay considerable attention to the proliferation of transmedia storytelling and marketing strategies in contemporary entertainment franchises, to show how fans' attempts at meaningful action are continuously threatened by the industry's attempts to control, appropriate, and incorporate resistant audience behavior and transformative fannish practices. At the same time, I demonstrate that these marketing strategies, meant to ensure audience loyalty by encouraging audience participation, not only appropriate fan practices and consumer-generated content but can also inadvertently facilitate fan-organized activism.

In chapter 3, **"'A Loser Like Me:' A community of outsiders, fan activism and transmedia marketing in *Glee* fandom",** I show how the politicized discourse emerging from online transformative fandom interrelates with fans' investment in specific fictional texts and subsequently translates into forms of fan-organized sociopolitical activism. Focusing on the high school dramedy series *Glee,* my case study analyzes why and how *Glee* fans become concerned with LGBT rights activism. The chapter shows that fans are inspired by what they consider the essential ethical message of the fictional text but also by a transmedia marketing campaign that creates the illusion of a sphere in which diegetic and extra-diegetic reality overlap, thus instilling in fans a

sense of agency. However, the chapter also points towards the perpetual tension between the resistant potential stemming from fans' critical engagement with the text, and the ways in which fannish practices are appropriated by entertainment companies striving to contain their resistant aspects. Chapter 4, "**We Are The Districts: Fans' Reactions to Lionsgate's Hunger Games Marketing Campaign",** further problematizes the relationship between the entertainment industry and fans engaged in sociopolitical activism. The chapter studies Lionsgate's controversial viral transmedia marketing campaign for the *Hunger Games* movies, which relied heavily on fannish online platforms and practices, but focused on the glamourous world of the Capitol, thus seemingly neglecting and disavowing the critical message of the text. I analyze fans' differing reactions to the marketing campaign and show that their opinion of the campaign heavily depends on their initial reception of the text itself: Fans who disliked the campaign showed themselves concerned with issues of social inequality and considered the original texts a call for action; by contrast, other fans saw the novels as an absolution from social responsibility and embraced the marketing campaign because it supported their personal reading of the text. At the same time, this chapter also uses the *Hunger Games* as an example to discuss how certain fictional texts acquire the potential to become icons of political resistance beyond the narrow context of their fan communities. I show how a number of symbols from the *Hunger Games* novels and movie adaptations have been used by political activists around the globe in order to make their political agenda – including anti-fracking activism, protests against police violence or the government, and the fight for fair wages – more relatable to a wider audience.

Finally, chapter 5, "**A Questionable Bromance: Queer Subtext, Fan Service and the Dangers of Queerbaiting in Guy Ritchie's *Sherlock Holmes* and *A Game of Shadows*"**, provides a specific example of how the entertainment industry has increasingly picked up on fans' investment

in social justice issues and appropriated their interests by making them part of a marketing strategy to attract certain audiences. The chapter demonstrates how Guy Ritchie's *Sherlock Holmes* movie adaptations employ a strategy that fans call 'queerbaiting,' which is specifically used to attract LGBT and female fan audiences who might otherwise not automatically be considered target audiences for the films. By toying with the implication that Sherlock Holmes and John Watson might be romantically involved, the films seemingly give their fans what they want to see; at the same time, this kind of purposeful subtext forecloses any chance of actual queer representation, so as not to offend audiences who might not be comfortable with the idea, and additionally contains resistant fan practices by appropriating them and incorporating them into the text itself. Rather than making the relationship between producers and consumers more harmonious, this kind of audience baiting ultimately increases the tension between the producers and fans.

My dissertation thus demonstrates the inevitable entanglements of 21st-century fannish activism with capitalism, but also the potential for resistance found in social formations rallying around cultural texts. Tracing the self-conceptions, communication technologies, and discursive practices of fan groups throughout the 20th century, it ultimately aims to show the significant role fan groups play as political and social actors on today's global cultural stage. Whether one ultimately embraces or rejects fans' particular approach to civic engagement, to ignore this potential for further political activism would under the current circumstances be inadvisable. Instead, a further analysis of similar initiatives might consider the ways in which fan-organized activism can connect with other forms of social and political resistance in the continuing struggle for change.

I. "Preserving harmony in all the fan field":

The Great Exclusion, the Breen Boondoggle, and the Debate over Community

Introduction

> "It never fails to amaze me that people regard fandom as an entity, something to be cherished, protected and prolonged at all cost." (Gregg Calkins, February 1965)[1]

When Gregg Calkins voiced this statement about science-fiction fandom in his contribution to a Fantasy Amateur Press Association (FAPA) mailing in early 1965, it wasn't an unprompted observation, but rather a reaction to the situation that had kept large parts of the North American science-fiction community in uproar for the previous year. The controversy had initially erupted over the Pacificon II[2] organizing committee's decision to ban a fan known for his history of child abuse from the convention in 1964, but the subsequent discussion extended far beyond the question of whether the committee had been right in stopping this particular fan from attending the convention. Instead, the conversation turned towards questions such as what should be seen as the most democratic form of organization for a fan community, who should have the right to make decisions for fandom in its entirety, and what kind of decisions would benefit fandom as a whole.

Of course, to return to Calkins' initial statement, these questions already presume that it makes sense to speak of fandom as a united entity in the first place. And indeed, even if the controversy that erupted over the exclusion of a fan from Pacificon II showed clearly that the fan community was far from fully united, most fans involved in the discussion seemed to believe that it very well *should* be – members of mid-20th century science-fiction fandom saw their community, according

[1] Gregg Calkins, "Untitled," *The Rambling Fap*, no. 36 (February 1965).

[2] Pacificon was the name given to the World Science Fiction Conventions (Worldcons) held in California (that is, on the Pacific Coast). Pacificon I had been held in Los Angeles in 1946, Pacificon II took place in Oakland in 1964.

to Calkins, as an "entity, something to be cherished, protected and prolonged at all cost." Therefore, conflicts erupting among different fractions of the fan community, as was the case with the Pacificon II ban, were often discussed not only in regard to their subject matter, but also in relation to how they affected fandom as a community. Controversies over general topics[3] frequently led back to discussions about the fan community's organizational structure, its internal hierarchies, rules of discourse, processes of decision-making, and the in- and exclusion of individual members. In fact, fans were often concerned specifically with how the issue at hand, as well as the conflict resulting from it, put the cohesion of the community at risk.

The invocation of the ideal community in controversies within 20th-century science-fiction fandom, then, is what I will focus on in this chapter. Against the backdrop of the theoretical discourse on 'community', I am going to consider science-fiction fandom's negotiation of community in the context of two major controversies that divided the fan community at the time of their occurrence and for years after: the so-called "Great Exclusion" of 1939, in which the conservative wing of the fan community stopped a group of socialist fans from attending the First World Science Fiction Convention (Worldcon) in New York, and the "Second Great Exclusion" in 1964, which had the fan community arguing over the exclusion of well-known fan Walter Breen from the Pacificon II and the Fantasy Amateur Press Association in response to his repeated abuse of children and teenagers in the fan community. I argue that the discourse on community in early/mid-20th century literary science-fiction fandom was dominated by a strongly communitarian ideal, which was grounded in a sense of intellectual elitism that positioned science-fiction fans as intellectually superior to the average population. This ideal of community was reiterated over decades through

[3] Including discussions about issues as diverse as US foreign politics, the Equal Rights Act, the Civil Rights Movement, the benefits and risks of pornography, religion, child-rearing, etc.

a perpetual evocation of crisis or threat from outside, which made the push towards a unified fandom appear particularly urgent. In the climate resulting from this ideal of community, the unity and growth of the science-fiction community generally took priority over individual interests, and the exclusion of members tended to be determined based on how much they affected the balance of the community, rather than their perceived misgivings or the danger they posed to individual members. At the same time, the tension between the communitarian ideal of community on the one hand, and the ideal of tolerance that came with fandom's self-conception as an intellectual, progressive group on the other, erupted repeatedly during controversies within the group. Despite the dominant discourse of cohesion and unity, the history of the science-fiction community throughout the 20th century was full of rather serious controversies between different fractions of fans, often revolving not so much around fan-specific issues such as the interpretation and evaluation of specific texts, but rather around matters of general social and political significance, like socialism or the women's rights movement. Fans, I show in this chapter, did not see these controversies as unrelated to their identity and interactions as fans. In fact, science-fiction fans often felt that national or world politics affected them not just as individuals or national citizens but also specifically as fans, and they saw themselves as playing their own role in public discourse.

Conflict and Community

It may at first seem counterintuitive to approach a study of community by focusing on conflicts and controversies. After all, theoretical approaches to the idea of community, both affirmative and critical, have for the most part focused on communities' potential for creating unity, cohesion, and consensus. In one of the earliest sociological texts on the question of community, the 1881 mono-

graph *Community and Society* (*Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft*, first transl. 1957), Ferdinand Tönnies describes the origin of (local) communities as an organic evolution from kinship relations, like those between mother and child or husband and wife: "The study of the home is the study of the Gemeinschaft."[4] For him, functioning communities – like families – are perfectly balanced systems of reciprocity, and social hierarchies within those communities are not detrimental to community cohesion, but rather working in perfect unity to everyone's benefit.

In many ways, this concept of community remained fairly consistent over the next 150 years. Robert Booth Fowler in his 1991 *The Dance with Community*, an overview on the discourse on community in political thought, still describes the idea of community as deeply rooted in a quasi-spiritual experience of togetherness:

> The concept of community invariably invokes the notion of commonality, of sharing in common, being and experiencing together. This is the root concept implied in most uses of the word. [...] That the sharing implies an affective or emotional dimension is a usual assumption. It is not that advocates of community spurn rationality [...]; it is, rather, that community is and must be a deeply felt experience. That is inherent to what it is.[5]

Tönnies and Fowler have in common with many other theorists of community not only that they emphasize the community's interest in consensus and unity, but also that they seem to consider this sense of community as difficult to grasp analytically, and describe it as a natural, subjective, even spiritual force that resists theorization. In the introduction to the 1991 anthology *Community at Loose Ends*, a collection of poststructuralist critiques of community, Georges Yves-Francois Van Den Abbeele describes this tendency as an "element of demagoguery or mystification at work in the seductive appeal to community", to which scholars on both sides of the political spectrum

[4] Ferdinand Tönnies, *Community and Society* (Translated by Charles P. Loomis. New York: Dover, 2011), 53; Ferdinand Tönnies, *Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft: Abhandlung des Communismus und des Socialismus als empirischer Culturformen* (Leipzig: Fues, 1887).

[5] Robert Booth Fowler, *The Dance with Community: The Contemporary Debate in American Political Thought* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1991), 4.

appear to succumb easily: "both the New Left and the New Right claim for themselves the enthusiastic appeal the notion still garners."[6]

In his much-discussed *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (2000), Robert Putman seems to share this perception of community as, if not explicitly anti-rational, at least rooted in instinctive, affective attachment. At the same time, however, he describes specific strategies of socializing that are necessary for maintaining this seemingly natural balance:

> Some forms of social capital are, by choice or necessity, inward looking and tend to reinforce exclusive identities and homogeneous groups. Examples of bonding social capital include ethnic fraternal organizations, church-based women reading groups, and fashionable country clubs. Other networks are outward looking and encompass people across diverse social cleavages. Examples of bridging social capital include the civil rights movement, many youth service groups, and ecumenical religious organizations.[7]

For Putnam, both "bonding" and "bridging" are necessary inclusionary strategies of networking with the purpose of holding communities together. Other scholars, however, although in the minority among those theorizing community, see this striving for consensus more critically. Not surprisingly, the deconstructivist literary scholars in *Community at Loose Ends* disapprove of the community's ideal of overcoming or eliminating difference: "These idealized communities of consensus, communism, and communion are all predicated upon the utopian overcoming of the historical or agonistic differences that keep them from being at one with themselves, that keep them from being themselves."[8]

Miranda Joseph's *Against the Romance of Community* (2002) more explicitly describes the darker side of communities' seemingly inclusionary strategies and shows that they can in fact turn communities into sites of oppression and exclusion. In her study of what many might consider the

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[6] Georges van den Abbeele, "Introduction," in *Community at Loose Ends*, ed. Miami Theory Collective (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), ix.

[7] Robert D. Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000), 22.

[8] van den Abbeele, "Introduction," xii.

prototype of an inclusive community, a gay and lesbian community theater, she describes the exclusionary rhetoric influencing the community's self-definition.

> [T]he invocation of community served to articulate what might be called homosexism – that is, the prioritization of gayness over other identity features. [...] [It] functioned here to exclude people of color and transgendered people for whom, though they might in fact also be gay, sexuality was not an isolated or primary identity.[9]

What scholars from Tönnies to Putnam perceive as the quasi-magical glue holding communities together creates for Joseph an atmosphere that excludes those not fitting comfortably into the group's self-conception, and leads to the suppression of open discourse within the group, because critical voices might be considered a threat to the community's unity. Iris Marion Young voices a similar criticism already in 1986 when she suggests that rather than overcoming difference, community actually cements divides between groups: "The desire for community relies on the same desire for social wholeness and identification that underlies racism and ethnic chauvinism, on the one hand, and political sectarianism on the other."[10]

Whether affirmative or critical, scholarship on community has focused consistently on the ideal of consensus and unity. However, it is noticeable that in many of these theoretical accounts, the emphasis on cohesion goes hand in hand with an evocation of crisis. Authors on the political left and right equally introduce their work by voicing concerns about the 'state of community,' which they perceive to be threatened by social and cultural changes. Jean-Luc Nancy states 1983 in *The Inoperative Community* (*La communauté désœuvrée*, first transl. 1991):

> The gravest and most painful testimony of the modern world, the one that possibly involves all other testimonies to which this epoch must answer […] is the testimony of the dissolution, the dislocation, or the conflagration of community.[11]

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[9] Miranda Joseph, *Against the Romance of Community* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), xvii.

[10] Iris Marion Young, "The Ideal of Community and the Politics of Difference," *Social Theory and Practice*, no. 12.1 (Spring 1986): 2.

[11] Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Inoperative Community* (Translated by Peter Connor et al. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), 1.

At the time, Nancy attributes this sentiment to the specific political situation towards the end of the 20th century, but in fact, a similar rhetoric appears repeatedly in discourses on community since the 19th century, even if the perceived reasons for this crisis change. For Tönnies, it is late-19th-century modern urban society which threatens the traditional community of the village. Almost a century later, Fredric Jameson describes the destructive effect capitalism has had on organic communities: "The historically unique tendential effect of late capitalism on all such groups has been to dissolve and to fragment or atomize them into agglomerations (Gesellschaften) of isolated and equivalent private individuals."[12] In 1991, Fowler explains why "modern communitarian thinkers"[13] (including himself) blame liberalism for the downfall of community: "Liberalism not only neglects our need for community, it is often downright hostile to it."[14] And at the turn to the 21st century, Putnam blames individualism in contemporary America for the decline of communal engagement.

The narratives that communities themselves develop often mirror this constant fear of a threat from the outside. In particular the founding myths of communities frequently revolve arounds moments of crisis, as Joseph points out: "Communities are frequently said to emerge in times of crisis or tragedy, when people imagine themselves bound together by a common grief or joined through some extraordinary effort."[15] Yet, the evocation of crisis is not limited to communities' myths of origin – in fact, a driving force behind ongoing narratives of community appears to be a recurrent threat or crisis.

[12] Fredric Jameson, "Reification and Utopia in Mass Culture," *Social Text*, no. 1 (1979): 134.
[13] Fowler, *The Dance with Community*, 161.
[14] Ibid., 15.
[15] Joseph, *Against the Romance*, vii.

This recurring narrative of community in crisis never fails to invoke, if sometimes implicitly, a (distant) past in which the cohesion of community was presumably given and secure. It is noticeable that unity and consensus never really appear as actual features of real-existing communities, but are introduced as a lost or fading ideal that is constantly under fire from outside threats. Nancy points out the problematic implications of such a narrative:

> But it is here that we should become suspicious of the retrospective consciousness of the lost community and its identity […]. We should be suspicious of this consciousness first of all because it seems to have accompanied the Western world from its very beginnings: at every moment in its history, the Occident has given itself over to the nostalgia for a more archaic community that has disappeared, and to deploring a loss of familiarity, fraternity and conviviality.[16]

Rather than merely nostalgic sentiment, however, the evocation of crisis actually serves a crucial function for narratives of community by creating the sense that community is a threatened sanctuary in need of being saved. By claiming that the spirit of community is in decline, the narrative of a constant crisis can actually work to establish continuity, while highlighting, in the face of a perceived threat, the importance of overcoming difference. Ultimately, then, the evocation of crisis has a stabilizing and unifying effect on the community.

At the same time, this permanent sense of crisis leads to an atmosphere in which any serious controversy within the community is treated as a threat to the cohesion of community. Unlike the threat from outside, which becomes a recurrent element of communities' self-narratives, internal conflicts are more likely to be suppressed or, in retrospect, downplayed or completely excluded from a community's history.

This stabilizing pattern of emphasizing external threats while suppressing internal conflict appears to emerge in a broad range of communities, but it is perhaps particularly crucial for social

[16] Nancy, *The Inoperative Community*, 10.

formations whose self-definition as community is based primarily on shared interests, communities that Tönnies describes as invisible townships:

> Thus, those who are brethren of such a common faith feel, like members of the same craft or rank, everywhere united by a spiritual bond and the cooperation in a common task. […] [S]piritual friendship forms a kind of invisible scene or meeting which has to be kept alive by artistic intuition and creative will.[17]

While he doesn't explicitly rank these affinity-based communities lower than other forms of community, Tönnies' statement that they have to "be kept alive" makes them appear fragile and vulnerable in comparison to his other examples, the 'organic' familial household and the village. In the absence of stabilizing factors like spatial proximity or shared territory (like the village or the nation state[18]), or even a shared experience of identity (like the queer community Joseph describes), communities that are "based on affinity rather than identity"[19] appear more arbitrary in their composition, and thus are less likely to be seen as 'natural' or necessary formations. It stands to reason that this perception might lead to a greater investment in securing the stability of the community by its members through a discourse that combines the insistence on internal cohesion with the reminder of an external threat.

[17] Tönnies, *Community and Society*, 43. The translation referenced here uses the phrase "invisible scene or meeting," but the original "unsichtbare Ortschaft" more literally translates into "invisible township/village": "So empfinden sich, gleich Kunst- und Standesgenossen, einander kennenden, auch die in Wahrheit Glaubensgenossen sind, überall als durch ein geistiges Band verbunden, und an einem gemeinsamen Werk arbeitend. […] so bildet hingegen die geistige Freundschaft eine Art von unsichtbarer Ortschaft, eine mystische Stadt und Versammlung, welche nur durch so etwas als eine künstlerische Intuition, durch einen schöpferischen Willen lebendig ist." Tönnies, *Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft*, 18.

[18] For a discussion of the nation state as "imagined community," see Benedict R. Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London/New York: Verso, 1991).

[19] Joseph, *Against the Romance*, xxvi.

Science-fiction Fandom as Literary Community

One such kind of invisible township held together by shared affinity are literary circles, whether they rely on spatial proximity like local book clubs, or have had to develop a practice of communicating across spatial distance – such as the literary science-fiction community, which from its early beginnings relied on letter-writing and the circulation of newsletters and fanzines to maintain the connection between its members. Despite the fact that literary communities appear to be bound together 'merely' by their shared interest in literature and reading, literary circles have often been attributed major significance for the emergence of public discourse and civic participation in Western modern society. Theorists tend to see the shared act of reading as both an intellectual and a communal practice that fosters political and social awareness and engagement. For Jürgen Habermas, author of the influential 1962 *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (*Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit*, first transl. 1989), the Western-European bourgeois public sphere of the 18th century emerged from the culture of literary salons. He understood public communication as tied to cultural consumption, and saw the emergence of the public sphere as the increasing political interest of an initially literary public.[20] In *Bowling Alone*, Robert Putnam attributed similar importance to reading circles in 19th-century America, which he credited with the proliferation of civic engagement: "From such groups and such moments were born the suffrage movement and numerous other civic-minded initiatives of the Progressive Era [...] by converting a solitary intellectual activity (reading) into one that is social and even civic."[21] Benedict Anderson, in *Imagined Communities*, described the importance of print-capitalism and the proliferation of newspapers in

[20] Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society* (Translated by Thomas Burger. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1989).
[21] Putnam, *Bowling Alone*, 149.

the 18th and 19th century for individuals' identification with the citizens of a nation state. The nation-wide consumption of newspapers is for Anderson a "mass ceremony" that

> is performed in silent privacy, in the lair of the skull. Yet each communicant is well aware that the ceremony he performs is being replicated simultaneously by thousands (or millions) of others of whose existence he is confident, yet of whose identity he had not the slightest notion.[22]

This idealized notion of intellectual reading circles as the hearth of civic or political engagement stands in stark contrast to an equally wide-spread, much more skeptical perspective on social formations around *popular* consumption. Decades after T.W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer's early critique of mass culture and its consumers in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (*Dialektik der Aufklärung* 1944, first transl. 1972), readers of popular fiction are still frequently accused of apolitical affective irrationality.[23] While social formations dedicated to 'serious reading' are considered birthplaces of political discourse, groups assembling around what is considered 'trivial consumption' have been deemed unreceptive to enlightened thought. In his recent essay on Marxist thought in early science fiction, Sean Cashbaugh criticizes this academic attitude towards readers of popular literature, and remarks that "studies of the American literary Left frequently ignore lesser-known writers and less traditional forms, namely those of popular culture (including SF)." He suggests that "[w]hen scholars ignore such spaces of production and forms in studies of American leftist culture, casting them

[22] Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 35.

[23] Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (Translated by John Cumming. New York: Herder and Herder, 1972). Further, see Janice Radway, *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy and Popular Literature* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984) for a discussion of romance novel readers' reputation; Joli Jensen, "Fandom as Pathology: The Consequences of Characterization," in *The Adoring Audience: Fan Culture and Popular Media*, ed. Lisa A. Lewis (London/New York: Routledge, 1992), 301–14, for the negative stereotyping of fans; Richard Shusterman, "Popular Art and Education," in *The New Scholarship on Dewey*, ed. James W. Garrison (Dordrecht/Boston: Kluwer, 1995), 35–44, for the academic bias towards popular art; Ken Gelder, *Popular Fiction: The Logics and Practices of a Literary Field* (London: Routledge, 2004), for the academic and public distinction between high literature and popular fiction; Melissa Click, "Understanding Twilight Fangirls and the Gendered Politics of Fandom," *Flow*, no. 11.4 (December 2009), for the media's problematic portrayal of *Twilight* readers. See for the debate around popular consumption also chapter 2.

as marginal or ephemeral, large spheres of leftist cultural activity escape critical examination."[24] The insistence on an often arbitrary distinction between serious and trivial reading (with 'trivial' frequently standing in as a synonym for 'feminine', 'lower-class', or 'children') allows scholars to ignore sites of political discourse because they have been associated with low or popular culture.

In reaction to this dismissive stance regarding popular consumption that continues to be perpetuated by much of the academic, as well as public discourse, historiographers of fandom and, mostly since the 1990s, fan studies scholars have worked to highlight the sophisticated discursive practices, the efficient communication networks, and the communal spirit of fan communities. While this has been a necessary and understandable reaction, this intentional active defense of fan communities meant that much of fan studies scholarship and fannish historiography has followed the pattern of dismissing internal conflicts in favor of a focus on consensus and cohesion, as Derek Johnson has pointed out. Johnson laments that accounts of conflict and controversies have been mostly omitted from historiographies of fan communities:

> While early works like Bacon-Smith's *Enterprising Women* (1992) stressed unity within fan communities, Jenkins's *Textual Poachers* acknowledged rifts among fans, producers, and even other fans […]. However, Jenkins too deflected attention from conflict and dissent, emphasizing the consensual […]. As Jenkins later explained, he "accented the positive" to distance fandom from perceptions of it as immature, deviant, and ultimately immaterial to academic study […].[25]

Camille Bacon-Smith's *Science Fiction Culture*, a monograph on 20th-century science-fiction fandom, is another good example for this take on fandom in fan studies scholarship, both in its focus on cohesion and in its narration of the founding myth of science-fiction fandom. Bacon-Smith

[24] Sean Cashbaugh, "A Paradoxical, Discrepant, and Mutant Marxism: Imagining a Radical Science Fiction in the American Popular Front," *Journal for the Study of Radicalism*, no. 10.1 (2016): 65.

[25] Derek Johnson, "Fan-tagonism: Factions, Institutions, and Constitutive Hegemonies of Fandom." In *Fandom. Identities and Communities in a Mediated World,* ed. Jonathan Gray and others (London/New York: New York University Press, 2007), 285–86.

describes the emergence of the science-fiction community in the early 20th century from a moment of socioeconomic crisis – a reaction to the lack of professional and social prospects young men in the United States faced in the aftermath of the Great Depression.[26]

> Those young men, raised to expectations of employment and status that the worldwide Great Depression took away, created in their clubs and organizations the complexly structured hierarchical forms of the corporate middle class to which they aspired.[27]

Bacon-Smith proceeds to carefully study the science-fiction community's cohesion-building strategies, both inward- and outward-facing, in her ethnography of fan conventions in the 1980s and 1990s. The strategies she discusses have noticeable similarities to the practices of "bonding" and "bridging" that Putnam discusses in his more recent *Bowling Alone*. She concedes, for example, that newer members will find it difficult to initiate change within fandom and will be met with resistance to new ideas, but argues that there is a good reason for the community's tendency to hold on to tradition:

> While this inertia can be frustrating to new members in times of fast change in the world and the science fiction community, it does provide a base of continuity that transcends the memory of the individual and passes the traditions from generation to generation of incoming fans.[28]

Similarly, she explains why the fan community is so concerned with maintaining the borders between members and non-members, particularly in convention spaces where their world intersects with other social groups: "A convention sharing space with outsiders must defend the boundaries of its realities more rigorously […]. [A]ll conventions must provide a defended space for the playing out of events and the safe practice of community."[29] Her seemingly uncritical repeated use of

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[26] Cashbaugh's account paints a similar picture of the beginnings of science-fiction fandom: "Gernsbackian utopianism provided the raw material for the formation of a community that responded to the contingencies of the 1930s, providing a means of collective empowerment and possibilities of professional mobility." (Cashbaugh, "A Paradoxical," 69-70.)

[27] Camille Bacon-Smith, *Science Fiction Culture* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000), 12-13.

[28] Ibid., 14.

[29] Ibid., 34.

the word "defend" implies that she sees the community's efforts of establishing traditions and borders as an understandable reaction to an apparently real threat from outside. Just as Putnam sees the strategies of "bonding" and "bridging" as necessary for maintaining the unity and harmony of a community, Bacon-Smith justifies the science-fiction community's strategies of preventing change and excluding outsiders by highlighting the significance of these strategies for fandom's continued survival as a community.

In this context, it might be an important factor that Bacon-Smith's ethnographic study relies heavily on interviews. This means that her account of the community's historical development is based to a large degree on witness accounts and fans' memories. In that regard, her monograph shares some similarities with other historical accounts of science-fiction fandom, many of which were written by community members, often prominent fans and/or authors, like Sam Moskowitz's *The Immortal Storm: A History of Science Fiction Fandom* (1954), Damon Knight's *The Futurians* (1977) and Lester Del Rey's *The World of Science Fiction, 1926-1976: The history of a Subculture* (1980).[30] This prevalence of fan-written accounts of science-fiction fandom might be as much due to science-fiction fans' proclivity for historiography and self-documentation as to the fact that fan communities were ignored as an object of research by academic scholarship until fairly recently. The insider reports are detailed and deeply insightful because they demonstrate an intimate knowledge of the community, but they also tend to gloss over some of the intra-communal controversies within the fan community. Disagreements which at the time of their occurrence shook the fan community at its core are often granted barely a mention or dismissed as interpersonal

[30] Sam Moskowitz, *The Immortal Storm: A History of Science Fiction Fandom* (Atlanta: Atlanta Science Fiction Organization Press, 1954); Knight, *The Futurians*; Lester Del Rey, *The World of Science Fiction, 1926-1976: The History of a Subculture* (New York: Garland Pub, 1980).

antipathy. Fan studies scholarship on science-fiction fandom and historiographies of the fan community have in common, then, that they tend to present fandom as more of a united front than it necessarily was.

Shifting the gaze away from 'officially' published literature on fandom to the discourse in fan-produced materials themselves, it first becomes apparent that the outsider perspective on consumers of popular literature is often quite at odds with readers' own understanding and explanation of their interests. Science fiction may only fairly recently have been accepted as a 'serious' literary genre of noticeable cultural and political impact, but since the earliest emergence of science-fiction fandom in the early 20th century, its consumers very consistently considered themselves serious readers and part of a highly intellectual community.

The science-fiction fan community's remarkably prolific investment in publication, documentation, and historiography, which manifested itself in an immense archive of printed documents, including amateur press mailings, fanzines, newsletters, brochures, leaflets, pamphlets, guidebooks, and convention materials, might be seen as a consequence of this self-perception. Numerous publications such as Donald Franson's 1962 booklet *Some Historical Facts about Science Fiction Fandom*[31] demonstrate fans' early interest in historicizing their own community. The wealth of archival material available to scholars today is not only an indication of fans' eagerness to print-publish in the decades from the 1920s to the 1980s (and even later, beyond the rise of the internet), it also demonstrates the considerable significance fan collectors at the time attributed to the articles, illustrations, and conversations in fanzines by preserving them for the 21st century.

At the same time, the production and circulation of fanzines and other fan-produced publications in which fans engaged by writing, editing, reading, sharing, or collecting, was not simply a

[31] Donald Franson, *Some Historical Facts about Science Fiction Fandom* (N3F Fandbook Publication, 1962).

way to document and preserve the community's practices but also was a significant communal practice in itself and shaped fans' self-conception of being part of their community. Rather than (merely) a way of communicating across distance to keep the community alive, it was a practice that in itself created and sustained a sense of community. Invoking (perhaps unknowingly) Tönnies' concept of the invisible township, Camille Bacon-Smith describes science-fiction fandom as "a community whose geography exists primarily in the minds of its members;"[32] however, one might add that this intellectual geography was in fact mapped and thus shaped in the publications that science-fiction fandom produced, spanning decades and wide spatial distances.[33] According to Liesbet van Zoonen, this work toward community maintenance is precisely what fan communities have in common with political constituencies. She proposes that "fan groups and political constituencies resemble each other when it comes to the endeavors that make one part of the community" and that "both rest on emotional investments that are intrinsically linked to rationality and lead to 'affective intelligence.'"[34] Her use of the term "affective intelligence" undercuts the distinction between 'serious readers' and 'popular consumers' and indicates that while their objects of interest might differ, the discourses and practices of community-formation might be more similar than expected.

Therefore, a dominant discourse in fanzine conversations throughout the decades was the sustenance and maintenance of community. One continuous, easily recognizable thread is the frequent

[32] Bacon-Smith, *Science Fiction Culture*, 12.

[33] Fans corresponded with each other within and beyond national borders from early on. The changing location of the World Science Fiction Convention throughout the early decades is a good indicator for the networks between different local/regional/national groups. The Worldcon was held not only all over the US, but also abroad: 1948 and 1973, the Worldcon took place in Toronto, Canada; in 1957 and 1965, it was in London, and in 1979 in Brighton, UK; and the 1970 Worldcon took place in Heidelberg, Germany. In 1975 and 1985, the event moved to Melbourne, Australia. Since the 1980s, the convention has been held again in Canada, the UK, and Australia, as well as Japan, the Netherlands, and Finland.

[34] Van Zoonen, *Entertaining the Citizen*, 53.

oscillation between an idealization of consensus within fandom and the fear of an outside threat to that very same community. On the one hand, there is a heavy focus on the unifying power of science fiction that goes far beyond a simple shared pleasure in a certain kind of fiction. In his speech at the Chicago Worldcon in 1940, guest of honor and science-fiction author Edward E. Smith described the science-fiction fan community as follows:

> It seems to me, then, that what brings us together and underlies this convention is a fundamental unity of mind. We are imaginative, but with a tempered, analytical imaginativeness which fairy-tales will not satisfy. We are critical – sometimes we have been called hypercritical. We are fastidious. We have a mental grasp and scope which does not find sufficient substance in the stereotyped, the cut-and-dried. We feel intensely, and we are not always either diplomatic or backward in putting our feelings into words, and sometimes into action.[35]

Smith justifies his emphasis on community cohesion with a concept of exceptionalism that understands fans not only as a group of people with similar literary interests but also as a specific type of human being. He is not alone in this perspective on fandom. In fact, particularly early fanzine articles from the 1930s and 1940s often speak about science-fiction fans as an avant-garde elite with the potential to significantly influence Western society, even as a superior type of human with qualities that surpass those of the general population: "Fans saw themselves as an elite cadre of science fiction literati, typically male, with the unique social authority and power associated with scientific knowledge."[36]

In later decades, this idea of science-fiction fans' superiority might not be articulated quite as frequently and explicitly, but it does keep reemerging in fanzine conversations. In 1979, a group of fans proposed in their contribution to an APA-55 mailing that the government should have an interest in encouraging procreation among science-fiction fans: "What we said was that fans should

[35] Edward E. Smith, "What Does This Convention Mean?" (World Con, Chicago, Ill., 1940)
[36] Cashbaugh, "A Paradoxical", 68f.

be paid by the government to have children, so that intelligent women will not find it so unprofitable, moneywise and emotionally, to have children."[37] Of course, their classist argument that calls for educated upper-/middle-class women to have more, and for lower-class women to have fewer children is not unique, but the fact that they identify fans as the group of well-educated professional women who should be encouraged to become mothers is certainly telling in its implications for the self-understanding of science-fiction fans at the time.

This insistence on shared mentality and superior intellect among science-fiction fans appears in fanzines side by side with the perpetual diagnosis of crisis that fandom appears to suffer from at any given time. In 1939, when self-organized science-fiction fandom in the USA was barely entering its second decade, Leslie A. Crouch already expressed this experience of crisis, combined with a nostalgic look backwards, in an article called "The Good Old Days" in the fanzine *Ad Astra:*

> How long, dear readers of AD ASTRA, have you opened an S-F mag and in the readers' department saw letters with phrases like these: "Remember the good old days when so and so wrote whosis and whatsis on the whirliwig?"; and "The stuff you print today ain't as good as what you gave us in the good old days of '28, '29, '30"; and "Remember such and such and this and that? Why can't we have stories like those today?"[38]

Four decades later, another fanzine article once again gave voice to the perception of a community in crisis, albeit for different reasons: For Paul Abelkis in 1979, it was the growing popularity of science fiction in television and cinema that threatened to ruin science fiction's good name and draw away readers from the literature he considered serious science fiction:

> Science fiction is presently experiencing its gravest crisis ever; while most "sci-fi" enthusiasts / fans is too generous a term / are losing themselves in "Superman," S.W., and "Battlestar Booboobtica", few trufen[39] even realize what is occurring.[40]

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[37] Bill Bridget, AJ Bridget, and Julie Wilhoit, "Unanniversary Slumber Party," *News from F*****-up Fandom*, June 1979.

[38] Leslie Crouch, "The Good Old Days," *Ad Astra*, no. 1.3 (September 1939).

[39] 'Trufen', for 'true fans', was a term in fannish slang that referred to the presumably most serious fans: specifically, fans of the traditional literary community used it to set themselves apart from those fans with an interest in science-fiction television and cinema.

[40] Paul Abelkis, "SOTF," *Sound-Off*, no. 1 (March 2, 1979).

Beyond this reiteration of internal unity vs. external threat, however, the fanzines and brochures from the early decades of science-fiction fandom also provide detailed insight into the internal conflicts within the group over time. Unlike scholarly accounts, which have tended to gloss over many of these internal controversies in favor of creating the image of a unified community, the immense archive of print materials left by science-fiction fans of previous decades has the significant benefit of providing a close look at the various conflicts and controversies within the community. Due to the countless conversations and debates in fanzines and amateur press publications led by numerous people across considerable spatial distances and over extended time periods, disputes within the community are painstakingly documented by those who witnessed them happening at the time of their unfolding.

Derek Johnson proposes that there are good reasons to pay closer attention to the role of controversy in fan communities, in particular at a point in time when fan studies has become a relatively stable field of research within media/cultural studies and is not constantly forced to defend its own object of interest to the broader disciplines. Media studies, he argues, "would benefit from more expansive theorizations of constitutive, hegemonic antagonisms."[41] However, when Johnson pushes for greater attention towards the controversies within fandom, he is primarily concerned with the debates over different interpretations of cultural texts: "I propose that ongoing struggles for discursive dominance constitute fandom as a hegemonic struggle over interpretation and evaluation."[42] In contrast, I am interested in the controversies within fandom that do not touch on

[41] Johnson, "Fan-tagonism," 285–86.

[42] Ibid., 286. Similarly, scholarship focusing on the figure of the anti-fan discuss conflict and dislike in fandom mostly in regard to fans' attitude towards specific texts, not their relationships among each other. See Jonathan Gray, "Antifandom and the Moral Text," *American Behavioral Scientist*, no. 48.7 (2005): 840–58; S. Harman and B. Jones, "Fifty Shades of Ghey: Snark Fandom and the Figure of the Anti-Fan," *Sexualities*, no. 16.8 (December 1, 2013): 951–68.

presumably fan-specific topics such as analyses of fannish objects, but instead are concerned with the functioning and structure of the community itself. I propose that internal controversies, often neglected in fan historiographies, are precisely the moments which best reveal the discursive practices within a community, since they force members to engage in fundamental negotiations about issues of inclusion/exclusion and consensus/disagreement. This is clearly visible, for example, in Julian Dibbell's influential article "A Rape in Cyberspace" from 1993. Dibbell describes the case of an avatar in an online MOO sexually assaulting other players within the online game, and the heated discussion that erupted among the participants after the details of the incident became known:

> It's the story of a man named Mr. Bungle, and of the ghostly sexual violence he committed in the halls of LambdaMOO, and most importantly of the ways his violence and his victims challenged the 1000 and more residents of that surreal, magic-infested mansion to become, finally, the community so many of them already thought they were.[43]

At first, Dibbell's statement might bring to mind the familiar foundational narrative of a community that finds itself bonding in difficult times. However, the debate among MOO players in the wake of the sexual assault against several members of the group did not end in a shared consensus, but was rather full of vehement disagreement and unsolvable differences. And yet it ultimately led to the implementation of a complaint system allowing the group to deal with similar cases of inappropriate behavior in the future. So when Dibbell writes that Mr. Bungle's actions forced the members of LamdaMOO to come together as a community, he does not suggest that they closed ranks in the aftermath of an assault, but rather that this internal crisis forced the members of an already-existing group to think about solutions for a shared problem; that is, they were forced to think about the structure and organization of their own community, to define themselves as an

[43] Julian Dibbell, "A Rape in Cyberspace; or: How an Evil Clown, a Haitian Trickster Spirit, Two Wizards, and a Cast of Dozens Turned a Database into a Society," *The Village Voice*, December 23, 1993: 200.

organization, a constituency, a political body with specific responsibilities and powers. Thus, I would argue that it is precisely the moments in which a community's structures and beliefs seem to be questioned or shaken up that they become visible the most clearly – and, in fact, might actually be shaped.

The Great Exclusion

If one trusts Lester Del Rey's account of the history of science-fiction fandom, the controversy fans at the time and later referred to as the "Great Exclusion Act" was barely worth a mention. He describes the event in the following, rather dismissive way:

> Long before the convention, feuding had broken out between some of the Futurians and others working to hold the affair. When the convention opened, some of the Futurians who had been most active – Pohl, Wollheim and Lowndes, among others – appeared; after considerable hassling, they were denied admittance by Moskowitz. This was blown up into a major action by many of the partisan fans.[44]

What Del Rey attributes in his throw-away comment to a merely personal feud, however, was at the time discussed in hundreds of articles and comments in various fanzines over several years, and considered a matter of great significance for the future of science-fiction fandom. In a pamphlet with the title "The Futurians and New Fandom," published in 1939 by the *Futurian Society*, Robert W. Lowndes writes:

> A short time ago a fan remarked to me his belief that the future of fandom would be settled here at this conference – either the Futurian way or the New Fandom way would prevail, once and for all. […] Between Futurians and New Fandom stands a word – democracy.[45]

[44] Del Rey, *The World*, 146.
[45] Robert Lowndes, "The Futurians and New Fandom," *Futurian Society of New York*, October 1939.

This grave statement, which interpreted the controversy around the "Great Exclusion" as nothing less than a fight over democracy itself, indicates that the people involved in the controversy considered it far more than a personal feud; in fact, they felt that it was closely tied to world-political matters at the time. This idea might very well have a somewhat megalomaniac ring to it, but becomes understandable if one considers the "Great Exclusion Act" not as an isolated event but in its connection to two other concurrent developments, one fandom-specific and one of global political concern. On the one hand, the "Exclusion" happened within the context of a larger discussion among fans regarding the implementation of a permanent Worldcon organizing committee and the foundation of a nation-wide science-fiction fan organization, both of which were geared towards making science-fiction fandom an established, unified, centralized organization, rather than the sprawling, growing, and ever-changing landscape of local clubs, chapters, and fanzines it was at the time. On the other hand, the controversy leading up to the "Exclusion" was very much influenced by the political climate during the era of the National Socialists' rule in Germany, at the beginning of World War II. The "Great Exclusion", therefore, was the result of a controversy over the political future of the 20th century as much as a negotiation over the organizational future of the fan community.

Ultimately, the event called the "Great Exclusion" was the high point of a controversy between two groups of fans that were both part of New York area science-fiction fandom in the late 1930s/early 1940s, but differed significantly in their internal organization as well as their perspective on fandom and politics. The mid-1930s saw much fluctuation and regrouping in the fannish landscape around New York due to both personal and ideological tensions that eventually culminated in the formation of two fan groups which proceeded to engage in a severely antagonistic

back-and-forth over the following years. The tensions first came to a head at the 1937 Third Eastern Science Fiction Convention in Philadelphia,[46] when New York fan John Michel presented a now infamous speech with the title "Mutation or Death" (read by his friend Donald Wollheim), in which he called for the political awakening of fandom. In this speech, he demanded that

> the Third Eastern Science Fiction Convention, shall place itself on record as opposing all forces leading to barbarism, the advancement of pseudo-sciences and militaristic ideologies, and shall further resolve that science fiction should by nature stand for all forces working for a more unified world, a more Utopian existence, the application of science to human happiness, and a saner outlook on life.[47]

The speech addressed the political climate in Europe, where the rise of fascism presented an increasingly imminent threat, but it also attacked the prevalent attitude towards politics and science in science-fiction fandom at the time. Hugo Gernsback's[48] professional science-fiction magazines had provided the point of origin around which self-organized science-fiction fandom had initially formed, and so the majority of fans seemed to more or less share the "largely apolitical, if not conservative"[49] mentality promoted by these magazines. However, the attribute 'apolitical' is to be considered with caution: This dominant mindset, which Cashbaugh calls "Gernsbackian ideology,"[50] represented a modernist type of utopianism fueled by faith in technological and scientific

[46] Compared to contemporary mass conventions like New York Comic Con, these early conventions were attended by a mere handful of people. Precise numbers for the "Third Eastern" are difficult to find, but based on the list of names given by Moskowitz, *Immortal Storm*, 116ff., the gathering appears to have attracted about 30 people, perhaps more. The following year, this number had grown to 125 (see Moskowitz, *Immortal Storm*, 151), indicating the rapid growth of science-fiction fandom during those early years.

[47] John B. Michel, "Mutation or Death" (Third Eastern Science Fiction Convention, Philadelphia, October 1937).

[48] Hugo Gernsback, the 'father of science-fiction' started publishing the first English-language science-fiction magazine *Amazing Stories* in 1926. This magazine also provided the starting point for organized science-fiction fandom, when fans began to get in touch with each other via the letter column in *Amazing Stories*: "Since the addresses were usually printed together with the names of the writers, other fans were encouraged to write to the man who had his letter published. In some areas, such as the larger cities, the addresses made it possible for fans to find friends with similar interests. This was the original nucleaus of organized fandom." (Del Rey, *The World*, 71/72)

[49] Cashbaugh, "A Paradoxical", 64.

[50] Ibid., 68.

success, and grounded in a socially conservative and economically capitalist worldview. Fans outspokenly believed in the ideal of "American modernity", the "celebration of American corporate and industrial success;"[51] they were 'apolitical' mainly in the sense that they believed science, technology, and industrial capitalism to be objective and untainted by politics.

This attitude is precisely what John Michel took offense with in his explicitly political speech "Mutation or Death," which was met with much resistance and even outrage from other fans. The fallout over his presentation at the "Third Eastern" consequently led to the formation of the two groups that eventually became the major antagonists in the events around the "Great Exclusion." On one side of the controversy was the Queens Science Fiction League (QSFL), a New York-based science-fiction club which was headed at the time by the influential fans Will Sykora, James Taurasi, and Sam Moskowitz, and shortly after gave rise to the movement of New Fandom. On the other side stood the group of Futurians around fans like Robert W. Lowndes, John Michel, and Donald Wollheim.

Their ideological differences were reflected already on the level of organizational structure. With clear bias, Lester Del Rey later describes the QSFL as "a real club" led by "important fans", and the Futurians as "more like a group of friends",[52] but despite his obvious partiality, his distinction nevertheless points to actual structural differences between the two groups. Like many clubs and chapters at the time, the QSFL had a rigid, hierarchical structure with official functions and protocols. In contrast, the Futurians purposefully rejected "the complexly structured hierarchical forms of the corporate middle class",[53] which many science-fiction clubs at the time were modeled

[51] Ibid., 67.
[52] Del Rey, *The World*, 142.
[53] Bacon-Smith, *Science Fiction Culture*, 13.

after. Instead, they preferred a much more loosely organized group structure, and even experimented with attempts at other forms of community-building like the "Futurian House", a commune of sorts in which several fans cohabitated in 1939.[54] While the members of New Fandom explicitly insisted on keeping politics out of science fiction, the Futurians believed that science-fiction fans, whom they saw as educated, future-oriented people, were responsible for taking an openly political stance against fascism. In their fanzines and pamphlets, the group was outspoken in their socialist leanings and frequently expressed concern over both the rise of fascism in Europe and the demonization of communism in the western world. In 1938, the Futurians founded the "Committee for the Political Advancement of Science Fiction (CPASF)", about which founding member John Michel wrote:

> From the deliberations of this group were evolved these concrete resolutions: That the world is rapidly approaching an international crisis, the nature of which shall be armed conflict between the mutually antagonistic forces of Fascism and Democracy; That science-fiction fans, by the nature of their outlook as visionaries and speculators, are inevitably and vitally concerned in the future development of international affairs; […] That science-fiction fans as progressive people must therefore lend their immediate aid to the cause of Democracy in an active and aggressive struggle to smash its enemies; That a committee be formed to rally, organize and direct science-fiction fans toward the fulfilment of that purpose.[55]

In its expression of intellectual elitism at least, this statement was actually fairly typical for the mentality of science-fiction fans at the time; yet many fans, like the members of QSFL, considered the pamphlet's particular political trajectory and rhetoric to be a betrayal of science-fiction fandom's core values, namely, the ideals of objective technological progress and science. The explicit introduction of politics (aka socialism) into fannish discourse was seen as a diversion and disruption of the community's cohesion. In fact, the Futurians' publications and activities, such as the foundation of the CPASF, were considered such a threat that some members of the QSFL saw the

[54] David Wollheim and John B. Michel, "Futurian House," *Science Fiction Progress,* no. 2 (September 1939).
[55] John B. Michel, *The Foundation of the CPASF* (New York: CPASF, 1939).

need to found a counter-movement, the so-called New Fandom: "Fearful of the Wollheim-Michel clique, the dynamic young Moskowitz convinced Sykora of the need to create a counter force called 'New Fandom';" with the self-declared purpose of saving "fandom from the former tyranny of Wollheim and Communism."[56]

The animosities between the two groups had had time to boil for a full year when the Fourth Eastern Science Fiction Convention[57] in 1938 came around. At the convention, the convention organizing team, consisting mostly of New Fandom members, brought forth a motion to appoint themselves as the temporary planning committee for the First Worldcon, which was scheduled for 1939. Members of the Futurian fraction expressed their dissatisfaction with the process leading up to the decision: "Unless the majority is permitted to decide things for itself, then you do not have democracy regardless of what else you have."[58] In protest, they withdrew themselves from any activities related to the organization of the Worldcon. The situation remained tense during the following preparations for the convention, with the Futurians criticizing New Fandom's organizational style as undemocratic, while New Fandom members were concerned that the Futurians might plan to boycott or disrupt the Worldcon with their political agenda.

As a consequence, reports of the escalation at the convention itself vary greatly depending on the commentator's loyalties. What most convention reports in fanzines agree on is that six fans, all affiliated with the Futurians, attempted to enter the convention space and were rejected by the organizing committee, which resulted in a series of rather tumultuous encounters at and around the location. At some point, the organizers called the police, who appeared at least twice during the back-and-forth, although they never arrested anyone.

[56] Sam Moskowitz, "There Are Two Sides," *Science Fiction Collector*, no. 5.2 (August 1939).
[57] Also known as the First National Science Fiction Convention.
[58] Lowndes, "The Futurians."

The bone of contention leading to the exclusion was a number of publications the Futurians had brought to the convention to distribute among fans, which included Lowndes' 1938 "Dead End" about the suicide of a fellow science-fiction fan, and "An Amazing Story" about Gernsback's magazine *Amazing Stories*; a print version of British fan Douglas W.F. Meyer's speech "The Purpose of Science Fiction"; and Michel's pamphlet "The Foundation of the CPASF."[59] The convention organizers considered these materials political propaganda, which they had proactively banned from the convention, and accused the Futurians of purposefully stirring up trouble. The Futurians, on the other hand, insisted that the materials they had brought were harmless and not meant as an affront to the organizing team. David Kyle, another fan who was loosely affiliated with the Futurians, in 1989 took responsibility for the occurrence and argued that it wasn't the Futurians' brochures that caused the exclusion, but a pamphlet of his own making with the headline "A Warning!",[60] in which he called out the undemocratic leadership of New Fandom and criticized the World Con organizing team:

> I, for better or worse, was the trigger for the banning of those six fans from the meeting. I published the infamous "yellow pamphlet" which provoked the incident. It reflects the times in so many ways, both fannishly and internationally.[61]

Right after the convention, the organizers blamed the altercation on the Futurians' actions, insisting that their behavior at the convention had left them with no choice but to exclude them: "Wollheim and his compatriots were not expelled by New Fandom or anyone associated with the organization. They actually expelled themselves."[62] In contrast, Donald Wollheim, one of the banned

[59] Robert Lowndes, *An Amazing Story* (New York: CPASF, 1939); Douglas W.F. Meyer, *The Purpose of Science Fiction. Speech Held at the Second Convention of the Science Fiction Association in London, UK, on April 10, 1938.* (New York: CPASF, 1939); John B. Michel, *The Foundation*.
[60] Dave Kyle, "A Warning," July 2, 1939.
[61] Dave Kyle, "The Great Exclusion Act of 1939," *Mimosa*, no. 6 (1989).
[62] Moskowitz, "Two Sides."

Futurians, voiced suspicions that their exclusion hadn't been a spontaneous decision, but had actually been planned far in advance;[63] and in his later monograph, Sam Moskowitz admits that an exclusion had at least been discussed: "the triumvirate felt serious consideration should be given to excluding them."[64]

The exclusion from the Worldcon did not curb the feud between Futurians and New Fandom; quite the contrary, the tension between the groups was refueled by biting exchanges in fanzines and erupted in several personal encounters, like a QSFL meeting in early 1941, more than a year after the convention:

> Queens, January 5, 1941: A fist fight which ended with William S. Sykora lying on the floor brought the January meeting of the Queens Science Fiction League to a hasty end and precipitated a near riot. In a physical attempt to expel two invited guests, William S. Sykora and two aides – James V. Taurasi and Sam Moskowitz – found that their bullying tactics, engaged in without the knowledge or consent of the duly elected officers of the club, had backfired. The result was that the manager of the meeting hall turned the entire gathering, one of the largest yet, out into the streets.[65]

Contrary to Del Rey's account, the intensity of these interactions makes the controversy leading up to and surrounding the "Great Exclusion" appear as far more than just a result of personal dislike. The "Great Exclusion" pitched two groups against each other who were certainly part of the same community – the New York area science-fiction fandom – but differed considerably in regard to their political views, as well as their ideas about the right way to organize a fan community. On both sides, the controversy was noticeably framed in absolute terms. Their rhetoric in speeches and fanzine articles reflects both groups' conviction that nothing less than the future of fandom was at stake in the fight. Fandom, according to the message on both sides, needed to be 'saved' – either from communism or an undemocratic dictatorship, depending on the group. Their

[63] Knight, *The Futurians*, 40.
[64] Moskowitz, *Immortal Storm*, 214.
[65] Robert Lowndes, "Sykora Starts Riot. QSFL Meeting Ends in Brawl," *Le Vombiteur*, no. 3.11 (January 6, 1941): 1.

controversy about the organization of fandom also gained an added urgency because it fell into a period when fandom was explicitly looking for ways to both solidify and expand the community's borders. The necessity to unify fandom in particular was a dominant theme in broader fannish discussions at the time, and it is reflected in writings by both Futurians and New Fandom members: Both sides felt that coming to a consensus was crucial if fandom was to persist at all.

At PhilCon[66] 1939, for example, Futurians and New Fandom clashed over the discussion of a national science-fiction organization, after New Fandom had proposed a constitution for this potential organization which the Futurians rejected as dictatorial:

> In the constitution [sic] which New Fandom will take as its law, NF openly declares its intention of controlling all stf dictatorially, of declaring who are fans and who are not, of 'preserving harmony in all the fan field' whether in or out of NF which means a declaration of war […] on all fans who will not bow to the dictation of the unspeakable Trio.[67]

Of course, that the Futurians rejected New Fandom's proposed constitution of a national science-fiction organization didn't mean that their side did not equally long for a united fandom – in 1941, Damon Knight called for the foundation of a National Fan Federation in an article with the title "Unite or Fie:"

> One of the queerest things about fandom which has to date come to my attention, during the year-and-two-months I have been a fan, is the fact that fandom as a whole, is not, and apparently has never been, organized for its own defense and welfare. It is obvious that a need for such an organization exists.[68]

The desire for a unified fandom also extended beyond the two parties involved in the feud: At the 1940 Worldcon in Chicago, Edward E. Smith alluded, in his aforementioned speech, to the controversy between Futurians and New Fandom precisely in order to appeal to fans' sense of unity:

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[66] A regional convention in Philadelphia, hosted by the Philadelphia Science Fiction Society. The election for the location of the 1940 WorldCon was held at PhilCon 1939.

[67] David Wollheim and John B. Michel, "The Philadelphia Convention," *Science Fiction Progress*, no. 4 (November 1, 1939).

[68] Damon Knight, "Unite or Fie!," *Fanfare*, no. 1.4 (October 1940).

> [N]ow, if as I believe, the basic causes of those local warfares have been elucidated, it should not be an impossible task to remove them. I hope not, for in such a group as ours, co-operation is, or should be, decidedly of the essence.[69]

And really, the following year, fans' repeated calls for a united national fan organization resulted in the foundation of The National Fantasy Fan Federation (N3F) – complete with a constitution, a president, a directorate, and an overseas bureau, geared at establishing relations with fan communities in other countries and thus unifying fandom beyond national borders.

Still, the fight around the "Great Exclusion" indicates that fans differed greatly in their position on how such cohesion should ideally be realized. New Fandom believed in a stratified and hierarchical form of organization, in which decisions were to be made by appointed officials and committees, whose position would grant them the authority to speak for fandom as a whole. They also believed that the influx of socialist politics into fandom in the 1930s upset the consensus about fans' shared mindset – the belief in technological and economic progress, and the objectivity of science – to the point where Worldcon organizers perceived the presence of the Futurians and their published materials as a threat to the cohesion of the fan community that needed to be contained, or rather excluded. The Futurians, on the other hand, were skeptical of the rigid organization of fandom that New Fandom supported, and questioned the (un)democratic process of elections within the fan community. In this context, their exclusion from the Worldcon only seemed to prove their point that New Fandom members were heading towards a dictatorial rule of fandom which would eliminate processes of direct democracy from the community. But they, too, clearly hoped for fandom to stand with the anti-fascist movement as a united front, and for a national or even world-wide fan organization, even if they imagined its organizational structure in a different way.

[69] Smith, "What does."

The intense desire for the ideal of a united fandom did not come to rest with the foundation of NF3; indeed, it continued to reappear throughout the history of the fandom. David Wollheim recounts a meeting with Will Sykora in the early 1950s, during which Sykora asked him to overcome their old differences and reconcile, so that they could "reorganize fandom, reorganize the clubs, and go out there and control fandom. […] Somebody should do it, somebody should, you know, *unite fandom*."[70] Sykora's proposal to his former antagonist reflects the drive towards cohesion in the literary science-fiction community even years after the controversy between New Fandom and Futurians had long simmered out.

The Second Exclusion, or the Great Breen Boondoggle

From the very beginning, this desire for unity within the fan community, which seemed to foreclose the possibility of diverse standpoints, was noticeably at odds with another part of fandom's self-conception. Science-fiction fans' self-definition as an intellectually superior group of people implied an image of fans as enlightened, progressive, and tolerant – not the least because science-fiction fans saw themselves as misunderstood by society and therefore had a certain immediate sympathy towards outsiders and misfits. This expectation of tolerance and open-mindedness tended to clash with the longing for a community that shared the same convictions and beliefs. In a fanzine-based letter exchange between two fans in 1964, this tension became visible in yet another argument over the presence of socialist fans in the community. Science-fiction fan John Boston reacted with heavy sarcasm to a previous statement by Edward Bryant, who had demanded the exclusion of socialist-leaning fans from the science-fiction community:

[70] Knight, *The Futurians*, 41.

> According to Ed Bryant, a member should be kicked out if he should be kicked out [sic] if he shows "overt signs of the Communist faith." This fatuously vulgar asininity is exemplary of the bigotry that fandom is usually free from. […] One of the most desirable features of fandom and the N3F is the relatively free exchange of ideas among its members.[71]

This correspondence shows not only that 25 years after the "Great Exclusion", communism was still a controversial issue within science-fiction fandom, but also reveals the double-sided face of a community which on the one hand was concerned with maintaining the cohesion of a spatially spread-out community of affinity, but on the other hand prided itself in being open-minded and progressive.

In 1964, the very year Bryant and Boston discussed censorship and communism in a fanzine letter exchange, another major conflict within science-fiction fandom put a similar spotlight on the tension between tolerance and consensus. This controversy went down into fannish history as "The Second Great Exclusion," a clear reference to the "Great Exclusion Act" of 1939. Even though at first glance, the two events don't seem to have all that much in common, in the fannish discourse the two events were very much linked as different variations of the same communal issues: the problem of in-/exclusion, the issue of authority, and the price to be paid for the community's unity.

While the "Great Exclusion" has occasionally been downplayed by the historiographers of fandom, the "Second Great Exclusion" has barely received any mention at all in historical accounts of science-fiction fandom. This may have to do with the sensitive nature of the conflict, or possibly also with the fact that from the distance of time passed, the conflict shines a somewhat unflattering light on the picture of the united, but tolerant fan community that is often painted by historiographers of fandom.[72]

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[71] John Boston, "Untitled," *Tightbeam*, no. 27 (September 1964).

[72] Within the recent history of science-fiction fandom, the controversy around the "Second Great Exclusion" did not really become a wide-spread topic of debate until 2014, and only indirectly, when Walter Breen's daughter Moira Greyland came forward to accuse her late mother Marion Zimmer Bradley of child abuse. But even the

The controversy revolved around Walter Breen, an active and well-connected member of the fan community in the Berkeley area. Breen participated in science-fiction fandom as a writer, co-ordinator, and editor of the fanzine FANAC;[73] he later gained additional influence through the growing fame of his wife, fantasy writer Marion Zimmer Bradley, whom he married in 1964.[74] At the same time, Breen was involved in several other 'communities of affinity': He was a passionate coin collector with a considerable reputation among the numismatic community; through his wife he became involved in the Pagan community; and he moved in circles with an interest in 'greek love,' that is, sexual relationships between men and young boys. It was this latter proclivity that led to the controversy remembered in fandom as the "Second Great Exclusion." Among science-fiction fans on the West Coast who interacted with Breen on a regular basis, it appears to have been fairly common knowledge that Breen was not only preoccupied with the theme of pederasty in his writings and his correspondence,[75] but also acted on these desires continuously and frequently.[76] In 1964, the discussion about Breen in the Berkeley fan community gained enough urgency that Bill Donaho, himself a well-known fan and member of the approaching Pacificon II'

following discussion revolved primarily around Zimmer Bradley's role in the case, with Breen remaining an afterthought – which is even more notable considering that two other communities that were affected by the scandal, the Pagan community and numismatic circles, have made admittedly sparse, but explicit attempts at working through the problematic aspects of their history with the Breen case (see Katessa S. Harkey, "In the Midst of Avalon: Casualties of the Sexual Revolution," in *Pagan Consent Culture*, ed. Christine Hoff Kraemer and Yvonne Arburrow (Hubbardston, MA: Asphodel Press, 2016), 194–213; Charles Morgan and Hubert Walker, "Confronting Breen," *CoinWeek*, November 3, 2015).

[73] Fanac is a fannish term from science-fiction fandom, referring to work done by fans that serves the sustenance of the fan community, including the publication of fanzines or the organization of fan conventions.

[74] They moved to Staten Island in 1968 and joined the New York area fan community; separated in 1979 and were divorced in 1990.

[75] During his time at Columbia Medical School, where Breen attended pre-med classes in the early/mid 1950s, he interviewed juveniles identifying as homosexual and/or transgender about their childhood sexual behavior, and collected data on their genitals, for what was presented as research on "gifted children;" various poems, plays, and literary texts produced in the 1950s/1960s explicitly reference sex with children (for both, see Breen, Walter. *Walter H. Breen Papers*, 1950–ca. 1992. Coll. 7755. Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Carl A. Kroch Library. Cornell University). In 1964, he published *Greek Love*, a defense of man/boy love, under the pseudonym J.Z. Eglinton.

[76] It should be stated at this point that there is, from a current perspective, no doubt that Breen had a long history of child molestation, spanning several decades and including dozens of victims. In 1954, he was arrested for

organizing committee, felt it necessary to write a long letter with the title "The Great Breen Boondoggle,"[77] recounting in detail the controversy around Breen's behavior towards children in science-fiction fandom. Donaho discusses several incidents involving Breen and different children (of which four are identified by name and several others are mentioned in passing), as well as the respective parents' reactions, which seem to have ranged from simply telling their children to keep their distance to banning Breen from their homes. The purpose of Donaho's letter was to gather opinions and advice from a group of friends on how to deal with Breen in regard to his presence at the upcoming convention and within fandom in general. It is apparent that Donaho himself didn't claim to know how to handle the situation. He brought up several options, which included informing the police, letting parents handle the issue themselves the way they saw fit, and excluding Breen from fandom by banning him from clubs and conventions, including the upcoming Pacificon II. The document was addressed merely to a number of friends, accompanied by the explicit disclaimer: "This article is most emphatically a Do Not Print, Do Not Quote and Most Especially Do No Blab My Name When You Mention This Letter Substitute." It may speak to the efficiency of science-fiction fans' communication channels that the letter nevertheless circulated among a much larger group of fans rather quickly so that "The Great Breen Boondoggle" became a hot topic in the wider fan community.

Two organizations took action against Breen in reaction to Donaho's report, and in both cases, their measures were met with very mixed reactions. In the decision that gave the "Second Great Exclusion" its name, the Pacificon II organizing committee did indeed decide to ban Breen from

child molestation in Atlantic City and received a probationary sentence. He was arrested again in 1990 after being reported by his daughter Moira and other victims. The following trial ended in another probationary sentence; a year later he was rearrested for another transgression and sentenced to 13 years in prison, where he died of cancer the following year.

[77] Bill Donaho, "The Great Breen Boondoggle or All Berkeley Is Plunged into War," 1964.

attending the conference. They were concerned that they might be held liable if Breen's behavior at the convention would prompt someone to press charges. The committee set a hearing to which Breen didn't appear, then proceeded to distribute a mailing to inform the fan community of the reasons for the exclusion. To protest this decision, eight fans announced that they would boycott the Worldcon,[78] and at the convention itself, supporters and critics of Breen got into a physical altercation that strongly resembles the brawls between Futurians and New Fandom 25 years earlier:

> In what has been inaccurately described as a fistfight but was actually a shoving, wrestling, and (on the Schwenn woman's part) a clawing match, Bob grabbed her wrists to keep her from scratching him any more. […] Things calmed down at last – in part because the people standing close kept the struggle from spreading by neither joining in nor letting anyone near who might like to join in – and HaLevy finally persuaded the trio to leave.[79]

Shortly after the Pacificon committee announced their decision, a number of FAPA members also signed a 'blackball' that effectively removed Breen from the FAPA membership waitlist and prevented him from joining the amateur press association. This blackball, however, was overturned almost immediately in two petitions launched by other FAPA members who opposed Breen's exclusion.

The actions taken against Breen and the subsequent counter-actions show clearly how much the Breen issue divided the fan community. And just like the "First Great Exclusion," the "Second Exclusion" was controversial not merely because of its subject matter – whether Breen was guilty of the things he had been accused of, and if so, whether this warranted any kind of action from the side of fandom – but also because of the communal procedures and practices employed in the process.

[78] Bill Donaho et al., "Untitled," *RPM*, no. 8 (August 1964).
[79] George Scithers, "Pacificon II Report," 1964.

Many felt there was plenty of evidence to show that Breen had molested children, although not everyone agreed on how to react: "As I said in SAPS last week, I am convinced that enough evidence exists to convict Walter Breen of child molestation, were those in possession of the evidence willing to put it forward."[80] But there were also a considerable number of fans who doubted the truth of the accusations – even among those who admitted that Breen didn't make a secret out of being attracted to children, not everyone wanted to believe he had actually acted on those desires, like Breen's fellow scientologist Prentiss Choate:

> So Walter Breen is attracted to children. What of it? A damn sight more of us have sexual attractions to children than we normally admit to each other or even to ourselves. The entire issue is, how much does a person have control over his impulses? And, in all the dirt that has flied so thick, I don't recall ever hearing Walter accused of molesting a child in the face of express disapproval on the part of the child, parents, or anyone else close to the scene.[81]

The sides in this controversy were anything but clear-cut, and as many fans remarked on, did not necessarily run along political lines of left/right. Still, the sociopolitical climate in mid-1960s America clearly influenced fans' reactions. On the one hand, the experience of McCarthyism and the denunciatory tendencies that went along with it had made many fans reluctant to trust accusations of a certain kind against members of the community. On the other hand, public and medical discourse in the 1960s falsely tended to equate homosexuality with pedophilia/pederasty, and science-fiction fandom was no exception in this regard. Therefore, fans' opinion of Breen's actions was often influenced by their attitude towards homosexuality – some fans who deemed themselves progressives defended Breen because they saw him first and foremost as a homosexual or bisexual man; others critiqued him harshly not primarily for abusing children, but for openly displaying his presumed homosexuality.

[80] Bruce Pelz, "Untitled," *Ankus*, no. 11 (May 1964).
[81] Prentiss Choate, "The Great Breendonaho Boon," *Postmortem*, May 1964.

Noticeable is that the vast majority of fans were clearly very reluctant to involve the authorities, and highly critical of Bill Donaho and Alva Rogers' decision to approach the Berkeley police with their collected evidence (which apparently did not convince the police to take action). Fans were concerned that drawing the authorities' attention to Breen would also draw unwanted attention[82] to the fan community in general and the Worldcon in particular – in their statement on the Breen case, Richard Brown and Dave Van Arnam pointedly retitled Pacificon II "Copcon."[83] The concern about potential negative consequences for the fan community apparently outweighed the arguments in favor of turning Breen over to the authorities. Overall, it is clear that fans saw the Breen problem as an internal issue that should be solved, one way or another, by the fan community itself.

But while the community seemed to be united in the desire to handle this problem within the community, they were far from reaching an agreement on what the community should have done. First, fans argued over whether this matter should be of any concern to the fan community at all – some fans suggested that Breen should not be penalized by the community as long as his digressions didn't relate to specifically fannish matters, like Richard Bergeron, who spoke out against the FAPA blackball: "On the basis of past performance I cannot see how Breen can do anything but make FAPA more stimulating. […] I do not see how a person's personal life will have any

[82] The fan community had an invested interest in not becoming subject to the scrutiny of the police, a concern that was tied to the reputation of fans outside their community. While fans themselves may have considered themselves intellectually superior to the average citizen, the general public tended to perceive them as 'freaks.' In addition, there were occasional worries about materials distributed in fan mailings being affected by obscenity laws (since fanzines often featured drawings (half)naked women on covers and as illustrations). Fan conventions were also a place where fans might have sexual encounters with each other, another reason why police presence at conventions would have been unwelcome. In addition, it appears that in the late 1950s some prominent fans were in fact investigated by the FBI, in regard to a potential affiliation with communism (see Knight, *The Futurians*, 225).

[83] Richard Brown and Dave Van Arnam, "Untitled," *Poor Richard's Almanach*, no. 17 (April 1964).

effect on my enjoyment of his membership in FAPA."[84] Others refused to consider such a separation of fannish and non-fannish life: "I see no basis whatsoever for an attitude that proclaims someone unacceptable in one facet of society - - the In Person facet - - and perfectly alright in another facet, the Correspondence facet - - the amateur presses."[85]

The more urgent question for many fans, however, was the question of whether, and under what circumstances, a committee like the Worldcon organizing committee or the FAPA leadership had the right to exclude members based on what they considered a danger to the community. Even those who attempted to remain neutral on the topic of Breen's guilt (because they did not feel informed enough) usually had an opinion about the representative rights and duties of committees within the fan community. The most adamant defenders of Breen were very critical of both the convention committee and the FAPA board's decision to exclude Breen. Brown/Van Arnam called for the convention committee to resign, claiming that they had somehow shirked their responsibility to the community by banning Breen from the convention.[86] For Breen's defenders, the convention committee had done injustice not only to Breen, but more importantly, to the community as a whole: Choate blamed the committee for having "driven many people away from the convention and caused a deep rift in fandom both locally and nationally that is likely to be very slow in healing";[87] Rusty Hevelin raised his voice to "say that it has not been established that the best interests of fandom and the convention are served by revoking the membership of any given fan in a convention society."[88]

[84] Richard Bergeron, "Untitled," *Warhoon*, no. 20 (1964).
[85] Pelz, "Untitled."
[86] Brown/Van Arnam, "Untitled."
[87] Choate, "The Great".
[88] Rusty Hevelin, "The Despicable Donhao Doggery," *Phineas Pinkham Pallograph*, August 1964.

Other fans, whether they believed in Breen's guilt or not, defended the committee's right to exclude people from the convention if there was any reason to assume that perhaps they might cause difficulties for the convention or the fan community as a whole.

> [A]s far as that specific statement of the power of the Committee goes, I'm all for it. In fact, I can't see that there is any question about the point. The Convention Committee is responsible for the convention; therefore it has the power to run the convention and to remove anyone who proves undesirable. The question in this case is whether or not the Pacificon Committee misused its authority; that it had the authority is demonstratable fact. The Con Committee is chosen by fandom to run the convention. Once chosen, they are in charge.[89]

Others again were fine with the convention committee's decision to ban Breen, but used the occasion to question the blackball amendment in the FAPA constitution, which stated that if ten members opposed the admittance of another fan, that fan would automatically be taken off the waitlist. Chuck Hansen, albeit hesitant to make any statements about Breen's guilt, had insisted on the committee's right to exclude Breen from the convention for liability reasons. He was equally clear that he felt the blackball was within the official rules of the FAPA constitution: "The cold facts are that the Fapa blackball was not monstrous, unethical, nor immoral. It was a perfectly decent, ethical legal act under the Fapa constitution."[90] But he went on to say that perhaps the concept of the blackball rule in itself was flawed and should be reconsidered:

> Personally I do not feel that it is very democratic that the vote of such a small minority of the membership can reject an applicant. I have considered submitting an amendment to require a majority of the membership for this purpose.

In the end, despite the fact that many fans seemed to feel uneasy about Breen's presence in fandom and supported the convention committee's decision to ban him from attending Pacificon II, the fallout from the "Great Breen Boondoggle" became so dramatic that Bill Donaho felt the need to publish an official apology for plunging fandom into uproar in August 1964:

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[89] Robert Coulson and Juanita Coulson, "Untitled," *Yandro*, no. XII.5 (May 1964).
[90] Chuck Hansen, "Untitled," *Damballa*, no. 2.3 (May 1965).

> The Pacificon II committee has cancelled the membership of Walter Breen. The committee feels this to be a necessary and desirable action. But it could have been done differently. It should have been done differently. […] I should not have published the BOONDOGGLE. […] The BOONDOGGLE was essentially true of course. But that's no excuse. […] Let's look at it from a purely practical point of view for a moment. We are going to get nowhere. […] There are too many people on both sides. And leave [sic] us face it, some of our best friends are evial [sic] monsters on the other side. Some friendships are already irrepairably [sic] gone. Let's don't [sic] send any more down the drain.[91]

Donaho's public apology shows that even those who had initially pushed for Breen's exclusion from fandom came to feel that his exclusion was not worth the toll the controversy had taken on the community. Restoring the harmony of the community as fully as possible ultimately appeared to take priority over the best solution for the Breen problem. Since it seemed impossible to resolve the controversy to everyone's satisfaction, the only reasonable solution for Donaho was to simply put the matter to rest and move on. Consequently, Breen remained an active member of the fan community for the following decades.

Consequences and Conclusion

From today's perspective, the "Great Exclusion" and the "Breen Boondoggle" might not seem to offer themselves automatically to a comparison. However, the two events highlighted similar aspects of science-fiction fandom's notion of community. Sam Moskowitz, one of the major players in the "Great Exclusion" of 1939, drew a direct connection between the two events when he wrote a retrospective piece about Pacificon II and the Breen controversy from the distance of several decades in 1989:

> This [that is, Breen's exclusion from the convention] opened up a new perspective on the action taken by the committee of The First World Science Fiction Convention in 1939 in barring six Futurians from entry for fear, "with overwhelming cause," that they might disrupt the convention.[92]

[91] Bill Donaho, "Apologia," August 22, 1964.
[92] Sam Moskowitz, "What to Do About Undesirables," *Noreascon III Program Book*, 1989.

As a convention organizer who had faced criticism for excluding the Futurians from the convention in 1939, he seemed to suggest here that if Breen's exclusion in 1964 had been justified, then surely that meant the Futurians' exclusion in 1939 had been the right thing to do as well – in both cases, the convention committee had claimed to act with the community's best interest in mind, since they were primarily concerned about potentially disruptive occurrences in the convention space. But regardless of whether one agrees with Moskowitz' conclusion, his argument indicates that the fan community perceived both cases as ultimately raising questions regarding the organizational and representational structure of the community – what was in the best interest of the community as a whole, who had the right to speak for the community, and how far did their authority ultimately reach. And even though the heated controversies in both cases demonstrated that these questions were highly contested territory over decades of fannish history, their negotiation in fanzines showed that the common good and the unity of the community were often given priority over the rights of individual members. This does not mean that fans necessarily agreed on what was best for the community, merely that their argumentation was usually grounded in communitarian rather than individualist ideals.

This ideal of community continued to have consequences for the negotiation of different conflicts within the science-fiction community, and ironically the focus on community cohesion is what ultimately caused part of the community to effectively split off from literary science-fiction fandom in the early/mid 1970s. The 1960s saw an increase in television programs and films with science-fiction themes, which led to what Paul Abelkis in 1979, as mentioned earlier in this chapter, called fandom's "gravest crisis ever." Around the same time, female writers like Joanna Russ started to develop a specifically feminist tradition within science-fiction literature, as all the while female fans began pushing for a more inclusive atmosphere in the fan community which up to that

point had certainly accepted women (often the wives and girlfriends of male fans) as participants, but had not taken them into consideration as equal members of the community, as comments like the following convention report from 1974 show:

> But doesn't the New Orleans group know that people's wives go to the convention – they must have noticed that not all the people at sf cons are male. That's a really male chauvinist attitude – I'm astonished anyone in fandom believes that sort of thing any longer. After all, aren't fans supposed to be more enlightened than other people?[93]

Both the influx of new fans through the appeal of audiovisual franchises like *Star Trek* and *Star Wars* and the noticeable effects of second-wave feminism on fandom were seen by many fans as threats to the unity of the community. The rejection of attempts to bring politics into fandom – already a driving force in the "Great Exclusion" – became a common argument again in fans' critique of women who attempted to introduce feminism into science-fiction fandom. In reaction to what he perceived as a forced politicization of Iguanacon, the 1978 Worldcon, Matt Hickman wrote:

> This letter is to vent my spleen on the matter of Harlan Ellison's[94] attempt to politicize the Worldcon and the boycott being instituted by the pro ERA-groups against the individual States that have not ratified the "Equal Rights Amendment".[95]

Hickman made it clear that whatever his opinion of the issues at stake, he did not think the World-con should be a place for politics, and that the organizing committee did not have the right to decide otherwise: "The Worldcon is not the property of the Guest of Honor, nor of the Worldcon Committee, it belongs to the membership." This resistance in the fan community both towards

[93] Rebecca Lesses, "Untitled," *It Can't Happen Here*, no. 32 (October 1974).

[94] Harlan Ellison (born 1934) has been, like numerous members of the science-fiction community, both active in the fannish community and an acclaimed professional writer of novels and short stories, among them well-known works like his short story "I Have No Mouth, and I Must Scream"(1967).

[95] Matt Hickmann, "Untitled," *Tightbeam*, no. 3 (1978).

those with an interest in science-fiction/fantasy-themed cinema and television, and those concerned with women's rights ultimately led to the emergence of a new fan community.[96] The female-dominated 'media fandom' combined both an interest in television and movie franchises and an investment in inclusionary politics and thus offered an environment for those who felt alienated and excluded by the rigid borders of literary science-fiction fandom. The programmatic statement of the *Star Trek/Star Wars* media zine *Organia*, for example, names feminism as an explicit concern: "Feminism is a strong concern throughout the zine, not just in the short Feminist section. Much of the fiction and poetry in the zine focusses [sic] on women or is told through the eyes of women."[97]

The community of media fandom, which over the decades developed into what is now most often talked about as transformative online fandom, will be the focus of the following chapter. We will see that in splitting off from traditional, male-dominated literary science-fiction fandom, media fans did not simply reproduce the organizational structures, the discursive practices, nor the ideal of community that drove the science-fiction community over decades and in some ways still drive it today. Transformative online fandom is dominated by a very different concept of community and public discourse, as well as a different notion regarding the relationship between community and individual. This shows that any general/universalizing theoretical approach to fan communities has its serious limitations, since there are significant differences between fan groups based on their historical and cultural contexts, demographic structure, and communal self-concep-

[96] See Bacon-Smith, *Enterprising Women*; Francesca Coppa, "A Brief History of Media Fandom," in *Fan Fiction and Fan Communities in the Age of the Internet*, ed. Kristina Busse and Karen Hellekson (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, 2006), 41–59; Joan Marie Verba, *Boldly Writing: A Trekker Fan and Zine History 1967-1987* (Minnetonka, Minn: FTL Publications, 1996). See also chapter 2.

[97] Bev Lorenstein and Judith Gran, "Welcome," *Organia*, no. 1 (July 1982).

tion. While Calkins' statement about the literary science-fiction community was an accurate description of 1960s science-fiction fandom, it cannot be applied automatically to any fan organization: Not every fan community considers itself an "entity, something to be cherished, protected and prolonged at all cost."

II. From Secretive Subculture to Alternative Public Sphere:

Journal-Based Fandom and Political Discourse

Introduction

> Hell, I'm one of the _black_ people who thought at first that the Internet was proving to be a bad place for this discussion to happen. But I changed my mind. Having it via the Internet gave us (people of colour and allies in SF/F[1] community) gave us [sic!] numbers. It let us see each other. For the first time in this community, we weren't isolated voices which could easily be shouted down. For the first time, we got to do some shouting back. (Nalo Hopkinson, January 21, 2010)

Posted in the comment thread of African-American fantasy author N.K. Jemisin's blog post "Why I think Racefail was the Bestest Thing Evar For SFF,"[2] both Jamaican science-fiction author Nalo Hopkinson's comment and the article it reacts to refer to a debate which caused considerable uproar in a not-so-small corner of the internet in early 2009. Over the course of about five months, thousands of participants talked about the role of race and racism in science-fiction and fantasy literature, in the respective professional circles and the fan communities. The events surrounding *RaceFail '09,* as the debate was dubbed by participants and observers, involved professional and amateur creators, critics, and academics, but most importantly countless readers and fans of speculative fiction.

Since the debate evolved over several months, involved so many actors and was led in many different blogs posts and comment threads that often cross-linked and referenced each other, it is almost impossible to trace this argument in a clear linear order. Most participants attempting to

[1] Science fiction and fantasy

[2] N.K. Jemisin, "Why I Think RaceFail Was The Bestest Thing Evar for SFF," *NKJemisin*, January 18, 2010, http://nkjemisin.com/2010/01/why-i-think-racefail-was-the-bestest-thing-evar-for-sff/#sthash.bWAnVGMu.VRH6Lu7i.dpuf.

provide a chronologically or thematically structured overview introduced it with a disclaimer or apology for inevitably failing to do justice to the complexity of the discussion: "RaceFail is a decentralized internet conflict, and thinking about it in terms of sides, timelines, or threads are all (sometimes necessary) simplifications."[3] The lack of a consistent chronology for *RaceFail '09* is due not only to the debate's hypertextual complexity, but also to its occurrence outside the framework of established institutions with the normative power to install a dominant narrative. On the other hand, the large number of overviews, summaries and link collections bear witness to the efforts many participants put into archiving and documenting the debate, and thus to the importance they attributed to the discussion.

What made *RaceFail '09* so significant was, first, that it is in all likelihood the only conversation on race in cultural production that *directly* involved this many people from so many different backgrounds speaking to each other at the same time. Second, while *RaceFail '09* certainly leaked into offline spaces like fan conventions, the conversation itself was led almost exclusively online, primarily on the journal-based social networking platform Livejournal. In this chapter, I argue that it was not simply *possible to have* this conversation on social networking platforms, but rather that it was precisely those platforms which *made the discussion possible* in the first place. More specifically, it was the mutual influence between the cultural practices of transformative fandom and the communication technology of journal-based platforms that facilitated the development of an alternative public sphere which not only supported the emergence of political discourse, but also interrogated the conditions and rules of discourse, in particular the distinctions between public and private, political and personal that stabilize dominant public spheres. In doing this, I respond to the discussion regarding the usefulness of Jürgen Habermas' concept of the public sphere[4] in the

[3] tablesaw, "O HAI RACEFAILZ: Notes on Reading an Internet Conflict," *Livejournal*, March 9, 2009.
[4] Habermas, *Structural Transformation*.

context of online participatory culture. By drawing on Michael Warner and Nancy Fraser's critiques' of Habermas,[5] I propose that the public sphere is indeed a useful model to think about the discursive practices of online communities; however, this requires a concept of the public sphere that takes into account the criticisms directed at Habermas' model of the liberal public sphere and that is adapted to the specific historical constellation at the turn of the millennium.

In the previous chapter, I discussed how the literary science-fiction community emerged in the early 20th century as a community of affinity whose communal practices did not only involve reading and writing speculative fiction, but also the production, circulation, and collection of fanzines and other fan-made written materials. This fan group, I argued, was characterized by an ideal of community that prioritized the unity of fandom and consensus among community members over the interests of its individual members. In this chapter, I contrast the particular notion of community that dominated early/mid-20th century science-fiction fandom with the self-conception of contemporary online journal-based transformative fandom. This fannish formation developed out of media fandom, the fan community that separated from literary science-fiction fandom in the late 1960s/early 1970s,[6] in reaction to science-fiction fandom's resistance both to televisual and cinematic science-fiction themed texts, and to the emergence of a feminist tradition within science fiction. I propose that transformative online fandom represents a notion of discourse and community that clearly distinguishes itself from the community of literary science-fiction fandom in the mid-20th century. Specifically, I argue that the emergence of political discourse in journal-based

[5] See Nancy Fraser, "Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy," *Social Text*, no. 25/26 (1990): 56–80; Nancy Fraser, *Scales of Justice: Reimagining Political Space in a Globalizing World* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009); Michael Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics* (New York: Zone Books, 2002).

[6] See Bacon-Smith, *Enterprising Women*; Coppa, "A Brief History"; Verba, *Boldly Writing*.

fandom (re)conceptualized the fannish identity as a political identity and opened the scope of fannish practices to include social and political activist engagement. This argument also offers a new perspective for the body of scholarship on the political significance of transformative fandom. While for two decades, fan studies scholars have seen the emancipatory potential of transformative fandom primarily in fans' resistant reading practices, recently their focus has turned toward fan-organized social and political activism in the form of charity fundraisers, awareness-raising campaigns, consumer boycotts, or public protests. In this chapter, I aim to bridge the gap between fannish practices of reception and fannish activism by directing the focus away from the relationship between fan and text and toward discursive practices, processes of community formation, and consensus-building among fans.

The Internet and the Public Sphere

In his 1962 work *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (*Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit*, first transl. 1989),[7] Jürgen Habermas declared the death of the autonomous bourgeois public sphere as a result of mass media conglomerates' co-option of public opinion. But in the 1990s,[8] the public sphere concept experienced a renewed interest, in particular from scholars at the intersection of media studies and political theory.[9] The emergence of Usenet (1980) and the World Wide Web (1991) inspired both enthusiasm and fears regarding the new technology's implications for concepts like citizenship, participatory democracy, and public discourse. Internet

[7] Habermas, *Structural Transformation*.

[8] This was partly due to the belated translation of Habermas' influential work (1962) into English in 1989, as well as a revised German edition of the text with a new introduction, in which Habermas directly engaged with the criticism directed at the original text: Jürgen Habermas, *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit: Untersuchungen zu einer Kategorie der bürgerlichen Gesellschaft* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1990).

[9] Warwick Mules, "Media Publics and the Transnational Public Sphere," *Critical Arts: A South-North Journal of Cultural & Media Studies*, no. 12.1/2 (January 1998): 24.

optimists saw it as a medium that would not only make possible a revival of the autonomous public sphere, but would overcome the blind spots of Habermas' concept. Despite the far-reaching influence of Habermas' description of the 18th-century bourgeois public sphere as an ideal model of communicative rationality and deliberative democracy, the theory also inspired fundamental criticism from various sides.[10] A major point of contention was Habermas' idealization of the bourgeois public sphere as an inclusive space that allowed all citizens to participate equally in the negotiation of public opinion. His critics suggested that by downplaying the exclusion of several groups from the liberal public sphere, in particular the working classes, the poor, and women, he ignored the fact that the bourgeois public, with its definition of the citizen as male, white, of age, and economically independent,[11] not only functioned as a tool of class, gender and racial distinction, but actually *depended* on those mechanisms of exclusion.[12] Habermas' separation between the public and the private sphere in particular glossed over the complex interrelations between state, economy, and family, and led to the structural exclusion of women through their association with the domestic sphere[13] and workers through their association with the realm of labor.[14] Habermas' critics have pointed out that disadvantaged groups have often formed

[10] Which others have summarized comprehensively and in detail, see: Craig J. Calhoun, ed., *Habermas and the Public Sphere* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1992); Peter Uwe Hohendahl and Marc Silberman, "Critical Theory, Public Sphere and Culture. Jürgen Habermas and His Critics," *New German Critique*, no. 16 (1979): 89–118; Robert C. Holub, *Jürgen Habermas: Critic in the Public Sphere* (London; New York: Routledge, 1991).

[11] "Der Status eines Privatmannes kombiniert die Rolle des Warenbesitzers mit der des Familienvaters, die des Eigentümers mit der des 'Menschen' schlechthin" (Habermas, *Strukturwandel,* 88). In translation: "The status of private man combined the role of owner of commodities with that of head of the family, that of property owner with that of 'human being' per se" (Habermas, *Structural Transformation*, 29).

[12] It does need to be said that Habermas himself not only acknowledged, but at least partly agreed with some of those criticisms in the introduction to the new edition, although he wasn't interested in fundamentally reassessing his theory (Habermas, *Strukturwandel*, 11-50).

[13] See Fraser, "Rethinking"; Joan B. Landes, "Women and the Public Sphere," *Social Analysis Gender and Social Life*, no. 15 (1984): 20–31.

[14] Alexander Kluge and Oskar Negt, *Öffentlichkeit und Erfahrung: Zur Organisationsanalyse von bürgerlicher und proletarischer Öffentlichkeit* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1972).

alternative publics,[15] and suggest that his insistence on a consensus achieved by a homogenous, general public postulates the universal and thus hides the hegemonic nature of the liberal public sphere. Even his focus on rational, objective discourse as the language of the liberal public sphere privileges not only those with access to education but also frequently devalues the opinions of non-hegemonic groups: "[I]t is a strategy of distinction, profoundly linked to education and to dominant forms of masculinity."[16] Last but not least, his narrative of the public sphere's decline as a consequence of the rise of mass media implies a dismissal of popular tastes and audiences that reflects the anxieties of a cultural elite concerned with their apparent loss of influence.

The internet, then, seemed to hold the promise of a democratic mass medium that would not only refute the cultural pessimism of the Frankfurt School, but would also be able to overcome the historical limitations of the bourgeois public sphere. The low access barriers,[17] the increased possibilities for networking across distances, and the flat, non-hierarchical structure of online communication led to the decentralization of publication, the blurring of the producer/consumer divide, and the proliferation of collective authorship, and made the internet appear as a technology that facilitated equal participation in the public sphere – even beyond the borders of the nation state on a global scale.[18]

At the same time, other scholars suggested that Habermas' concept of the public sphere could

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[15] For instance proletarian public spheres (Kluge/Negt, *Öffentlichkeit*); women's public spheres (Landes, "Women"); or, to extend the list beyond the context of 18th century Europe, black (L.F. Selzer, "Angela Nissel From Blog to Books: Authorship and the Digital Public Sphere," *Auto/Biography Studies*, no. 27.1 (2012): 127–52) or queer counter publics (Warner, *Publics*).

[16] Warner, *Publics*, 51.

[17] Of course, the implicit barriers of internet access and basic literacy need to be kept in mind – even the (relatively) low access barriers to online communication give an advantage to those with access to primary education and public internet access. Today, more than 40% of the entire world population have access to the internet, in 1999 it was only 5% ("Internet Users," *Internet Live Stats*, http://www.internetlivestats.com/internet-users/). This means that more than half of the world's population is still cut off from online communication.

[18] Henry Jenkins, David Thorburn, and Brad Seawell, eds., *Democracy and New Media* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2003), 1–13; Marita Sturken and Lisa Cartwright, *Practices of Looking. An Introduction to Visual Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001); 333–342.

not be usefully applied to online communication at all, because the historical, political, and technological conditions of publicity had changed too drastically. They proposed that since his description of the 18th-century bourgeois public sphere had been based on the assumption of a nation state with a (more or less) clearly defined constituency of citizens, his definitions of citizenship and publicity failed to describe a contemporary political landscape shaped by globalization and hyper-capitalism.[19] Still others focused on the virtual character of online communication, and either suggested that it was inferior to face-to-face-communication and therefore would be detrimental to rational discourse and consensus-building,[20] or that in fact it far surpassed the possibilities of traditional forms of communication and therefore required new theoretical concepts and a new terminology.[21]

Looking back at this debate two decades later, a considerable weakness of both positions seems to be their attempt to essentialize the internet as a cohesive entity that was expected to either entirely fulfill the requirements of an autonomous public sphere, or to leave the concept of communicative consensus-building behind completely.[22] Since then, the diversification of the internet and the accompanying developments in interpersonal communication, publishing, data storage, state surveillance, commerce, finance, culture, sex work, gameplay, and online activism, have made it more, rather than less, problematic to consider the internet's function, its mechanisms and effects as homogenous. Therefore, any working concept of the internet needs to take into

[19] Jodi Dean, "Why the Net Is Not a Public Sphere," *Constellations*, no. 10.1 (March 1, 2003): 95–112.

[20] James Brook and Iain Boal, *Resisting the Virtual Life: The Culture and Politics of Information* (San Francisco: City Lights, 1995).

[21] Mark Poster, "Cyberdemocracy: The Internet and the Public Sphere," in *Reading Digital Culture*, ed. David Trend (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers Ltd, 2001), 259–71.

[22] Equating the distribution technology with the social structures that both bring forth and emerge from technological innovations creates false dichotomies and hinders the analysis of actual communicative processes. This problem also cannot be solved by simply replacing the public sphere concept with different terminology. For example, Jodi Dean's proposal to define the internet as a "zero institution," in one category with both the "nation state" and "sexuality," ("Why the Net", 105) seems to be less a helpful parallel and rather a good indicator for the way scholars have struggled to categorize the internet as a homogenous entity.

account its decentralized multiplicity. Henry Jenkins, for example, distinguishes between "medium" and "delivery technology" in order to acknowledge the way the internet fulfills the function of different communication, entertainment and storage media, without necessarily *replacing* older methods of transmission.[23] This makes it possible, for instance, to continue a conversation about cinematic aesthetics, even though 'film' as delivery technology has practically disappeared; or to discuss *Netflix* original programming as 'television' even though these shows have never been aired on a network. Mark Poster, on the other hand, suggests thinking of the internet as a space[24] that internet users occupy and appropriate, and that (like physical spaces) shapes the users' actions but doesn't determine them. This concept has the advantage of accounting for different virtual interactions from online shopping to cloud storage that often don't fit into essentializing models of the internet.

Both approaches suggest that while the internet itself does not automatically constitute a public sphere, there is no reason why it should not be possible for public spheres *to form* on the internet. Of course, these publics won't simply be a repetition of the Habermasian 18th-century bourgeois public sphere; and as the criticism directed at Habermas' model has shown, they *shouldn't*, if they are to retain any resistant or emancipatory potential. In her re-conceptualization of Habermas' model as a transnational public sphere, Nancy Fraser insists that the public sphere as "a space for the communicative generation of public opinion" and "a vehicle for marshaling public opinion as a political force" still has value as a "critical theory of democracy",[25] but that in

[23] Henry Jenkins, *Convergence Culture. Where Old and New Media Collide* (New York: New York University Press, 2006), 13.

[24] Poster, "Cyberdemocracy", 262. To reconcile this perspective with the description of the internet as delivery technology, one might conceive of it as the space mapped out by the interconnected servers between which electronic messages have to travel.

[25] Fraser, *Scales of Justice*, 76.

order "to locate normative standards and emancipatory political possibilities,"[26] it is necessary to "envision conditions under which current flows of transnational publicity could conceivably become legitimate and efficacious."[27] Fraser points out that a "major blindspot"[28] in the discussion around Habermas' conception of the public sphere was its unquestioned reliance on the idea of the nation state as political constituency. She proposes that the focus on the nation state needs to be reevaluated at a time in which markets, political alliances and cultural traditions frequently cross national borders, and transnational organizations and a globalized economy contest not only the nation state's political control over its citizens, but also its cultural influence: "Consider, finally, the assumption that a public sphere rests on a national vernacular literature, which supplies the shared social imaginary needed to underpin solidarity. This assumption, too, is today counterfactual."[29] Thomas Olesen similarly suggests that the nation state as unifying concept is increasingly joined by other loyalties and alliances, and proposes "that individuals and social movements are increasingly forging ties that cut across national civil societies and create new spaces of political activism."[30] Della Porta/Mattoni find that this move away from national politics doesn't necessarily imply a decline in political interest, but encourages alternative forms of political participation:

> Recent research on political participation noted that, while some more conventional forms of participation are declining, protest forms are instead increasingly used. Citizens vote less, but are not less interested or less knowledgeable about politics. And if some traditional types of associations are less and less popular, others (social movement organizations and/or civil society organizations) are growing in resources, legitimacy and members.[31]

[26] Ibid., 77.
[27] Ibid., 93.
[28] Ibid., 85.
[29] Ibid., 91.
[30] Thomas Olesen, "Transnational Publics: New Spaces of Social Movement Activism and the Problem of Global Long-Sightedness," *Current Sociology*, no. 53.3 (2005): 420.
[31] Della Porta/Mattoni, "Cultures of Participation," 172.

But if identification with national citizenship is replaced or at least contested by identification with other, non-institutionalized constituencies, it is necessary to consider the social formations that can act as (transnational, alternative) constituencies and publics. Warner speaks of "cultures and sub-cultures"[32] in this context, Olesen references "social movements" and "collective identities."[33] As I have done in the first chapter, I purposefully continue to use the term 'community' when speaking about the fan groups I analyze here – both because it is used by its members as a form of self-designation and because it carries connotations of affective and identificatory involvement that, as I am going to show below, are crucial for my analysis of transformative fandom as alternative public. This does not imply an idealized notion of social formations: I have already demonstrated that regardless of theoretical approaches treating community as a naturalized form of quasi-mythical togetherness, communities can very well also be spaces of oppression and exclusion. Here, I am focusing on community as a social group whose members share certain practices, experiences, vocabulary, and possibly a historical narrative, that is, a common 'culture' in the broadest sense of the term; as well as some form of affective (not necessarily always positive) investment in the community, be it an attachment to certain values or topics, or to other members of the group. This concept of 'community' also does not exclude the simultaneous association with other social groups; rather it assumes that individuals are part of different communities that relate to different parts of their self-conception.

Assuming a multiplicity of intersecting communities of social and political alliance also requires one to discard the ideal of a homogenous, universal public sphere, and to imagine instead an interplay between different, sometimes overlapping publics, some of them hegemonic, some of

[32] Warner, *Publics*.
[33] Olesen, "Transnational Publics."

them non-hegemonic 'alternative publics.'[34] The Habermasian (hegemonic) bourgeois public sphere was meant to exert control over the state via public media. But non-hegemonic publics have to rely on alternative media to generate public discourse. Therefore, the non-hegemonic alternative public does not only provide a counter-weight to forms of legislative power but also to the power exerted by the cultural hegemony in dominant media.

Transformative Fandom as Community

Speaking from Jürgen Habermas' perspective in *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, it must appear counter-intuitive to think about fans as participants in an alternative public sphere. As supposedly loyal, or even *obsessive* consumers, they appear especially tightly entangled in the net of the culture industry that Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer criticize in their analysis of popular culture. Admittedly strongly influenced by their work, Habermas connects the disintegration of the public sphere to the rise of mass media and the entertainment industry: "Thus, a new category of influence emerged: a media power which was used manipulatively and robbed the principle of publicity of its innocence";[35] a development that, according to Habermas, replaced the critical recipient of high culture with the passive consumer of mass culture.[36]

[34] Warner calls non-hegemonic publics "counter publics" (Warner, *Publics*); but his terminology implies an oppositional relationship that might not be able to fully account for the complex interrelations between hegemonic and non-hegemonic publics, as L.F. Selzer rightly points out in regard to online public spheres (Selzer, "Angela Nissel", 148). I disagree however with Selzer's suggestion that a distinction between mainstream/hegemonic and alternative/non-hegemonic online publics is not useful anymore at all.

[35] "Damit entstand eine neue Kategorie von Einfluß, nämlich eine Medienmacht, die, manipulativ eingesetzt, dem Prinzip der Publizität seine Unschuld raubte." (Habermas, *Strukturwandel* 28; Transl. by HM)

[36] By the time Habermas wrote a second introduction for the revised edition of his book in 1990, he had changed his position on this point: "Kurzum, meine Diagnose einer geradlinigen Entwicklung vom politisch aktiven zum privatistischen, 'vom kulturrässonierenden zum kulturkonsumierenden' Publikum greift zu kurz. Die Resistenzfähigkeit und vor allem das kritische Potential eines in seinen kulturellen Gewohnheiten aus Klassenschranken hervortretenden, pluralistischen, nach innen weit differenzierten Massenpublikum habe ich seinerzeit zu pessimistisch beurteilt" (Habermas, *Strukturwandel*, 30). ("In short, my diagnosis of a linear development from politically active to private, from an audience that reflects on culture to an audience that consumes culture, is too simplistic. My assessment of the resistance and specifically the critical potential of a

However, scholars in the 1980s and 1990s increasingly began to question the Frankfurt School's image of the passive, uncritical consumer of mass culture by examining the active engagement of audiences with (popular) texts: Janice Radway's work on female romance readers[37] found that the act of reading itself can be a form of resistance for disadvantaged groups; Stuart Hall and John Fiske showed how underrepresented groups become accustomed, out of necessity, to reading hegemonic texts against the grain;[38] and Roberta Pearson, Alan McKee, and Matt Hills respectively have pointed out that the distinction between the 'fan' on the one hand, and the 'aficionado' or 'expert' on the other, often works as a class distinction that has been used to systematically discredit specific groups of recipients, particularly lower class audiences, women, and children.[39]

Often described as the opposite of passive consumers, transformative fans in particular moved to the forefront of scholarly interest. Other than fans in traditionally 'affirmative' or 'celebratory' fan groups,[40] fans in 'transformative' or 'fanworks' fandom don't connect with each other primarily via the object of their interest, but rather via their fannish practices: Transformative fans don't 'merely' consume, they reappropriate the texts and objects they engage with and rework,

diverse, differentiated mass audience whose cultural habits transcend class differences was too pessimistic." Transl. by HM)

[37] Radway, *Reading the Romance*.

[38] John Fiske, *Understanding Popular Culture* (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1989); Stuart Hall, "Encoding/Decoding," in *Culture, Media, Language. Working Papers in Cultural Studies, 1972-79*, ed. The Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, University of Birmingham (London et al.: Hutchinson, 1980), 128–38.

[39] Matt Hills, *Fan Cultures* (London/New York: Routledge, 2002); Alan McKee, "The Fans of Cultural Theory," in *Fandom. Identities and Communities in a Mediated World*, ed. Jonathan Gray and et al. (New York/London: New York University Press, 2007), 88–97; Roberta Pearson, "Bachies, Bardies, Trekkies, and Sherlockians," in *Fandom. Identities and Communities in a Mediated World*, ed. Jonathan Gray, Cornel Sandvoss, and C. Lee Harrington (New York/London: New York University Press, 2007), 98–109. *NY Times* critic A.O. Scott's recent lament about the "death of adulthood," for example, in which he blames the popularity of Young Adult literature on an unfortunate "decline of patriarchy", is very telling in the way it dismisses women's, youth's, and working class literary tastes all at once (A. O. Scott, "The Death of Adulthood in American Culture," *The New York Times*, September 11, 2014).

[40] obsession_inc, "Affirmational Fandom vs. Transformational Fandom," *Dreamwidth*, June 1, 2009.

rewrite, and critique them in fanfiction, fanart, fan videos, drama, roleplay, cosplay[41], crafts, filk,[42] fan activism, as well as critical and fan-scholarly writings. As a heavily female and queer dominated space,[43] [44] transformative fandom provides a forum for underrepresented groups to rewrite dominant (heteronormative, ethnocentric) narratives from their own perspective. While not every transformative work should automatically be considered subversive, many fanworks indeed do rewrite the source material by breaking with mainstream culture's dominant conventions:

> Fanworks can be an amazing space within which to negotiate these boundaries because the limits become permeable. Gender-bending, race-bending, age-bending, alternate universes – all of these provide the opportunity to engage with, challenge, reposition, or remove these ideologies as depicted in the original media.[45]

Transformative fanworks undermine traditional concepts of authorship, originality, and intellectual property by approaching texts not as autonomous, complete works, and authors not as owners of their creations: rather, texts are treated as open archives that can be extended infinitely (Derecho speaks of fanfiction as "archontic literature"[46]), and as material that can be endlessly remixed and

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[41] Costume play; fans dressing up as fictional characters.

[42] Fannish slang; borrows from the term 'folk music' and is used to describe music/songs about fictional texts or characters.

[43] For example, in a 2013 survey among 10,000 users of the multi-fandom fiction archive *AO3*, 80% of respondents identified as female (in comparison, 4% identified as male) and 71% identified as non-heterosexual (centrumlumina, "AO3 Census: Masterpost," *Tumblr*, October 5, 2013). Results from several other, smaller surveys among transformative fans between 2004 and 2008 showed between 83.5 and 96.5 % of participants as female, and between 47 and 84.5% as non-heterosexual (melannen, "Science, Y'all," *Dreamwidth*, January 16, 2010).

[44] As discussed in the first chapter, this gender divide traces back to the emergence of 'media fandom' as consequence of a rift in the established science-fiction community around 1970, when controversies arose over the popularity of the TV show *Star Trek* as well as the emergence of feminist science fiction, both of which many traditional writers did not accept as 'serious' science fiction. Both science-fiction television/cinema, and feminist speculative fiction, shifted away from science-fiction's traditional focus on technological innovation and instead focused on an engagement with sociology and psychology, and an exploration of social and political u/dystopias that dealt with issues of gender, sexuality or race (see Bacon-Smith, *Enterprising Women*; Coppa, "A Brief History"; Verba, *Boldly Writing*).

[45] Rukmini Pande and Samira Nadkarni, "From a Land Where 'Other' People Live. Perspectives from an Indian Fannish Experience," in *Fic. Why Fanfiction Is Taking over the World*, ed. Anne Jamison (Dallas: BenBella Books, 2013), 350.

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

reworked. Jenkins calls transformative fans "textual poachers"[47] in reference to Michel De Certeau's *The Practice of Everyday Life* (*L' invention du quotidian* 1980, first transl. 1984).[48] Transformative fandom's particular affinity for TV shows and comics might certainly have to do with the fact that these serial, collaborative works similarly undermine the concept of the autonomous work, but Shakespeare's *Hamlet* or Brecht's *Dreigroschenoper* are appropriated just as readily.

The productive activity of transformative fandom is highly specialized and includes writers, artists, filmmakers, craftswomen, performers, costume designers, photographers, editors, proofreaders, translators, programmers, moderators, organizers, and archivists, who volunteer their work without expectation of compensation. Fanworks are non-commercial and circulate in a form of gift exchange culture,[49] where works are shared with the community, in exchange only for the work of others.[50] Occasional attempts to commercialize fanworks, for instance by the short-lived company FanLib in 2007/2008[51] and more recently Amazon, have been met with forceful resistance from the fans:

> I have been against the whole concept of FanLib from day one as it's just a prelude to The Man selling us back our *own work* at a profit, and I'm sick of a group of boys who can't even be bothered to punctuate claiming to be collecting "the best fanfiction out there" and trying to become the public face of our community.[52]

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[47] Henry Jenkins, "Star Trek Rerun, Reread, Rewritten: Fan Writing as Textual Poaching," in *Close Encounters: Film, Feminism, and Science Fiction*, ed. Constance Penley and others (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), 171–204.

[48] Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven Rendall (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984); Michel de Certeau, *L'invention du quotidien 1: Arts de faire* (Paris: Gallimard, 1990).

[49] Karen Hellekson, "A Fannish Field of Value: Online Fan Gift Culture," *Cinema Journal*, no. 48.8 (2009): 113–18.

[50] Exceptions are occasionally made for the sake of charity auctions, in which the money raised with commissioned fanworks is donated to a specific cause (see for a discussion of fanworks auctions also chapter 3).

[51] See Jenkins, *Convergence Culture*, 177; Henry Jenkins, "Transforming Fan Culture into User-Generated Content: The Case of FanLib," Confessions of an Aca-Fan, May 22, 2007, http://henryjenkins.org/2007/05/transforming_fan_culture_into.html.

[52] geekturnedvamp, "Untitled Comment," *Livejournal*, May 18, 2007.

The gendered opposition set up in this statement points towards a direct connection between transformative fandom as gift exchange economy and transformative fandom as female space. Thriving on free labor, fanworks continue the history of women's unpaid labor in the 'private' domestic sphere;[53] but by consciously investing labor in their own and each other's pleasure in a way that defies culturally dominant, socially acceptable norms, the insistence on non-commercialized, free labor can be understood as resistant. The century-long exploitation of women's domestic work as free labor and the systematic exclusion of women from the field of technology also has made fans sensitive to the implications of controlling their means of (re)production. The history of transformative fandom therefore runs parallel to the history of women's access to and control over emerging technology, from the first xeroxed *Star Trek* fanzines[54] to the appropriation of VCR technology,[55] Photoshop and HTML.

The shift to 'journal-based fandom' was equally connected to technological innovations, like the introduction of the World Wide Web (1991) and the emergence of personal blogs. Most importantly, it was related to the introduction of Livejournal (LJ), one of the first online social networking platforms long before the advent of facebook, twitter, and tumblr,[56] based on an open source code developed by Brad Fitzpatrick in 1999. LJ wasn't specifically designed as a fannish platform, but its launch led to an immediate mass migration of fans to the site:[57] "Perhaps the single most significant fannish change in the last 10 years […]: the move from mailing lists to

[53] Abigail De Kosnik, "Should Fan Fiction Be Free?," *Cinema Journal*, no. 48.4 (2009): 118–24; Tiziana Terranova, "Free Labor: Producing Culture for the Digital Economy," *Social Text*, no. 18.2 (2000): 33–58.

[54] Bacon-Smith, *Enterprising Women*; Verba, *Boldly Writing.*

[55] Francesca Coppa, "An Editing Room of One's Own: Vidding as Women's Work," *Camera Obscura*, no. 26.77 (May 2011): 123–30.

[56] Many terms now widely associated with social networking sites, like the verbs 'to friend' or 'to friends-lock,' likely originated on LJ.

[57] This doesn't mean that all transformative fans interact on these platforms: The community around Wizard Rock, for example, a filk music genre in *Harry Potter* fandom, was primarily connected via *MySpace*.

LiveJournal."[58] The LJ code was unique in its combination of blogging, discussion and networking. Unlike the early text-only newsgroups and MOOs, LJ supported different file formats from the beginning, including images, video clips, and audio files; but in contrast to later microblogging sites like facebook or twitter, LJ also encouraged the publication of longer texts. The equally text- and image-friendly software allowed fans to easily publish written texts (like fanfiction), but also (audio)visual materials, which up to that point had to be distributed by mail, or could only be shared at fan conventions, like in the case of videos and music.

More importantly, the platform facilitated community-building across previously separate social groups, and made possible the development of a public discourse within this community. On the mailing lists and newsgroups in the early days of internet fandom, discussion topics had been limited to one fannish interest and were strictly regulated:[59]

> These lists were good for many things, but longer, detailed, carefully organized essays were not among them. In addition, although lists to discuss issues and themes across multiple fandoms existed, they weren't always easy to find.[60] Perhaps just as problematic was an implied and even overt hostility to critical discussion.[61]

In contrast, the LJ friendspage feed allowed users to follow any number of interest-specific communities, but also individual users' blogs, no matter their interests. The high character limit (65,000) for LJ posts, combined with a lack of content restriction, led to the proliferation of 'meta', long, non-fictional essays with analytical focus, which discussed cultural texts, the state of fandom, or the relationship between fandom and politics. The introduction of threaded comments permitted an immediate continuation of the conversation with other fans – in fact, the comment section could

[58] Rebecca Lucy Busker, "On Symposia: LiveJournal and the Shape of Fannish Discourse," *Transformative Works and Cultures*, no. 1 (2008): 1.5. http://journal.transformativeworks.org/index.php/twc/article/view/49/23.

[59] The fanfiction newsgroup alt.startrek.creative, for instance, was accompanied by the subgroup alt.startrek.creative.erotica.moderated for those specifically interested in erotic fiction.

[60] They were also difficult to navigate, especially in times of slow and limited internet access, when switching between different sites was still a problem.

[61] Busker, "On Symposia", 1.3.

be used as a multi-thread discussion board. Because crosslinking to other posts or comments was easy, conversations could also be led or referred to across different journals.[62] As trends and discussion topics crossed easily between journals, so they did between fan communities: LJ's network of communities and journals connected members from different corners of fandom who had previously not interacted much: "As a result, fans have an increased peripheral, and sometimes even very specific, knowledge of other fandoms."[63] Transformative fandom merged into an amalgamation of various intersecting subgroups, including fans of TV shows and movie franchises, literary sources, Japanese manga, superhero comics, hockey, figure skating, soccer, J-Pop and K-Pop, and American boybands, among others. LJ made 'polyfannish'[64] behavior easy, and simultaneous engagement with different and changing objects became the norm: "In our own LJs, no one is confined to one topic. I can jump from Buffy to West Wing to Smallville to meta to the New York football Giants and no one can smack me down for being off topic."[65]

At the same time as different communities grew closer together, they also grew rapidly in size. The pre-internet/Usenet fan communities had been tight-knit groups, where most people knew each other in person, and comprehensive mailing address lists circulated among fans. Now, instead of a few hundred fans per country, there were millions worldwide. The hierarchical structure of pre-internet fandom, with its organized clubs and edited fanzine publications, shifted into an open,

[62] Of course, the existence of a discussion culture in fandom was not new. Both early science-fiction fandom since the 1920s and media fandom since the 1960s had developed a practice of communication across distances in fanzine letter sections. Fans would write to the editors of the fanzine, letters would be printed, and the editors or contributors would respond in the next issue. Likewise, fanzine creators would also respond to articles in other fanzines. But since fanzines were printed in often irregular installments and distributed by mail, it was painstaking work to closely follow all those conversations.

[63] Busker, "On Symposia", 2.4.

[64] Polyfannish: Fan terminology to describe the interest in and engagement with different textual sources.

[65] musesfool, "Nothing New under the Sun," *Frail and Bedazzled. Livejournal*, September 9, 2003.

sprawling, decentralized network of participants. Names and addresses were replaced by pseudonyms, but instead of creating distance, the pseudonymous space was perceived as a safe environment that allowed fans to share not only their fanworks, but also private information like histories of abuse or (mental) health issues. While not all fans on LJ knew each other personally, LJ communities, multi-fandom discussion spaces, and fiction exchanges led to the development of a network of affective relations between fans across different fandoms. "The impact of this shift has been profound, and in many ways it has served to take the focus off the source and put it on the fan, and in turn, on fandom."[66]

Instead of individual objects, journal-based fandom now related to a shared archive of texts, an alternative canon. Fans did not so much identify as fans *of something*, and rather simply spoke of 'being active in fandom.' The fannish identity was not primarily conceived of as a relationship between fan and text, but as a *social* identity, as a number of studies indicate: "These users tend to think of LiveJournal more as a neighborhood than as a social network, an emotional affiliation built on trust that exists in both face-to-face and virtual relationships."[67] The conception of LJ fandom as a community was foregrounded: "Regardless of age, those who used Live Journal commented on its centrality to […] its role in community making."[68] (Bury et al. 301/302)

Transformative Fandom as Public Sphere

As I have shown in the first chapter, this work towards community formation and maintenance in 'invisible townships,' or as Marwick calls it, "neighborhoods," is what leads fan communities to

[66] Busker, "On Symposia", 2.2.
[67] Alice Marwick, "LiveJournal Users: Passionate, Prolific and Private" (LiveJournal Inc., 2008): 1.
[68] Rhiannon Bury et al., "'From Usenet to Tumblr: The Changing Role of Social Media,'" *Participations. Journal of Audience and Reception Studies*, no. 10.1 (March 2013), 301/302. http://www.participations.org/Volume%2010/Issue%201/contents.htm.

think of themselves as constituencies[69] – political bodies with the responsibility to negotiate and resolve conflict, and therefore, potential participants in a public sphere.

At the same time, the *public* appearance of fan communities also plays into the emergence of fannish alternative public spheres. Miriam Hansen, in her work on silent movie fans in the early 20th century, explains how the street riots of Rudolph Valentino fans in the 1920s became a politically charged form of publicness precisely because they were perceived as a threat by the general public, or more specifically, by men: "these events appeared to have been staged by women, to the exclusion of men, more precisely, […] the Valentino cult gave public expression to a force specific to relations *among* women."[70] Likewise, journal-based fandom began to emerge as a *public* in the sense of a constituency at the same time it began to become *public* in the sense of outwards visibility and influence.

Transformative fandom had, before the advent of the internet, been mostly 'underground,' a secretive subculture whose publications were only circulated among the members of the group: "Early printed fanzines carried a samizdat-like air as they were quietly sold or exchanged via mail or at conventions; ad listings made use of codes to describe their content."[71] This shadow existence was at least partly due to a fear of social stigma and legal persecution. The uncertain legal status of their work made fans wary of discovery by copyright owners. Furthermore, media fans' production of (oftentimes erotic) fanworks not only earned them the derision of the 'traditional' literary science-fiction community, but it also forced female fans to hide their involvement in

[69] van Zoonen, *Entertaining the Citizen*.
[70] Hansen, *Babel and Babylon*, 260.
[71] Catherine Coker, "The Angry!Textual!Poacher! Is Angry! Fan Works as Political Statements," in *Fan Culture: Theory/Practice*, ed. Katherine Larsen and Lynn Zubernis (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2012), 83.

fandom from employers, colleagues, families and partners.[72]

The emergence of online fandom made transformative fan culture suddenly visible to the general public, and reports in mainstream media about online fandom became more and more frequent,[73] in particular in regard to the veritable explosion of *Harry Potter* fandom around the turn of the millennium. At the same time, transformative fandom also moved to the foreground of the industry's awareness, whose position up to that point had oscillated between gentle encouragement and purposeful ignorance. "The culture industries never really had to confront the existence of this alternative cultural economy because, for the most part, it existed behind closed doors and its products circulated only among a small circle of friends and neighbors."[74] Now entertainment companies began to change their strategy towards fandom. Some producers saw fanworks as a threat equal to online piracy, and tried to restrict any kind of appropriation of copyright-protected materials by fans. Adult content in particular became a source of perpetual conflict between fandom and the industry. In the early 2000s, *Warner Brothers* and author J.K. Rowling started sending cease-and-desist letters to *Harry Potter* fanfiction sites;[75] and in 2010, fantasy writer Diana Gabaldon clashed dramatically with transformative fans when she compared writing fanfiction to "break[ing] into somebody's house" and "trying to seduce my husband".[76]

Other producers tried to contain the perceived threat by appropriating fannish practices: they focused on improving their relationship with the fans by actively encouraging fan participation, in order to increase mouth-to-mouth publicity, gain valuable feedback, ensure viewer loyalty or

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[72] Verba, *Boldly Writing*.
[73] Jonathan Gray et al., "Introduction: Why Study Fans?", in *Fandom. Identities and Communities in a Mediated World.* (London/New York: New York University Press, 2007), 2.
[74] Jenkins, *Convergence Culture*, 140.
[75] Ibid., 194.
[76] kate-nepveu, "Diana Gabaldon & Fanfic Followup," *Incidents and Accidents, Hints and Allegations. Livejournal*, May 10, 2010.

create new markets for merchandise.

> As we have moved from an era of broadcasting to one of narrowcasting, a process fueled by the deregulation of media markets and reflected in the rise of new media technologies, the fan as a specialized yet dedicated consumer has become a centerpiece of media industries' marketing strategies.[77]

With fandom's transformation from an underground subculture to a visible public, the rift between copyright owners and transformative fans became a fight over legal, intellectual and moral authority. Fans considered producers' and writers' disapproval of fanworks a sign of ungratefulness and disrespect towards their fanbase, and defended the legal fair use status of transformative works. Furthermore, the industry's attempts at appropriating fannish practices and spaces caused concern among transformative fans who were determined to maintain the independence of their outlets of publication. The creation of the Organization of Transformative Works (OTW) in 2007, and the non-profit, LJ code-based platform dreamwidth.org (DW) in 2008 were direct responses to attempts at commercializing fanworks and controlling fannish content. LJ was valued highly by fans because it was based on an open source code developed by an independent fan-friendly company. However, after Fitzpatrick sold LJ in 2005 to the Russian company SixApart, fans were outraged when the new owners purged hundreds of journals in 2007 without prior warning – an event that went down into fan history as 'strike-through.' Combined with the simultaneous resistance against FanLib, this was enough incentive for fans to create alternative platforms that would guarantee their continued independence and protection from commercial interests.

> We need a central archive of our own, something like animemusicvideos.org. Something that would NOT hide from google or any public mention, and would clearly state our case for the legality of our hobby up front, while not trying to make a profit off other people's IP and instead only making it easier for us to celebrate it, together, and create a welcoming space for new fans that has a sense of our history and our community behind it.[78]

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[77] Gray et al., "Introduction", 4.
[78] astolat, "An Archive Of One's Own," *Livejournal*, May 17, 2007.

This statement in a LJ post, which received over 600 comments, was the beginning of a process that led to the foundation of OTW,[79] a member-owned non-profit organization that argues for the legal fair use status of fanworks. Aside from their legal work, OTW maintains fanlore, a wiki for fannish historiography, the open access fan studies journal *Transformative Works and Cultures*, as well as the fiction archive Archive of Our Own (AO3) with currently over 468,000 registered users. As Della Porta/Mattoni point out, alternative media are not "merely oriented towards the creation of content and infrastructures," but "inherently political. Indeed, these media create spaces that oppose the dominant cultures in a direct manner, and, hence, challenge mainstream and mass media power that have the monopoly over the naming of realities."[80]

The increased interest from the perspective of the industry also made fans aware of the influence they could exert on cultural production, which led to a sense of ownership and the responsibility among fans to protect the 'spirit' of the texts, even against the copyright owners, producers and creators themselves.

> The potential for alternative public politics in fandom is so great, I think, because of the immense interest that fans hold within particular cultural objects. This is interesting not just in the sense of curiosity and excitement, but more importantly in the political-economic sense of investment and ownership.[81]

This situates transformative fandom at the border between private and public: It is *public* in its engagement with culture and involvement in public discourse, but the sense of ownership and affective attachment that fans associate with the objects of their interest also makes it *private*. The

[79] Francesca Coppa, "An Archive of Our Own. Fanfiction Writers Unite!," in *Fic. Why Fanfiction Is Taking over the World*, ed. Anne Jamison (Dallas: BenBella Books, 2013), 302–8.
[80] Della Porta/Mattoni, "Cultures of Participation," 176.
[81] Henry Jenkins, Anne Kustritz, and Derek Johnson, "Gender and Fan Culture (Round Thirteen, Part One): Anne Kustritz and Derek Johnson," *Confessions of an Aca-Fan*, August 30, 2007, http://henryjenkins.org/2007/08/gender_and_fan_culture_round_t_2.html.

form of the personal blog with its tension between private journal and public website,[82] and the relationship of fannish cultural production to (private) domestic labor further blur clear distinctions between public and private, but also contribute to a heightened political consciousness: "a medium that by its nature mixes the personal with the fannish must contribute to increased awareness and discussion of the sociopolitical."[83]

For Habermas, the separation of public and private was a necessary precondition for communicative rationality in the public sphere. Feminist and queer theorists, however, showed that the private is far from apolitical[84] but rather a highly contested arena that regulates intimacy, sexuality, reproduction, and labor in the domestic sphere. The LJ fan community was similarly invested in sociopolitical issues located at the intersection of public and private, like cultural representation or the distribution of labor and capital in the culture industry:

> [T]he fan joining to follow discussions on critical feedback will also become aware of discussions about misogyny in fandom or depictions of religious issues in a source as well. […] Much as fannish discussion has abstracted to meta themes, it has also dug down into underlying issues, including questions of race, gender, sexual orientation and identity, religion, class, and other sociopolitical issues, not only as they manifest in a given show or comic, but as they manifest in fandom itself.[85]

These debates and controversies occurred with enough regularity that communities like "meta-fandom" were created with the primary purpose of archiving links to meta essays, and projects like "fandom_wank[86]" and "fail-fandomanon" were dedicated solely to documenting and archiving the

[82] Selzer, "Angela Nissel"; Elke Siegel, "Remains of the Day: Rainald Goetz's Internet Diary Abfall für Alle," *The Germanic Review*, no. 81.3 (2006): 235–54.
[83] Busker, "On Symposia", 3.4.
[84] Warner, *Publics*.
[85] Busker, "On Symposia", 3.4.
[86] The name is somewhat misleading, as 'wank' (British slang for masturbation) is the fannish term for heated arguments erupting over more or less irrelevant issues. While in hindsight superfluous discussions certainly occur, a big part of the debates archived by fandom_wank are anything but irrelevant and relate to issues such as harassment, violation of privacy, fraud, discrimination/hate speech etc.). Anne Jamison suggests that even the discussions that appear petty are often symptomatic for more serious issues: "What sometimes seems like squabbling over petty issues is almost always a proxy for large, unresolved, and perhaps unresolvable concerns." Anne Jamison, *Fic. Why Fanfiction Is Taking over the World* (Dallas: BenBella Books, 2013), 233.

often sprawling collections of links, posts and comments relating to those debates. Fandom's self-conception as a space of public discourse manifests in these archival projects.

Inclusiveness and Pseudonymity

The fan communities around speculative fiction, comics, anime, and television have always been connected through a transnational network. In particular fans from North America, Europe, Asia and Australia have been in touch in one way or another throughout the 20th century.[87] But pre-internet structures certainly privileged those who traveled easily – attending conventions, for instance, could be difficult for those with physical disabilities or little money. In addition, the organization of fan clubs and amateur presses mirrored in many ways the access barriers and hierarchical structures of civic institutions and the established publishing industry.

The flat, decentralized structure of journal-based online fandom did away with many of those barriers. Access to journal-based fandom did not come with formal restrictions: basic user accounts were free, and in order to read and to comment on posts, it was not necessary to have an account. Theoretically, this space appeared to be open to anyone with access to the internet.[88] But as Fraser and Warner have pointed out, formal restrictions are not the only way to regulate access to public discourse. Those calling out Habermas' model of the public sphere on its lack of inclusiveness did not only critique the fact that access to the historical bourgeois public was limited to financially independent white men of age. They also questioned Habermas' assumption that within the discursive space of the public sphere, existing social inequalities were being bracketed for the sake and duration of the conversation. Not only did Habermas' assumption suggest that the presumably equal participants in the conversation weren't actually that equal, but Fraser and Warner also

[87] See also chapter 1.
[88] Which in itself can be a barrier.

doubted the possibility of discussion participants simply tuning out those inequalities: "On the contrary, such bracketing usually works to the advantage of dominant groups in society and to the disadvantage of subordinates."[89]

Pseudonymity, which quickly became the norm in journal-based fandom and other online spaces, was considered to provide an at least partial solution to this problem. Unlike anonymity, the pseudonym gives the participant a recognizable identity, but also leaves them in control over the personal information they want to reveal: factors that commonly influence offline interpersonal relationships, including gender, sexuality, race, age, class, education, (dis)ability, speech, or physical appearance, are often consciously left unmentioned. Opponents of pseudonymity see this omission as evidence for the inadequacy of virtual communication, which they perceive as 'less real' than face-to-face interaction, claiming that a real-name policy will prevent uncivil behavior and online harassment, as it forces participants to assume responsibility for their actions. Amitai Etzioni, for example, considers the disclosure of participants' identity a precondition for the formation of functional online communities.[90] Feminist activists, however, argue that real-name policies don't actually prevent harassment, because those in empowered positions often feel entitled to their behavior:[91] In fact, just like in face-to-face interactions, real-name policies mostly benefit those in positions of power whose statements will be perceived as more legitimate. Fans in journal-based fandom voiced similar criticism regarding the assumed superiority of face-to-face

[89] Fraser, "Rethinking," 64.

[90] Amitai Etzioni, "Are Virtual and Democratic Communities Feasible?," in *Democracy and New Media*, ed. Henry Jenkins and David Thorburn (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2003), 85–100. Google+'s implementation of a real-name policy in 2011 was a dangerous precedent for the enforcement of real name politics in social networking platforms; even more so in combination with the enforced synching of G+, youtube, and gmail accounts. In 2014, Google abandoned its real-name policy for G+ after vehement criticism from users (Rebecca MacKinnon and Hae-in Lim, "Google Plus Finally Gives Up on Its Ineffective, Dangerous Real-Name Policy," *Slate*, July 17, 2014, http://www.slate.com/blogs/future_tense/2014/07/17/google_plus_finally_ditches_its_ineffective_dangerous_real_name_policy.html).

[91] Ellen Moll, "What's in a Nym? Gender, Race, Pseudonymity, and the Imagining of the Online Persona," *M/C Journal*, no. 17.3 (November 6, 2014).

conversation:

> As a woman in male-dominated academic settings for most of my life, let me tell you, I don't think, gee all the face/face talks I have when I'm one of the few white women in the room with mostly white men (and maybe one POC) are all sparkles and butterflies! […] So--why do *some* people want to claim the idea of face/face as somehow always inherently/essentially better than/superior to online? To say people will always be kinder? Is it because they have more control over their physical surroundings and who they spend time with and how much they can control who says what?[92]

For members of disadvantaged groups, pseudonymity not only offers protection from harassment, it also allows them to participate in online spaces with a lower risk of discrimination or dismissal.[93] In pseudonymous fannish circles, 'doxing' a person by publicly exposing their offline identity is therefore considered a form of online harassment and a serious violation of privacy rights: "Revealing someone's 'real life' identity and location quickly came to be understood as a sin of great magnitude, whereas in the days of zines, such information was commonly shared."[94]

Thus, pseudonymity can be seen as a way to even the slanted playing field of public discourse. However, it also further complicates the tension between the public and the private by considering the privacy of disadvantaged participants as something to be protected precisely *because* it is political. As we will see, the discussion around *RaceFail '09* brought attention to the tension between these different conceptions of the private in the fight over access to the public sphere.

RaceFail '09

The debates around *RaceFail '09* played out along lines putting different groups in opposition to each other. While the discussion was ostensibly a controversy between writers and fans of color on the one hand, and white creators and fans on the other, a deep rift also appeared to emerge

[92] ithiliana, "A Minor Issue, Perhaps...," *The Heart of the Maze*. *Livejournal*, March 7, 2009.
[93] In this context, it is important to remember the centuries-long tradition of female writers using pen names to not be identified as women by publishers, critics and readers.
[94] Jamison, *Fic*, 112.

between professional writers and their affirmative fans on one side, and amateur creators and transformative fans on the other. Over the course of several months, *RaceFail '09* engaged with the issue of race on several discursive levels. Important issues in the debate were the prevalence of ethnocentrism in cultural representations of race and ethnicity, the global distribution of cultural capital, and the industrial structures of cultural production; however, *RaceFail '09* also initiated a heated conversation about access to the hegemonic public sphere and the rules of public discourse.

The point of departure for the controversy was a LJ post by Caucasian-American science-fiction author Elizabeth Bear on the literary representation of foreign cultures, or as she titled it, on "Writing The Other without being a dick."[95] Fans of color from the community of transformative fandom responded critically to her essay by calling out Bear on her ethnocentric perspective in several meta essays.[96] The fans described how their cultural memory, their imagination, and therefore their creative output were impacted by the legacy of colonialism: "I grew up with half a tongue," Indian fan Deepad stated in her essay "I Didn't Dream of Dragons," and went on to explain how her access to cultural capital was determined by the global dominance of European-American culture. Despite the transnational diversity of transformative fandom, fans were conscious of the fact that their textual archive was dominated by a limited number of languages and cultures:[97]

> I am lucky in that Indian culture is more widely represented in Western media than other colonised regions – when I talk about Bollywood in the yuletide chat room, there are people who have an idea about what I might be referring to […]. Yet still, my ability to connect

[95] Elizabeth Bear, "Whatever You're Doing, You're Probably Wrong," *Throw Another Bear in the Canoe. Livejournal*, January 12, 2009.

[96] It is important to notice that Bear's original essay was very much a well-meaning take on 'how to do better' – fans were mostly concerned with her unreflected ethnocentrism; as well as what they perceived as hypocrisy, since her own novel seemed to fall into the same trap she advised others to avoid (see below). But the escalation of the conversation was triggered mainly by writers' defensive rejection of fans' criticism, not her initial post.

[97] Most prominently represented are the USA, the UK, and Japan, followed by other countries to a much lesser degree, like South Korea (TV shows and pop music), India (Bollywood cinema), or Germany (soap operas).

> fannishly with people from different parts of the world is mediated through the coloniser's language and representation. Enid Blyton, with her hideous caricatures of African tribal boys helping the intrepid British children is read from Johannesburg to Jaipur – Iktomi stories are not.[98]

Deepad and other fans criticized the repeated under- and misrepresentation of non-western characters or cultures in dominant western narratives: the lack of protagonists of color, the stereotyping of non-white characters and the recurrence of racially charged narrative tropes, as well as common practices like 'whitewashing'[99] in audiovisual materials. In their essays, they didn't hesitate to directly call out the work of science-fiction and fantasy authors participating in the discussion, including Bear herself, for instance in regard to her novel *Blood and Iron:*

> It's about the fact that you and writers like you *don't have to think about this stuff*. That you have the ready made excuse that it all *'serves the story'* and that said character was written intelligently and as a well rounded individual with wants and needs of his own; with plots even. It's about the fact that I couldn't finish reading your book because I threw it across the room in disgust.[100]

The defensive response from Bear and several of her colleagues set the stage for the further development of *RaceFail '09* as a controversy between (mainly white) professional writers and producers on the one hand, and transformative fans (of color) on the other:

> I keep seeing the same thing happening this year: over and over again, in all of my fandoms, there have been battles between creators (backed up by their affirmational fanbase) and their transformational fanbase. The subjects are different (although RaceFail'09 "wins" in that respect for being the biggest, the most vociferous, and regarding the most serious, real-life-impacting subject matter) but the pattern is incredibly similar: the creators have a run-in with fans from the transformational side of fandom; the creators do not feel properly respected; the creators attempt to, well, beat the recalcitrant fans into submission.[101]

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[98] deepad, "I Didn't Dream of Dragons," *Dreamwidth*, January 13, 2009.

[99] Whitewashing refers to the practice of casting characters of color with Caucasian actors and/or completely erasing their racial origin. The TV adaptation of Ursula LeGuin's *Earthsea* novels is a notorious example of whitewashing in speculative fiction; see Ursula K. Le Guin, "A Whitewashed Earthsea," *Slate*, December 16, 2004, http://www.slate.com/articles/arts/culturebox/2004/12/a_whitewashed_earthsea.html; for more examples of whitewashing, see Amanda Scherker, "Whitewashing Was One Of Hollywood's Worst Habits. So Why Is It Still Happening?," *Huffington Post*, July 10, 2014, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/07/10/hollywood-whitewashing_n_5515919.html.

[100] seeking-avalon, "Open Letter: To Elizabeth Bear," *Seeking Avalon*, January 13, 2009.

[101] obsession_inc, "Affirmational Fandom".

This disagreement was anything but a clear-cut opposition. On the one hand, several professionals (mostly of color) sided with the fans and embraced the emergence of a discussion about race; on the other hand, there were those who had both a name in professional publishing and in transformative fandom and navigated both communities at the same time.[102] Still, *RaceFail '09* exposed not only the different perspectives on authorship and criticism that divided professionals and fans, but also the discursive norms that restrict access to the hegemonic public sphere. At this point, the discussion had already developed into different, frequently intersecting lines of discussion in various journals, posts, and comment threads. However, several arguments about the legitimacy of public discourse emerged as focal points that were repeatedly cross-linked, referenced and picked up in different places.

Invisibility and exclusion: Professional writers tried to explain the lack of a discourse on race in speculative fiction by suggesting that there simply hadn't been enough readers of color to warrant such a discussion: "never before have so many Readers of Color existed to *have* the conversation." A fan replied to Bujold directly in the following comment:

> I don't understand why you are laboring under the impression that sci-fans of color didn't exist simply because they avoided attending cons. […] We were reading and discussing all along, we just weren't doing it in front of white people. Looking at Racefail...is it any wonder why?[103]

Another fan took this exchange as inspiration for a roll-call under the title "Wild Unicorn Herd Check In"[104] in a post that acquired 1070 comments from fans of color describing their history and

[102] This has always been the case: The distinguished science-fiction author and academic Joanna Russ is a famous early example of a professional who also wrote *Star Trek* slash fanfiction, because she felt transformative fandom was a safer place to explore certain themes than the dominant professional science-fiction scene (Verba, *Boldly Writing*; Bacon-Smith, *Enterprising Women*). These examples also show that the lines between different fan communities aren't always clear-cut: Fans can participate in traditional literary science-fiction fandom and transformative online fandom (or other fan communities) at the same time, and often do.

[103] Lois McMaster Bujold, "Untitled Comment," *Livejournal*, May 9, 2009.

[104] delux_vivens, "Wild Unicorn Herd Check In," *Livejournal*, May 11, 2009. Unicorn: Online slang for someone who stands out for being part of a minority group (or for being perceived/depicted as the exception to the norm).

experience as readers of speculative fiction. This discussion about the invisibility of fans of color in fannish spaces also drew attention to one of the more problematic consequences of pseudonymity: While pseudonymity was seen by fans of color as a form of protection against harassment and discrimination, it also exposed assumptions about fans' 'default identity.' Fans realized that as long as they didn't clearly identify themselves as being of color, they were often assumed to be white: "The extent to which the 'race-free' theory of the early Internet is related to white people's failure to 'see' people of color in online spaces, such as fandom, is exemplified by the surprise Bujold expressed."[105] In fact, some writers went as far as to question fans' status even after they disclosed their ethnic or racial identity, and accused them of just pretending to be of color – thus discrediting their arguments by accusing them of trolling.[106]

The norm of rational discourse: Throughout the conversation, (white) professional writers repeatedly evoked the notion of 'rational discourse' to deflect criticism, by questioning fans' analytic reading skills and accusing them of a lack of objectivity. In response to fans' analysis of *Blood and Iron*, fantasy author Sarah Monette commented: "I think it's more accurate to say that [professionals] are trying to talk about the book on a literary/analytic level whereas you got short-circuited before you could reach that kind of discussion by a personal/political reaction."[107] Transformative fans in return called Monette out for using 'the tone argument', which they critiqued as a common derailment strategy to devalue marginalized participants in public discourse: "I am astounded that so many people wanking about their precious academic credentials

[105] Robin Anne Reid, "'The Wild Unicorn Herd Check-In': The Politics of Race in Science Fiction Fandom," in *Black and Brown Planets: The Politics of Race in Science Fiction*, ed. Iasiah Lavender (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2014), 230.

[106] Troll: Online term for participant in online discussion who does not participate in order to communicate, but rather to disrupt the conversation and provoke certain reactions, often by means of insulting and harassing other participants.

[107] Sarah Monette, "Untitled Comment," *Livejournal*, January 15, 2009.

are completely ignorant of how goddamn OFTEN PoC have seen these same generalized dismissals. Too emotional, too loud, too angry, too uneducated, TOO FUCKING COLOURED".[108] In many ways, fans' critique of the tone argument directly mirrored Fraser's and Warner's critique of the role of 'rationality' as a strategy of distinction in the bourgeois public sphere. Fans pointed out that a separation of the personal and the political, and the emotional distance to the discussion topic at hand is a privilege of those not negatively affected by the outcome, that is, the already advantaged participants. Gender played into this argument as well, as Oyceter remarks in a retrospective discussion on *RaceFail '09:*

> That was part of the miasma around the RaceFail debate: the old boys' club of SFF book fandom that led to the dismissal not only of people of color but also of LiveJournal. They had the idea that LJ is full of hysteria and shrieking, and they asked, 'Where are the rational people in this discussion?' That's very gendered.[109]

The separation of public and private: The *RaceFail '09* debate was shaped by a constant struggle over the border between the public and the private. On the one hand, proponents of real-name policies, in particular among the professional writers, discredited fans' practice of pseudonymity as insincere, and even doxed a transformative fan in the process, an action that was met with consternation and interpreted by fans as "the old-guard power-structure reasserting its control."[110] On the other hand, some authors voiced their concerns when they felt that the public debate around *RaceFail '09* began to interfere with their private life: In March 2009, three months into the discussion, Bear called for a "cease fire." She stated that she felt like the discussion had gotten out of hand since "it keeps following me home."[111] In response, fans of color pointed out that the ability to separate public discourse and private life was a general privilege of advantaged groups:

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[108] bossymarmalade, "Untitled," *Dreamwidth*, January 18, 2009.
[109] Alexis Lothian et al., "Pattern Recognition: A Dialogue on Racism in Fan Communities," *Transformative Works and Cultures*, no. 3 (2009): 5.2.
[110] veejane, "Untitled," *Livejournal,* March 2, 2009.
[111] Elizabeth Bear, "Cease Fire," *Throw Another Bear in the Canoe. Livejournal*, March 5, 2009.

> You see, I couldn't just decide not to have a conversation about race anymore, because it follows me home. My race issues ARE my home. Other people can pick them up when they want to look at something shiny, something exotic tasty foreign bright colourful strange exciting; they toss them around, try them on. Start to explain them to me and find different names for them, like *classism* and *learning experience*.[112]

In arguments like these, the border between public and private kept being invoked as a line of defense by both sides in the debate. Fans in particular pointed out how the assumption of the public sphere as a space free of private interests and emotional language could be used to police access to and behavior in public discourse in a way that further disadvantages marginalized groups.

Free labor and the work of translation: One of the most common reactions among white authors in response to the critique from transformative fans of color was the request for guidelines on 'how to do better.' This turned out to be a deeply divisive point between fans/writers of color and white fans/writers. Fans of color in particular strongly resented the suggestion that they should take on the responsibility for explaining and educating other participants in the debate: "*I don't do Anti-Racism 101*," seeking-avalon writes in response to one of these inquiries. "It's extremely exhausting to do someone else's homework for them, especially when that someone is often tens of various white people wanting me to explain and/or award points (every. flipping. day)."[113] These complaints were usually not meant as a rejection of dialogue and communication, but rather a response to the wide-spread expectation that marginalized groups should not only adopt and practice the accepted language of the dominant discourse (in this case, the discourse of academic literary studies), but also translate their own language back to those in the dominant group. This double burden can also be seen within the context of free labor and the role it plays in transformative fandom. As shown earlier in this chapter, female transformative fans who willingly invest free labor in fannish activities can be seen as resisting the exploitation of free domestic

[112] bossymarmalade, "Sees Fire," *I Don't like Angry Future Romulans. LiveJournal*, March 4, 2009.
[113] seeking-avalon, "Open Letter".

labor; similarly, fans of color are equally conscious of the fact that colonialism and slavery have exploited the free labor unwillingly executed by people of color for centuries as well. The readiness to invest free labor in the creation of fanworks, while refusing to provide free labor in the form of education for the sake of the hegemonic group also needs to be understood as a form of resistance that fans of color exercised consciously during the *RaceFail '09* debate.[114]

RaceFail '09 never came to an official conclusion or ended in an official proclamation. And while several participants reported emotional exhaustion and burn-out, many participants considered the debate necessary and ultimately successful (or, to revisit Jemisin's initial quote, the "Bestest Thing Evar for SFF"). The fact alone that the community of transformative LJ fandom had made the debate possible in the first place was celebrated by many fans, like lavendartook:

> And yes thank you internet, and especially the danga[115] platform of LJ, DW, IJ, and JF for allowing a broader, yet still immediate conversation than could be had in limited face-to face space and kept the voices of FOC from being isolated, and that also afforded a platform to any of us who are less empowered in the face-to-face space where these conversations happen.[116]

While the heated debate on LJ and related blogs and platforms ebbed after about five months, many felt that the dialogue opened up by *RaceFail '09* had not ended, but was merely the beginning of a continuing conversation that would slowly help change the face of popular culture and fandom alike: "I think that the conversations *RaceFail* started […] were critical, not only in terms

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[114] Of course, there is another way in which questions of labor played into the *RaceFail '09* debate. While lines were drawn between professional authors on the one hand, and amateur writers and fans on the other, it is worth considering that the professional writers willing to engage in the debate with fans were for the most part not dominant players in the entertainment industry, but rather independent authors, many of them struggling to make a living. In an interview, speculative fiction author Nalo Hopkinson (a writer of color) talked openly about how a teaching position at UC Riverside helped her leave behind a life of poverty. Nalo Hopkinson, John Joseph Adams, and David Barr Kirtley, "Interview: Nalo Hopkinson," *Lightspeed Magazine*, June 18, 2013, http://www.lightspeedmagazine.com/nonfiction/interview-nalo-hopkinson/. In that regard, these authors were certainly more vulnerable to the critique of their readers than the producers and directors of major Hollywood productions accused of practices like whitewashing. (With thanks to Siobhan Carroll for pointing out this issue.)

[115] *Danga* was the name of Fitzpatrick's company that developed the LJ code. DW (*dreamwidth*), IJ (*insanejournal*), and JF (*journalfen*) were all LJ "spin-offs" based on the open source code of LJ.

[116] Jemisin, "Why I Think".

of what was being discussed but the fact that they became a way for fans of color to find each other and build communities as well."[117]

Beyond this sense of heightened consciousness regarding issues of race and racism among both fans and professionals, *RaceFail '09* also had tangible results: Fiction anthologies like *Long Hidden* (2014) and *We See a Different Frontier* (2013)[118] were published as direct reactions to the online debate. Author Nalo Hopkinson discussed *RaceFail '09* in her keynote speech at the academic *International Conference on the Fantastic in the Arts* 2010, and conventions increasingly made an effort to include panels on race and ethnicity. Within the fan community, there was a noticeable increase in projects focusing on PoC representation in popular culture and fandom: the foundation of the awareness-raising grassroots organization *Racebending.com*, journal-based fiction communities like *Dark Agenda,* and the *Remyth Project*, which focused on "taking back" non-western myths and stories that had been appropriated by western culture.[119] Without resulting in legislative measures or even an 'official' consensus, the public debate about race that transcended the border between the alternative public sphere of transformative fandom and the dominant sphere of genre publishing did in fact bring forth visible results and continues to do so.

Conclusion

In the essay "A Rape in Cyberspace" about the events following a virtual rape case in *LambdaMOO* (an early text-based MUD), which I have discussed in more detail in chapter 1, Julian Dibbell suggests that it was precisely the ruthless violation of the previously unwritten rules of conduct

[117] Pande/Nadkarni, "From a Land," 347-48.

[118] Fabio Fernandes and Djibril Al-Ajad, eds., *We See a Different Frontier: A Postcolonial Speculative Fiction Anthology* (Futurefire, 2013); Rose Fox and Daniel José Older, eds., *Long Hidden: Speculative Fiction from the Margins of History* (Framingham: CrossedGenres, 2014).

[119] Terminology also became an issue of debate: For example, parts of the fan community chose to adopt the term 'chromatic' to replace the controversial 'of color.'

that forced the users of *LambdaMOO* to think of themselves as a political constituency, leading to the implementation of a system of petitions and ballots, to help solve similar cases in the future. In reaction to the sexual assault case, the online community of *LamdaMOO* established a form of direct democracy based on majority vote that would help them reach a consensus in future controversies. For Habermas, reaching a consensus which would then put pressure on the legislative in the form of public opinion was one of the main concerns of the ideal public sphere; Fraser likewise suggests that transnational publics should translate into a form of efficacy that gives the opinion of the public sphere political weight.

But despite the fact that controversies happened regularly in the alternative public sphere of transformative fandom, the community never implemented governmental structures to regulate communication and interaction between fans; in fact, transformative fans are generally suspicious of the potentially oppressive goal of universal consensus. Consequently, *RaceFail'09* did not conclude in a universal consensus among all participants, not even among transformative fans themselves. And yet, fans considered the conversation as ultimately productive and efficacious, both in regard to the issues at hand and in regard to the rules of discourse: the thrust of the conversation was channeled into different forms of social activism, the publication of alternative media, and the critical interrogation of communal and discursive practices. Instead of focusing on universal consensus, the potential for change was seen in the continued process of communication, the insistence on the continuation of dialogue, and the participants' willingness to continuously question and test the premises on which their communication is based.

The difficulty of clear-cut distinctions between different constituencies and publics in the fan community is part of what keeps this critical potential alive: *RaceFail '09* shows that some of the potential for change derived from the fact that the alternative public of transformative fandom and

the dominant public of commercial publishing were not completely separate but intertwined in complicated ways. In fact, it appears that the intersection of different communities through those who navigate different communal spaces simultaneously can help to sustain these communities' critical potential because it prevents them from becoming fossilized and forces them to interrogate their own position over and over again.

As *RaceFail '09* shows, much of the energy created in the debate also derived from the tension between different conceptions of the public/private divide within the discursive arena of transformative fandom – between the equalizing potential of pseudonyms by bracketing identity on the one hand, and the insistence on the continuity between the private and the public, the personal and the political, on the other. However, instead of trying to resolve the tension, fans used it as a catalyst of conflict that forces the community to repeatedly confront its own discursive rules, and thus becomes productive as a critical tool of communication.

III. "A Loser Like Me:"

A Community of Outsiders, Fan Activism and Transmedia Marketing in *Glee* Fandom

The Box Scene: Introduction

The setting: A high school hallway. The characters: Two teenage boys in skinny pants. The prop: A jewelry box. The dialogue:

Blaine	I think this year we should be thankful for the things we do have, not for the things we don't have. Which is why … I know that our relationship has reached a new level this year …
Kurt	If that's an engagement ring, my answer is yes.
Blaine	Kurt … just open the box.

This interaction between Kurt Hummel (Chris Colfer) and Blaine Anderson (Darren Criss), on-screen boyfriends on the high school musical dramedy *Glee,* took place during a scene that was shot for "Extraordinary Merry Christmas," the Christmas episode of season 3.[1] The episode as a whole revolved around the fairly obvious conflict between the students' desire for a cheerful, present-laden holiday and their awareness of, and fight against, social inequality. Thus, Blaine's choice of presenting Kurt with a gift of low financial value, but high sentimental value – a promise ring made from gum wrappers – seemed to fit in nicely with the overarching theme of the episode.

When "Extraordinary Merry Christmas" aired, however, even though promotional pictures of this scene had been circulating online and fueled the rumor mill, fans were disappointed to notice that the actual scene had been cut from the episode. An announcement that the scene would be included in the Season 3 DVD box did little to appease them, but the story of the "Box Scene" did

[1] Ryan Murphy, "Extraordinary Merry Christmas," *Glee* (FOX, December 13, 2011).

not actually end with what *Glee* fans criticized harshly as a tepid compromise.

In May 2012, Project Angel Food, a LA-based non-profit organization dedicated to providing meals for people with HIV/Aids, auctioned off the original script of "Extraordinary Merry Christmas" to raise money for their organization. When they found out about the auction, *Glee* fans Heather Kirkpatrick and Tamila Gresham started a fundraiser called "The Box Scene Project", with the goal to raise enough money to bid on the script. 113 fans, in a joint effort, managed to win the auction, with over $1,000 to spare – money that they chose to donate to Project Angel Food as well. The original script itself went to the individual who had given the highest amount, but not before it was scanned and distributed among the fans, thus being made accessible to everyone involved in the effort. Furthermore, their success inspired the organizers to turn The Box Scene Project into an ongoing non-profit initiative. The organization (which is still active today under its new name Represent: Because Representation Matters) pursued a twofold agenda: Raising money for charities concerned with LGBT rights, and raising awareness for the representation of LGBT people in the media. "It is our sincere hope and belief," the organizers wrote in their mission statement,

> that by allying with other fans and groups, the money we raise and donate will help others continue to do good in our world while simultaneously increasing visibility and representation of LGBT characters and couples in popular media, and thereby helping to create a more equal and just world.[2]

In this chapter, I focus on the example of *Glee* and The Box Scene Project to discuss how the ethics that fans perceive to be at the heart of a fictional text inspire them to social activism. In the previous chapter, I suggested that the increase of sociopolitical discourse emerging from online

[2] Tamila Gresham et al., *Box Scene Project*, http://www.theboxsceneproject.org/ (last accessed September 8, 2014); now *Represent,* http://www.werepresent.org/.

transformative fandom in the last decade can be explained as a consequence of the changes transformative media fandom underwent after the migration to journal-based fandom in the early 2000s. I explained how the move toward journal-based fandom led to a merging of different communities into a loosely connected globalized network of fans with shared interests and practices. The shift from subcultural fringe phenomenon to alternative online public resulted in the necessity of renegotiating and redefining the ethical guidelines of this broader community, which led to an increasingly politicized self-conception among fans. I argued that the self-awareness transformative fans in journal-based fandom developed as community and as actors in the political landscape led to an increased interest in different political and social issues with an outreach beyond their fan community.

In this chapter, then, I show how this heightened political awareness translated into action by focusing on *Glee* fans and their engagement in support of LGBT rights. My study of The Box Scene Project demonstrates how the specific ethical foundation that draws fans to the TV series *Glee* is also what inspires their civic engagement, and shows that the emotional attachment to the text, and the emotional investment in certain political issues are, for many fans, inseparable. I also analyze *Glee*'s transmedia marketing strategy to show how it has both facilitated and complicated fans' *Glee*-inspired social activism. I argue that the marketing campaign's intentional blurring of the line between fiction and (mediated) reality with the purpose of increasing fan loyalty facilitated the fan community's reach beyond of the sphere of fandom and thus the translation of fan activism into social activism. In fact, the same communal structures that the show's transmedia storytelling supported in order to ensure viewer loyalty led to the emergence of a practice of media criticism that did not hesitate to target the creators themselves whenever they violated what fans perceived to be the show's ethical foundation. Therefore, while the activism emerging from *Glee* fandom

cannot be seen as independent from the show's transmedia strategies, it also was never fully contained by the efforts of industry-driven fan management.

Fannish Solidarity: A History of Fan Activism

The Box Scene Project and its emergence from the interplay between fannish engagement and marketing interests is not the only, or first, case of fan-organized sociopolitical activism. In fact, the coinciding of fan activism (in this particular case, fueled by fans' interest in a particular episode of their show) and sociopolitical activism (the fans' investment in social equality and media representation) is a phenomenon that has become more and more prevalent in different fan communities over the last decade.

Since 2006, the Can't Stop the Serenity project organizes screenings of *Serenity*, the 2005 movie sequel to the short-lived cult science-fiction show *Firefly* (2002-2003), every year on *Firefly* creator Joss Whedon's birthday, with the goal to raise money for Equality Now, a non-profit organization supporting gender equality.[3] The mid-2000s also saw a wave of fanwork auctions, fan-organized events in which fannish creators could offer their own fanworks, from fanfiction over fanart to fanvids and fannish crafts, to be auctioned off to other fans willing to bid money on a fannish creation tailored to their personal preferences. The charity auction Sweet Charity, for example, ran bi-yearly from 2006 to 2010 and raised money for a number of causes, for example in support of victims of sexual abuse. Other auctions like help_haiti on Livejournal (2010) and subsequent events like help_japan on Livejournal/Dreamwidth (2011) were based on a similar

[3] See Joss Whedon, *Serenity*. Universal Pictures/Barry Mendel Productions, 2005; Joss Whedon, *Firefly*. Mutant Enemy/20th Century Fox Television, 1 season, 2002/2003; Sheilah O'Connor and Stephanie Leasure, *Can't Stop the Serenity. The Global Sci-Fi Charity Event*, 2006, http://www.cantstoptheserenity.com/; Yasmeen Hassan et al. *Equality Now*, 1992. http://www.equalitynow.org/.

model, but usually directed their efforts at supporting regions hit by natural disasters.[4]

The Harry Potter Alliance (HPA),[5] founded by Andrew Slack, Seth Soulstein and Paul DeGeorge in 2005, is probably the most prominent case of fan activism-turned-social engagement and the one most often discussed in scholarship.[6] Since its foundation, the HPA has developed into a global organization with currently around 150 chapters in the USA and over 60 international chapters, distributed over all continents. HPA has launched numerous campaigns for a variety of causes, ranging from the genocide in Darfur over child labor and analphabetism to marriage equality. For those campaigns, the organization has employed various media strategies: In an early collaboration with the non-profit initiative Walmart Watch in 2006, for example, the HPA produced the fan video *Harry Potter and the Dark Lord Waldemart*,[7] in order to draw attention to Walmart's problematic labor practices. In 2014, visitors of the HPA website were temporarily stopped from accessing the site, as a means of drawing attention to the threatening loss of net neutrality.

This increase of fan-organized sociopolitical campaigns became noticeable enough that panels on fan activism were organized at LeakyCon[8] in 2013 ("Can Fandom Change the World?")[9] and 2014 ("How Fandom is Changing the World"). The phenomenon also started to draw the attention of fan studies scholars, like Kligler-Vilenchik et al., Hinck and Cochran.[10] The early scholarship on fan activism primarily focused on fans' personal transition from fan to activist and their

[4] "Sweet Charity," (2006, down since 2011), http://www.sweet-charity.net/; "Help Haiti. A Fandom Auction to Help Haiti Recover," *Livejournal*, 2010; "Help for Japan: March 2011 Relief Charity Auction," *Dreamwidth*, 2011.
[5] Melissa Anelli et al., *The Harry Potter Alliance*, 2005. http://www.thehpalliance.org/.
[6] See Hinck, "Theorizing"; Kligler-Vilenchik et al., "Experiencing Fan Activism".
[7] Ian Brownwell, *Harry Potter and the Dark Lord Waldemart*, Harry Potter Alliance/Walmart Watch, 2006, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=no0WqYWdH74.
[8] A fan convention organized by the *Harry Potter* fansite *The Leaky Cauldron.*
[9] Andrew Slack et al., "Can Fandom Change the World?" *Panel at LeakyCon 2013*, Portland, 2013, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PVSn0Dgjy3M.
[10] Kligler-Vilenchik et al., "Experiencing Fan Activism;" Hinck, "Theorizing;" Cochran, "'Past the Brink".

relationship to the fictional text in response to the question "[w]hat causes the shift from save-my-favorite-show rallies to support-my-favorite-charity sociopolitical campaigns."[11] Most studies identified this kind of activism as a recent development, although Kligler-Vilenchik et al. do rightfully pointed out that a spirit of solidarity and the willingness to act on it has always been an important element of transformative fan communities:

> Fandoms have unquestionably always involved a significant component of helping others. Teaching other members about resources and tools, giving feedback on others' fan fiction, offering personal support and even charitable donations.[12]

This statement in itself already indicates a need to study fan-organized activism not only in its contemporary manifestations, but also in its historical dimension. A historical approach can show both that fans' awareness of and interest in sociopolitical issues is not as recent a development as it may first appear, and that there are, at the same time, distinct differences between, for example, the kinds of early community-oriented activism Kligler-Vilenchik et al. refer to, and more recent examples of fan-organized activism.

Representative of earlier forms of fan-organized activism, charity auctions were held at fan conventions from the very beginnings of media fandom. The organization of these early charity auctions was already closely tied to the participants' identity as fans, insofar as they stood for a sense of solidarity and community that was considered a characteristic trait of media fandom. In 1994, Karen Ann Yost elaborated on this connection in a *Strange New Worlds* column, where she discussed the different kinds of charity work media and science-fiction fans engaged in, from cash donations over blood drives to recycling programs, and stressed the significance of charity work for the fannish identity.

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[11] Cochran, "Past the Brink," 1.4.

[12] Kligler-Vilenchik et al., "Experiencing Fan Activism", 5.2.

However, the connection between the benefitting charity and the community's object of interest appears to have been relatively arbitrary in these early auctions, in the sense that it was often determined primarily by a popular star's personal connection to the respective charity. "Many fan clubs adopt a favorite charity of the actor they support," writes Yost, and continues:

> British actor Paul Darrow (Avon in *Blake's 7*) is a regular sponsor of charities in both England and the United States. One of his favorite organizations is Canine Companions for Independence (CCI). […] During one Christmas drive, the California-based Paul Darrow Appreciation Society raised $661 to donate to CCI in Mr. Darrow's name.[13]

Blake's 7 fans raised money for an assistance dog non-profit organization not necessarily because they had a special interest in the training of service dogs *per se*, but because an actor they admired was dedicated to the cause. Similarly, ZebraCon[14] attendants who participated in the auction on behalf of the Pediatric AIDS Foundation did so primarily because of *Starsky and Hutch* star Paul Michael Glaser, whose wife and two children had been infected with HIV after a blood transfusion during his wife's pregnancy. This incentive for social engagement, in which celebrities leverage their influence to inspire their fans, is still common today. In fact, as Lucy Bennett has shown in her discussion of star-inspired campaigns,[15] contemporary celebrities increasingly seem to realize that civic engagement can be used as a way to connect with their fans. *Supernatural* actor Misha Collins, for example, is co-founder and board president of the non-profit organization Random Acts, which revolves around the idea of "random acts of kindness." The fact that he organized this initiative in collaboration with his own fans indicates a positive rapport between actor and fans; it boosts Collins' reputation of being unpretentious and approachable; and the organization's

[13] Karen Ann Yost, "It Is Better to Give . . . A Look at Fandoms and Their Relationships with Charities," *Strange New Worlds*, March 1994, http://www.strangenewworlds.com/issues/fandom-12.html.

[14] A media fandom convention focusing on the television show *Starsky & Hutch* (and later other 'buddy shows'), which was held from 1979 to 2007 in Chicago and Kalamazoo.

[15] Bennett, "Fan Activism".

charitable, but somewhat arbitrary trajectory fits into Collins' often almost Dadaist approach to publicity.[16] In this regard, organizations like Random Acts benefit from the support of a famous actor as much as the celebrity benefits from being associated with a charitable cause.

More recently however, fan-organized initiatives have also started to take different forms. On the one hand, the outreach of more recent campaigns increasingly extends beyond the sphere of the fan community. Kligler-Vilenchik et al. recognize this different trajectory when they remark that they

> see a different discourse about helping others, one that is often expressed in terms of social justice or equality. The key difference in this discourse is its outward focus, its concern for those who aren't part of the narrowly defined community, as well as some participants' desire to create structural social change.[17]

On the other hand, while the trajectory of fan-organized initiatives now frequently extends beyond the realm of fandom, the connection between the cause and the fannish text/object seems to have tightened in comparison to earlier forms of fannish social engagement. Furthermore, the strategies employed in these campaigns rely more heavily on fandom-specific practices, thus establishing a closer connection between the fannish identity and fan-organized activism.

The fanwork auction, for example, could be seen as a mere continuation of the tradition of fannish charity auctions, but the strategies it uses to raise money are actually rather different. Unlike earlier auctions at fan conventions, the fanwork auction relies primarily on fans providing labor in the form of fan-specific practices: Writers, artists and craftswomen in transformative fandom offer the kind of fiction, art, podfic, video or craft they usually produce as part of their

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[16] Misha Collins et al., *Random Acts,* 2009, http://www.randomacts.org/. For a more detailed discussion of Collins' relationship to his fans, see Lynn Zubernis and Katherine Larsen, *Fandom at the Crossroads: Celebration, Shame and Fan/Produser Relationships* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2012), although the book does not mention the *Random Acts* project.

[17] Kligler-Vilenchik et al., "Experiencing Fan Activism", 5.2.

participation in fandom, and the bidders receive a piece of fanwork that complies with their personal wishes or preferences. Thus, the fanwork auction establishes a closer relationship between fan identity and social engagement, because it is through common fannish practices that donations are raised. In the context of the auction, practicing fandom and being involved become one and the same thing. As the money raised in the auction is donated directly to charity (that is, buyers are asked to provide evidence that they have donated to a specific organization), and writers and artists are not compensated for their work, this kind of auction also does not seem to break with fandom's ethical principles, which demand that fans exchange transformative works, services, advice and feedback without any monetary compensation.[18] Still, some fans have argued that these auctions do in fact somewhat complicate the system of fannish gift exchange culture since they attach a monetary value to fanworks.

As multi-fandom projects drawing fans from very different corners of transformative fandom, these auctions also support the concept of a global transformative fan community that is tied together through its practices rather than the investment in one specific text, as I have discussed in chapter 2. Consequently, the incentive behind the participation in the auctions is not so much inspired by fans' attachment to a specific text, but rather an attachment to the practices and ethics of transformative fan culture.

More typical for the new wave of fan-organized activism are initiatives that emerge directly from fans' engagement with specific texts. In those cases, being a fan of a particular text goes along with a personal investment in specific sociopolitical issues, and the fans see their activism as "a way to bring into the real world the ethics of the imaginative texts they love," as Tanya

[18] See Hellekson, "A Fannish Field."

Cochran suggests.[19] In her analysis of social engagement in Joss Whedon fandom, Cochran discusses what motivates fans of Whedon's TV shows and feature films, in particular the space western *Firefly* (2002-2003) and the fantasy series *Buffy The Vampire Slayer* (1997-2003),[20] to become involved specifically with the non-profit organization Equality Now, which focuses on gender equality and speaks out against gendered violence.

Equality Now is supported and promoted by showrunner Joss Whedon himself, but Cochran shows that his fans' involvement with Equality Now is not simply another example of fans investing in the charity of a star, even though his personal influence certainly plays a not insignificant role. That Whedon can function as a credible representative of and even inspiration for feminist activism, however, is due primarily to his reputation as the creator of complex strong female characters. In particular his early show *Buffy The Vampire Slayer* has been read as a feminist text by many fans, who also praise him for his credible female protagonists in other works, from *Firefly*'s Zoe Washburne and River Tam, to *The Avengers*' Maria Hill and Natasha Romanov.[21] Therefore, the fans' motivation to actively support the women's rights organization Equality Now is rooted in their engagement with the texts just as much (or more) as it is influenced by their attachment to Whedon himself.

In the work of the fan organization Harry Potter Alliance, social engagement and fans' emotional investment in the text are even more closely intertwined. The fans involved with HPA explicitly see themselves as carrying on the spirit of the books they have come to love. The mission

[19] Cochran, "Past the Brink," 4.4.

[20] Joss Whedon, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, Mutant Enemy/20th Century Fox Television, 7 seasons, 1997-2003.

[21] This is not to say that Whedon's female characters are without their problems, and Natasha Simons has demonstrated fairly poignantly why Whedon's 'street cred' as feminist might need to be reevaluated: Natasha Simons, "Reconsidering the Feminism of Joss Whedon," *The Mary Sue*, April 7, 2011, http://www.themarysue.com/reconsidering-the-feminism-of-joss-whedon/. Still, what matters in this context is that many of Whedon's (female) fans have expressed an invested interest in the representation of women in (popular) culture.

statement on the HPA website proclaims:

> The Harry Potter Alliance turns fans into heroes. We're changing the world by making activism accessible through the power of story. Since 2005, we've engaged millions of fans through our work for equality, human rights, and literacy.[22]

Ashley Hinck has shown in detail how J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* novels serve as the "public engagement keystone" that anchors fans, allows them to identify as part of a community and provides an ethical foundation from which a concept of social engagement can grow. She shows how HPA uses the philosophy underlying the fictional texts to inspire fans to social activism. For example, "[t]he HPA's ethic of speaking out rejects apathy disguised as neutrality",[23] which correlates with the fictional characters in the novels who see it as their mission to stand up against oppression and injustice. However, while she explains convincingly how the ethics of a fictional text can be used to inspire activism, the reverse side of this relationship needs to be acknowledged as equally important: The text's ethics may very well be the reason it appeals to certain fans in the first place. Liesbet van Zoonen, whose remarks on fans in *Entertaining the Citizen* have been repeatedly cited in scholarship on fan activism, argues that fan groups, like political constituencies, "rest on emotional investments that are intrinsically linked to rationality and lead to 'affective intelligence.'"[24] Her emphasis on the significance of rationality and intelligence at the core of fans' engagement also suggests that fans' emotional investment in specific sociopolitical issues might not be simply the result, but rather the cause for their engagement with certain texts. The example of *Glee* and The Box Scene Project shows that many fans did not only get involved with social

[22] Anelli et al., *Harry Potter Alliance*.
[23] Hinck, "Theorizing," 7.3.
[24] van Zoonen, *Entertaining*, 53.

issues like LGBT representation and bullying because they love *Glee*; rather, they love *Glee* precisely because the show focused on these issues. Here, the love for the text and the dedication to the cause become inseparably intertwined.

But whether audiences are drawn to the text because of the message it conveys, or whether their engagement with the text first encourages their interest in social issues, it is clear that the foundational ethics of a text influence their decision to become active and the direction their activism takes. As we will see later, this can also motivate fans to turn *against* the producers of a text if they fail to comply with the ethics that initially appealed to them. Fans' disappointment when the text violates the ethical foundation it originally established, which is at the core of their attachment to the text, can even cause them to abandon a work completely over time.

Glee's Success: Identification with the Misfit

Glee, the show about a group of social outcasts in a high school glee club, started as a small teenage-oriented dramedy on Fox in 2009, but became one of the most talked-about TV shows of the decade (and eventually ended in 2015 after six seasons). For many *Glee* fans, their emotional connection to the show was linked to its representation of minorities, in particular LGBT characters and same-sex couples, as Marwick et al. confirm in their empirical study of teenage *Glee* fans:

> [W]e consistently found that our young participants used Glee to appreciate and navigate their own sexualities and experiences. Both our participants and many of the Twitter accounts we observed seemed to have strong emotional ties to the program and its characters. To young people, the continued representation of minority characters in media is extremely important, not only to validate their own existences but also to open them to the experiences of others.[25]

[25] A. Marwick, M. L. Gray, and M. Ananny, "'Dolphins Are Just Gay Sharks': Glee and the Queer Case of Transmedia as Text and Object," *Television & New Media*, no. XX(X) (February 26, 2013): 16.

Different minority characters are in the majority among the protagonists of *Glee,* most of whom are continuously harassed by fellow students and even the teachers for being different. Soprano Kurt Hummel is repeatedly abused emotionally and physically for being effeminate and gay, Artie Abrams's (Kevin McHale) wheelchair makes him vulnerable to the attacks of fellow students, and even cheerleader Quinn Fabray (Dianna Agron) becomes the victim of harassment during her teenage pregnancy. All of them are also mocked simply for being part of the show choir: "Stop it right there, Mercedes," Kurt tells his friend who admits that she wishes for a boyfriend. "We are in glee club. That means we are at the bottom of the social heap."[26]

Two rituals of humiliation in particular are suffered so frequently by those at the bottom of the social hacking order at McKinley High that they gain symbolic significance over the course of the show. The most popular way of demonstrating someone's unpopularity is to 'slushie' them by throwing a frozen drink at their face. Slushieing scenes on *Glee* are often staged as dramatic – and traumatic – experiences: In the episode "Mash-up,"[27] for example, quarterback Finn Hudson (Cory Monteith) is pressured by his football teammates into slushieing fellow student Kurt Hummel to reaffirm his heterosexuality, but Kurt takes the higher moral ground by sparing Finn the decision and pouring the slushie over himself. The other frequently repeated ritual is the practice of throwing unpopular students into the dumpster in the school parking lot. For Kurt, this seems to be an almost daily ritual at the beginning of the show. Both practices are portrayed as forms of cruel violence that are particularly stigmatizing because the bullied student has to wear the visible traces of his/her humiliation. The sympathies of the show, and therefore the audience, are clearly with those suffering this degrading treatment from their fellow students.

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[26] Ryan Murphy and John Scott, "Acafellas," *Glee* (FOX, September 16, 2009).
[27] Ryan Murphy and Elodie Keene, "Mash-Up," *Glee* (FOX, October 21, 2009).

Very quickly, the series attracted a strong fanbase of people who identified with the show in a very personal way. In her online manifesto "In Defense of Gleeks," electricpurplearmor, who calls herself a "NYC-Dwelling, twenty-something aspiring actor and singer who makes lattes for a living," explains what drew her to the show:

> I often say that folks who condemn *Glee* don't 'get it'. This has absolutely nothing to do with IQ. This is not about intellectual understanding, it's about an emotional connection. I was, without a doubt, one of these kids in high school. […] I remember being that kid, feeling hopelessly awkward and going through all the worst parts of puberty, all while being a shy introvert to boot. I had very few friends freshman and sophomore year, and if my one lunchtime companion was absent that day, I would eat alone in the hallway outside the cafeteria. It wasn't until I found the drama club: a band of other misfits like myself – the bad kids, the stoners, the sexually confused, the prissy christian choir girls, the D&D nerds, the band geeks – that I finally felt like I'd found a home; A group of people who understood what so many others didn't about me.[28]

For electricpurplearmor, *Glee* is a show in which she finds herself, because the show about social outcasts reminds her of her own time in high school. She also suggests that those who haven't gone through the same experience might not be able to fully understand what the show means to her, or as she says: they "don't get it." *Glee* fan Josey, who appears in *Glee The 3D Concert Movie* (2011), seems to contradict her at first glance when she defines the appeal *Glee* has had for herself and others: "Everybody watches Glee. It doesn't matter what race, gender, what your sexuality is – anybody can be a Glee fan."[29] However, it was precisely between these two poles that the self-conception of the *Glee* fan community took shape, between the inclusiveness of "anybody can be a Glee fan" and the assumption that to understand the show, one needs to be familiar with the social and emotional cost of being an outsider.

Glee's focus on the suffering of social misfits clearly hit a nerve with teenagers: "*Glee* started

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[28] Electricpurplearmor, "In Defense of Gleeks, Part Two: But, Why Glee?" *A Sense of Humor Is Needed Armor*, April 4, 2012. http://electricpurplearmor.wordpress.com/2012/04/04/in-defense-of-gleeks-part-two-but-why-glee/.

[29] Kevin Tancharoen, *Glee: The 3D Concert Movie* (Ryan Murphy Productions/20th Century Fox Television, 2011).

at a really good time for me, because I was starting my new school, and I was getting bullied for being a bit of a loser," a girl explains in her video message directed at the *Glee* cast, which was featured in the British television documentary *I Heart Glee* (2013).[30] With *Glee*'s rise to popularity, the issue of peer-on-peer bullying in high schools also moved to the forefront of the American consciousness. During the 2000s, an anti-bullying movement had already begun to develop in the English-speaking world and brought forth initiatives like the National Bullying Prevention Month, founded in 2006 by PACER's National Center for Bullying Prevention. But shortly after the premiere of *Glee* on US television, violence and harassment among teenagers in schools and colleges began to draw increasing attention. It's impossible to determine whether the attention toward bullying should be primarily attributed to *Glee'*s popularity, or whether it was in fact *Glee* that jumped on the already moving bandwagon, but the fact is that initiatives to prevent and stop bullying kept popping up in the wake of *Glee*'s premiere. In September 2010, columnist Dan Savage started the now infamous It Gets Better[31] project, for which celebrities (and others) recorded inspirational video messages for LGBT teenagers suffering from discrimination. In 2011, Lee Hirsch's documentary *Bully* came to the theaters, accompanied by the awareness-raising campaign The Bully Project.[32] In March 2011, the then presidential couple Barack and Michelle Obama hosted a White House Conference on bullying prevention and launched the U.S. Federal Government's website StopBullying.gov.[33]

These initiatives were accompanied by a slew of media reports about bullying incidents in American high schools and their sometimes fatal consequences. In October 2010, for example, the

[30] "I Heart Glee," (Sky 1, March 10, 2013).
[31] Dan Savage, *It Gets Better Project. Give Hope to LGBT Youth*, 2010, http://www.itgetsbetter.org/.
[32] Lee Hirsch, *Bully* (The Bully Project/Where We Live Films, 2011); The Bully Project, *The BULLY Project*, 2011, http://www.thebullyproject.com/.
[33] U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, *StopBullying.gov*, 2012, http://www.stopbullying.gov/.

Huffington Post published an article about a high school in Mentor, Ohio, where four students had killed themselves over the course of only two years after being bullied by their classmates. "One was bullied for being gay, another for having a learning disability, another for being a boy who happened to like wearing pink." The fourth left a suicide note that "told of her daily torment at Mentor High School, where students mocked her accent, taunted her with insults like 'Slutty Jana' and threw food at her."[34]

Coincidentally or not, *Glee's* version of Mentor High, the fictional McKinley High School, was located not even 200 miles away from Mentor in Lima, Ohio. The significance of location as a sacred place for fans of cult texts has been discussed by Matt Hills, Nick Couldry, and Roger Aden[35] respectively; but while the location of Lima, Ohio carries significant weight for the fans of *Glee*, it does not play the same role as New Jersey did for fans of the HBO show *The Sopranos* or Albuquerque for *Breaking Bad* fans, and not only because *Glee* was for the most part actually shot in Los Angeles, California. Although a town of that name does in fact exist in Ohio, *Glee's* Lima does not so much reference a specific extra-diegetic location, and *Glee* fans don't generally feel the need to travel to Lima – because the show suggests that even if they don't know Lima, they know places just like it. With settings like a generic mall, the auto repair shop "Hummel's Tires and Lube", a coffee shop called "Lima Bean," and the mediocre Italian restaurant "Breadstix", *Glee's* Lima is purposefully interchangeable, a nondescript representation of Midwestern small town America that stands in for any other town or city in the United States where high school is a

[34] Meghan Barr, "4 Bullied Teen Deaths at Ohio School," *Huffington Post*, December 8, 2010, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2010/10/08/4-bullied-teen-deaths-at-_n_755461.html.

[35] Roger C. Aden, *Popular Stories and Promised Lands: Fan Cultures and Symbolic Pilgrimages*, Studies in Rhetoric and Communication (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1999); Nick Couldry, "On the Set of The Sopranos: 'Inside' a Fan's Construction of Nearness," in *Fandom. Identities and Communities in a Mediated World*, ed. Jonathan Gray and et al. (London/New York: New York University Press, 2007), 139–148; Hills, *Fan Cultures*.

mostly miserable experience. When head cheerleader Quinn Fabray finds out she is pregnant on the show, she laments: "I really thought I had a chance of getting out of here!"[36] For Quinn and her fellow glee club members, leaving Lima after graduation is the light at the end of the tunnel, and there is nothing worse for them than the prospect of being a "Lima Loser" – that is, not being able to escape and getting stuck for the rest of their lives in a place where being different is not an acceptable option. "We live in Ohio, not New York ... or some other city where people eat vegetables that aren't fried," popular quarterback Finn reminds his new step-brother Kurt in the episode *Theatricality*,[37] when he reprimands him for being too flamboyant and 'in-your-face' about his homosexuality.

The allegorical significance of *Glee*'s Lima might be illustrated best with the shout-out to *Glee* on the not-at-all related cop show *Hawaii Five-O* (2010-present), in an episode about the murder of a sex worker. The victim's last client turns out to be a high school teacher from Lima, who has to explain his actions to the investigators. "Have you ever been to Lima, Ohio?" the suspect asks during the interrogation. "I mean, come on. This is Hawaii, I just wanted to have fun."[38] This blink-and-you-will-miss-it, tongue-in-cheek reference works so well precisely because Lima, as portrayed on *Glee*, serves to represent the exact opposite of Hawaii; that is, the opposite of fun and freedom. Unlike locations in other cult TV shows, the fictionalized town of Lima, Ohio is not a place viewers want to escape to from their own lives: quite the contrary, Lima is the place everyone wants to escape *from*.

On *Glee* itself, it is not Hawaii, but rather New York City that is usually pitched against Lima as a quasi-utopian place. Rachel Berry (Leah Michele) and Kurt Hummel, the most ambitious

[36] Ryan Murphy and Brad Falchuk, "Preggers," *Glee* (FOX, September 23, 2009).
[37] Ryan Murphy, "Theatricality," *Glee* (FOX, May 25, 2010).
[38] Larry Teng, "Hana I Wa 'Ia," *Hawaii Five-0* (CBS, January 21, 2013).

members of the glee club, are convinced that New York is their destiny, both as the place that will make them famous and the place where people will accept them for who they are. Kurt's father Burt (Mike O'Malley) agrees with that notion when eventually he sends his son off to New York after his high school graduation:

Burt Hummel	New York is going to be a breeze, compared to Lima. Think about all the crap you've been putting up with the last couple years. You know the difference between this place and New York?
Kurt Hummel	Decent bagels?
Burt Hummel	New York is filled with people like you. People who aren't afraid to be different. You can feel at home there.[39]

The physical transition from small town Lima to big city New York goes along with the symbolic transition from teenager to adult, but more importantly, from being an outsider to a place of belonging. In the show, this transition does not begin only when the high school graduates finally move to New York after the show's third season. In fact, their transition process begins the moment the students first join the glee club. Within Lima, glee club fulfills the function of a symbolic New York, and even for those who will never make it out of Lima, it is the place where they can feel at home.

The *Glee* Cast: Losers Like Us?

The fans' strong investment in this utopian fantasy was supported by the public narrative of *Glee*'s production history, which highlighted the parallels between the intra- and the extra-diegetic level of the show. The mediated narrative about the show's production and the actors' personal lives was presented in a way that mirrored the premise of the show. On *Glee*, McKinley High's glee club "New Directions" is consistently portrayed as the 'underdog' in high school competitions because

[39] Ryan Murphy and Brad Falchuk, "The New Rachel," *Glee* (FOX, September 13, 2012).

their group works without a budget, without the streamlined performances of competing glee clubs, but also because their group lacks the demographic homogeneity of other choirs, as the coach of a more successful glee club points out to McKinley's glee club teacher:

> Schuester I love my kids.
> Goolsby What? No you don't. They're hideous. My kids are at least attractive. Yours look like they haven't been baked properly.[40]

Glee's perceived credibility as the voice of the unappreciated was supported by the fact that the show itself was initially presented in the media as the underdog in the TV season 2009. "I never thought the show would even last. […] I just didn't think people would get it," creator Ryan Murphy is quoted by *Entertainment Weekly* in 2010.[41] Similarly, the younger members of the cast were introduced as newcomers for whom the show finally indicated a break. Publicity during the first season took care to point out that while some cast members had prior acting experience, many were new to the show business. Amber Riley, the actress playing black diva Mercedes Jones, had previously auditioned for *American Idol* and been rejected, a fact that was highlighted rather than glossed over in the publicity for the show. Cory Monteith, who starred on *Glee* as quarterback-turned-glee club leader Finn Hudson, talked in interviews about his past struggles with drugs and alcohol and his difficulties of finding work as actor before he was cast on *Glee*.[42]

Chris Colfer in particular lent himself to this kind of parallel between the characters on the show and the actors playing them. The role of gay soprano Kurt Hummel was his first real acting gig, and the story of his audition, told and retold in countless interviews, became part of the myth surrounding the series *Glee*. When he auditioned for *Glee*, showrunner Ryan Murphy liked him so

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[40] Ryan Murphy and Brad Falchuk, "New York," *Glee* (FOX, May 24, 2011).

[41] Tim Stack, "'Glee': The Show Heard Round the World," *Entertainment Weekly*, May 28, 2010, http://www.ew.com/ew/article/0,,20386845,00.html.

[42] Cory Monteith died in July 2013 at the age of 32, presumably as a result of the simultaneous consumption of alcohol and heroin.

much that he created the role of Kurt specifically for him, or so the story went:

> As soon as I walked in the door, Ryan Murphy looked at me and asked: 'Why do I have a feeling you've been in *The Sound of Music*?' And I said, well, I was Kurt in *The Sound of Music* when I was fourteen. And then lo and behold, when I went to the next audition, they were replacing Rashish, an Indian student, with this new character named Kurt, and I thought, *interesting*, and I was the only one there auditioning for Kurt, and I thought, *interesting*, again … and the rest is history.[43]

In interviews during the first two seasons of *Glee,* Chris Colfer was also repeatedly asked to speak about his own high school experience in his hometown of Clovis, California. In his responses to this question, he always confirmed that he had suffered abuse by his peers in middle and high school himself: "I actually was bullied so much in middle school that my parents home-schooled me for 7th grade," he said at the New Yorker Festival in October 2011. "I kept getting shoved into lockers, because I was very tiny." Colfer's public confession that he was a victim of bullying further underscored the similarities between the actor and his character, and highlighted the parallels between Clovis, Mentor, and Lima, the actual and fictional places where abuse takes place. Just like the students in *Glee* want to get away from Lima, Colfer talked about his hope for a similar escape: "I would always go to these auditions thinking: 'This is my way to escape. This is my way to get out.'"[44] This media narrative suggested that for Colfer, being cast on *Glee* was as significant as joining glee club was for his character Kurt. Repeatedly he stressed that he had had very few friends before being cast on the show, and that on the set of *Glee*, he had for the first time found friendship and acceptance: "We're a big family behind the scenes. They're the best friends I've ever had, besides the CEHS Kitchen staff."[45] This recurrent evocation of the ideal of family by cast members is also mirrored by *Glee* characters, who often speak of their glee club as a family,

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[43] "Glee: Keep on Believin'," *Biography* (BIO Channel (now fyi), April 10, 2012).

[44] Chris Colfer et al., *Panel at New Yorker Festival 2011* (New York, 2011).

[45] Chris Colfer, "Q&A with Chris Colfer," *Chris-Colfer.com*, not dated, http://chris-colfer.com/qa_chris. CEHS = Clovis East High School.

as cheerleader Brittany S. Pearce (Heather Morris) does in the episode "New York": "Well, family is a place where everybody loves you no matter what. And they accept you for who you are. […] I love them, I love everyone in glee club and I get to spend another year with the people I love. So, I'm good."[46]

But there was another experience that actor Chris Colfer and his character Kurt had in common: Both came out as gay during *Glee*'s first season in 2009. In a storyline that turned out to be one of the most popular and iconic stories *Glee* ever told, the fourth episode showed Kurt joining the high school football team as kicker in order to impress his all-American mechanic father, only to come out to him as queer later in the episode.[47] Somewhat less theatrically, Colfer officially came out on the talk show *Chelsea Lately* in December 2009.[48] Even though fans rumored that the network had wanted him to keep quiet about his sexuality, his coming-out clearly did not hurt FOX, or his own reputation, in the slightest. Cast in an odd twist of events for a part that had to be written into the script for him, he had originally no more than a supporting role, but over the course of seasons 1 and 2, Chris Colfer/Kurt Hummel became one of the biggest successes of *Glee*. As a result of the character's popularity, his part continued to be expanded until he was without doubt one of the show's main protagonists. Colfer himself did not only win a Golden Globe for the role in 2011, but was also named one of "the most influential people in the world" on the 2011 *TIME 100* list.[49] Over the course of little more than a year, Colfer had somehow been turned by the media into the spokesperson of queer American teenagers. The audience's positive reaction to Kurt also opened the door for the introduction of other LGBT characters on the show. Cheerleaders Brittany

[46] Murphy/Falchuk, "New York".
[47] Murphy/Falchuk, "Preggers".
[48] Chelsea Handler, "Guest: Chris Colfer," *Chelsea Lately* (E!, December 3, 2009).
[49] Dianna Agron, "Chris Colfer: Song-and-Dance Man," *TIME*, May 2, 2011.

and Santana (Naya Rivera), originally depicted as sexually adventurous, but heterosexual BFFs, eventually came out as bisexual and lesbian respectively. Season 2 introduced Kurt's future boyfriend (and eventual husband) Blaine; in a twist of bittersweet irony, Kurt's most cruel bully Dave Karofsky (Max Adler) turned out to be a tormented closeted boy; and at the end of season 3, the show introduced transgender student Unique (Alex Newell).

Despite this comparably large number of LGBT characters, in particular later seasons of *Glee* have been criticized for the heteronormativity of their narratives. As both Frederik Dhaenens and Lynne Joyrich[50] have discussed, the show's integration of same-sex couples into the heteronormative structures of monogamous relationships and marriages, its romanticized image of nuclear family models and traditional concepts of masculinity, and its reluctance to treat bisexuality seriously did not seem geared at challenging public perceptions about gender, sexuality, and family. However, this certainly justified criticism did not change the fact that many viewers saw *Glee's* representation of LGBT teenagers on American broadcast television as revolutionary. As problematic as the idea of empowerment through mere visibility and representation may be, for many of the teenagers watching *Glee*, representation meant everything:

> Me frantically trying to MacGyver my computer into a DVR to capture that first Brittana kiss is an example of why positive representation for minorities is so important on TV. That was the first time I had ever seen a lesbian couple on TV, and they looked so happy; a possibility I had given up on for myself. Fiction or not, Brittany and Santana's story felt like part of what my story could be, and that changed things in a big way.[51]

Similarly, in the caption to her youtube fan video "How Klaine Changed the World," the creator

[50] Frederik Dhaenens, "Teenage Queerness: Negotiating Heteronormativity in the Representation of Gay Teenagers in 'Glee,'" *Journal of Youth Studies*, no. 16.3 (2013): 304–17; Lynne Joyrich, "Queer Television Studies: Currents, Flows, and (Main)streams," *Cinema Journal*, no. 53.2 (2014): 133–39.

[51] Versusthefans, "The Trouble with 'Glee,'" *Versus the Fans*, September 30, 2013, http://versusthefans.com/2013/09/30/the-trouble-with-glee/.

wrote about Kurt and his boyfriend Blaine: "This is not just a ship.[52] This is a positive step forward in changing the way people view others in society."[53] And another fan explains: "People ask me all the time, 'Why do you love this show so much?' or 'Why is this show any different from other shows on TV?' My answer is always the same: 'Glee is changing the world.' You may not realize it. But it is."[54]

It is not a coincidence that the notion of change, of transformation, features prominently in all these statements. The belief in *Glee*'s potential for progress and social change played a significant role in fans' relationship to the show. *Glee*'s transmedia marketing further supported this faith by consistently blurring the lines between fiction, mediated reality, and the fans' own lives. Beyond the parallels between actors and fictional characters that the publicity campaign made sure to highlight, *Glee* also promised fans the possibility for change in their own lives in two regards, both of which were represented by the institution of glee club: the desire to be part of a community and the dream of becoming a star.

Glee fans, or "Gleeks,"[55] as they called themselves, felt that the show allowed them to experience the transition from being an outsider to becoming part of a community:[56] "I think that we are the majority. We are the quirky, weird kids. We don't all look the same way," explains a girl who is interviewed for *Glee The 3D Concert Movie*,[57] once again giving expression to *Glee*

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[52] Ship: Fannish term for the romantic relationship between two fictional characters that fans are particularly invested in. This can be both a relationship actually depicted in the text, or one that fans simply would like to see.

[53] lulzychan, "How Klaine Changed the World" (*Youtube* 2012).

[54] troutymouth, "What Glee Means To Me," *Trouty Mouth*, August 2, 2012, http://troutymouth.com/2012/08/what-glee-means-to-me.html.

[55] Gleek: a mash-up of the words Glee and Geek.

[56] In his study on *X-files* fans, Will Brooker describes rituals of fan viewing as symbolic pilgrimage, as a "rite de passage" that indicates the fans' transition to a place of belonging. Watching *Glee*, and being a *Glee* fan, similarly created this sense of belonging. Will Brooker, "A Sort of Homecoming: Fan Viewing and Symbolic Pilgrimage," in *Fandom. Identities and Communities in a Mediated World*, ed. Jonathan Gray and et al. (New York/London: New York University Press, 2007), 149–64.

[57] Tancharoen, *3D Concert Movie*.

fans' self-conception oscillating between inclusivity ("the majority") and exclusion ("quirky, weird"). However, the "we" in her statement does not only refer to fans, but also to the fictional characters, as well as the actors playing them, who all became part of *Glee*'s community of outsiders. Not only did fans recognize themselves in the characters on the show and identify with their goals and dreams, they also drew parallels between the fictional characters on *Glee* and public information about the actors' personal lives. Especially in regard to Chris Colfer/Kurt Hummel, fans were able to follow the story from tormented outsider to an accepted member of the group not just on the fictional level of the show, but also in their mediated experience of Colfer's own life. Colfer's success story provided the real-life legitimation for Kurt's story and lent it much of its credibility.

Both the marketing around the show and the showrunner/writers tapped into this sense of community and referenced it frequently. One symbol of the connection between fans, characters, and actors became the Loser-L hand gesture that had appeared early on in the marketing for the show. It was soon reclaimed by fans as a gesture of belonging – and ultimately made its way back into the show, where the characters used it in a public performance at a glee club competition, thus closing the circle between fictional narrative, marketing, and fandom.

Glee The 3D Concert Movie similarly promoted the idea of the *Glee* community as one big family that accepted everyone for who they are, no matter how different. In parts, the movie was a recording of the 2010 *Glee Live! In Concert!* Tour, a series of live performances during which the actors appeared on stage exclusively in character – that is, they starred not as Leah Michele or Chris Colfer, but as Rachel Berry and Kurt Hummel, thus creating the illusion that fans could actually meet the fictional characters in real life. At the same time, *Glee The 3D Concert Movie* was also a documentary about *Glee* fans and contained extensive footage of fans at the concerts,

as well as segments featuring individual fans who got to tell their personal story and what *Glee* meant to them: including a young woman with Asperger's syndrome who talked about making friends in the *Glee* fan community, a young man of color recounting his coming-out story, and a little person who was elected prom princess at her high school. By never quite breaking the illusion of fictional characters performing live, not even in the backstage interviews with the cast, and by mixing these segments with features about fans, the film quite effectively blurred the line between fiction and extra-diegetic mediated reality.

"In relation to cult geography," Matt Hills writes, "we are all 'outsiders' in a sense since the notion of the 'inside' is displaced here into a mediated point which, by definition, cannot arrive: [...] we cannot ever get 'inside' the originating text."[58] *Glee*, however, suggested that such a transcendence of mediated reality was in fact possible. By giving fans the chance to see their favorite characters perform live on stage, by highlighting the parallels between the *Glee* actors and the fans' personal lives, and by suggesting that fans can actually become a part of this phenomenon, *Glee* created a sense of community that extended across the different spheres.

You Can Be a Star: Transmedia Marketing around *Glee*

While *Glee The 3D Concert Movie* focused on the concept of *Glee* as family, the casting show *The Glee Project* and the Give a Note charity campaign primarily promoted the idea that everybody can become a star. The Glee Give a Note campaign was a music competition that took place in fall 2011 and was organized by the National Association for Music Education, the Give A Note Foundation and FOX/*Glee*. High school glee clubs were invited to submit short videos explaining

[58] Hills, *Fan Cultures*, 146.

why the music program at their school was in need of financial aid, and the awarded grants were financed from the proceeds of the *Glee* Season 2 DVD. Thus, the campaign reconfirmed the competitiveness of the musical theater world, all the while providing publicity for the show's producers, highlighting their concern for art programs in high schools and boosting the show's reputation as socially conscious programming. At the same time, the campaign did directly benefit high school art programs and was focused on the idea of the show choir as a team, thus stopping short of promoting the idea of individual students becoming stars.

The promise of stardom that was perpetually invoked in the marketing and publicity around *Glee* was made much more explicit with *The Glee Project*, a spin-off casting show that premiered on *Oxygen* in 2011. The show served as a public audition platform for *Glee*, and the winners of the competition were promised a minor role on the show. The casting call promo for season 2 highlighted the idea that *The Glee Project* gave everyone a chance to be part of *Glee*. Two winners from season 1 appear in the promo, exclaiming: "We auditioned online. And now you can do it too!"[59] Over the course of two seasons, six candidates (winners and runners-up) were cast for roles on *Glee* and actually appeared on the show. But while their success seemingly fulfilled *The Glee Project's* promise of stardom for everyone, Matthias Stork points out that participants were in fact carefully selected for their compatibility with the conceptual vision of *Glee*.[60]

Furthermore, despite the fact that six *Glee Project* finalists appeared on *Glee*, most of them did not have a significant presence on the show, nor were they particularly well received by the audience, since most of their plotlines failed to be more than forced add-ons, or were too brief to

[59] "The Glee Project Casting Promo" (Oxygen, August 2011).

[60] Matthias Stork, "The Cultural Economics of Performance Space: Negotiating Fan, Labor, and Marketing Practice in Glee's Transmedia Geography," *Transformative Works and Cultures*, special issue Fandom and/as Labor, ed. Mel Stanfill and Megan Condis, no. 15 (2014), http://journal.transformativeworks.org/index.php/twc/article/view/490/420.

leave a lasting impression. Probably the most successful addition to the *Glee* cast via *The Glee Project* was Alex Newell, a queer black plus-sized young man who was cast in the role of trans-girl Unique Adams and thus represented one of the very few transgender characters on television at the time.

The casting show *The Glee Project* along with the scheduling of *Glee*'s fourth season for the time slot after the talent shows *The X Factor* and *American Idol* were part of a marketing strategy promising fans that they could be just as successful as the stars of *Glee*. And in fact, the early *Glee* boom in particular had contributed to an increased interest in high school and college show choirs in Canada and the USA in 2010 and 2011.[61] *Jazz Times* published a survey among show choir directors showing that

> forty-three percent noted a sharp rise in student interest and enrollment, plus a huge number of requests from choir members that songs from the show be added to their repertoire. At the University of North Texas in Denton, Joe Coira announced the creation of a new vocal group the day after *Glee*'s first season finale, and was shocked when more than 100 students showed up to audition.[62]

This development seems to indicate that the message sent by *Glee*'s transmedia marketing campaign was taken, at least to some extent, at face value, and that not all Gleeks were content to simply watch the fictional characters move from small-town Lima to New York City, or follow the actors' careers from unknown bullied high school students to celebrated television stars, but wished to experience the rise to stardom themselves.

Stork has rightfully criticized *Glee*'s transmedia marketing for this attempt to connect to fans through the promise of individual success. He shows how *Glee*, with a long list of soundtrack

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[61] See Cathy Applefeld Olson, "Can 'Glee' Make a Splash in Music Class?," *Teaching Music*, no. 19.1 (2011): 32–34, 36; Jaime J. Weinman, "A Song in Their Hearts," *Maclean's*, November 22, 2010.

[62] Christopher Loudon, "The Glee Effect," *JazzTimes*, September 16, 2010, http://jazztimes.com/articles/26514-the-glee-effect.

albums and hit singles, a concert tour, and a feature-length movie, developed into a distinct brand crossing a variety of media platforms, and points out how *Glee*'s transmedia marketing strategy, as a means to promote viewer loyalty, implies that the fans could be as successful as the actors.[63] But while Stork is certainly right in assuming that a career in musical theater was important to many fans of the show, I am more reluctant to agree with his assessment that *Glee* fandom exhausted itself in the fans' aspiration to achieve individual professional success. Instead, I argue that for many fans, *Glee*'s promise of stardom was associated more with a fantasy of achieving acceptance and revenge, rather than the mere ambition of monetary success. More importantly, *Glee*'s transmedia marketing with its message of 'You can do it, too!' was successful also in a possibly unintended way: While it gave fans the confidence that encouraged them to become active beyond the borders of their fan community, many of them did not (only) channel their passion into their potential, but ultimately unlikely future as superstars, but rather into attempts at building the social utopia they saw represented by the show.

Labor of Passion: *Glee*'s Utopian Vision

For the most ambitious characters on *Glee*, the dream of becoming a star is what keeps them going, even in the face of perpetual harassment and disappointment. Rachel and Kurt dream of Broadway, Mercedes wants to be the new Whitney Houston, Mike (Harry Shum Jr.) aspires to become a dancer, Artie plans to go to film school. But throughout the first three seasons, the show does not actually portray their dream of reaching stardom as a realistic career goal; instead, it functions as escapist utopia and equally as a revenge fantasy. The original song "A Loser Like Me," which the

[63] Stork, "The Cultural Economics".

glee club performs at regionals in season 2, explores the outsiders' fantasy of finally getting to prove that they are so much better than their tormenters:

> Push me up against the locker
> And hey, all I do is shake it off
> I'll get you back when I'm your boss
> I'm not thinking about you haters
> 'Cause hey, I could be a superstar
> I'll see you when you wash my car
> All of the dirt you've been throwing my way
> It ain't so hard to take, that's right
> 'Cause I know one day you'll be screaming my name
> And I'll just look away, that's right.[64]

While fans easily and readily identified with the dream of the outsider finally achieving well-deserved fame and respect, actual stardom appeared to be something that was more difficult to relate to. In fact, *Glee*'s ratings started to drop, with fans beginning to lose interest in the show, at precisely the moment when the dream of success in the show business actually started to become reality for some of the *Glee* characters in season 4. Similarly, the low acceptance of *The Glee Project*, which was canceled after only two seasons, indicated that fans had been much more invested in the show's initial message of community and solidarity than in the marketing's promise of stardom.

Naomi Lesley points out that even on the show itself, the concept of success is not tied primarily to the idea of material or professional achievements but is measured first and foremost in terms of character growth, passion and belonging. *Glee*, she suggests, "contrasts the corrupted pursuits of upward mobility, prestige, and material acquisition with the pursuit of happiness, and the ugly world of monetary and political calculation with the pure exchange of love."[65] In her

[64] Adam Anders et al., "Loser Like Me" (Columbia, 2011).
[65] Naomi Lesley, "Character Education and the Performance of Citizenship in Glee," *Children's Literature*, no. 41 (2013): 12.

analysis of the show, she teases out the message's double-edged nature: She, too, acknowledges that this philosophy with its focus on individuality and its promotion of free labor in the name of passion has the potential to be exploited by a neoliberal agenda, but suggests that it also opens up space for utopian thought:

> In the educational world of *Glee*, both utopia and activism are set into motion through musical performances that train the students for a life of emotional investment and passion. […] The energy and hope Will produces may make the students available for co-optation and exploitation; however, they are also the only sources of power available for imagining social transformations.[66]

That this fantasy resonated in particular with *Glee* fans in the community of transformative fandom is not surprising, given the fact that an essential aspect of transformative fandom is the belief in a gift exchange culture that aims to interrupt the circulation of capital.[67] Fans provide free labor – the labor of passion – in the form of fiction, art, mentoring, technological and organizational skills, among others, and in exchange benefit only from other fans' works and their feedback, encouragement, and praise. In fact, the gift economy of transformative fandom has much in common with the ideal of solidarity and community in *Glee*'s show choir – both are meant to invoke a utopian space outside of commodification and capitalism. In "Opening Night," when Rachel is experiencing stage fright the night before her Broadway debut after reading too many negative reviews online, her friend Kurt tells her:

> Give me your phone. You're being unplugged until after your opening night. No going on the Internet for anything. […] Okay? We are going to hermetically seal this loft into a big love bubble and fill it with positive affirmations and validations from people who know you and love you and have no doubt that you're going to be amazing. If you need your cup filled, we'll fill it right here.[68]

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[66] Ibid., 15-16; 21.
[67] See also chapter 2.
[68] Ryan Murphy and Eric Stoltz, "Opening Night," *Glee* (FOX, April 22, 2014).

By taking away her smartphone, he literally cuts her off from the outside world running on competition and evaluation, instead sheltering her in the safe space of her community where friends are responsible for giving her what she needs: love and appreciation, without expecting anything in return.

Just like the students on *Glee* channel the passion of song into resistance against the status quo, fans appropriated the participatory potential of *Glee*'s transmedia marketing by setting aside the promise of professional success in favor of their belief in a social utopia. *Glee* fans' investment in the idea of social change was manifested in the repeated expression of their wish to change things, in their frequent references to the utopian space that the show had opened up for them: "I've found, thanks to *Glee*, that hope is the idea that can make the most difference," writes one *Glee* fan.

> Think about it. Hope for a better day tomorrow. Hope that you know one day you'll get out of the school where kids are bullying you. Hope that you'll find what gets you excited, and makes you want to *do* something. Hope that *YOU* can make a difference.[69]

For another fan, blogging is her way of making a difference:

> Here's my confession, I guess: A bunch of fictional TV characters turned this grown person into a slightly crazy, but more hopeful, human being determined to make sure other people get the same opportunity in any way possible. All of this talk about social media and TV shows and finding ways to use the fandom is my way of trying to accomplish that.[70]

These statements capture the moment where the self-understanding of being a fan merges with fans' social conscience in the conviction that being a Gleek and fighting for change belong together. The ethical foundation of *Glee*-inspired activism was the set of beliefs that drew fans to the show in the first place – that everyone is worth getting a chance, that being part of a community

[69] troutymouth, "What Glee."
[70] versusthefans, "The Trouble."

provides strength, that intolerance and harassment should not be tolerated – whereas the marketing promise of individual agency facilitated the decision to actually become active. The perpetual convergence of fiction and reality in the show's marketing strategy made the possibility of actual change seem realistic and thus provided *Glee* fans with the sense of agency necessary to inspire action.

In some cases, this convergence of fannish and political engagement was put into practice on a micro-level that might appear as a form of self-expression rather than social activism, for example in fans' reactions to "Born This Way."[71] The episode focused on the characters' struggle with self-image and shame in regard to body image issues and internalized homophobia. For the final musical number, Lady Gaga's hit "Born This Way,"[72] the members of the glee club wear T-shirts naming a physical or character trait they are ashamed of (ranging from "Nose" over "OCD" to "Can't Sing") as a demonstration of self-acceptance and provocation alike. Kurt's shirt announces "Likes Boys," whereas lesbian student Santana's shirt carries the tongue-in-cheek misspelling "Lebanese." Reproductions of the T-shirts were later sold as merchandise, and during the *Glee* concert tour, many fans in the audience wore various versions of the shirt. However, not all of them wore the official merchandise; in fact, instead of buying the official product, many fans felt inspired to create their own shirts that better reflected their personal situation. On the one hand, these T-shirts (both the merchandise and the handmade versions) functioned as a means to connect with the fictional characters on the show as well as other *Glee* fans, and thus supported community-

[71] Ryan Murphy and Alfonso Gomez-Rejon, "Born This Way," *Glee* (FOX, April 26, 2011).

[72] Lady Gaga, "Born this Way" (Streamline/Kon Live/Interscope, 2011). Lady Gaga explicitly dedicated her hit to the members of different minorities facing discrimination. Part of the sales of her "Born This Way – The Country Road Version" remix went to the Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network, and in 2011, the artist and her mother founded the Born This Way Foundation, dedicated to promote tolerance and fight bullying: Lady Gaga and Cynthia Germanotta, *Born this Way Foundation*, 2012, https://bornthisway.foundation/.

building in a mostly affirmative way. However, while fellow *Glee* fans were instantly able to recognize the reference to the show, outsiders most likely did not perceive in particular the self-made shirts as fan articles and thus were forced to read them as a personal and potentially political statement. That this seemingly insignificant clothing choice could actually bear risks for those involved becomes apparent in a *Glee* fan's tumblr comment:

> I thought I had rid myself of that homophobic church, when my Sunday School teacher knocks on my door. I have to answer because she saw my face through the window, but I was wearing my Born This Way shirt. I pray to God she didn't notice, because I really don't want to be out to them. Ugh.[73]

Changing Things: The Move to Fan-Organized Activism

While wearing a "Born this Way" T-shirt might seem insignificant compared to initiatives like the Box Scene Project that crossed the border from personal statement to organized activism, both actions had in common that they were grounded in what fans perceived as the spirit of *Glee* and the belief that actual change was possible. In the case of the Box Scene Project, the organizers felt encouraged by the realization that a group of fans could actually make an impact, after they achieved the release of an episode script, and later, indirectly, the release of the actual scene.[74] They continued their efforts to create change by raising money for organizations supporting disadvantaged youth and LGBT people, like Project Angel Food, Young Storytellers Foundation and Baycat; organizing a panel discussion on media representation; and financing scholarships and grants for students and young independents in the media arts.[75]

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[73] Haley, "Born this Way", *Tumblr*, not dated.

[74] Showrunner Ryan Murphy endeared himself to his fans when he released the cut scene via youtube/twitter half a year later, in summer 2012 (Ryan Murphy, "Untitled," *Twitter,* August 1, 2012).

[75] Another success was the purchase of the episode script of "The First Time" (Ryan Murphy and Bradley Buecker, "The First Time," *Glee* (FOX, November 8, 2011)), which featured four students venturing to a gay bar, and Kurt and Blaine's first time having sex. This script, too, was distributed among fans, to make the queer-themed storylines accessible to others in the fan community. After the cancellation of *Glee*, the organization continues to

Since all these projects relate to the issues that for fans are at the heart of what constitutes *Glee* – minority representation, LGBT rights and support for struggling youth –, this form of fan-organized activism can be understood as affirmative: It is inspired by and carried out in the spirit of the show. Even if unintended, this kind of initiative cannot be unwelcome to producers; since the free labor fans invest also draws attention to the text that inspired them, *Glee*-inspired activism also automatically creates publicity for the TV show and therefore functions, in one way or another, as indirect advertising for the brand name *Glee*.

However, as it turns out, fans' loyalty to the ethical principles that attracted them to the text might run stronger than their attachment to the text itself. Therefore, fan-organized activism can just as easily turn against the text itself when it violates the same ethical code it originally put in place. The initial campaign behind The Box Scene Project combines both sides of fan-organized activism, the affirmative and the resistant side. Initially, the organizers' activism was set off by the omission of a particular scene, a romantic scene between the show's (at the time only) gay couple that treats Kurt and Blaine as 'just another couple' and shows the deep affection between the boyfriends. For fans whose emotional attachment to *Glee* was linked closely to its treatment of LGBT characters and same-sex relationships, this scene was charged with as much symbolic value as the promise ring exchanged in the clip. The omission of the scene from the episode, then, appeared to these fans as a slap in the face, in particular since the episode focused heavily on the relationship of heterosexual lead couple Rachel and Finn.[76] Fans felt strongly that Kurt and

exist as Represent: Because Representation Matters, and still focuses on "equal media representation in film, television, and theater for the LGBT community, women, people of color, folks with disabilities, and all who live at the intersection of these identities." (Tamila Gresham et al., *Represent*, 2011, http://www.werepresent.org.)

[76] Which in turn angered fans also because the episode showed Rachel demanding an unrealistic amount of Christmas presents from her boyfriend, despite her canonical Jewishness, something that fans perceived as a religious whitewashing of the character. For a discussion of Whiteness and Jewishness on *Glee*, see also Rachel E. Dubrofsky, "Jewishness, Whiteness, and Blackness on Glee: Singing to the Tune of Postracism,"

Blaine's sexuality had factored heavily into the producers' decision to cut the Box Scene from the Christmas episode.

Early scholarly discussions of fan activism usually defined it in a way that was clearly distinct from political forms of activism, and mostly referred to fan-organized campaigns protesting decisions made by writers or producers that fans were unhappy about, like the cancellation of a show or the departure of a beloved actor. This type of fan activism was considered resistant mostly in the sense that it encouraged fans to actively use the influence coming with their role as consumers in order to undermine creators' and producers' authority. But not always is fan activism only a demand for more of the same (more episodes, more appearances by an actor/actress), it can also pursue an agenda that is driven by sociopolitical concerns. This is especially obvious in cases concerned with issues of representation in popular culture, where the fans' interest in the text and their investment in issues of societal significance begin to merge.

LGBT and female fans, especially those with an interest in texts predominantly written for straight male audiences, have long been used to not seeing themselves represented, or not represented adequately, by the texts they consume. For them (as for members of other underrepresented minorities), subversive or resistant readings of popular texts have long been one of the few strategies that allowed them to take pleasure from texts not specifically made for them. But faced with an increasing social acceptance for alternative sexualities on the one hand, and an entertainment industry that is paying closer attention to the practices and interests of fans on the other, at some point this simply didn't seem enough anymore. As Henry Jenkins and John Tulloch have pointed out, "resistant reading is not necessarily a sufficient response to dissatisfaction with

Communication, Culture & Critique, no. 6.1 (March 2013): 82–102.

the images currently in circulation. […] It is […] no substitute for other forms of media criticism and activism."[77] Jenkins and Tulloch made this statement as early as 1995 in their study on the *Gaylactic Network*, an organization of queer science-fiction fans and an early example of fan activism motivated by sociopolitical concerns. For more than a decade, the *Gaylactic Network* fought to convince the producers of *Star Trek* to include a queer character into an episode of *Star Trek – The Next Generation* (1987-1994). They argued that *Star Trek's* pluralistic vision itself seemed to demand the inclusion of queer characters and found it hard to imagine a 24th-century galaxy whose inhabitants were exclusively heterosexual. Ultimately, their efforts were not successful, and the fans were left with a number of episodes that not so subtly touched on the issue of queerness in a 'metaphorical sense,' and their own imagination that allowed them to read *Star Trek* against the grain.[78]

While *Glee* fans hardly had to fight for the inclusion of a queer character, their critique of the show's treatment of LGBT characters came from a similar place. The Box Scene Project's initial campaign arose from the concern that *Glee* did not treat its straight and same-sex couples the same way, and in this regard, fans' fight for the release of the Box Scene was directed against the show itself, which in their opinion had, by cutting the scene between Kurt and Blaine, violated its own ethical code.

Here, The Box Scene Project closes the gap between fan activism and media critique. Media critique has long been a significant aspect of the work and practices of fans in transformative fandom, to the point where the line between fannish discussion and media journalism begins to

[77] John Tulloch and Henry Jenkins, *Science Fiction Audiences. Watching Doctor Who and Star Trek* (London/New York: Routledge, 1995), 111.

[78] In fact, only the latest installment in the *Star Trek* franchise, the feature film *Star Trek Beyond* (2016), introduced the first openly queer character in the *Star Trek* universe (in what remained a very minor subplot).

blur. Meta pieces in journal-based fandom (as described in chapter 2) often offer long, detailed, and insightful commentaries on various aspects of popular texts that often resemble academic research papers in depth and reach, even as they consciously employ a different, more accessible tone. On the other side of the amateur/professional divide, the media blog *The Mary Sue*[79] explicitly addresses a female fannish audience with its mixture of fannish 'squee'[80] and serious media analysis.

The Box Scene Project likewise extended its efforts to include media critique specifically with its awareness-raising campaign Fandom for Equality,[81] which was developed alongside the organization's fundraising campaigns. This blog project aimed to draw attention to the representation of women, LGBT people, people of color, and people with disabilities in mass media by offering think pieces and analyses focusing on minority representation in contemporary popular culture.

Another example of media critique inspired by *Glee* was The Glee Equality Project,[82] a fan-organized campaign on tumblr that, in contrast to Fandom for Equality, directed its focus exclusively on the show itself. The Glee Equality Project was dedicated to evaluating the representation of queer characters and couples on *Glee*. Keeping a tally of all the public displays of affection shown on the series, the organizers called *Glee* out on its unequal treatment of straight and gay couples. In their mission statement, the organizers write:

> Glee's strength, the reason it has been celebrated and held up as an example, is its wealth of young characters who among them represent a spectrum of diversity and sexuality.

[79] 'Mary Sue' is a fannish term used for an original character in a piece of fanfiction who is very obviously a stand-in of the writer's own personality. The name of the journal is therefore an explicit reference to the fan practices of female fans in transformative fandom, thus establishing a link between fan practices and professional journalism.

[80] In fan terminology, 'squee' is the action of expressing delight over an element of popular culture that meets the fan's emotional or intellectual needs or desires.

[81] Tamila Gresham et al., *Fandom for Equality*, 2013, http://fandomforequality.tumblr.com/.

[82] "GleeEqualityProject," *Tumblr,* 2012, http://glee-equality-project.tumblr.com/?og=1.

> Characters who've captured our hearts and imagination. […] But […] [t]here is a troubling double standard in how it has treated its young LGB characters and couples. Kurt and Blaine, Brittany and Santana have a lot of issues in common […]: lack of discussion, lack of privacy, constant chaperonage, rationed displays of affection.

When the initiative went on an open-ended hiatus in February 2013 for personal reasons, the project organizers stated that while *Glee* had indeed improved in regard to its queer representation, their work was not over: "we also said we would still be watching: that as long as Glee is in production there will be a need to watch and judge whether the show is meeting expectations."

While different in scope, both Fandom for Equality and the Glee Equality Project and their engagement with the issue of minority media representation were ultimately inspired by the ethical foundation fans saw at the core of the television show *Glee*. But while fan-organized sociopolitical activism is often inspired by the ethics of the texts fans are invested in, these ethical beliefs can turn out to be stronger than their loyalty to the text when fans feel that the text betrays its own standards. This indicates that fans' loyalty to a text is far from absolute, but depends on an unwritten contract between the text and its consumers. In the case of *Glee*, this contract entails certain ethical principles that the fans expect writers and producers to uphold. If this contract is violated, the utopian ideas fans associate with *Glee* might become more important than their trust in the creators' authority. Consequently, *Glee* (and other popular texts) don't only inspire fan activism, but can also become the *target* of their critique.

Conclusion

As I have shown in the previous chapter, transformative fan communities are grounded in a sense of community and solidarity that functions as a necessary precondition for sociopolitical activism. In this chapter, I have demonstrated how fans' affective attachment to a specific fandom can

provide both the emotional and the ethical motivation for fans to reach out beyond the borders of their own community. Increasingly, fan-organized social activism specifically draws on the ethics of the texts fans engage with. The text functions as the ethical codex of their constituency, which influences and inspires fans and directs their attention towards specific sociopolitical issues. Furthermore, the organizational and technical skills that fans acquire through their engagement within the fan community also provide them with the necessary tools to plan effective campaigns: they already know how to rally people and connect them, how to distribute work, how to moderate and organize.

At the same time, recent transmedia marketing strategies in the entertainment industry both facilitate and complicate fan-organized activism. One the one hand, transmedia marketing increasingly appropriates fan platforms, practices, and interests, in order to ensure fan loyalty. On the other hand, the heavy use of participatory elements (geared at binding fans to the brand) can also support civic participatory engagement by boosting the fans' sense of agency.

In the following chapter, I turn towards another example of fan-organized engagement. My study of *The Hunger Games* franchise and the discourses surrounding it will further problematize the relationship between audiences and transmedia marketing strategies I have begun to analyze in this chapter. In the case of *Glee*, we saw that the marketing and publicity accompanying the show tapped into fans' emotional attachment to the text by developing a narrative of community that transcended the line between fiction and reality and included not only the fans, but also the fictional characters and the actors playing them. In an analysis of the *Hunger Games* franchise, however, we will encounter a marketing campaign that seemed to categorically undermine the politically resistant message of the original texts and to capitalize on values that the text itself critiques: the embrace of capitalism and the dismissal of social responsibility. On the one hand, we

will see that fans with an emotional investment in the political message of the novels felt that they needed to 'rescue' the source text from its appropriation by the marketing, which led to an increased effort by fan activists to draw attention to issues of social inequality, poverty, and media censorship. On the other hand, my study also demonstrates that even texts which appear to extend an explicit invitation for political engagement can be read very differently by different parts of their audience. While *The Hunger Games* trilogy became a symbol of anti-capitalist, anti-government resistance for many activists around the globe, not all fans felt alienated by the marketing campaign accompanying the films and instead embraced its focus on hedonism and luxury.

IV. We Are The Districts:

Fans' Reactions to Lionsgate's Hunger Games Marketing Campaign

"Fire is catching": The Hunger Games as Political Reference

During the protests starting from Ferguson, Missouri in 2014, in the wake of the trial over the death of Michael Brown, a photograph circulated on the social networking platform facebook, showing a hastily written line of graffiti on a monument in the city of St. Louis: "If we burn, you burn with us."[1] The message was easily identifiable as a quote from *Mockingjay*, the third and final novel in Suzanne Collins' young adult fantasy trilogy *The Hunger Games* (2008-2010). In the novel, the impoverished and exploited "Districts" rise against the wealthy "Capitol" after decades of oppression, and the rebels distribute this slogan – "If we burn, you burn with us" – in an illegal video message to invite others to join their cause.[2] In St. Louis, the anonymous graffiti artist quoted the same phrase to establish a parallel between the rebellion in the fictional dystopian universe and the protests against systemic racism and police brutality in the United States.

Coincidentally or not, the distribution of this image via social media also mirrors the media strategies the rebels in the *Hunger Games* employ to undermine the totalitarian government's official discourse. The dictatorial government in the novel uses censorship, state-controlled television, and media surveillance to keep its oppressed population under control but is ultimately defeated with its own weapons when rebels begin to hack mass media to spread their messages of dissent. "By becoming adept at interpreting and using information and the media, [Katniss] not

[1] Daniel Bates, "Ferguson Protesters Scrawl Hunger Games Slogan on Landmark as Tense Town Waits for Grand Jury Decision on Indicting Officer Darren Wilson over Killing of Michael Brown," *Daily Mail Online*, November 24, 2014, http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2847503/Ferguson-protesters-scrawl-Hunger-Games-slogan-landmark-tense-town-waits-grand-jury-decision-indicting-Darren-Willson-killing-Michael-Brown.html.

[2] Suzanne Collins, *The Hunger Games. Mockingjay* (London: Scholastic, 2010), 100.

only survives, but also outwits the Gamemakers, undermines the power of the Capitol, and sparks a revolution."[3]

Those engaged in the anti-racism protests in the United States similarly used mass and social media to draw attention to their cause. The city of St. Louis covered the *Hunger Games*-themed graffiti up quickly,[4] attempting to erase the revolutionary message, and thus only few could have seen the writing in person. Yet a photo of the graffiti spread through social media, making the message ultimately impossible to control.

The spray-painted slogan in St. Louis was neither the first nor last time *The Hunger Games* universe served as textual reference for an activist group or movement. In 2013, activists with the Great Plains Tar Sands Resistance unrolled banners carrying the Mockingjay symbol and *Hunger Games*-inspired slogans at the Devon Tower in Oklahoma City to protest against Devon Energy's fracking practices and their involvement in toxic tar sands extraction – a peaceful protest which nevertheless earned the activists a threat of terrorism hoax charges after their arrest.[5]

In the fall of 2014, US Walmart employees and workers in the fast-food industry appropriated the fictional rebels' three-fingered salute[6] in their fight for fair wages during the Black Friday Protests and Fight for $15 demonstrations.[7] The same gesture was used by anti-government protesters in Thailand after the military coup in May 2014: a number of people were arrested for

[3] Don Latham and Jonathan Hollister, "The Games People Play. Information and Media Literacies in the Hunger Games Trilogy," *Children's Literature in Education*, no. 45 (2014): 33.

[4] Laurie Skrivan, "Vandal Damages Statue near Shaw Neighborhood of St. Louis: News," *St Louis Post Dispatch*, November 24, 2014, http://www.stltoday.com/news/local/metro/vandal-damages-statue-near-shaw-neighborhood-of-st-louis/article_e3234aa0-fa6e-54f6-8e1b-4393a322186e.html.

[5] Suzanne Goldenberg, "Terror Charges Faced by Oklahoma Fossil Fuel Protesters 'Outrageous,'" *The Guardian*, January 10, 2014, http://www.theguardian.com/environment/2014/jan/10/terror-charges-oklahoma-fossil-fuel-protest.

[6] Index, middle, and ring finger held up together.

[7] Wiedeman, "#Activism"; Ashoka, "Hunger Games Salute Used by Black Friday Protesters Fighting for Higher Wages," *Forbes*, December 5, 2014, http://www.forbes.com/sites/ashoka/2014/12/05/hunger-games-salute-used-by-black-friday-protesters-fighting-for-higher-wages/.

using the salute, and Thai movie theaters canceled showings of *Hunger Games – Mockingjay 1* in reaction to the arrests.[8] Appropriating revolutionary symbols, gestures and slogans from the *Hunger Games* universe, all these different protesters attempted to make their political agenda more relatable by drawing parallels to the oppressed population in a fictional text – a move based on the assumption that others would be able to understand this connection because they read *The Hunger Games* in a similar way. And one might consider this a fairly safe bet: Collins' young adult trilogy conveys a fairly nuanced ethical and political philosophy and draws obvious connections to real-life issues like state surveillance,[9] environmental damage,[10] globalized markets, and social inequality: "Panem is a microcosm of the system whereby developed nations exercise their economic power over poor populations in exchange for food or material goods."[11] Furthermore, Brianna Burke considers a major strength of the trilogy that it actually explicitly spells out these connections, thus making them understandable to young readers (or really, any readers with little knowledge about a globalized economy). Amber Simmons likewise commends *The Hunger Games* for making real-world issues relatable to young readers, and even suggests using the novels in high-school education to encourage social action among students: "By incorporating the Hunger Games trilogy into the classroom, teachers can encourage students to look at current issues of violence and domination in our world."[12]

The way public media have also begun to use *The Hunger Games* as a catchphrase to discuss issues of social inequality suggests that the connection between the fictional text and real-life

[8] Seth Mydans, "Thai Protesters Are Detained After Using 'Hunger Games' Salute," *The New York Times*, November 20, 2014, http://www.nytimes.com/2014/11/21/world/asia/thailand-protesters-hunger-games-salute.html.
[9] Latham/Hollister, "Games People Play."
[10] Brianna Burke, "'Reaping' Environmental Justice through Compassion in The Hunger Games," *Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment*, no. 22.3 (2015): 1–24.
[11] Ibid., 8.
[12] Amber M. Simmons, "Class on Fire: Using the Hunger Games Trilogy to Encourage Social Action," *JAAL Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, no. 56.1 (2012): 23.

issues has also been solidly established in the public discourse. When CNN refused to cut short their coverage of the White House Correspondents' Dinner to report about the anti-racism protests in Baltimore in April 2015, *Daily Show* host Jon Stewart and his correspondent Jessica Williams (dressed up as *Hunger Games* character Effie Trinket) compared CNN's attitude to the Capitol's media censorship during the revolution in the *Hunger Games*.[13] And during the primaries for the US presidential election, democratic candidate Bernie Sanders' twitter account distributed the picture of a young Sanders supporter holding a sign that compared Sanders to the Mockingjay, accompanied by the caption: "Casey knows a political revolution when she sees one."[14]

Considering that this focus on social and environmental injustice emerges as the apparently dominant reading of the *Hunger Games* trilogy, it may come as a surprise that these issues were never mentioned in the big-scale, elaborate marketing campaign the production company Lionsgate launched in cooperation with the agency Ignition Creative to promote the release of the *Hunger Games* film adaptations in 2012. In fact, even the spectacle of the Hunger Games themselves, which after all provide the title for the trilogy, was very much put on the backburner in the campaign. Unlike the activists using the text as political reference or teachers working with the novels to encourage social consciousness, Lionsgate did not tap into the presumably dominant reading of the text, but instead chose to draw fans into the fictional universe by addressing them as inhabitants of the Capitol, as members of Panem's ruling class that oppresses and exploits the people in the impoverished districts. Collins' novels describe life in the Capitol as revolving around luxury goods and excessive consumerism – expensive food, luxurious living quarters,

[13] Jon Stewart, *The Daily Show* (Comedy Central, April 27, 2015).
[14] People for Bernie, "Casey".

fashion, and body modification –; and this was precisely what the marketing campaign focused on.

In the previous chapter, I used the example of *Glee* fandom to show how transmedia marketing strategies employed to create consumer loyalty can actually inadvertently inspire fannish activism, and also encourage a critique of the text and its creators. In this chapter, I focus primarily on one element of Lionsgate's *Hunger Games* campaign, the website *Capitol Couture* and its related tie-in products. I discuss the seemingly contradictory relationship between Lionsgate's campaign and the texts it promotes and analyze discussions in social media to study consumers' reactions to the campaign. I show that while many fans rejected the identificatory potential of *Capitol Couture*, approached it as an extra-diegetic corporate paratext, and felt a need to protect the message of the fictional text from its appropriation through the production company, others accepted Lionsgate's transmedia marketing as part of the diegetic universe, readily identified with the inhabitants of the Capitol, and even embraced the campaign as an absolution from social responsibility. I argue that the different reactions to Lionsgate's marketing are ultimately rooted in differing readings of the fictional text; readings which determine whether fans consider the campaign a commercial paratext or rather a form of transmedia storytelling. Ultimately, Lionsgate's marketing campaign and the responses it brought forth do not only undermine notions about the relationship between text and paratext; but also upset common assumptions about the status of alternative readings as politically resistant.

Transmedia Marketing, Transmedia Storytelling

Lionsgate's big-scale, long-game combination of viral marketing and tie-in merchandising is an extremely sophisticated example of a contemporary transmedia marketing campaign relying on

transmedia storytelling elements. This specific form of "commercial intertextuality"[15] has become an increasingly popular branding strategy employed by entertainment franchises to maximize profit and encourage consumer loyalty.[16]

The term "transmedia storytelling" was coined by Henry Jenkins in his 2006 *Convergence Culture*, where he applied it to the franchise surrounding the movie trilogy *The Matrix* (1999-2003). Jenkins showed that *Matrix* fans were encouraged not only to watch the movies themselves, but to pursue the narrative arc over different media platforms:

> The filmmakers plant clues that won't make sense until we play the computer game. They draw on the back story revealed through a series of animated shorts, which need to be downloaded off the Web and watched off a separate DVD. Fans raced, dazed and confused, from the theaters to plug into Internet discussion lists, where every detail would be dissected and every possible interpretation debated.[17]

This kind of storytelling across different media requires audiences to trace all the narrative threads on different platforms if they want to feel like they have all the relevant knowledge, and it rewards those who do with the feeling of being part of an interpretative community of insiders. At the same time, transmedia storytelling facilitates brand loyalty, because it forces consumers to engage with or buy different products associated with the brand.

In his discussion of *Torchwood* media tie-ins, Matt Hills modified and expanded on Jenkins' definition of transmedia storytelling by suggesting that transmedia franchises don't always use

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[15] Jonathan Hardy, "Mapping Commercial Intertextuality: HBO's True Blood," *Convergence: The International Journal of Research into New Media Technologies*, no. 17.1 (February 1, 2011): 7–17.

[16] Leigh Edwards, "Transmedia Storytelling, Corporate Synergy, and Audience Expression - ProQuest," *Global Media Journal*, no. 12.20 (2012): 1–12; Hardy, "Mapping Commercial"; Matt Hills, "Torchwood's Trans-Transmedia: Media Tie-Ins and Brand 'Fanagement,'" *Participations. Journal of Audience and Reception Studies*, no. 9.2 (November 2012): 409–28; Henry Jenkins, *Convergence;* Henry Jenkins, "Transmedia Storytelling 101," *Confessions of an Aca-Fan*, March 22, 2007, http://henryjenkins.org/2007/03/transmedia_storytelling_101.html; Henry Jenkins, "Transmedia 202: Further Reflections," *Confessions of an Aca-Fan*, August 1, 2011, http://henryjenkins.org/2011/08/defining_transmedia_further_re.html; Knowledge@Wharton and Andrea Phillips, "Transmedia Storytelling, Fan Culture and the Future of Marketing," *Knowledge@Wharton UPenn*, July 3, 2012, http://knowledge.wharton.upenn.edu/article/transmedia-storytelling-fan-culture-and-the-future-of-marketing/.

[17] Jenkins, *Convergence,* 96.

different platforms in order to tell one single coherent story as Jenkins proposes.[18] Instead, transmedia storytelling allows creators and companies to develop different partial versions of a story or universe that don't necessarily always add up to one cohesive image but may also present alternative versions of a character or event. With this kind of transmedia storytelling, audiences may choose which parts of the story or fictional universe they want to consume and include in their interpretation or reading of the text. In the case of the British TV show *Torchwood* (2006-2011) for example, it is certainly possible to only watch the television series without feeling left out of the loop; yet, the tie-in novels and audio plays may offer different interpretations of certain characters or events that will let fans see the TV show in a different light.[19]

While Jenkins mostly embraces transmedia storytelling as a new form of narrativity in the age of media convergence, Hills is more skeptical of transmedia storytelling in its function as branding and fan-management strategy. He suggests that franchises use media tie-ins to react to audience criticism by offering alternative versions of the story/text without having to make them part of the 'main' text, such as in *Torchwood*'s treatment of its most popular romantic couple Jack Harkness and Ianto Jones: the tie-in audio play

> *The House of the Dead* (Goss 2011a) not only enables Jack and Ianto to be reunited post-*Children of Earth*,[20] but also to proclaim their love for one another. This honours the Jack-Ianto relationship, providing fan service for loyal audiences who felt the pairing was poorly treated by the events of series 3.[21]

[18] Hills, "Torchwood's Trans-Transmedia."

[19] This treatment of 'text' as a fragmented archive of potentially infinite alternative versions also correlates with the reading and writing practices of transformative fans. Similar to the practices of transmedia storytelling, transformative fanworks undermine the traditional understanding of the autonomous unity of the work of art and instead bring forth a kind of "archontic literature" (Derecho, "Archontic Literature"), a theoretically endless archive of variations and continuations. This means that transformative fans in particular already possess the media literacy that allows them to engage fruitfully with transmedia narratives, because they are accustomed to working with texts in similar ways.

[20] Ianto Jones dies in the last episode of season 3. Russell T. Davies, "Day Five". *Torchwood: Children of the Earth*, episode 5 (BBC, July 10, 2009).

[21] Hills, "Torchwood's Trans-Transmedia", 416.

But while seemingly giving those fans invested in the couple what they want, the reunion between the lovers in the audio play can also be seen as an attempt to manage and control unauthorized fan texts: by the time *The House of the Dead* appeared, fans had already written hundreds of stories presenting their own version of what in fannish terminology is called a 'fix-it.'[22] By offering an 'official fix-it' in the form of a radio episode, the creators implicitly invalidated fans' versions of the story, thus regulating their transformative reading practices.

Despite their differences, Hills and Jenkins have in common that they consider transmedia storytelling primarily within the context of fictional texts, and understand transmedia tie-ins as part of a diegetic universe, or tying into an overarching narrative. That means, despite the fact that they certainly acknowledge the strategic use of transmedia storytelling in order to tie consumers to a brand, they discuss it mainly as a narrative strategy in fictional texts.

In marketing and advertising literature, however, transmedia storytelling does not necessarily relate to a (fictional) narrative or diegetic universe. For marketing scholars and practitioners, the 'story' can simply be the message told about a product meant to be sold. Jason Thibeault, for example, explains how transmedia storytelling can be used to sell shoes: in this case, neither the product nor the campaign surrounding it are narratives in the narrow sense, but the message that is conveyed across different media platforms is thought of as a story that is told to make sense of the product's selling points.[23] This broad understanding of 'storytelling' in the context of marketing work is further complicated by the fact that social media like youtube have made it possible for corporations to actually employ more conventional forms of storytelling to sell their

[22] A fix-it is a piece of fanfiction (or art, or video) that reworks parts of a narrative that left fans particularly dissatisfied, like the death of a beloved character or the break-up of a couple fans were deeply invested in.

[23] Jason Thibeault, "Is Transmedia Storytelling the New Digital Marketing?," *Jason Thibeault*, October 17, 2013, http://jasonthibeault.com/2013/10/17/is-transmedia-storytelling-the-new-digital-marketing/.

products. As part of Pereira & O'Dell's recent *Crossroads* campaign for Coca-Cola in Latin-America, for example, renowned director Dustin Lance Black shot a short narrative film about the friendship between a straight and a gay teenage boy. *El SMS* (2015) was distributed via social media and could be consumed like any other LGBT-themed short film. The only indication that this was in fact a form of advertising were the Coke bottles that one of the boys fetches from the fridge towards the end of the film.[24]

In all the above-mentioned examples of "commercial intertextuality,"[25] the two definitions of transmedia storytelling (narrative form vs. marketing strategy) are not clearly separated. In fact, the existing literature on transmedia storytelling discusses almost exclusively examples from a corporate context, in which the two functions are generally intertwined.

However, I propose that it would be useful to introduce a terminology that distinguishes more clearly between transmedia storytelling as narrative form and transmedia storytelling as branding strategy. Therefore, in this chapter I am going to use the terms 'transmedia storytelling' and 'transmedia marketing' not interchangeably, as has often been done, but rather to reference the two different functions of transmedia narratives. I define transmedia storytelling specifically as a narrative strategy that could very well exist outside of a commercialized context (or as much as any fictional text can). In this vein, I understand transmedia storytelling (with Hills and Jenkins) as the practice of telling a (fictional) narrative across different media in various parts that either form one coherent storyline or contribute to the same diegetic universe. The term transmedia marketing, on the other hand, I use to describe the strategy of selling a product – whether it is a story or a shoe – through a campaign that distributes promotional messages across different media platforms and may potentially encourage consumer participation in the context of social media.

[24] Dustin Lance Black, *El SMS* (Coca Cola, 2015).
[25] Hardy, "Mapping Commercial."

To illustrate the differences between the two terms and how they can be helpful in analyzing transmedia franchises, I am going to return briefly to the marketing campaign around the brand name *Glee*, an example of a recent big-scale transmedia campaign which I have described in detail in chapter 3. The US high school musical TV show, which aired on FOX from 2010 to 2015, was accompanied – among other things – by a number of hit singles and soundtrack albums; a concert tour during which the actors performed in character on stage, thus creating the illusion that fans could actually meet the fictional characters; and a casting show that offered fans the chance to compete for a guest role on the show, so that they could themselves become part of *Glee*. While all of these products are part of a transmedia marketing campaign attempting to tie *Glee* fans to the brand, only the concert tour is strictly speaking a form of transmedia storytelling, since it maintains the illusion of the diegetic space, suggesting that the characters themselves are touring the country. The casting show, on the other hand, is not a form of transmedia storytelling, since it does not present itself as part of the diegetic universe; however, it does employ another strategy that it shares with many transmedia marketing campaigns: by offering audiences a chance to become part of the fictional universe, it blurs the line between mediated reality and diegesis.

In the context of my argument, this distinction is relevant because of the way transmedia storytelling significantly complicates the relationship between 'text' and 'paratext.' In his discussion of media paratexts, including promos, spoilers, and merchandise, Jonathan Gray shows that the function of the media paratext and its relationship to the text is a complex one. For Gray, paratexts are not independent extra-textual entities; they cannot be completely separated from the text because they influence consumers' reception of the text itself: "rather than simply serve as *extensions* of a text, many of these items are filters through which we must pass on our way to the

film or program, our first and formative encounters with the text."[26] However, it is important to keep in mind that Gray still does make a distinction between the 'actual text' and its paratexts, even though he concedes that lines can be blurry. I would argue, however, that transmedia storytelling poses yet another problem for the distinction between paratext and text, namely the fact that the text itself is not a unity confined to one medium anymore, but sprawls and extends across different media and platforms. Because consumers don't necessarily accept all the offers for a further exploration of the text, depending on what fits into their interpretation of the text and what doesn't, a piece of narrative might be considered part of the text by some consumers, but seen as a form of marketing or promotion (and thus, a paratext) by others. For example, on the website *Pottermore*, *Harry Potter* author J.K. Rowling continues to publish tidbits of information about the seven *Harry Potter* novels, often concerning the background or the future development of certain characters. Depending on whether this information fits into fans' previous readings of the novels, fans will decide whether they consider these bits of transmedia storytelling part of the text,[27] or whether they see them as a form of retroactive author's statement, that is, a paratext that does not necessarily influence their reception of the text. In this complex network of textual elements, it is not only the paratext that influences audiences' interpretation of the text, as Gray suggests. Rather, the previous reading of the text also decides whether consumers will see additional narrative fragments as part of the text, or as extra-textual paratexts.[28]

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[26] Jonathan Gray, *Show Sold Separately: Promos, Spoilers, and Other Media Paratexts* (New York: New York University Press, 2010), 3.

[27] J.K. Rowling, *Pottermore*, 2012, https://www.pottermore.com/. In the case of *Harry Potter*, most fans might agree that the 'text' includes, at the very least, seven novels and eight movie adaptations; for some, it might also include the prequel/spin-off *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them* (2001), as well as the sequel stage play *Harry Potter and The Cursed Child, written by* J.K. Rowling, Jack Thorne and John Tiffany (2016); others might reject or ignore these later additions to the universe.

[28] This distinction between 'text' and 'paratext' to some extent overlaps with, but is also different from the distinction between 'canon' and 'fanon' that is used in fan communities to determine the significance or value of narrative elements. The 'canon' comprises the entirety of facts and information that most fans agree on as being 'officially' part of the fictional storyworld; whereas 'fanon' encompasses assumptions about characters or

Capitol Couture: The Future of Fashion

The examples of transmedia marketing discussed in the previous section all have in common that their use of transmedia storytelling serves, in one way or another, to strengthen the emotional or intellectual attachment of the consumer to the text, that is, it facilitates fans' identification with the characters, raises the stakes they have in the development of the storyline, or encourages their engagement with the (personal, ethical, political) values promoted by the text. In chapter 3, I have demonstrated, for example, how the marketing campaign around *Glee* tapped into fans' emotional investment in the message of solidarity and tolerance promoted by the show.

It stands to reason that, had the *Hunger Games* marketing campaign followed these examples and taken a similar approach, it would have capitalized on the seemingly obvious potential for identification with the oppressed people in the districts, or the revolutionaries trying to overthrow the Capitol. This is, after all, also what the political activists did who appropriated the *Hunger Games* as reference for their respective causes, and this is, presumably, what teachers build on when they use the *Hunger Games* to speak about social responsibility in the classroom.

Lionsgate, however, chose a different route, by addressing the fans not as potential rebels, but rather as proud citizens of Panem, the totalitarian state founded in economic exploitation. In a viral marketing campaign that included several tumblr-based websites, a youtube channel and other social media, *Hunger Games* fans were invited into the diegetic space of the fictional universe.

events that a majority of the fan community believes to be true, even though the text has never explicitly stated this. This does not mean that the opinion on what is part of canon is always univocal. In the case of *Star Trek*, most viewers will agree that information conveyed by the television show and the tie-in feature films are canon, whereas opinions might differ in regard to the tie-in novels. Still, the distinction between canon and non-canon is less subjective/individualized than the distinction between text and paratext I'm aiming to tease out here: one might very well agree that certain events are canonical, but they might not necessarily be part of an individual fan or recipient's text – for instance if the fan of a television show refuses to watch an episode in which a beloved character dies, and proceeds to ignore the existence of this storyline moving forward.

However, unlike *Glee* or *Harry Potter* fans, they were not addressed as allies and friends of the fictional protagonists, but rather as their opponents.

At the center of the viral marketing campaign were two tumblr-based websites, *The Capitol* and *Capitol Couture – The Future of Fashion*,[29] which complemented each other by touching on different aspects of the text. *The Capitol* was set up as the official website of Panem's government and heavily dominated by the pseudo-fascist aesthetics and propagandist rhetoric that characterize the representation of the government in the *Hunger Games* movie adaptations.[30] This website explicitly addressed fans as citizens of Panem by asking them to register for an identification card that 'officially' identified them as inhabitants of the fictional state. *Capitol Couture*, on the other hand, presented itself as a fashion and lifestyle magazine from the fictional Capitol that reflected the glamourous, frivolous surface of Panem's capital. The mission statement on the magazine's homepage announced that *Capitol Couture* wants to "celebrate the incredible achievements coming out of the Capitol – the beating heart of Panem."[31]

Appearing as a magazine from Panem's capital, *Capitol Couture* was a piece of transmedia storytelling that also aimed at blurring the line between mediated reality and fiction. The online magazine was promoted by advertisements in other, actual magazines and by billboards in urban spaces like a regular fashion magazine. Neither ads and billboards nor the magazine itself ever explicitly promoted the *Hunger Games* movies, thus consistently maintaining the illusion of being part of the diegetic universe. The content of the magazine blended stories about fictional characters set within the diegetic storyworld with information about the contemporary fashion scene and

[29] Ignition Creative, *Capitol Couture*, 2012, http://capitolcouture.pn/; Ignition Creative, *The Capitol*, 2012, http://thecapitol.pn.

[30] With the premiere of *Hunger Games – Mockingjay* in 2014, this website got 'hacked' by the revolutionaries. Although most of the propagandist content remained untouched, the homepage showed Katniss instead of President Snow in the throne on the picture, and a line of revolutionary graffiti was scribbled across the screen.

[31] Ignition Creative, *Capitol Couture*.

references to actual fashion designers and real make-up brands. For example, the magazine included a cover story on the *Hunger Games* character Johanna Mason, with references to a number of actual designers in the description of Johanna's outfit, but also presented an article on the work of Annouk Wipprecht and Lauren Bowker, contemporary designers who work with the kind of futuristic materials one might expect from designers in the fictional word of *The Hunger Games*.

The interrelation between fiction and mediated reality was even further supported by art challenges in the magazine, which encouraged fans to directly insert themselves into the diegetic space by creating and submitting *Hunger Games* fan art to the website. Their submissions were published on *Capitol Couture* under a category called "Citizen Activity." This strategy once again reaffirmed fans' identity as citizens of Panem and turned them into actors within the fictional universe, while at the same time incorporating non-commercial transformative fanworks into a marketing campaign, thus regulating and controlling fannish practices and making use of user-generated content.[32]

Some of the articles in the magazine also functioned as set-up for product placement, as advertisement for tie-in products that resulted from collaborations between *Lionsgate* and different companies on occasion of the movie premiere of *Hunger Games – Catching Fire* in 2013. The promotion of the tie-ins was seamlessly incorporated into the mix of fiction and mediated reality that made up the content of the magazine, as if these products, too, were simply part of the diegetic universe. *The Capitol*, the website for Panem's fictional government, likewise included product

[32] 'User-generated content' is a term generally used to describe the corporate strategy of appropriating free labor employed by consumers in order to generate profit – fan videos, for example, have served as an unofficial, non-commercial kind of advertising for decades, but more recently companies have begun to incorporate these works into their own marketing efforts: for companies, this has the advantage of both being provided with free content and giving fans the impression that their voices and creative output is valued (see Jenkins, "Transforming").

placement into their content by presenting an actual Mazda commercial as part of their "Capitol TV" programming; unlike the car promoted in the Mazda commercial, however, the products advertised in *Capitol Couture* were specifically developed for the *Hunger Games* campaign.

For the luxury online fashion retailer Net-A-Porter, costume designer Trish Summerville developed the *Capitol Couture Collection*,[33] a women's clothing line inspired by the costume design of the *Hunger Games* movies, with prices ranging from between $75 for a T-Shirt to about $1000 for a dress (Smith). One year after the nail lacquer company China Glaze had produced the nail polish line *Colours from the Capitol* in 2012, the make-up company CoverGirl released *Capitol Beauty*, a make-up line with color schemes based on the 12 districts of Panem: the make-up for the Mining District for example included eyeshadow in the shades of "Turquoise, Silver Sky, Onyx Smoke" and nail polish in shades of "Bronze Beauty and Black Diamond." And high-end chocolate manufacturer Vosges Haut-Chocolat offered a series of chocolate flavors under the headline *Capitol Confections* – this included a line of chocolate bars also named after the 12 districts, as well as a number of confectionery boxes named after different characters from the *Hunger Games* universe.

From the perspective of a marketing department, there are straight-forward reasons to explain why Lionsgate may have chosen this particular approach to promote the *Hunger Games* movies. Considering the ongoing trend of gendered marketing for men and women,[34] it was perhaps to be expected that the marketing for a young adult franchise with a female protagonist would

[33] "Shop Capitol Couture at NET-A-PORTER." Net-a-Porter, 2013, http://www.net-a-porter.com/Shop/Designers/Capitol_Couture_by_Trish_Summerville/All.

[34] In contrast to franchises like *The Hunger Games* or *Twilight*, which have been primarily marketed to female audiences, movies in the *Marvel Cinematic Universe* have been criticized for targeting a primarily male audience (which includes the almost complete erasure of female superheroes in their merchandising), despite the fact that women make up a significant part of comic book readers/buyers. See Richard Berrigan, "The Case of the Missing Action Figure: Gender in Marketing," *Moviepilot*, May 3, 2015, http://moviepilot.com/posts/2905218.

specifically target female audiences with typically female-oriented products. It is also reasonable to assume that Lionsgate had an interest in developing high-price tie-ins with the potential to achieve a higher revenue than any products connected to the image of the impoverished districts. Unsurprisingly, marketing magazines univocally praised Lionsgate's campaign for its ingenious strategy, designed both to make profit and to secure fan engagement. Sarah Luoma in *The Strategist* commends Lionsgate's viral marketing for establishing "a deep emotional connection with the characters that drives brand loyalty"[35] – a somewhat surprising statement, since whatever else the *Hunger Games* campaign was doing, it was certainly *not* establishing an emotional connection to the main protagonists in the text.

The websites as well as the tie-in products addressed fans as citizens of Panem and were clearly designed to invoke the image of the wealthy Capitol, the same political and economic power *Hunger Games* protagonist Katniss Everdeen and her allies fight against. Furthermore, the novels themselves are explicit in their critique, not necessarily of the individual inhabitants of the Capitol, but certainly of their consumer habits and the economic system that makes their lifestyle possible in the first place. The marketing campaign's apparent invitation to identify with the society in the Capitol seems to fundamentally contradict the novels' critique of the exploitative system that enables the Capitol's luxurious lifestyle. So when Luoma compares Lionsgate's viral marketing to Warner Brothers' marketing around the *Harry Potter* movies, the parallel she draws falls short, as Seth Soulstein, co-founder of the fan organization *Harry Potter Alliance*, points out. He explains why Lionsgate's strategy for *The Hunger Games* would not work in the context of the

[35] Sarah Luoma, "How The Hunger Games Franchise Wins Fans With Content Marketing," *Strategist Magazine*, February 24, 2015, http://strategistmagazine.co/sarahluoma/hunger-games-mockingjay-1148.

Harry Potter franchise at all: "It's as if, for the Harry Potter movies, it was all just Death Eater stuff – buy 'Down with Mudbloods' T-shirts and so on."[36]

While Luoma's comparison with the marketing for the *Harry Potter* films seems questionable, there have been other campaigns that might serve as a more useful comparison for the *Hunger Games* marketing campaign. In fact, Lionsgate's campaign is not the first to put the audience in the position of the social group a fictional text heavily critiques. Perhaps most prominently, the Alternate Reality Game *The Beast* was launched in 2001 as part of the marketing campaign for Steven Spielberg's movie *A.I. – Artificial Intelligence* (2001).[37] Today, *The Beast* is mostly discussed as one of the first Alternate Reality Games,[38] even though it was simultaneously an early example for a viral transmedia marketing campaign. In the ARG *The Beast*, players could become members of the so-called Anti-Robot Militia and participate in anti-robot protests. Only later, they would find out that the game they were playing was connected to the film *A.I. – Artificial Intelligence*, which tells the story of an android boy who sets off on an odyssey to become "a real boy." At some point during his adventures, the android boy and his robot friends are hunted, captured, and tortured by a rogue group which turns out to be the Anti-Robot Militia – the same group ARG players had participated in. Andrea Philipps describes her experience with *The Beast*:

> A friend of mine sent me a link to this website for the Anti-Robot Militia. We had no idea what it was, but it was really weird. These people were talking about how robots aren't alive and have no right to exist. It was anti-robot hate speech. We were so baffled by this that we started looking around. My friend found more websites and then found a Yahoo group called Cloudmakers, which were people looking into this thing. It was amazing because we didn't quite know what these interrelated websites were. We called it "The Game," and we called ourselves Cloudmakers, but we didn't have any other language to

[36] Seth Soulstein, Interview about the Odds in Our Favor campaign, May 7, 2015.
[37] Steven Spielberg, *A.I. – Artificial Intelligence* (Amblin Entertainment/Stanley Kubrick Productions, 2001).
[38] Jay Bushman, "Cloudmaker Days: A Memoir of the A. I. Game," in *Well Played 2.0: Video Games, Value and Meaning.*, ed. Drew Davidson and et al. (ETC Press, 2010); Charles Herold, "Game Theory: Tracking an Elusive Film Game Online," *New York Times*, May 3, 2001, http://www.nytimes.com/2001/05/03/technology/03GAME.html.

> describe it. […] There was an interesting tension in that whole experience that you don't see anymore because times have changed.
>
> We didn't know who was behind it to begin with. We didn't know it was a movie tie-in. There were Anti-Robot Militia rallies that we went to. That was fun. I think somebody wound up searching for the wrapping of packages that had been sent to the venues to look at the return label [and found] they had been sent from Microsoft. And then because of the characters mentioned in the story and this idea of a little robot named David, we figured that it was going to be a tie-in to the film *A.I*. But there was no moment when we saw, "In theaters on such and such date…" within the context of the game.[39]

While it was obvious to its players that *The Beast* was a game set in a fictional world (since the anti-robot agenda was clearly not based in any real-life situation), it is important to keep in mind that the participants were drawn into the narrative of the game without knowing that it was part of a larger storyworld and in fact a marketing strategy to promote Spielberg's movie. It is impossible to know if the reaction to the game would have been the same if participants had seen the movie first, but Philipps' nostalgic reminiscence about supporting anti-robot hate-speech and protests at least raises the question whether players might have felt any guilt or responsibility over their participation in the game when they were eventually confronted with the Anti-Robot Militia's violent actions in the movie, and whether this was an effect the producers might have intended, or not.

"Is it totally ironic?" Fans' Readings of the Campaign

The *Hunger Games* campaign could not have repeated the audience experience of *The Beast*. By the time the marketing campaign for the first movie was launched, the *Hunger Games* book trilogy already had a significant international following made up mainly by digital natives, who were bound to recognize *Capitol Couture*'s terminology, references and rhetoric as related to the novels they had read and the movies they were waiting to see. So one can assume that most recipients of

[39] Knowledge@Wharton/Phillips, "Transmedia Storytelling".

Capitol Couture understood that the website was part of *Lionsgate*'s efforts to promote the first part of the *Hunger Games* film adaptation. What *Capitol Couture* had in common with *The Beast*, however, was that it seemed to offer very little guidance in regard to its intended reception and forced recipients to consider their stance towards the material. Consequently, the campaign became a major point of contention among *Hunger Games* fans, who argued on a number of online platforms about the right way to read the campaign.

"Is this irony? Hypocrisy? Bread and/or circuses?" one fan speculated in a comment on the feminist media blog *Jezebel*.[40] In fact, their list of possible readings – irony, hypocrisy, entertainment – neatly summarizes the three major positions regarding the campaign among fans, as they crystalize from an analysis of fan discussions on various online platforms. It would be beyond the scope of this chapter to attempt a methodologically speaking representative analysis of *Hunger Games* fans' opinions on this issue. Still, the selection of data considered for this chapter gives a realistic overview over fannish discussions on English-language online platforms frequented by recipients and consumers of the novels, movies, and marketing campaign. For the selection process, I ran several online searches over the course of six months (May-November 2015) to find the most relevant articles and blog posts that reported on Lionsgate's online marketing on platforms frequented by fannish audiences and those interested in popular culture and/or fantasy literature. The majority of the data is not the articles themselves, but rather the discussions that developed in the comment sections of the articles. In total, I considered 15 articles/blogposts and 378 individual comments. I don't attempt to analyze comments and opinions in regard to specific demographics, and not only because information about age, gender, or social

[40] Dodai Stewart, "Volunteering for the Hunger Games? Don't Forget the CoverGirl Lipgloss," *Jezebel*, May 17, 2013, http://jezebel.com/volunteering-for-the-hunger-games-dont-forget-the-cove-508277061.

status of the commenters is not easily accessible. Rather, the focus here is on overarching trends as well as on the specificity of different public online spaces. As the data shows, the three dominant – and conflicting – positions regarding the campaign emerge similarly in all online spaces I considered, despite the websites' differences in focus and target audience. This alone indicates that there are no obvious clear lines between consumer groups in regard to demographic aspects like age: very similar arguments were made, for example, in a discussion on tumblr, which is frequented by a dominantly young, often teenage audience, and on tor.com, which addresses the professional(ized) science-fiction community.

Article/Post	Author	Date	Website	Comments
"You know what's ironic about the Hunger Games?"	Allinablur	1/11/2012	tumblr[41]	1,340 notes, 108 answers/adds = comments
"Update: Lionsgate Still Trying To Make *The Hunger Games* Theme Park Happen"	Victoria McNally	8/20/2014	TheMarySue[42]	20 comments
"District Fashions Are on Display In The Latest *Hunger Games* Couture Offerings"	Jill Pantozzi	6/19/2014	TheMarySue	23 comments
"*Hunger Games* Clothing Line Is Available for Purchase Despite a Serious Lack of Butterfly Dresses"	Rebecca Pahle	12/31/2013	TheMarySue	8 comments
"CoverGirl Emphasizes Capitol Decadence For Their Hunger Games Makeup Line"	Isabella Kapur	8/16/2013	TheMarySue	9 comments
"The Internet Has Done It: We've Found the Dumbest *Hunger Games* Tie In"	Susana Polo	11/8/2013	TheMarySue	28 comments
"Want to Dress Like You Live in Panem? Capitol Couture Is Here!"	Laura Beck	9/19/2013	Jezebel[43]	40 comments
"Volunteering for the Hunger Games? Don't Forget the CoverGirl Lipgloss"	Dodai Stewart	5/17/2013	Jezebel	38 comments

[41] tumblr, an image-friendly micro-blogging platform with a predominantly young membership. Tumblr is not specifically a fannish space, but since around 2012, it has increasingly become the dominant venue for young transformative media fans, replacing the journal-based platforms like Livejournal and Dreamwidth in their significance for transformative participatory fandom.

[42] *TheMarySue*, a well-known online media journal that focuses on the intersection of geek culture and feminism. *TheMarySue* attracts by definition a fannish audience that seems predominantly, but not exclusively, female, and is age-wise more diverse than the fannish participants on tumblr.

[43] *Jezebel*, a feminist media blog with a focus on popular culture and celebrities. Because of their shared interests in women/feminism and popular culture, there is presumably some overlap in audiences between Jezebel and *TheMarySue* (and I found occasional references to *Jezebel* in comments on *TheMarySue*).

"There Are McQueen Shoes On The *Hunger Games* Fashion Tumblr!"	Dodai Stewart	1/24/2012	Jezebel	54 comments
"Is the Capitol Couture Clothing Line Sending the Wrong Message to *Hunger Games* Fans?"	Emily Asher-Perrin	9/18/2013	Tor.com[44]	16 comments
"Crossing the (Fashion)Line"	The Girl with the Pearl	9/5/2013	Victors Village[45]	17 comments
"You'll Have to Kill a Child but at Least You'll Look Good Doing It"	Lilinaz Evans, Georgia Luckhurst, and Melissa Campbell	11/20/2013	SPARK Movement[46]	17 comments
"Hunger Games Month: The brilliant irony of Lionsgate's marketing"	Ashley Leckwold	3/17/2012	The Diary of a Dimension Hopper[47]	Individual blog, no comments
"Capitol Couture: Innovation or Complete Contradiction?"	Stephen Riordan	9/23/2013	The Lone Wolf[48]	Individual blog, no comments
"You have to Love Lionsgate's Commitment to the Dark Side: Catching Fire's Misfired Marketing…"	Siobhan O'Flynn	8/30/2013	in medias unrest[49]	Individual blog, no comments

Irony

Many fans who were appreciative of Lionsgate's marketing campaign chose to read the campaign as an ironic, self-reflexive strategy that forced fans to reflect on their own role within a global economy. In a discussion thread on *Jezebel*, one fan states: "[T]he marketing for Hunger Games has always felt kinda meta" and another *Jezebel* reader calls the campaign "kind of clever, actually, in a tongue-in-cheek way."[50] These recipients seem to understand *Capitol Couture* primarily as a form of satire that breaks down the fourth wall to raise questions about the relationship between

[44] Tor.com, a science-fiction and fantasy online journal. Tor.com differs from the above-mentioned sites in that it publishes original fiction and is geared toward those with a professional interest in literary science fiction (authors, editors, publishers).

[45] Victors Village, a Wordpress-based fan-run fansite for *The Hunger Games*. In contrast to the transformative fans on tumblr, Victors' Village appears to represent a more affirmative brand of fandom.

[46] Blog of the SPARK Action Squad (SAS), an organization of young feminist activists.

[47] *The Diary of a Dimension Hopper*, Leckwold's blog under an explicitly indicated pen name. Leckwold identifies as "'media enthusiast' (or 'fangirl,' if you prefer)", and is on the staff for *Nerdophiles*, a Nerd Culture online magazine.

[48] *The Lone Wolf*, Riordan's blog. He identifies as "22 year old writer from Ireland, Gay, Irish/ Thai, Hufflepuff Pride!"

[49] *In medias unrest*. O'Flynn's blog. She introduces herself: "I teach. I write. I track emerging trends, innovations & disruptions in digital culture. I advise on interactive storytelling and experience design."

[50] Stewart, "Volunteering."

consumer and text: for example, does buying a movie ticket to see *Hunger Games – Catching Fire* automatically puts the spectator in the same position as the members of the Capitol? That is, does watching the film at a large chain-owned movie theater imply a complicity with the global economic system of competition and exploitation, and is enjoying a movie about teenagers fighting to the death is similar to Capitol members taking pleasure in following this kind of violence for entertainment? Taking a more cynical stance, some recipients also suggested that since Lionsgate was already part of the capitalist machinery, it seemed fitting (or perhaps simply honest) that the production company would be so blunt about the fact that they were first and foremost thinking about profit: "Is it totally ironic?" Ashley Leckwold writes. "Oh hell yes. We've pretty much bought into the Capitol in this process."[51]

Perhaps motivated by the controversy around the marketing campaign, author Suzanne Collins actually voiced her own opinion concerning Lionsgate's marketing in 2013. In her statement, she explicitly agreed with the assessment of the campaign as self-reflexive satire:

> It's appropriately disturbing and thought-provoking how the campaign promotes "Catching Fire" while simultaneously promoting the Capitol's punitive forms of entertainment. The stunning image of Katniss in her wedding dress that we use to sell tickets is just the kind of thing the Capitol would use to rev up its audience for the Quarter Quell. That dualistic approach is very much in keeping with the books.[52]

Of course, to think of the *Hunger Games* campaign as "thought-provoking and disturbing," as Collins puts it, would mean to measure the campaign's success by its potential to make viewers uncomfortable enough to distance themselves from the kind of consumer practices associated with the Capitol. And at least to some extent, the campaign did seem to inspire reactions of alienation

[51] Ashley Leckwold, "Hunger Games Month: The Brilliant Irony of Lionsgate's Marketing," *The Diary of a Dimension Hopper*, March 17, 2012, https://lieselhindmann.wordpress.com/2012/03/17/hunger-games-month-the-brilliant-irony-of-lionsgates-marketing/.

[52] Mark Graser, "Suzanne Collins Breaks Silence to Support 'The Hunger Games: Catching Fire,'" *Variety*, October 29, 2013, http://variety.com/2013/film/news/suzanne-collins-breaks-silence-to-support-the-hunger-games-catching-fire-1200775202/.

among its recipients. On *Jezebel*, one fan admits: "I feel kind of weird reading the Hunger Games tumbler/magazine. It makes me feel like a Capital [sic] Dweller...and that creeps me out." In a comment on the same article, another fan suggests that the disturbing, unsettling effect of *Capitol Couture* is due to its striking similarity with the imagery of real-life mainstream fashion magazines: "I see ridiculous, out-of-touch shit like that in Vogue all the time."[53] This fan draws attention to the fact that the *Capitol Couture* tumblr, which extended the illusion of the Capitol's wealth into mediated reality, presented an unsettlingly familiar discourse of glamour and fashion which gained a dark undertone of oppression and exploitation from the context it was situated in. This allowed consumers to draw parallels to the more problematic aspects of the fashion world, like the common use of colonialist, sexist imagery in fashion design against the backdrop of ethical economic issues like the practice of low-cost production in developing countries.

In this regard, *Capitol Couture* is both similar to and different from another movie marketing campaign that forced consumers to reflect on their own position regarding the ethical dilemma raised by the text. On a much smaller scale than Lionsgate's *Hunger Games* campaign, but still very noticeable, were the billboards advertising for Neill Blomkamp's post-apocalyptic science-fiction film *District 9* (2009), which warned drivers on US highways not to pick up non-human hitchhikers: "Picking up non-humans is forbidden. $10,000 fine. Report it here 1-866-666-6001."[54]

These posters did not simply draw attention to the product they were advertising; in fact, despite the fact that the billboards included a URL leading to a website with information about the film, the ads were presumably still confusing to those who had not already heard about the film. Positioned in the public space, the posters created the illusion that passersby were in fact part of

[53] Dodai Stewart, "There Are McQueen Shoes On The Hunger Games Fashion Tumblr!," *Jezebel*, January 24, 2012, http://jezebel.com/5878995/there-are-mcqueen-shoes-on-the-hunger-games-fashion-tumblr?comment=46332713.

[54] Katie Riley, *Viral Marketing Campaign: District 9*, not dated, http://district9campaign.weebly.com/.

the fictional universe, and thus forced the spectator to consider their own stance towards issues raised by the movie, from their behavior towards hitchhikers to their definition of what counts as 'human,' and whether they would prioritize their personal moral compass over the law. Considering that the billboards were marketing a movie with not-so-subtle references to the South-African apartheid system, opening a dialogue about these questions certainly seemed appropriate.

However, while the *District 9* posters might have inspired thought even in those not familiar with the movie, the *Capitol Couture* billboards presumably appeared to the uninitiated as just another fashion ad. Another, and potentially more critical, difference between the campaigns is that while the *District 9* billboards only advertised for the actual movie, *Capitol Couture,* with its mix of fiction, journalism and product placement, did far more than that.

Hypocrisy

The latter aspect, in particular, was what a second group of fans considered the main issue with the *Capitol Couture* campaign. These fans did to some extent acknowledge or even appreciate the self-reflexive potential of the *Capitol Couture* website. However, they argued that the interpretation of the *Hunger Games* marketing as a clever piece of satire got significantly complicated by Lionsgate's tie-in partnerships. On *tor.com*, one commenter explains:

> It's one thing to have the designs and the marketing as part of the viral campaign to promote the movie – that's extending the satire and commentary of the story. But to actually produce the line for sale? That's *becoming* The Capitol, not mocking it or warning against it.[55]

These fans pointed out that Collins' *Hunger Games* novels and the movies critique precisely the unequal distribution of wealth that allows a minority of the population to afford the kind of luxury

[55] Emily Asher-Perrin, "Is the Capitol Couture Clothing Line Sending the Wrong Message to Hunger Games Fans?," *Tor.com*, September 18, 2013, http://www.tor.com/blogs/2013/09/is-the-capitol-couture-clothing-line-sending-the-wrong-message-to-hunger-games-fans.

items Lionsgate's marketing campaign promotes. Consequently, the tie-in products undermined the core of what these fans perceived to be the essential message of the fictional text. "I feel bad for Suzanne Collins," one reader of *TheMarySue* remarks, "because she wrote something amazing and the studio is turning [sic] into the exact thing she spoke against in the books."[56]

Beyond their general displeasure with what they saw as Lionsgate's blatant encouragement of consumerism, fans also criticized more specific aspects of the tie-ins. Some were unhappy that the *Hunger Games* campaign was such an obvious example of gendered marketing in its clichéd association of female audiences with fashion, make-up and chocolate; especially since *The Hunger Games'* female protagonist is popular among girls and women precisely because she does not show any interest in make-up and fashion. As one fan states: "Well it would help if they weren't trying to sell make-up using a character whose in-story 'beautifying' was clearly a negative experience for her and is specifically to make her more appealing to the masses who hold her life in their hands."[57]

This is noticeable in particular in comparison to the toy company Hasbro, which in 2013 took the immense success of *The Hunger Games* (and Disney's 2012 movie *Brave*) as inspiration to release *Nerf Rebelle*, their first ever toy weapon line for girls.[58] The *Nerf Rebelle* toys, which included cross- and compound bows, as well as various nerf guns, did face critique for being so obviously gendered in their purple-and-pink flowery design; still, unlike Lionsgate, Hasbro at least seemed to acknowledge that the appeal of texts like *The Hunger Games* and *Brave* for many young

[56] Victoria McNally, "Update: Lionsgate Still Trying To Make The Hunger Games Theme Park Happen," *The Mary Sue*, August 20, 2014, http://www.themarysue.com/hunger-games-still-theme-park-still-happening/#comment-1551596074.

[57] Jill Pantozzi, "District Fashions Are on Display In The Latest Hunger Games Couture Offerings," *The Mary Sue*, June 19, 2014, http://www.themarysue.com/hunger-games-capitol-couture-disctrict-fashions/#comment-1445397934.

[58] Hillary Busis, "Hasbro Launches 'Rebelle' Nerf Line for Girls," *Entertainment Weekly's EW.com*, February 8, 2013, http://www.ew.com/article/2013/02/08/hasbro-introduces-nerf-rebelle-line-for-girls-starting-with-the-heartbreaker-bow-exclusive.

girls was based in a non-traditional representation of femininity that was not merely defined by heteronormative romance.

Others primarily criticized that the tie-in products were high-end luxury goods and appeared to address an audience with the financial means to spend $200 on a box of chocolates. Not only, they complained, did the marketing campaign encourage fans' identification with the upper classes in the storyworld, it also excluded low-income or even middle-class fans from its target audience. "[T]hese are technically young adult books and most teens don't have $900 disposable income to blow on a dress",[59] one fan commented on *TheMarySue*, and on the *Hunger Games* fansite *Victors' Village*, one of the contributors stated in an article about Summerville's clothing line: "The clothes will probably be beautiful. We may even want to buy some but… again, we can't. Both because we're poor and because it just *feels wrong.*"[60]

A number of social justice grassroots organizations reacted to Lionsgate's campaign with attempts to steer the audience's attention away from the consumerism-focused marketing and back to what they saw as the resistant potential of the novels. The SPARK Action Squad (SAS), a group of young US and UK feminist activists, targeted CoverGirl's make-up line *Capitol Beauty* with their satirical tumblr blog *Capitol Cuties*. In a mockery of CoverGirl's *Capitol Beauty* ads featuring models in fantastical over-the-top hair and make-up, *Capitol Cuties* shows photos of girls in grotesque make-up, accompanied by satirical texts that expose the problematic implications of a celebration of mass consumerism in the face of a society ruled by exploitation and violence. "Your

[59] Rebecca Pahle, "Hunger Games Clothing Line Is Available for Purchase Despite a Serious Lack of Butterfly Dresses," *The Mary Sue*, December 31, 2013, http://www.themarysue.com/capitol-couture-clothing-line/#comment-1182604443.

[60] The Girl with the Pearl, "Crossing the (Fashion) Line," *Victor's Village*, September 5, 2013, http://victorsvillage.com/2013/09/05/crossing-the-fashion-line/.

suffering is not a problem to solve, but an inspiration for the look of the day!" the profile page announces, and one of the contributors quips sarcastically:

> I am so over the protests from all of the poor districts. You are all ruining the games for everyone else and it is embarrassing. Some of us actually *enjoy* the fantastic games our wonderful Capitol provide us every year. It's free, fun, and fabulous. Stop acting like peasants. Taking the fun out of the games for everyone else. I was going to talk about how much fun I am having with the Covergirl Capitol Collection, but I am not feeling as festive at this current time. I heard there was a really big riot breakout in District 11? Well anyways, thank you Covergirl, for reminding us the real purpose of the Games, makeup. Panem today. Panem tomorrow. Panem forever.[61]

Equally sarcastically, albeit less explicit in its social criticism, was the response by the creators of the website for the *Hunger Games* parody *The Hunger But Mainly Death Games*, which offered their own take on China Glaze's nail polish line. Their line-up included colors like "Definitely-Not-Poison Teal" (with the description: "Wow, a gift from a rival tribute's sponsor! Well, whatever it is, it's definitely not poison, that's for sure. So go ahead and eat it!") and "President Snow Red" ("Inspired by the blood of your execution if you ever make fun of President Snow for wearing nail polish").[62]

The non-profit fan organization Harry Potter Alliance, on the other hand, very explicitly set out to 'hack' Lionsgate's campaign by drawing attention towards issues like poverty and income inequality. In an opinion piece in the *LA Times,* HPA co-founder Andrew Slack wrote:

> We can't produce our own multimillion-dollar marketing campaign, but we can hack Lionsgate's. Wherever the studio and its promotional partners post an advertisement for the movie, you'll see our members posting pictures of themselves doing the three-finger salute — the Districts' symbol for solidarity in the face of the Capitol. Instead of letting the studio's campaign silence or distort the film's message, activists will draw attention to

[61] SPARK Action Squad, *Capitol Cuties,* not dated, http://capitolcuties.tumblr.com/?og=1.

[62] Michelle Mismas, "China Glaze Capitol Colours - Hunger Games Collection Update," *All Lacquered Up*, December 13, 2011, http://www.alllacqueredup.com/2011/12/china-glaze-colours-from-the-capital-hunger-games-collection-update.html.

> the reality of economic inequality in America and to organizations that are working to end it.[63]

In an awareness-raising fan video with the title "The Hunger Games are Real"[64], the Harry Potter Alliance criticized mass media's focus on the love triangle between Katniss, Peta and Gale in their reporting on the *Hunger Games* movies, and Lionsgate's spotlight on luxury and excess in their marketing campaign. The video suggested that the media distracted viewers from the main message of the texts, and tried to make up for this by drawing spectators' attention to social issues of poverty and inequality. In addition to the video and the accompanying social media campaign "Odds in Our Favor", in 2014 the Harry Potter Alliance also directly encouraged *Hunger Games* fans to move their protests to the streets by supporting workers in the service industry during their protests for minimum wages. Once again, social media like twitter and facebook were used to document the protests and spread the images across the internet.

Bread and Circuses

Unlike these fans and organizations, who felt the need to 'rescue' the fictional text from its appropriation by the marketing machinery, a considerable number of voices did not perceive Lionsgate's campaign to be at odds with the stance of the text and therefore did not feel as conflicted or jaded about it. Fans in this group were most likely to argue with representatives of the second group in the online discussions about the marketing campaign, and the two groups clashed rather forcefully several times. For some representatives of this last group, the acceptance of the marketing campaign was merely a question of the separation between fiction and reality. They sorted the marketing campaign and the tie-in products into the category 'fiction' or 'art,' and

[63] Andrew Slack, "Ad Campaign (Lip) Glosses over 'Hunger Games' Message," *Los Angeles Times*, November 25, 2013, http://www.latimes.com/opinion/op-ed/la-oe-1125-slack-hunger-games-covergirl-capitol-20131125-story.html.

[64] thehpalliance. "The Hunger Games Are Real," 2013, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BmVJaBuoEYA.

argued that there was a difference between enjoying things in entertainment and approving of them in real life. "You may fully understand what the Capitol represented and still love ridiculous, ostentatious garb,"[65] one fan argued on *Jezebel*, and on *tor.com*, someone similarly stated: "[F]ashion is supposed to be FUN! Don't take it so seriously. How do you read so far into fantastical, whimsical costumes?"[66]

Another subsection of fans, however, did not only dismiss the real-life significance of advertising, but in fact outspokenly embraced the identificatory potential of the transmedia campaign and explicitly stated that they identified with the members of the Capitol. Granted, the fans in this group were not the only ones to think of themselves as 'Capitol members,' but for representatives of the 'Irony' and 'Hypocrisy' fractions, this identification was usually a shameful, guilty experience: "Not to take this too seriously," one commenter on *TheMarySue* wrote,

> but we actually do live in the real Hunger Games. Most of us (who have computer, internet, etc.) actually live in the Capitol. There really are children out there dying from starvation in much of the world. And children are forced to kill other children, they are called child soldiers. And the gap between rich and poor gets bigger everyday.[67]

Those who embraced the campaign's offer of identification, however, rejected the suggestion that this role should come with social responsibility, and were outspoken in their disagreement with fans who criticized the marketing campaign. "What exactly are you implying?", one commenter on *tor.com* asked. "That wealth and luxury are inherently bad things, and never, ever should they be in any way glorified? I strongly disagree […] and frankly, I have always been strongly against

[65] Laura Beck, "Want to Dress Like You Live in Panem? Capitol Couture Is Here!," *Jezebel*, September 19, 2013, http://jezebel.com/this-i-wouldnt-wanna-live-in-say-victorian-england-1350326568.
[66] Asher-Perrin, "Is the Capitol Couture."
[67] Susana Polo, "The Internet Has Done It: We've Found the Dumbest Hunger Games Tie In," *The Mary Sue*, November 8, 2013, http://www.themarysue.com/hunger-games-subway/#comment-1114097179.

the notion that the so called excesses of the might and wealthy are somehow evil or decadent."[68]

On tumblr, a fan remarked with reference to the *Hunger Games* make-up line:

> So I'm gonna extend kudos to the thinking kid who buys that nail polish. Heck yeah. Because it's okay to have shallow desires. It's okay to like a little bit of glittering pretty, and to want something tangible in your hand that associates with a story you love. And with my eyes open, I know that no one's gonna suffer for the purchase of that polish. No kid's gonna get killed. No oppressive government is going to prosper. 'Cause who gets the money ultimately? Merchants. Producers. Investors. People who worked or risked to make the story real. It's a paradox designed to make us THINK, but we don't have to wallow in guilt or decry the people who seem to play along a little more than others. We just have to remember that we're all human in the end.[69]

Just as the fans who were critical of the marketing campaign, these fans likewise supported their position with references to the fictional text. The above-cited commenter explains in their defense of Octavia, a character from the Capitol:

> Octavia is part of the Capitol. Octavia exaggerates, fangirls, goes out and buys the Hunger Games nail-polish, writes smutty fanfic about the starcrossed lovers of District 12 (Don't look at me like that, you know she did.), and carries on about her favorite celebrities having FEELS about them, all while obliviously not comprehending their real problems, and generally being blind to a lot of the things that are so wrong with the world she's in. But Octavia is no heartless bitch. Octavia's eyes can be opened once everything is made personal. When it is her victor, her FRIEND, who's [sic] life is going back under the chopping block, she cries. And maybe hates the Capitol (herself) too. And Gale treating her like she isn't human is WRONG.

This identification with the representatives of the Capitol may come as a surprise, considering that the novels appear to spell out very explicitly the relationship between the luxurious lifestyle in the Capitol and an economic system of exploitation, and are not very subtle in their references to the contemporary global economy. Instead of putting the blame for social inequality on certain individuals and falling back onto simplistic oppositions of good vs. evil, Collins depicts a system of structural inequality that cannot be significantly improved without fundamental changes.

[68] Asher-Perrin, "Is the Capitol Couture."
[69] Allinablur, "You Know What's Ironic about The Hunger Games?" *Tumblr*, January 11, 2012.

However, Brianna Burke argues that it is precisely Collins' exposure of systemic inequality (as opposed to individual blame) that may open the novels up for alternative interpretations.

> Collins shows throughout the novel that the feeling of privilege and entitlement – to foodstuffs as well as to material wealth – is inculcated into the population in order to reinforce and maintain the created system. Because of this, one could easily argue that Collins excuses the ignorance of the citizens of the Capitol, in turn simultaneously alleviating readers' complicity in global hunger.[70]

The reaction of this last group of fans towards both the text and the marketing campaign seems to support Burke's argument regarding the reception of Collins' novels. Similarly, the Instagram pictures of a J. Crew executive who celebrated with colleagues after spending the day laying off 175 co-workers and posted pictures of their drunken celebrations with hashtags referencing *The Hunger Games* indicates that he, too, did not feel individual guilt over his role in the system that led to his co-workers losing their jobs.[71]

That popular texts are polysemic and open to alternative interpretations is not a new discovery by any means. As John Fiske has argued, popular texts in general aim to reach not a small and exclusive, but rather a broad audience, and therefore need to be open to readings by different groups of readers or spectators.[72] At the same time, the creative processes of transmedia entertainment franchises position these evolving texts of collective authorship outside the discourse of originality and authorship that has influenced the production and reception of Western 'high culture' since the 18th century: neither one single author nor one narrative element can claim authority over the interpretation of the story.

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[70] Burke, "Reaping Environmental Justice", 13.

[71] Jana Kasperkevic, "J Crew Executive Posts Hunger Games Jokes Online after Hundreds of Layoffs," *The Guardian*, June 18, 2015, http://www.theguardian.com/business/2015/jun/18/j-crew-executive-jokes-about-hunger-games-after-layoffs.

[72] Fiske, *Understanding*, 392-394.

Yet unlike dismissive voices that blame the polysemic openness of popular texts on their one-dimensionality, it seems that in the case of *The Hunger Games* the text was opened up to alternative readings precisely by the author's attempt at a more complex and less clear-cut representation of political structures. It is also interesting that the controversy about alternative readings of the text – as fundamentally different as they may seem – was only revealed in fans' reaction to the marketing campaign, and their arguments about whether the campaign should be treated as part of the text.

Text vs. Paratext

The different reactions towards *Capitol Couture* and its tie-in merchandise not only divided the *Hunger Games* fanbase in their reception of the marketing campaign, but also revealed alternative readings of the fictional text and different opinions about the relationship between fiction, marketing, and politics.

Both the 'Irony' and the 'Hypocrisy' fractions among the fans ultimately distanced themselves from the marketing campaign's offer of identification, even though the consequences they drew from their reading of the campaign differed. Both groups seemed to agree that the 'text itself' (which primarily meant the novels and to a lesser degree the film adaptations) conveyed an important message regarding today's global economic system. For the 'Irony' fraction, the marketing for the movies simply proved the point they felt the novels were trying to make, namely that it is practically impossible to not become complicit in the global system of exploitation, willingly or not. For the 'Hypocrisy' fraction, on the other hand, the novels were not only taking stock of the current situation, but rather represented a call for action; the marketing campaign was an example of corporate appropriation that only made the need to act seem more prevalent. The

two groups had in common that they distinguished between text and marketing, that is, they considered *Capitol Couture* as a paratext that did not considerably influence their interpretation of the text. Yet, their opinions regarding this paratext differed: for one group, the marketing was a clever comment on the issues raised by the text; for the other, it was a crude distortion of the message the text was trying to convey.

In contrast, *Capitol Couture* also called to a third group of fans who approached the campaign from an alternative reading of the text. For these fans, Lionsgate's marketing campaign served as reaffirmation for an already existing interpretation of the text – one that allowed them to embrace their position as members of the wealthy class and absolved them from social responsibility. For these fans, the transmedia storytelling elements of *Capitol Couture* became part of the diegetic universe, that is, *Capitol Couture* was seen not so much as a paratext but rather as part of the text itself, because it fit into their understanding of the diegetic universe.

The example of Lionsgate's marketing campaign shows how corporate transmedia storytelling significantly complicates the relationship between text and paratext, since a piece of storytelling might be considered a paratext by some but read as part of the actual text by others. This decision is influenced by audiences' reception of the text, and by the question of whether a specific transmedia element complies with their previous understanding of the text or not. Gray proposes that paratexts influence the reception of texts in crucial ways: "they create texts, they manage them, they fill them with many of the meanings we associate with them."[73] In this case, however, it is the text that influences the reception of the paratext – and the question of whether a piece of storytelling is a paratext at all.

[73] Gray, "Show Sold Separately", 6.

Fans' reactions to the *Hunger Games* marketing campaign also seriously complicate assumptions about dominant and alternative readings. In his seminal 1980 essay "Encoding/Decoding," Stuart Hall developed a model of textual reception that is based on the process of decoding messages.[74] Depending on social context and the position of the reader/spectator, Hall suggests, one and the same message will be decoded (read) in different ways. Hall offers three different main categories of decoding, the "dominant/hegemonic position" (reading the text the way it was intended), the "negotiated position" (reading the text in some ways the way it was intended, but not in others), and the "oppositional position" (reading the text against the grain). Perhaps because Hall developed his theory in regard to the reception of television news programming, he assumed that the "dominant reading" is automatically aligned with "hegemonic politics," while the "oppositional position" represents an attitude of political resistance.

But *The Hunger Games* and the alternative readings it brought forth undermine this automatic association of dominant readings with hegemonic politics. On the one hand, the dominant reading of what is now an enormous multimedia franchise happens to align itself with resistant politics to the point where the text has become a political reference for different activist groups all over the globe, from anti-racism activists in the US to anti-government protesters in Thailand. On the other hand, the marketing campaign surrounding the franchise reveals an alternative reading of the text that reflects hegemonic politics, showing that alternative readings are certainly not automatically resistant. Thus, this example can serve as a reminder that alternative, non-dominant readings are not always transgressive or subversive, but might in fact align themselves with hegemonic positions, even as they resist the dominant reading of the fictional text.

[74] Hall, "Encoding/Decoding."

Furthermore, while it is certainly reasonable to criticize this specific marketing campaign for the way it explicitly encourages excessive consumerism of luxury goods, thus seemingly embracing the system of inequality attacked by Collins' novels, this also raises the question whether a different kind of campaign that focuses on the exposure of injustice would have better served the interests of those affected by inequality. The frequent references to *The Hunger Games* by political activists seem to imply that a campaign focusing on issues of social inequality might have been able to draw increased attention to those issues among *Hunger Games* fans. However, presumably this also would have helped ease the way for the franchise to capitalize on what appears – at least on paper – as an appeal for revolutionary change.

In the following (and final) chapter of this dissertation, I will pursue this question further by discussing Guy Ritchie's *Sherlock Holmes* film adaptations as an example for a marketing strategy that specifically latches onto subversive and/or progressive readings of the text. I show that while this potentially opens up spaces for progressive politics to be introduced into commercial popular texts, there is a danger that producers will appropriate fans' subversive readings without actually following the progressive trajectory associated with their reception. At the same time, this example will show that audiences are not automatically willing to accept such a commercial appropriation of their social and political agenda, but are ready to call out producers on questionable marketing strategies.

V. A Questionable Bromance: Queer Subtext, Fan Service and the Dangers of Queerbaiting in Guy Ritchie's *Sherlock Holmes* and *A Game of Shadows*

"Who taught you how to dance?" An Introduction

"I thought you'd never ask," John Watson remarks dryly when Sherlock Holmes holds out his hand in a silent request to join him for a dance, and they take off, waltzing with other couples on the dance floor at the peace summit in Reichenbach, Switzerland. Of course, their dancing actually serves the purpose of searching for the assassin among the attending diplomats, and thus preventing a war between France and Germany, but that doesn't stop Holmes from asking afterwards: "By the way, *who* taught you how to dance?" It is a rhetorical question, but Watson doesn't point that out. "You did," he replies instead, with a fondly exasperated smile that only widens when Holmes responds, suddenly almost embarrassed: "Well, I've done a fine job."[1] It is their last conversation before Watson has to watch helplessly as Holmes drags his nemesis James Moriarty with him over the rail of the balcony into the deadly Reichenbach Falls, sharing a last meaningful glance with his friend before disappearing into the abyss.

Scenes like this, seemingly full of wistful flirtatiousness and melodramatic romance, explain why so many reviews of Guy Ritchie's 2011 movie *Sherlock Holmes: A Game of Shadows* referred to the on-screen relationship between Sherlock Holmes and John Watson as a thinly-veiled gay love story. "*Sherlock Holmes: A Game of Shadows* is Gayer, Steamier, and Explodier Than Before" wrote the online media journal *i09*,[2] while other critics jokingly changed the movie title into

[1] Guy Ritchie, *Sherlock Holmes: A Game of Shadows* (Warner Bros./Village Roadshow Pictures/Silver Pictures, 2011).

[2] Annalee Newitz, "Sherlock Holmes: A Game of Shadows is Gayer, Steamier, and Explodier than Before," *io9.com*, December 16, 2011, http://io9.gizmodo.com/5868673/sherlock-holmes-a-game-of-shadows-is-gayer-steamier-

"Sherlock Homo: A Game of Eyeshadow"[3] and "Sherlock Holmes: Out of the Closet."[4] These reviews indicate that the homoeroticism in *Sherlock Holmes* (2009) and its sequel *A Game of Shadows* (2011) was so obvious that it was difficult to ignore even for those not generally attuned to such subtextual connotations.

However, in this chapter I argue that Ritchie's film adaptations should not be seen so much as a queer reading of Arthur Conan Doyle's famous stories; instead, the numerous hints at a romantic relationship between Robert Downey, Jr.'s Holmes and Jude Law's Watson should be understood as an intentional form of fan service directed at LGBT audiences and slash fans in transformative fandom, which among those audiences is critically called 'queerbaiting.'

In the last two chapters on fan activism and transmedia marketing in the context of *Glee* (chapter 3) and *The Hunger Games* (chapter 4), I have discussed how fans navigate the spaces of intersection with commercial franchises in a way that allows them to retain agency even as producers increasingly attempt to incorporate and appropriate fan practices into their marketing strategies. I have also shown that the polysemic structures of both popular texts and their accompanying marketing campaigns still allow for an interpretative openness that leads to sometimes unexpected readings and practices of consumption. In this final chapter, I am going to discuss *Sherlock Holmes* and *A Game of Shadows* as examples of the effect the entertainment industry's awareness of fan culture and fannish practices has on patterns of representation in contemporary popular culture. In particular, the practice of 'queerbaiting' in *A Game of Shadows* demonstrates that the increasing familiarity of producers with the interests of fan communities

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and-explodier-than-before.

[3] Dennis Ayers, "Sherlock Homo: A Game of Eyeshadows," *The Backlot*, January 2, 2012, http://www.newnownext.com/sherlock-homo-a-game-of-eyeshadows/01/2012/.

[4] Stephen Whitty, "'Sherlock Holmes: A Game of Shadows': A Loud, if Handsomely Produced, Adventure," *The Star Ledger/NJ.com*, December 16, 2011, http://www.nj.com/entertainment/movies/index.ssf/2011/12/sherlock_holmes_a_game_of_shadows_a_loud_if_handsomely_produced_adventure.html.

does not necessarily prompt a change in representation, but instead may lead to the containment and control of fans' resistant readings and transformative practices. Under the pretense of fan- and queer-friendliness, then, these adaptations end up reiterating the sexism and homophobia inherent in the homosocial culture in which the original texts are rooted. At the same time, audiences' critical reaction to these strategies indicate that fans are often aware, and generally resentful, of these attempts at appropriation, and continue to search for ways to critically engage with the materials they are offered by the industry.

"Five very happy years." The History of a Fandom

Scholars and movie critics have pointed out that the marketing campaign for Ritchie's first Sherlock Holmes film adaptation in 2009[5] relied heavily on its association with the popular neologism "bromance."[6] The movie's categorization as bromance[7] was supported in particular by the two male leads, Robert Downey, Jr. and Jude Law, who kept hinting at romantic feelings between the super detective and his partner in interviews about the film. During a press conference at San Diego Comic Con 2009, Downey Jr. described their relationship as "circumstantial homosexuality",[8] and Law made similar, if somewhat less explicit statements:

[5] Guy Ritchie, *Sherlock Holmes* (Warner Bros./Village Roadshow Pictures/Silver Pictures, 2009).

[6] Kayley Thomas, "'Bromance Is so Passé'. Robert Downey Jr.'s Queer Paratexts," in *Sherlock Holmes for the 21st Century. Essays on New Adaptations*, ed. Lynnette Porter (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, 2012), 35–47.

[7] Bromance: This neologism is an amalgamation of "bro" (slang for buddy, male friend) and "romance," and refers to popular narratives revolving around male friendship and homosocial bonding. While the term itself is a neologism and has been used to describe a resurgence of bromance stories in popular culture since the 1990s, the trope of quasi-monogamous male platonic life partnership is much older. In fact, Leslie Fiedler, in his influential article "Come Back to the Raft Ag'in, Huck Honey!" (1948), suggested that many of the famous friendships of American canonical literature – from Cooper's *Leatherstocking* tales to Melville's *Moby Dick* – represent boyish fantasies of a 'pure', sexless marriage between two men.

[8] Scott Huver, "Robert Downey Jr.'s Man Crush," *People*, July 27, 2009.

Law	It was pitched to me, before we even met, that there was this uncharted territory between them, this kind of Butch and Sundance vibe. And we took that and ran with it. And I think we embraced slightly more the domestic … the domesticity of this couple. And if you go to the books and you realize that they are living with each other …
Downey Jr.	It would be weird if it wasn't dysfunctional.
Law	Right. [Pauses, puts his hand on RDJ's arm, leaves it there] Or overly formal.[9]

As this piece of dialogue shows, the actors invoked the idea of a romantic relationship between Holmes and Watson not only in their statements about the film, but also in their behavior towards each other. Interviewed together, both Law and Downey Jr. frequently initiated physical contact, as in the above-cited interview; during their appearance on the Graham Norton Show[10] they made a point of staring lovingly into each other's eyes, and on different occasions, they admitted to feelings of mutual attraction. "It has to be Downey!" Law told *MTV News* in 2013 when asked about his 'mancrush.' "Has to be! Only because he'd be devastated if I said anyone else!"[11]

Fans frequently expressed delight at these public displays of affection: "How are they so adorable??? HOW? Robert petting Jude on the head like a kitten, I am SO CHARMED :D", one fan wrote online,[12] and another went even further in their (not necessarily serious) speculations: "totally fucking each other. y/y?"[13]

That Downey and Law's statements during public appearances certainly drew so much attention from fans and media alike was likely due to the fact that Ritchie's film was not the only or first published adaptation of Arthur Conan Doyle's characters that toyed with the idea of a

[9] "Robert Downey Jr. y Jude Law," Interview in Madrid on occasion of movie premiere, *Yahoo!Cine* (Yahoo Espana, January 2010).
[10] Graham Norton, *The Graham Norton Show*, Season 10, Episode 8 (BBC One, 16 Dec. 2011).
[11] "Exclusive! Side Effects star talks Channing Tatum's feelings for him ..." *MTV News* (MTV, March 8, 2013).
[12] the-randomist, "GIFS v 2.0 – Jude Law and Robert Downey Jr.", *Livejournal*, February 3, 2010.
[13] TW_319988, "Robert Downey Jesus and Hobo Law acting all married on Graham Norton + Bonus Eddie Izzard!" *Livejournal*, December 17, 2011.

romantic relationship between the protagonists. Billy Wilder's 1970 movie *The Private Life of Sherlock Holmes*, for example, invokes a romance between Holmes and Watson when Holmes, in an attempt to let down a very ardent female admirer, suggests that he and Watson are more than just friends: "You see, I am not a free man … A bachelor living with another bachelor, for the last five years. Five very happy years."[14] Wilder merely hints at the idea of a relationship between Holmes and Watson, but a number of published Sherlock Holmes pastiches[15] are much more explicit in their exploration of the romantic tension between the two characters.[16]

Still, although speculations about the nature of Holmes' and Watson's relationship have a long tradition, they tended to remain on the fringes of the fan community, which can be seen partly as a consequence of the discourse that dominated Sherlock Holmes fandom throughout the 20th century. Self-identified 'Sherlockians' or 'Holmesians' traditionally reject the label 'fan' for themselves, claiming a place among the aficionados of high culture rather than the fans of pop culture.[17] Their fan practices are guided primarily by the ideal of preserving the spirit of the original texts, and the extremely prolific body of writing brought forth by this fan community has been characterized by its loyalty to the 'canon' – that is, the works produced by Arthur Conan Doyle himself. A big part of 'Sherlockian scholarship' is based on the assumption (and the suspension of disbelief) that Holmes and Watson are actual historical figures, not fictional characters; and fan scholars who treat Doyle's writings as fiction share with the Sherlockian historians a focus on textual hermeneutics and historical research. The most famous form of

[14] Billy Wilder, *The Private Life of Sherlock Holmes* (Mirisch Production Company, 1970).

[15] Pastiches are, in the Sherlockian community, derivative fictional texts by different authors that are not just based on Arthur Conan Doyle's writings, but try to imitate the writer's style.

[16] Among others: Rohase Piercy, *My Dearest Holmes* (BookSurge Publishing, 1988); Larry Townsend, *The Sexual Adventures of Sherlock Holmes* (New York: Masquerade Books, 1993); T.D. McKinney and Terry Wylis, *Kissing Sherlock Holmes* (Amber Quill Press, 2011); Joseph de Marco, *A Study in Lavender – Queering Sherlock Holmes* (Maple Shade: Lethe Press, 2011); L.A. Fields, *My Dear Watson* (Maple Shade: Lethe Press, 2013).

[17] Pearson, "Bachies", 106/107.

fictional Sherlock Holmes fan writing, the pastiche, is traditionally judged by its proximity to Doyle's own style of writing.[18] This fidelity to canon and the general suspicion toward non-canonical writings and adaptations is probably one of the main reasons for the relative marginality of speculations about the sexual preferences of Holmes and Watson: "there is a strong affirmational tradition within the Sherlock Holmes fan community."[19]

The promotional efforts for Guy Ritchie's movie in 2009, however, were not just directed at the established Sherlockian community. In fact, the advertising for the movie clearly aimed to attract other groups of fans that were at home not (only) in the literary tradition of Arthur Conan Doyle's writings, but in the world of contemporary geek culture, cult cinema, science fiction, and fantasy. The official trailer for the movie did not linger on the promise of murder mysteries and methods of logical deduction that audiences had grown accustomed to in previous adaptations of the materials. Instead, the trailer teased with action scenes, a steampunk[20] setting, shots of Rachel McAdams in Victorian-style lingerie, and copious amounts of bromantic banter between Holmes

[18] Roberta Pearson, "'It's Always 1895': Sherlock Holmes in Cyberspace," in *Trash Aesthetics. Popular Culture and Its Audience*, ed. Deborah Cartmell et al. (London/Chicago: Pluto Press, 1997), 149/150; Ashley D. Polasek, "Winning 'The Grand Game'. Sherlock and the Fragmentation of Fan Discourse," in *Sherlock and Transmedia Fandom. Essays on the BBC Series*, edited by Louisa Ellen Stein and Kristina Busse (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, 2012), 42-49.

[19] Polasek, "Winning", 44. Traditional Sherlock Holmes fandom had, until very recently, not come into the focus of fan studies scholarship, despite dating back as far as the early 20th century. In an article from 2007, Sherlockians expert Roberta Pearson still commented: "Sherlockians have so far (with the exception of a previous article of mine: see Pearson 1997) escaped academic scrutiny, despite being probably the oldest established fandom." (Pearson, "Bachies", 105) Because much of early fan studies scholarship in the 1990s was driven by the desire to make the subversive or feminist potential of fan culture visible, scholars focused heavily on transformative and/or female-dominated fan practices. Consequently, the mostly affirmational and male-dominated community of Sherlockians and Holmesians most likely did not register immediately as a relevant subject. Pearson, "Always 1895"*;* Pearson, "Bachies"; Roberta Pearson*,* "'Good Old Index', or, The Mystery of the Infinite Archive," in *Sherlock and Transmedia Fandom*. Essays on the BBC Series, edited by Louisa Ellen Stein and Kristina Busse (Jefferson: McFarland & Co, 2012), 150–164.

[20] Steampunk refers to a subgenre of science fiction that does not rely on futuristic settings, but instead depicts an alternate history. Most commonly, steampunk fiction features an alternate version of the Victorian age or the Wild West that includes anachronistic technology, in particular the (steam engine-driven) technology envisioned in futuristic/utopian texts at the time.

and Watson.[21] In addition to these elements speaking to different audience segments, the cast, crew and setting of *Sherlock Holmes* were wisely chosen to represent an accumulation of 'fan credit' that the movie was bound to cash in at the box office. Director Guy Ritchie, for example, had already achieved cult film director status with gritty movies such as *Lock, Stock and Two Smoking Barrels* (1998) and *Snatch* (2000), while main actor Robert Downey, Jr. had gained overwhelming popularity with different divisions of the comic and science-fiction fandom for his role as *Iron Man* in 2008. The decidedly steampunk-y elements of the Victorian setting were bound to appeal to other parts of the fantasy and science-fiction community, and finally, the advertising that marketed the film as bromance was directed at yet another very specific group of fans:

> [T]hat homoerotic aspect of the film was pretty canny, and a big part of its advance marketing. It no doubt drew a lot of people into theaters who might otherwise have skipped out on a Guy Ritchie film. And count me in that camp. I mean, give me queer subtext over *Lock Stock and Two Smoking Barrel*s – or *Snatch* – any day![22]

The fans that Ayers, writer for the gay online media journal *The Backlot*, referred to in his review, are an audience group that has only come into the focus of the entertainment industry's marketing efforts in the last two decades: LGBT audiences, as well as queer and female transformative fans, in particular those with an interest in 'slash.'[23] Slash fans, who are invested in queer representation as well as the queer subtexts they recognize in popular texts (particularly in traditionally male-oriented genres like science fiction, western, action, crime and horror), are a subsection of transformative participatory fandom, the diverse and loosely connected global community that is

[21] Guy Ritchie, *Sherlock Holmes – The Official Trailer* (Warner Bros., 2009).
[22] Ayers, "Sherlock Homo".
[23] Slash: fan terminology describing fanworks that imagine two fictional characters of the same sex to be involved in a romantic or sexual relationship. Originally, the term was used only to describe the rewriting of relationships between characters who in the source material were canonically heterosexual; as a result of the increase in LGBT representation in popular culture, the term later was used sometimes also to refer to canonically queer characters. To avoid the problematic implications of this conflation, more recently fanworks are often simply categorized as "M/M", "M/F", "F/F" etc. to refer to the romantic couplings appearing in the work, whether canonical or not.

characterized by its practices of critical media analysis and the creative appropriation of pop culture in fanworks like fanfiction, art, or videos.[24] Once a more or less secretive underground subculture, transformative fans and their practices have moved to the foreground of the industry's awareness as fanworks have become easily accessible online, and producers, writers and actors openly admit to frequenting fan discussion forums and fanfiction sites. As Henry Jenkins elaborates in *Convergence Culture*, companies have begun to understand the importance of fan support for commercial success, both in regard to the distribution of information and the creation of user-generated content:

> [T]he media industry is increasingly dependent on active and committed consumers to spread the word about valued properties in an overcrowded marketplace, and in some cases they are seeking ways to channel the creative output of media fans to lower their production costs.[25]

The industry's attitude towards grassroots fandom and fanworks, which before had mostly oscillated between gentle encouragement and purposeful ignorance, has changed significantly over the past 10 to 20 years. Now producers are keen on improving their relationship with the fans by actively encouraging fan participation, in order to increase mouth-to-mouth publicity, gain valuable feedback, ensure viewer loyalty or create new markets for merchandise.

The advertising of *Sherlock Holmes* as a bromance film with homoerotic undertones should be seen as part of this new strategy, aimed at winning over new audience groups for a product that in the past would have been mostly advertised to male straight audiences. Of course, in the case of *Sherlock Holmes*, this was a somewhat obvious choice. The promotional efforts could fall back on the (marginal, but existent) tradition of narratives indicating a romance between Holmes and Watson in the established Sherlockian/Holmesian community, and several cast and crew members

[24] For further discussion of transformative fandom, see in particular also chapter 2 and 3.
[25] Jenkins, *Convergence,* 138.

involved with the film had previously worked on projects that held a certain significance for both the LGBT and the slash community: In Ritchie's case, fans were likely to remember the gay subplot in his 2008 gangster movie *Rock'n'Rolla,* while Downey, Jr. had starred as homosexual editor Terry in *WonderBoys* (2000) and next to Val Kilmer's queer private investigator in *Kiss Kiss Bang Bang* (2005). A significant step in Jude Law's early career had been his role in the homoerotic thriller *The Talented Mr. Ripley* (1999), and loyal Holmes fans at least might have recalled his small role in an episode of the TV series *The Case-Book of Sherlock Holmes*, in which his character wore a dress and posed as a woman.[26] The fact that both the director and the two main actors were known not to shy away from representations of queer characters or storylines was likely to attract the attention of LGBT and transformative fans and guarantee their interest in the film.

"Gladstone is *our* dog!" Bromance in *Sherlock Holmes* (2009)

The film itself fulfilled the promises of its promotion, presenting all the "elements common to the bromance […]: back-and-forth banter, a love-hate dynamic, codependency, masculine physicality and action, male camaraderie and loyalty, and potential homoeroticism."[27] In Ritchie's *Sherlock Holmes*, Holmes and Watson fight side by side, not bothering to wait for their backup before joining the action as one: "Where's the Inspector?" – "He's getting his troops lined up." – "That could be all day." They bicker and banter like the proverbial old married couple: "Get that out of my face." – "It's not in your face; it's in my hand." – "Get what's in your hand out of my face." Most importantly, they actively discourage each other from pursuing relationships with anyone else, and Holmes in particular refuses to face the reality of Watson's engagement and meet his

[26] Michael Cox, "Shoscombe Old Place," *The Case-Book of Sherlock Holmes*, episode 3 (Granada Television, March 7, 1991).
[27] Thomas, "Bromance", 38.

fiancée, as can be seen in the following conversation:

Watson	Mary's coming.
Holmes	Not available.
Watson	You're meeting her, Holmes!
Holmes	Have you proposed yet?
Watson	No, I haven't found the right ring.
Holmes	Then it's not official.
Watson	It's happening, whether you like it or not! 8:30, The Royale. Wear a jacket.
Holmes	*You* wear a jacket.

But while Holmes is clearly jealous of Watson's relationship with Mary Morstan (Kelly Reilly) and tries everything to can to boycott her, he is equally fascinated with super-spy Irene Adler (Rachel McAdams), who keeps getting the better of him, despite his prowess as thinker and fighter. Regardless of the overt bromance motif that reappears as a continuous thread throughout the film, *Sherlock Holmes* is still fairly ambiguous in its representation of Holmes' sexuality: "In the first film, Ritchie and his screenwriters develop Holmes' sexuality in several directions simultaneously."[28] The fact that Holmes appears desperate for both Watson and Adler's attention, while his behavior also implies masochistic physical desires (for example, he takes pleasure from getting beaten up in boxing matches), opens the text up to an interpretation of Holmes as (sexually) submissive, rather than ambiguously queer. In fact, Watson's description of the relationship between Holmes and Adler fairly explicitly spells out the dynamic of domination and submission driving it:

Watson	Look at you! Why is the only woman you've ever cared about a world class criminal? Are you a masochist?
Holmes	Allow me to explain.
Watson	Allow *me*. She's the only adversary who ever outsmarted you … twice. Made a proper idiot out of you.
Holmes	Right, you've had your fun.
Watson	What's she after, anyway?
Holmes	It's time to press on.

[28] Anissa M. Graham and Jennifer C. Garlen, "Sex and the Single Sleuth," in *Sherlock Holmes for the 21st Century. Essays on New Adaptations*, edited by Lynnette Porter (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, 2012), 30.

Watson	What could she possibly need?
Holmes	Doesn't matter.
Watson	Alibi? A beard. A human canoe. She could sit on your back and paddle you up the Thames.

While the interactions between Holmes and Adler are full of hints at an S/M relationship, most of the scenes alluding to a romantic relationship between Holmes and Watson focus heavily on the domestic nature of their bond and downplay any sexual tension. This is exemplified by an argument between Holmes and Watson, after Holmes' investigations lead to their arrest and a subsequent night in jail:

Holmes	You've never complained about my methods before.
Watson	I'm not complaining.
Holmes	You're not? What do you call this?
Watson	I never complain! How am I complaining? When do I ever complain about you practicing the violin at three in the morning, or your mess, your general lack of hygiene, or the fact that you steal my clothes?
Holmes	Uh, we have a barter system...
Watson	When have I ever complained about you setting fire to my rooms?
Holmes	*Our* rooms...
Watson	The rooms! Or, or, the fact that you experiment on my dog?
Holmes	*Our* dog...
Watson	The dog!
Holmes	Gladstone is *our* dog!

Like in the cliché of the long-married couple, shared habits seem to play a far more important role in the relationship between Holmes and Watson than sexual attraction. While the homoerotic undercurrents in their friendship are certainly obvious, the sexual aspects are rather toned down: "But for all the homo hoohaw, that Holmes and Watson bromance in the first film was fairly tame."[29]

Still, many fans seemed fairly content with this representation of the Holmes/Watson dynamic, and took the movie for what they had hoped it to be: "I'm sorry," one fan wrote, "but if you didn't

[29] Ayers, "Sherlock Homo".

see the subtext in this one, you weren't watching it right. It was thisclose [sic] to being canon."[30] The proliferation of fanworks inspired by *Sherlock Holmes*, including reviews, videos, artworks, and fan fiction, likewise demonstrate the impact this movie had on slash fans in the transformative fan community. The fairly young (at the time), but already firmly established fanfiction archive *Archive Of Our Own*, for example, hosts an impressive number of fan stories in a large variety of fandoms, among them a category named "Sherlock Holmes & Related Fandoms." In the two years between the archive's foundation in 2007 and the premiere of *Sherlock Holmes* in late 2009, only 115 Sherlock Holmes-related stories were posted on the site (some of them dated back to the years 1993-2006, indicating that they had been written before 2007), and this number included stories referring to various adaptations, like Laurie R. King's pastiche *The Beekeeper's Apprentice* (2002) or the Disney movie *The Great Mouse Detective* (1986). Out of those stories, about 62% were tagged as slash, and 54% featured Holmes/Watson as a couple,[31] suggesting that even before Ritchie's *Sherlock Holmes* came to the theaters, the notion of a Holmes/Watson romance was a fairly established concept in transformative fandom, despite the marginality of Sherlock Holmes-related fanfiction in general.

With the premiere of *Sherlock Holmes* in 2009, the number of stories posted to the archive drastically increased. In the six months between the premiere of Ritchie's film and the premiere of the BBC television show *Sherlock* in late July 2010 alone, a good 500 stories were added to the archive, the majority of them tagged for "Sherlock Holmes 2009," although some stories were tagged for "Arthur Conan Doyle – Sherlock Holmes," implying that the movie had also sparked a renewed interest in the original stories. Out of these 500 stories, which appear to be more or less

[30] amelia-17, "Sherlock Holmes: Ignore the Homoerotic Subtext Behind the Curtain," *Livejournal,* January 7, 2010.
[31] 44% (51 stories) were Holmes/Watson stories, an additional 10% (12 stories) featured threesomes with Holmes/Watson and another character, and 7% (8 stories) had other slash (m/m) or femslash (f/f) pairings.

directly inspired by the 2009 film, an overwhelming 70% have a Holmes/Watson pairing (354 stories, among those 337 Holmes/Watson stories and 17 stories with three- or foursomes including Holmes/Watson). An additional 8% (42 stories) indicate other slash (m/m) or femslash (f/f) pairings, and only 20% are not slash (104 stories with a heterosexual pairing, or no romantic/sexual pairing).[32]

This development, combined with the success of the BBC miniseries *Sherlock*, which premiered a mere six months after Ritchie's movie[33], set the stage for what should have been an enthusiastic reception of the sequel: By the time *Sherlock Holmes: A Game of Shadows* came into the theaters in December 2011, Sherlock Holmes had an established spot in transformative online fandom with a large fan base awaiting the second movie.

"You know what happens when you dance?" Raising the Stakes in *A Game of Shadows* (2011)

It seemed unavoidable that the sequel would return to the subtextual homoeroticism and bromantic banter of the first movie, and in fact, the sequel demonstratively upped the ante in its treatment of the Holmes/Watson bromance: not without reason, Newitz described the movie as "gayer" and

[32] Of course statistical data can only give limited insight into the changes within a community, but as Polasek has demonstrated in her study of the reception of BBC's *Sherlock*, numbers can certainly be helpful in demonstrating the impact particular texts have on fandom.

[33] Hills and Polasek have both discussed how the BBC TV miniseries *Sherlock* (2010) managed to bring together different groups of fans, thus causing "a fragmentation in the traditional fan discourse" (Polasek, "Winning", 41) by "drawing together established Sherlockians, fans of the other work of executive producers Steven Moffat and Mark Gatiss (especially *Doctor Who*), readers passionately focused on the relationship between Sherlock (Benedict Cumberbatch) and John (Martin Freeman), and fan audiences drawn to Cumberbatch-as-Holmes, as well as to the show's use of contemporary styling such as its Belstaff coats or Spencer Hart suits, and its highly stylized televisuality, attributable to the directorial input of Paul McGuigan." (Matt Hills, "Sherlock's Epistemological Economy and the Value of 'Fan' Knowledge. How Producer-Fans Play the (Great) Game of Fandom," in *Sherlock and Transmedia Fandom. Essays on the BBC Series*, ed. Louisa Ellen Stein and Kristina Busse (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, 2012), 29). But while it is true that the BBC show ended up outdoing previous Sherlock Holmes adaptations in its popularity with transformative fans by far, it was Ritchie's *Sherlock Holmes* that first stimulated transformative fandom's interest in *Sherlock Holmes*, in particular regarding the Holmes/Watson relationship.

"steamier" than its predecessor.[34] Most noticeably, the sequel almost completely ignored the heterosexual romance plots for the sake of male bonding. The dynamic between Adler and Holmes in particular was remarkably changed in the sequel. While Adler appeared to have a certain weakness for Holmes in the 2009 movie, she still managed to outsmart him most of the time. Using his attraction to her as a weapon against him, she drugs his wine and then leaves him naked and tied to the bed in one memorable scene that once again invokes BDSM practices and sexualizes their relationship, but also demonstrates her superior abilities. In *A Game of Shadows*, however, Holmes obviously has the upper hand in their encounters, and his attitude towards her is decidedly more confident and snarky. More importantly, their interaction is brief, because Adler is killed by James Moriarty (Jared Harris) only ten minutes into the movie, even before the opening credits begin to roll. Her death sets up the dynamic between Holmes, Watson, and Watson's fiancée/wife Mary Morstan as a love triangle. The film highlights Holmes' dependence on Watson, implying that Watson's absence following his engagement with Mary has left Holmes increasingly unstable because he is not capable of functioning without his friend. "You do seem … manic … bordering on psychotic," Watson states when he visits Holmes, who is drinking formaldehyde like wine and has, according to the housekeeper, been living "on a diet of coffee, tobacco and coca leaves." Holmes then proceeds to boycott Watson's stag night and almost makes him miss his wedding, only to pull him away again from his wife on the way to their honeymoon. Watson and Holmes proceed to go on an adrenaline-fueled honeymoon of their own, while the newly-wedded Mary Watson is forced to spend the rest of the film in the company of Holmes' brother Mycroft (Stephen Fry).

[34] Newitz, "Sherlock Holmes."

Of course, Watson really seems just as little prepared to live without Holmes, as becomes apparent in the scene in which Watson frantically attempts to revive a dying Holmes and finally saves his life by injecting (penetrating) him with Holmes' own wedding gift, an adrenaline-filled syringe, in a strange Victorian reenactment of the iconic scene between John Travolta and Uma Thurman from Quentin Tarantino's *Pulp Fiction* (1994).

But not only do Holmes and Watson basically elope together in *A Game of Shadows*, their relationship is also noticeably more sexualized and physical than in the first movie. This becomes most obvious in the scene in which a cross-dressing Holmes pushes Morstan out of a moving train, right before engaging Watson in a wrestling match that bears strong resemblance to an act of sexual intercourse: "The furious Law tackles Downey, ripping off his drag costume in a comic wrestling match that looks as if they are rolling down Brokeback Mountain."[35]

Other allusions to a romantic relationship are more subtle, like Holmes' side comment to Watson while they are being hosted by a group of Romani people: "For God's sake, don't dance!" he warns. "It'll be the death of you! You know what happens when you dance?" Whatever horrible outcome Holmes is referring to here is never clarified. Watson dances with abandon, Holmes watches him intensely, and the morning finds Watson hungover and tired but otherwise unharmed. But Holmes' remark gives additional meaning to the final interaction between Holmes and Watson – the aforementioned waltz and the following flirtatious interaction –, considering that it was apparently Holmes himself who taught Watson how to dance. In both scenes, the film is eager to point out that clearly, there is history between these two men, a history that includes dance lessons and subsequent events that seem to be better left unmentioned.

[35] Colin Covert, "'Sherlock' II Fights Crime with Panache," *The Star Tribune*, December 15, 2011, http://www.startribune.com/sherlock-ii-fights-crime-with-panache/135671483/

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, movie critics easily picked up on the heavy-handed implications of homoeroticism throughout the film. The majority of reviews at least made mention of it, although many of them did so in a rather critical way. However, the target of their criticism was not the fact that the film allowed the audience to imagine a romantic relationship between Holmes and Watson; quite the contrary, critics mostly resented that the implication was at once too demonstrative, and not explicit enough. On the one hand, *A Game of Shadows* seemed to cross the line that other bromance narratives at most toe; the line that separates subtext and text, and allows slash fans to detect a gay romance where other viewers see mere friendship. "Given Robert Downey Jr.'s queeny, hilarious, cranked-to-11 performance as the titular genius, you might actually not want to call that subtext," *The Salon* wrote, and didn't seem to mean it as a compliment: "It's more like supertext, if that's a word."[36] *Empire* similarly stated that the homoeroticism in the movie was "less a subtext than extended routine."[37] On the other hand, critics pointed out that for a movie that so demonstratively toyed with the idea of a same-sex romance, it seemed surprisingly reluctant to seriously consider the reality of a queer relationship: "*A Game of Shadows* is so overt in its insinuations that it becomes a distraction, begging one to imagine what an honestly homosexual retelling of the Sherlock Holmes character might look like."[38] But this was the actual line that the film stubbornly refused to cross. Instead, *A Game of Shadows* seemed to mock the very idea it had put into its audiences' heads in the first place:

> The sad thing is that Downey's instincts aren't necessarily wrong – Holmes' affection for Watson runs deep. But Downey disrespects his own idea, covering it up with wink-wink

[36] Andrew O'Hehir, "'Sherlock Holmes: A Game of Shadows': Guy Ritchie's Cheerful, Idiotic Sequel," *Salon*, December 15, 2011, http://www.salon.com/2011/12/15/sherlock_holmes_a_game_of_shadows_guy_ritchies_cheerful_idiotic_sequel/.

[37] Ian Nathan, "Sherlock Holmes: A Game of Shadows Review," *Empire Online*, November 24, 2010, http://www.empireonline.com/reviews/reviewcomplete.asp?FID=137034.

[38] Benjamin Mercer, "A Homoerotic, Bullet-Time Cash Grab," CinemaSoldier, 2011, www.cinemasoldier.com/articles/tag/sherlock-holmes-a-game-of-shadows.

> references and not-so-subtle innuendos. Neither provocative nor proud, it's merely a simpering satire.[39]

LGBT audiences and slash fans, who had shown excitement over the romantic undertones in the first film, had similar reservations; and where journalists still carefully tried to explain what exactly was wrong with Ritchie's portrayal of Holmes' and Watson's relationship, the fan community already had a term for it. *A Game of Shadows*, the fans decided, was guilty of queerbaiting. One fan explained in a comment on the film:

> i really liked noomi rapace's character, i really liked the silly gags, i really liked the music and the ridiculous steampunk feel. i did not like the honestly highly offensive stereotypes of romani folks and i resented the queerbaiting."[40] (lowercase spelling in original)

"Wink wink nudge nudge": Queerbaiting and misogyny in *A Game of Shadows* (2011)

Queerbaiting, at least in its contemporary form, is a fairly new phenomenon:[41] It describes the tendency of creators to purposefully write queer subtext into a movie or show, in order to draw the attention of a queer and female fannish audience – much to the same communities' despair.

For LGBT and female fans who take pleasure in reimagining texts predominantly written for straight male audiences, queer subtext in (popular) male-oriented texts has for a long time been an important source of imagination. The homoerotic undertones of male friendship portrayed in popular culture were so appealing to LGBT audiences and transformative fans in the past because actual representation of queer characters had been rare, and the representation of functional queer

[39] Whitty, "Sherlock Holmes".

[40] Iambickilometer, "Untitled," *Tumblr*, February 19, 2013.

[41] It could be argued that the entertainment industry has employed similar strategies in the past: When homosexuality was somewhat 'en vogue' in the early 1930s, Hollywood "responded to this development by including homosexual characters and themes in film, and also by allowing some of its stars to project an ambiguous sexual and gender image." Ronald Gregg, "Queering Brad Pitt: The Struggle between Gay Fans and the Hollywood Machine to Control Star Discourse and Image on the Web," in *LGBT Identity and Online New Media*, ed. Christopher Pullen and Margaret Cooper (New York/London: Routledge, 2010), 140.

relationships almost non-existent.[42] "When I started writing for AfterEllen," media journalist Heather Hogan writes in 2013,

> there was barely enough lesbian pop culture news to fill a weekly column. We went an entire year without a major lesbian character on broadcast TV. I'm talking like five years ago, that was the reality. Not one single major lesbian character. And gay guys weren't all that present on broadcast TV either.[43]

In this hostile climate, slash fanfiction was one way of transgressing the experience of ubiquitous heteronormativity in (popular) culture: by bridging the gap between (socially accepted) homosociality and (taboo) homosexuality that supports the foundations of patriarchal heteronormativity,[44] by sexualizing straight male bodies, or simply by undermining the authority of the literary author.[45] But now that the industry has started to pay attention to the practices and interests of fans, the concept of transgression becomes more complicated, since the subtexts slash fans zoom in on are often purposefully included precisely for their sake. When Jenkins first discussed this development in *Convergence Culture*, he was hopeful that the industry's awareness for fan interests would lead to a more harmonious relationship between producers and consumers. But since then, scholars like Matt Hills and Suzanne Scott have pointed out that the industry's newfound knowledge bears the significant risk of a containment and restriction of fans' readings strategies.[46]

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[42] Fans have been invested in changing this situation for decades, as documented for example by Henry Jenkins and John Tulloch's study of queer science-fiction fans (Tulloch/Jenkins, *Science Fiction Audiences*), which provides an account of the battle *Star Trek* fans have been fighting for the inclusion of queer characters into the *Star Trek* universe.

[43] Heather Hogan, "'Glee' Recap 4.13: A Hummel Is a Homo Version of a Hustla," *AfterElton*, February 8, 2013, http://www.afterelton.com/2013/02/glee-recap-413-hummel-homo-version-hustla?page=0%2C1.

[44] Eve Sedgwick, *Between Men. English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), 1-27.

[45] Scholars have provided a number of explanations for the slash phenomenon: some consider slash a radical subversion of heteronormative texts (Penley), others see it as the act of uncovering already existent homoerotic subtext (Gwenllian-Jones). Green, Jenkins and Jenkins manage to show that fans themselves often provide the most insightful and differentiated analysis of their own practices (Green/Jenkins/Jenkins).

[46] Hills, "Torchwood's Trans-Transmedia"; Suzanne Scott, "Who's Steering the Mothership? The Role of the Fanboy Auteur in Transmedia Storytelling," in *The Participatory Cultures Handbook*, ed. Aaron Delwiche and Jennifer

What fans call queerbaiting is one of the more problematic consequences of the industry's reaction to fan culture. While the intentional inclusion of queer subtext acknowledges and seemingly rewards slash fans' interest in queer storylines, it also takes away their pleasures of transgression, and is ultimately reduced to a marketing strategy. When slash fans or LGBT audiences now recognize the queer subtext in a bromance-themed film, they don't subvert its heteronormativity, but read the movie exactly the way it was intended. Maybe even more dangerously, queerbaiting ultimately precludes the possibility of representing actual queer relationships. The text perpetually invokes homosexuality, but contains it by turning it into an inside joke and thus rendering it impossible, as fans themselves point out:

> throughout sherlock holmes adaptations, to my knowledge not one has been explicitly queer. the closest we have gotten is queer baiting which adaptations such as guy ritchie's and moffat's sherlock holmes has [sic] done to an offensive degree. it is giving us the potential for a queer relationship through a wink wink nudge nudge, but ultimately playing it up as [sic] laughs or as a means of titillating the audience (lowercase spelling in original).[47]

Eve Sedgwick, in her work on the homoerotic elements of homosocial bonds between men, showed that what so categorically distinguishes homosexual from homosocial relationships is the homophobic fear that functions to suppress homoerotic desire in homosocial relationships and thus secures heteronormative patriarchy.[48] Similarly, LGBT and slash fans are fully aware that there is a marked difference between queerbaiting and queer representation, and that this difference manifests in the way queerbaiting restricts the possibility of actual LGBT representation by exploiting the notion for comic relief. Queer subtext can certainly function as a stand-in when queer representation, for one reason or another, is impossible; but it is not an adequate replacement. Queerbaiting, then, is not merely a marketing strategy to win over certain audience groups, but a

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Henderson (New York/London: Routledge, 2013), 43–52.

[47] icicleman, "Untitled," t*umblr*, 2012.

[48] Sedgwick, *Between Men*, 1-27.

narrative trope that makes for texts with homophobic undertones.

> Orbitingasupernova It is NOT okay to promote queerbaiting as actual lgbtq representation. Many shows with dude/dude relationships queer bait because most audiences accept it as being totally ~gay friendly~ without being actually… you know, gay. And then the writers get credit for being super ~gay friendly~ without actually writing critical, real and honest queer stories. If you get offended by the phrase, 'no homo,' then you should be offended by queerbaiting.
>
> Mymindtardis Sherlock Holmes: Game of Shadows, I'm looking at you.[49]

However, the avoidance of queer representation by means of subtext was not the only problem fans and film critics had with *A Game of Shadows*' employment of the bromance trope, as Roz T poignantly states in her review of the sequel:

> Bromance is rarely achieved in modern cinema without a side helping of misogyny, and *A Game of Shadows* is no different in that it mostly associates women with domesticity, and domesticity itself with the constraining of male self-expression.[50]

Sedgwick showed how homosocial culture works to systematically exclude women from male-dominated communities, and the same is true for many stories of male friendship in popular culture: When male friendship takes the place of romance in cinematic narratives, there is no room for women anymore – after all, romantic subplots are often the only purpose female characters have in male-oriented movies. The representation of Holmes and Watson's friendship in *A Game of Shadows* works in a similar way, as movie critics have pointed out:

> But as the story races across Europe, and Holmes and Watson don goofy costumes and engage in all manner of misdirection, it becomes embarrassingly clear that this movie has little interest in inviting women into its boys' club. (Rachel McAdams, who was a game foil in the first movie, appears briefly here, but not long enough to balance the scales.) Fun and fleet as *Sherlock Holmes: A Game of Shadows* often is, it leaves the sour taste of misogyny in your mouth.[51]

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[49] orbitingsupernova, "But if I can expand on that slash shipping post going around," *Tumblr*, 2012.

[50] Roz T, "Film Review: Sherlock Holmes – A Game of Shadows," *The Flaneur*, June 26, 2012, http://flaneur.me.uk/06/film-review-sherlock-holmes-a-game-of-shadows/

[51] Christopher Kelly, "Second 'Sherlock Holmes' Movie a Fast-Moving Charmer," *Dfw.com*, December 17, 2011, http://www.dfw.com/2011/12/15/550987_movie-review-second-sherlock-holmes.html

The reviewer for the *Star Tribune* agrees: "There's an undercurrent of misogyny in the way women are dismissed or knocked around here."[52] The increase of bromantic tension between Holmes and Watson in the movie sequel is inversely proportional to the importance of the female characters: In *Sherlock Holmes*, Irene Adler and Mary Morstan still find ways to pursue their own interests, and for the most part they manage to keep up with Holmes' attempts to outrun them. Adler is Holmes' equal, if not superior when it comes to their professional activities, and she gets to be part of the action-fueled finale. Morstan wins, despite Holmes' best efforts, the battle over Watson's attention, and does not hesitate to take her revenge on Holmes for trying to break them up: She throws a glass of wine at his face for insulting her, and later leaves him at the jail when she comes to bail out Watson. While the movie is far from passing the Bechdel Test, it does present two female characters with minds of their own; two characters that the sequel seems to try hard to get rid of as quickly as possible. Adler's affection towards Holmes is turned into the weakness that gets her killed, while Morstan is pushed out of a moving train into a lake, a merely symbolic death that takes her out of the action nevertheless. The women's absence leaves the floor open for more scenes between the two male protagonists: "Did you just kill my new wife?" Watson yells at Holmes, seconds before literally ripping off his clothes in the following wrestling match.

Furthermore, much of the humor provided by the bickering between the men unfolds at the expense of the female characters. Throughout the film, bromance functions as an excuse for sexism, for example in Holmes' derisive comments about Watson's engagement and marriage, meant to expose his jealousy and abandonment issues. When he comments on Watson's "heinous handmade scarf … clearly one of your fiancée's early efforts," he reduces Mary to the domestic sphere and simultaneously questions her domestic talents. Holmes' insults towards his

[52] Covert, "Sherlock II".

housekeeper Mrs. Hudson, whom he likes to call "dear sickly sweet nanny," are similarly gendered and played up for laughs.

His brother Mycroft's backhanded compliment to Mary Morstan similarly expresses the sentiment that male companionship is always preferable to female company, echoing the stereotypical misogyny of homosocial societies when he says:

> You know, although our time together has been but a brief interlude, I'm beginning to understand how a man of a particular disposition, under certain circumstances – extreme ones, perhaps – might grow to enjoy the company of a person of your gender.

But this particular remark serves more than one function. Besides an expression of his contempt towards the female sex, it also alludes to a possible homosexual inclination, labeling him, the celibate eccentric nudist, as queer. This insinuation offers another instance where serious queer representation might have been possible, but once again, it is merely implied. More importantly, Mycroft's ambiguous queerness actually serves to ridicule homosexuality and to reaffirm Holmes' and Watson' heterosexuality in comparison: If the overweight eccentric Mycroft is identified as gay, surely that means his brother Sherlock and John Watson (the active, attractive heroes) are not.

The constant lacing of queer subtext with misogyny is in itself problematic, but it is particularly frustrating for slash fans who are, after all, specifically targeted by bromance narratives, and for the most part identify as female. The consistently unkind treatment of female characters in bromance stories creates the sense among female fans that producers do not understand or respect their demand for actual queer representation, and that they also do not understand or respect them as female fans. "Add to that fridging[53] Irene and the really misogynistic treatment of Mary Morstan and I was spitting," one fan writes furiously,[54] and another comments:

[53] "Fridging" is a fan term originating from comics fandom, where it refers to the perpetually negligent and violent treatment of female characters especially in superhero comics. For more information, see the website *Women in Refrigerators* (Simone).

[54] Legionseagle, "Untitled," *Dreamwidth*, August 11, 2012.

> I will gladly dance with you in the field of wonderful homoeroticism, but let's not forget that far, far too often, 'subtracting ALL the hetero' comes at the price of gross narrative misogyny. Is it too much to ask for a movie that, yes, is *that* gay, and doesn't throw its women under the bus in the process?[55]

"I wouldn't blink." An Outlook

Of course, this last remark by a Holmes fan already hints at the double-edged nature of the problem that plagues *Sherlock Holmes* and *A Game of Shadows*. On the one hand, LGBT and slash fans' concerns regarding the homophobic and misogynist implications of the bromance hype are an immensely valuable form of media critique and absolutely should be taken seriously as such. On the other hand, fans' protests do not necessarily mean that they will stop consuming the texts they criticize, if only because of a lack of alternatives, or because the theme of romantic male friendship is still appealing to them, despite their frustrations. Ultimately, box office numbers as well as secondary and tertiary sales still have more influence on studio decisions than fannish complaints.

At the time of this chapter's completion in 2016, a third *Sherlock Holmes* movie is in preparation, and scheduled to appear in 2018. Main actor Jude Law already announced that it is going "to be better than the other two,"[56] although what this means for the development of the Holmes/Watson relationship remains speculation for now. One critic at least already made predictions: "Where the Holmes and Watson partnership goes from here is a tossup, but I wouldn't blink if they ultimately reprise the finale of 'Some Like It Hot.'"[57] This is probably a guess as good as any regarding the question of what the third of Ritchie's Holmes movies is going to bring, but as entertaining as a scene like this would undoubtedly be, the difference between the original and

[55] autoluminescence, "Untitled," *Tumblr*, 2012.
[56] Phil de Semlyen, "Jude Law Talks Sherlock Holmes 3. 'It's going to be better and smarter than the others,'" *Empire*, 26 Sep. 2013, http://www.empireonline.com/movies/news/jude-law-talks-sherlock-holmes-3/
[57] Covert, "Sherlock II"; Billy Wilder*, Some Like it Hot* (Ashton Productions/The Mirisch Corporation, 1959).

a potential reenactment is obvious: Billy Wilder's (in)famous movie finale used comedy as a means to introduce the possibility of a functioning long-term queer relationship during a time when Hollywood's production code still restricted the representation of any kind of alternative sexuality. In the 21st century, when high school musical dramedies like *Glee* show love, sex and marriage proposals between same-sex couples on US network television without teenaged viewers even blinking an eye, the same kind of joke has to fall short, and instead leaves the audience to wonder what Hollywood could do with a serious queer imagining of Holmes and Watson's relationship, and whether it is ever going to happen. At the same time, whether the next installment of *Sherlock Holmes* chooses to continue the problematic practice of queerbaiting or not, fans will likely be ready to call the film out on its flaws.

Conclusion

In the aftermath of the 2016 US presidential election, famous activist and prison abolitionist Angela Davis, during a speech at University of Chicago, highlighted the importance of community for the continued struggle of organized political activism: "How do we begin to recover from this shock? By experiencing and building and rebuilding and consolidating community. Community is the answer."[1] Davis' statement, meant to get the left opposition to come together after the for her devastating results of the election, is a recent telling example for the way in which the concept of community continues to be invoked as an alternative to the shortcomings of the state and as a driving force behind political activism outside the framework of institutional politics. Of course, as the first chapter of this dissertation has demonstrated, it is not quite as simple as that: I have discussed how the ideal of community continues to be employed by theoretical and political movements with rather different goals, from reactionary conservativism to the radical left; and my study of 20th-century literary science-fiction fandom has shown how the notion of community can also serve the exclusion of members from social formations and the suppression of disagreement within these formations for the sake of preserving consensus within the community.

Nevertheless, while a strong sense of community in social formations such as fan communities is not automatically an indicator of political resistance, throughout this dissertation I have argued that there is in fact a strong correlation between a group's self-conception as community and its discursive rules in regard to matters of in-/exclusion, internal conflict and consensus, and in consequence also its members' attitude towards social and political issues beyond the borders of

[1] Bené Viera, "Angela Davis' Advice on Dealing with Election Aftermath Gives Us a Little Hope," *The Frisky*, November 23, 2016. http://www.thefrisky.com/2016-11-23/angela-davis-advice-on-dealing-with-election-aftermath-gives-us-a-little-hope/

the community itself. The controversy around *RaceFail '09* which played out between different groups of creators and fans on journal-based online platforms (as discussed in chapter 2), shows how much the participants' perspectives on issues like race, gender, cultural appropriation, and intellectual property were shaped not simply by their personal background, but to a large degree by the self-conception and social practices of the community they considered themselves to be a part of.

Of course, since no social or cultural formation exists in a vacuum, the specific discursive and cultural practices within a particular fan group are also in constant interplay with other factors. On the one hand, the case studies in chapter 3 and 4 have demonstrated that fans' motivation to participate in sociopolitical activism is often tied closely to their engagement with specific cultural texts. At the same time, fans' interests in specific social issues are not necessarily sparked by the text itself – instead, it might be their previous investment in a particular topic that first inspires their interest in particular cultural texts. On the other hand, my analysis of fan-organized activism surrounding *Glee* (chapter 3) and *The Hunger Games* (chapter 4) has made it clear just how important the large-scale transmedia marketing campaigns around entertainment franchises have become for audience's engagement with the texts they consume – to the extent that marketing campaigns are seen as parts of the fictional texts, or in fact as texts in their own right. This does not mean, however, that the audience's reception of a text can be reliably controlled or steered by the marketing efforts around a franchise: Chapters 3, 4, and 5 have all shown that while transmedia marketing has a significant impact on fans' engagement with cultural products, it can also have unintended and unforeseen effects, from a selective appropriation in the case of *Glee* fans to *Hunger Games* fans' outright rejection of a particular marketing campaign.

Furthermore, my investigation of *Hunger Games* fans in particular can serve as a reminder to avoid quick and generalized assumptions about the reception of a particular text or franchise. While literary studies have traditionally drawn conclusions about the reception of a text simply by means of textual analysis, fan studies – in the footsteps of Stuart Hall's theory of coding/decoding[2] – have often zoomed in on resistant and subversive readings of canonical texts, by showing how social or cultural context influence processes of interpretation. Fans' reactions to the *Hunger Games* marketing campaign, however, also reveal that alternative readings are not automatically politically resistant, but can in fact align themselves with hegemonic politics. This finding shows once again that engagement with a text by itself is not necessarily what motivates fans to concern themselves with specific sociopolitical issues, but that different fannish communities with different and even conflicting views can form around one and the same text.

While the case studies of both *Glee* and *The Hunger Games* demonstrate that fans' participatory engagement with fictional texts and marketing campaigns cannot be fully controlled or even predicted, chapter 5 shows how fannish practices and cultural production are nevertheless entangled in ways that often appear to facilitate the control, restriction, or containment of fannish practices by the industry. The more fans have emerged as actors in the public sphere, the more the entertainment industry has worked to appropriate their practices and interests in order to ensure their loyalty to the product. The case of queerbaiting in Guy Ritchie's *Sherlock Holmes* adaptations shows clearly how fans' investment in queer representation can be appropriated by creators for a form of fan service that seems to respond to fans' needs, but ultimately does not satisfy their demand for more diverse representation. This certainly indicates that fans' complicity as consumers in the capitalist structures of the entertainment industry conflicts regularly with their

[2] Hall, "Encoding/Decoding".

investment in social change; however, their response to the industry's attempts at regulating audience behavior also shows that they continue to be critical in their role as recipients and don't hesitate to question, criticize, or even abandon texts or products that don't offer a serious engagement with the issues they care about.

Ultimately, this dissertation aimed to show how self-organized fan groups throughout the 20th century have developed rather distinct self-conceptions, rules, and practices as constituencies, which has led certain fan communities to emerge as noticeable participants in the public sphere, and as actors in alternative activist movements with an investment in social change. The proliferation of fan-organized activism over the past decade is therefore as much a consequence of developments within self-organized fan communities since the early 20th century as it is an indicator of a general trend towards sociopolitical engagement outside the channels of traditional institutional politics in western society. The ways in which social formations around fictional texts from popular culture seem to be able to inspire and motivate fans to care about and become active for social, political, or environmental change are, in the context of the contemporary global political landscape, significant for two reasons: On the one hand, the examples of activism emerging from within fan communities can offer additional insight into the draw of alternative activist movements in the face of growing disenchantment with institutional party politics among the population in many western countries. On the other hand, the role popular culture plays for fans' self-conception as members of a community and as actors in the social and political sphere might also provide a renewed perspective on the strategies and narratives of institutional and governmental politics: perhaps, to think about political campaigns as popular fictional narratives might permit a different understanding of voters' decisions in electoral processes as well.

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